



## Key Terms and Phrases:

**Agency:** A charitable organization that provides the food supplied by a food bank directly to people struggling with hunger, through various types of programs.

**American Community Survey (ACS):** A U.S. Census Bureau survey based on a sample of 3 million addresses. ACS data are used to produce Map the Meal Gap estimates. In order to provide valid estimates for areas with small populations, the county-level ACS data used in Map the Meal Gap were averaged over a five-year period.

**Average Meal Cost:** The average amount of money spent per week on food by food-secure people, as assessed in the Current Population Survey (CPS), divided by 21 (assuming 3 meals eaten per day). This number is then adjusted for counties, states, and food bank service areas by the cost-of-food index (see below).

**Charitable Food Assistance:** Charitable feeding programs like food pantries, kitchens and shelters, whose services are provided to people in times of need.

**Child Food Insecurity:** The household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate nutritious food, as reported for households with children under age 18; it is assessed in the Current Population Survey (CPS) and represented in U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) food-security reports.

**Child Food-Insecurity (CFI) Rate:** The approximate percentage of children (under 18 years old) living in households in the U.S. that experienced food insecurity at some point during the year. The child food-insecurity measures reflected in this study are derived from the same set of questions used by the USDA to establish the extent of food insecurity in households with children at the national level. "Child food insecurity" and "CFI" are used inter-changeably throughout this report.

**Cost-of-food Index:** A measure that uses food price data provided by Nielsen to estimate the relative cost of food in each county. The index is a multiplier for counties, states, and food bank services areas that reflect the cost (after taxes) of purchasing the equivalent of a USDA Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) market basket relative to the national average. These multipliers are then used to generate local estimates of the national food budget shortfall and average meal cost.



**Current Population Survey (CPS)**: A nationally representative survey conducted by the Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) providing employment, income, food insecurity and poverty statistics. Households are sampled to be representative of civilian households at the state and national levels, and do not include information on individuals living in group quarters such as nursing homes or assisted living facilities.

**Food Bank**: A charitable organization that solicits, receives, inventories and distributes donated food and grocery products pursuant to industry and appropriate regulatory standards. The products are distributed to charitable social-service agencies, which provide the products directly to people struggling with hunger through various programs. Some food banks also distribute food directly to people who need assistance.

**Food Budget Shortfall**: As assessed in the CPS: the amount of money per week food-insecure people report needing to meet their food needs, as assessed in the Current Population Survey. This amount is annualized for the purposes of this study.

**Food Insecurity**: A condition assessed in the CPS and represented in USDA food security reports. It is a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food.

**Food-Insecurity Rate**: The percentage of the population that experienced food insecurity at some point during the year.

**High Food-Insecurity Counties**: The counties with food-insecurity (or child food-insecurity) rates falling into the top 10 % as compared with the food-insecurity (or child food-insecurity) rates among all counties in the United States.

**Income Eligibility Threshold for Federal Nutrition Programs**: A dollar amount tied to the federal poverty line that determines whether a household is income-eligible for federal nutrition programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Income eligibility is one aspect of eligibility, which varies by state and includes other tests based on assets and net income.



**The Meal Gap:** A conversion of the total annual food budget shortfall in a specified area divided by the weighted cost per meal in that area. The meal gap number represents the translation of the food budget shortfall into a number of meals.

**Metropolitan/Micropolitan Areas:** County-based geographic categories defined by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Metropolitan (metro) areas have a core urban area of 50,000 or more residents while micropolitan (micro) areas have a core urban area between 10,000 and 50,000. Metro and micropolitan areas consist of one or more counties and include the counties containing both the core urban area, as well as any adjacent counties that have a high degree of social and economic integration with the urban core. Here we use counties categorized as part of nonmetro areas to broadly define “rural” counties although we analyze food insecurity in micropolitan counties as well.

**Non-metro/Rural Counties:** Counties that are categorized as part of nonmetro areas by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and used here to define “rural” counties. Nonmetro counties are located outside the boundaries of metropolitan (metro) areas and are widely used to study conditions in “rural” America. They can be subdivided into micropolitan (micro) and all remaining counties (neither metro nor micropolitan), and further subdivided using USDA ERS Rural-Urban Continuum Codes (RUCCs).

**Percent of Poverty Line:** A multiple of the federally established poverty line, which varies based on household size. These percentages are used to set federal nutrition program thresholds for eligibility, such as the SNAP threshold.

**Persistent-Poverty County:** A term used by the USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) to refer to counties where at least 20 percent of the population has been living in poverty over the last 30 years.

**Rural-Urban Continuum Codes (RUCC's):** A classification scheme for counties that distinguishes metropolitan counties by the population size of their metro area, and nonmetropolitan (including rural and micropolitan) counties by degree of urbanization and adjacency to a metro area.

**Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):** Formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, SNAP is the largest of the Federal nutrition programs and provides qualified recipients with resources, in the form of an electronic payment card, to buy groceries.