

IOWA FOOD *Security, Insecurity, AND Hunger*

How Iowa Fares: **Food Insecurity in Iowa and the United States**



Food insecurity has become an important gauge of a state's ability to ensure the wellbeing of its residents. Policymakers consider a state's food insecurity rate as they design policies to improve wellbeing, especially as it pertains to nutrition. Iowa's economic climate and demographic characteristics influence how the state compares with its neighbors and the United States as a whole. These economic and demographic characteristics also affect how policymakers respond to problems of food insecurity.



Iowa vs. the United States

From 2001-2003, 9.5 percent of Iowans (111,055 households) were food insecure at some point during the previous year (Nord et al 2004, table 7). (Because of small sample sizes in some states, food insecurity rates and some other state-level statistics are reported as a three-year average rather than annually.) In other words, they lived in households that did not have access to enough food for active, healthy lives. This compares favorably with the United States, where 11.0 percent of households suffered from food insecurity during this same period. However, Iowa does not fare as well with respect to a more severe measure of food insecurity—food insecurity with hunger. While Iowa's rate is lower (3.0 percent versus 3.4 percent), the difference is not statistically significant.



Poverty and Unemployment

Whether a household suffers from food insecurity is closely tied to its members' income and employment status (Gundersen and Gruber 2001, Gundersen and Oliveira 2001, Ribar and Hamrick 2003, Van Hook and Balistreri 2005, forthcoming).

Therefore, one would expect a similar relationship between aggregate measures of poverty, employment, and food insecurity at the state level. This is the case in Iowa—the unemployment rate was 4.5 percent in 2003 versus 6.0 percent for the United

States, and Iowa's poverty rate was 8.5 percent in 2001 to 2003 versus 12.1 percent for the United States (U.S. Department of Labor 2004).

Elderly Population

Iowa's substantial elderly population also may influence the food insecurity rate. In the United States, 12.4 percent of the population is elderly; in Iowa, the figure is 14.9 percent. Thus, if elderly households are less likely to be food insecure, Iowa should have a lower food insecurity rate than the United States. And the elderly are much less likely to be food insecure: in 2003, 11.2 percent of all households were food insecure, whereas 6.0 percent of households with a senior citizen were food

Improving the median income in Iowa is one way that the state potentially could reduce its food insecurity rates. Insofar as public policies can influence income growth, this is one path policymakers may want to pursue.

insecure (Nord et al. 2004, table 2). This pronounced gap remains even when the population is restricted to households with incomes below 130 percent of the poverty level (the income eligibility cutoff for the Food Stamp Program, called the Food Assistance Program in Iowa). In 2003, of U.S. households with incomes below 130 percent of the poverty level, 32.5 percent were food insecure versus 16.1 percent of households with an elderly person (Nord et al. 2004, table 4).

Rurality

Iowa's rural setting may further contribute to its lower food insecurity rates. In non-metropolitan areas, the average rate of food insecurity is 11.1 percent, versus 11.6 percent in metropolitan areas. The



Iowa State University Extension, the Iowa Nutrition Network, and the Iowa Department of Public Health present this policy brief

- ***to increase understanding about the status of food insecurity and hunger among Iowa families, and***
- ***to suggest specific action steps to help Iowa families and communities become more food secure.***

Table 1. Measures of Food Security for Iowa, Neighboring States, and U.S.

State	Food Insecurity Rate ¹	Unemployment Rate ²	Median Income ³	Poverty Rate ⁴
Illinois	7.9%	6.7%	\$45,607	11.8%
Iowa	9.5%	4.5%	\$41,985	8.5%
Minnesota	7.1%	5.0%	\$54,480	7.1%
Missouri	10.1%	5.6%	\$43,492	10.1%
Nebraska	10.4%	4.0%	\$44,357	9.9%
South Dakota	8.9%	3.6%	\$39,829	10.9%
Wisconsin	9.0%	5.6%	\$46,782	8.8%
United States	11.0%	6%	\$43,527	12.1%

¹Average for 2001-2003, Nord, et al. (2004)³Data for 2003, Denavas-Walt et al. (2004)²Data for 2003, U.S. Department of Labor (2004)⁴Data for 2003, Denavas-Walt et al. (2004)

difference is reversed for food insecurity with hunger, where the respective figures are 3.4 percent and 3.5 percent; but this difference is not statistically significant.

Median Income

Median household income is another measure of the economic status of a state's residents. In general, lower median household income would indicate higher food insecurity rates. In Iowa, the median household income was \$41,985 in 2001 to 2003, versus \$43,527 for the United States. Despite having lower median household income than the national average, Iowa has lower food insecurity rates than would be expected, thanks to better performance on other economic and demographic characteristics.

Iowa vs. Neighboring States

Comparing Iowa with the United States as a whole is difficult because of the enormous variation across the states. However, examining adjacent states controls for some of this variation and, moreover, offers a look at food insecurity within the Midwest. When averaged over 2001 to 2003, food insecurity rates range from 7.1 percent in Minnesota to 10.4 percent in Nebraska (see table 1). With a food insecurity rate of 9.5 percent, Iowa falls into the middle of its neighboring states—with a statistically significant difference from Minnesota.

Unemployment and Median Income

Given the connections between a state's economic status and food insecurity, Iowa's position versus its neighbors is not surprising when unemployment rates and median incomes are examined. As shown in table 1, Iowa's unemployment rate is in the middle of a range from 3.6 in South Dakota

to 6.7 percent in Illinois. Regarding median household income, Iowa fares poorly compared with its neighbors, as well as with the United States. With the exception of South Dakota, Iowa has a lower median household income than all its neighbors. The gap is quite large in some cases, including a more than \$12,000 difference with Minnesota.

Poverty

In light of poverty rates, perhaps Iowa would have been expected to perform somewhat better than its neighbors. And indeed, Iowa's rate is lower than all states except Minnesota and is far lower than Illinois and South Dakota (table 1).

Implications

If past trends continue, Iowa's food insecurity rate should remain below the United States average, and about average with respect to neighboring states. Improving the median income in Iowa is one way that the state potentially could reduce its food insecurity rates. Insofar as public policies can influence income growth, this is one path policymakers may want to pursue.

Poverty and Food Insecurity

Given its low poverty rates, Iowa perhaps should be performing better compared with its neighboring states regarding food insecurity. One implication from this finding is that a larger proportion of the non-poor in Iowa are food insecure compared with their counterparts in neighboring states. Another possible implication is that poor people are more likely to be food insecure in Iowa. Future research may determine the extent to which either or both of these implications hold.

Reaching Those Who Need Help

Future research will help policymakers and program administrators design interventions that reduce food insecurity in Iowa. If the first implication is the primary explanation, Iowa should increase efforts to reach near-poor households identified as being in need. This is important since food assistance participation rates fall as income increases. While food assistance program participation rates are higher among poor families, many poor families still are not reached. Thus, even if the second implication holds, outreach efforts still may be relevant, particularly if research indicates that food assistance programs are bypassing poor families with limited English skills, and if these households are in danger of food insecurity. In light of Iowa's growing population of recent immigrants, reaching poor households with limited English skills then would be especially relevant to efforts to reduce food insecurity in Iowa.

References

Denavas-Walt, C., B. Proctor, and R. Mills. 2004. *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2003*. U.S. Census Bureau Publication P60-226.

Gundersen, C. and J. Gruber. 2001. "The Dynamic Determinants of Food Insecurity." *Second Food Security Measurement and Research Conference, Volume II: Papers*. Edited by Margaret Andrews and Mark Prell. United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, Food Assistance, and Nutrition Research Report 11-2, 92-110.

Gundersen, C. and V. Oliveira. 2001. "The Food Stamp Program and Food Insecurity." *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, v83 875-887.

Nord, M., M. Andrews, and S. Carlson. 2004. *Household Food Security in the United States, 2003*. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, Food Assistance, and Nutrition Research Report 42.

Ribar, D. and K. Hamrick. 2003. *Dynamics of Poverty and Food Sufficiency*. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, Food Assistance, and Nutrition Research Report 33.

Van Hook, J. and K. Balistreri. Forthcoming. "Ineligible Parents, Eligible Children: Food Stamps Receipt, Allotments, and Food Insecurity Among Children of Immigrants." *Social Science Research*, 2005.

U.S. Department of Labor. 2004. *Unemployment Rates for States: Annual Average Rankings*.

Funded by the Iowa Nutrition Network, Iowa Department of Public Health, and USDA Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program.

Written by Craig Gundersen, associate professor, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, and affiliate, Institute for Social and Behavioral Research, with research assistance by Bruce Randall, graduate student, Iowa State University.

... and justice for all

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Many materials can be made available in alternative formats for ADA clients. To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call 202-720-5964.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Stanley R. Johnson, director, Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, Ames, Iowa.

File: Family Life 9