

# Connecting Communities



## Rising Food Insecurity in America: COVID-19 and a Lack of Emergency Savings

August 20, 2020

*Organized by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis*

# Welcome

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## Agenda for this webinar

Food Insecurity in the U.S.  
During the COVID-19  
Pandemic



Operation Food Search's  
Response to the Increased  
Need During the COVID-19  
Crisis



Using Policy Levers to Tackle  
Food Insecurity During the  
Pandemic

Join

- Call-in number: **888-625-5230**
- Conference code: **524 722 54#**
- Webinar link: <https://www.webcaster4.com/Webcast/Page/584/36461>

Questions

- Email us at [communities@stls.frb.org](mailto:communities@stls.frb.org).
- Type your question into the chat box of the webinar.

Website

- Please visit <https://bsr.stlouisfed.org/connectingCommunities>.

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# Legal Notices and Disclaimer

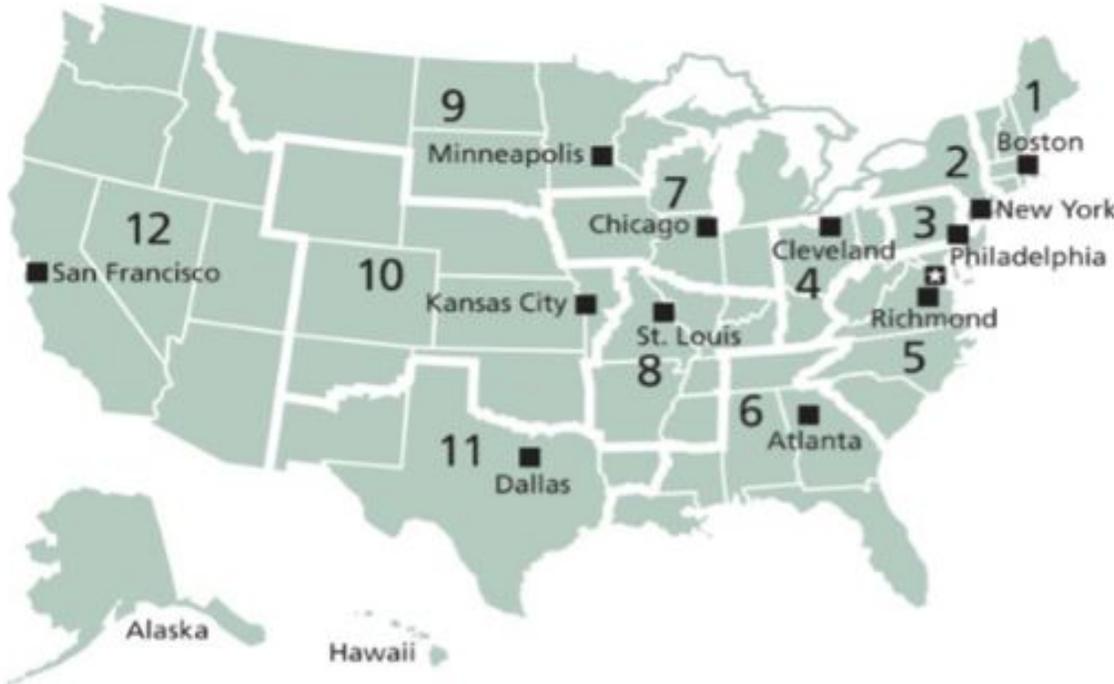
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**The information, analyses, and conclusion set forth are those of the presenters and do not necessarily indicate concurrence by the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, the Federal Reserve Banks, or members of their staffs.**

# Community Development

The mission of the Federal Reserve’s community development function is to promote the economic resilience and mobility of low- to moderate-income and underserved individuals and communities.



# *Food Insecurity in the U.S. During the COVID-19 Pandemic*



**Lowell Ricketts**  
Lead Analyst  
Center for Household Financial  
Stability



Center for  
**HOUSEHOLD  
FINANCIAL  
STABILITY**®

Researching Family Balance Sheets to Strengthen  
Families and the Economy | [stlouisfed.org/hfs](http://stlouisfed.org/hfs)

# Executive Summary

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- Emergency savings are an important factor in avoiding food (and other forms of) hardship given income loss.
- Existing food insecurity has been exacerbated by the pandemic.
- Black and Hispanic households; those without a Bachelor's degree; and Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z are experiencing the most insecurity.
- A diverse range of states and metro areas have seen a sharp rise in insecurity. Mississippi, New York, Nevada, and California have similar rates.

# Strong Balance Sheets Critical to Weathering Shocks

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- Accumulated wealth (what you own minus what you owe) is central for both economic resiliency in short-term and long-term upward mobility.
- Access to assets (especially liquid assets) is a form of private insurance for events such as an income shock.
- Liquid assets appear to be a salient factor in reducing risk of instability such as not having enough to eat. ([Gallagher and Sabat](#) 2017, [Ricketts and Boshara](#) 2020)

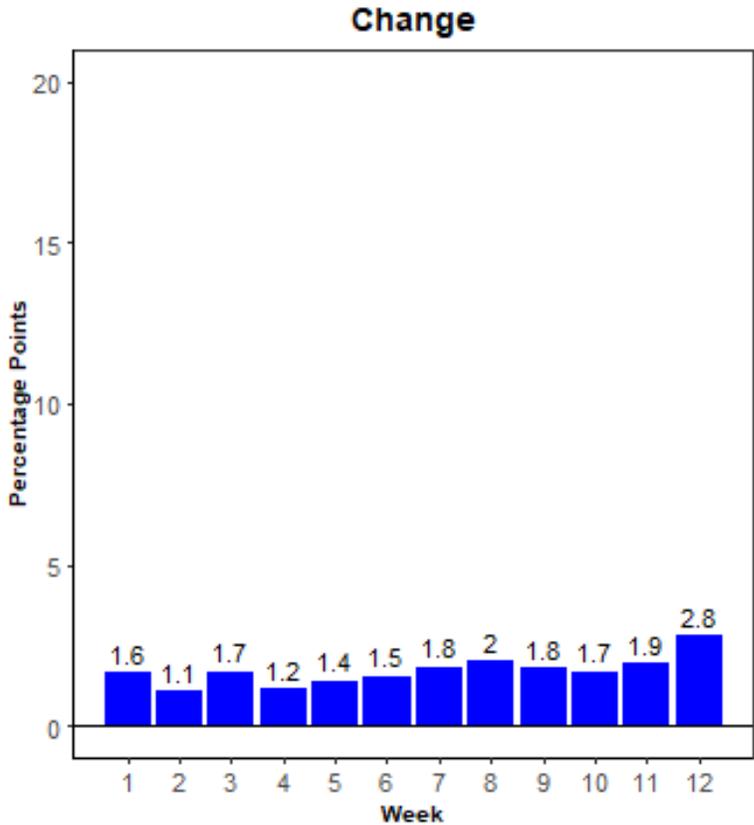
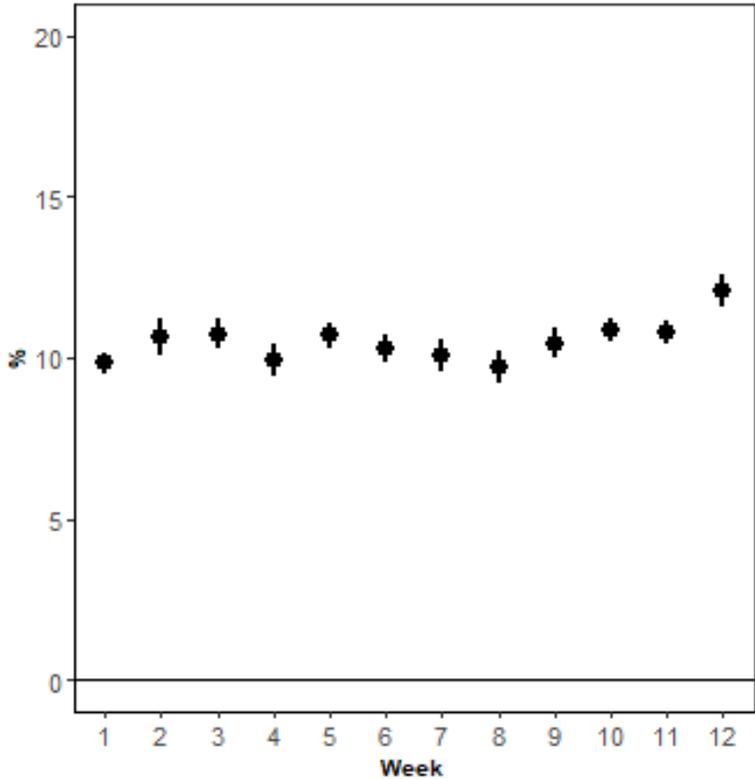
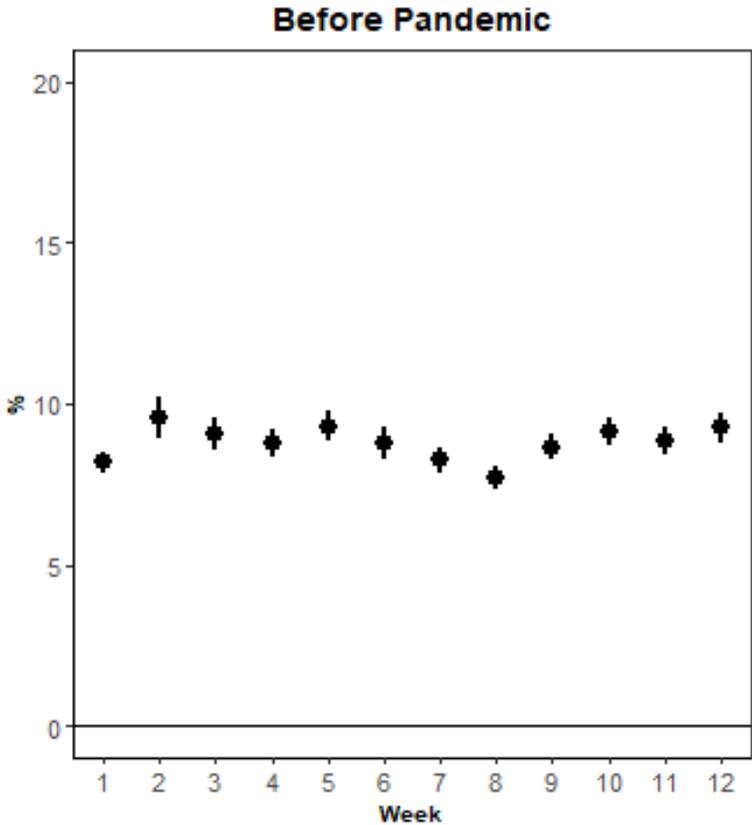
# Data

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- The Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey is run weekly; the first wave was fielded April 23–May 5 and the most recent was July 16–21.
- Household respondents indicated which of the following applied for the food eaten in their household:
  - Enough of the kinds of food (I/we) wanted to eat
  - Enough, but not always the kinds of food (I/we) wanted to eat
  - **Sometimes not enough to eat**
  - **Often not enough to eat**
- Respondents asked about the current situation (past 7 days) and the situation prior to March 13 (pre-pandemic).

# Food Insecurity Has Risen, Especially in Late July

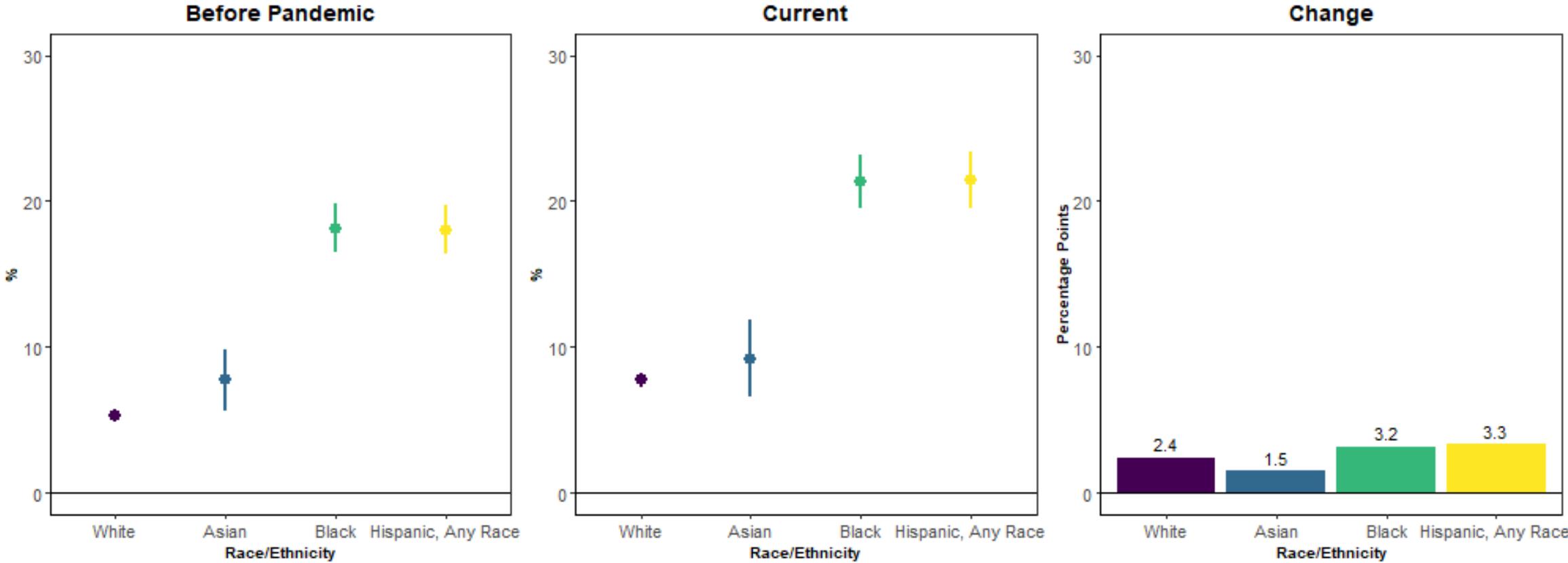
National Food Insecurity



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Household Pulse Survey

# Existing Racial Inequities Exacerbated

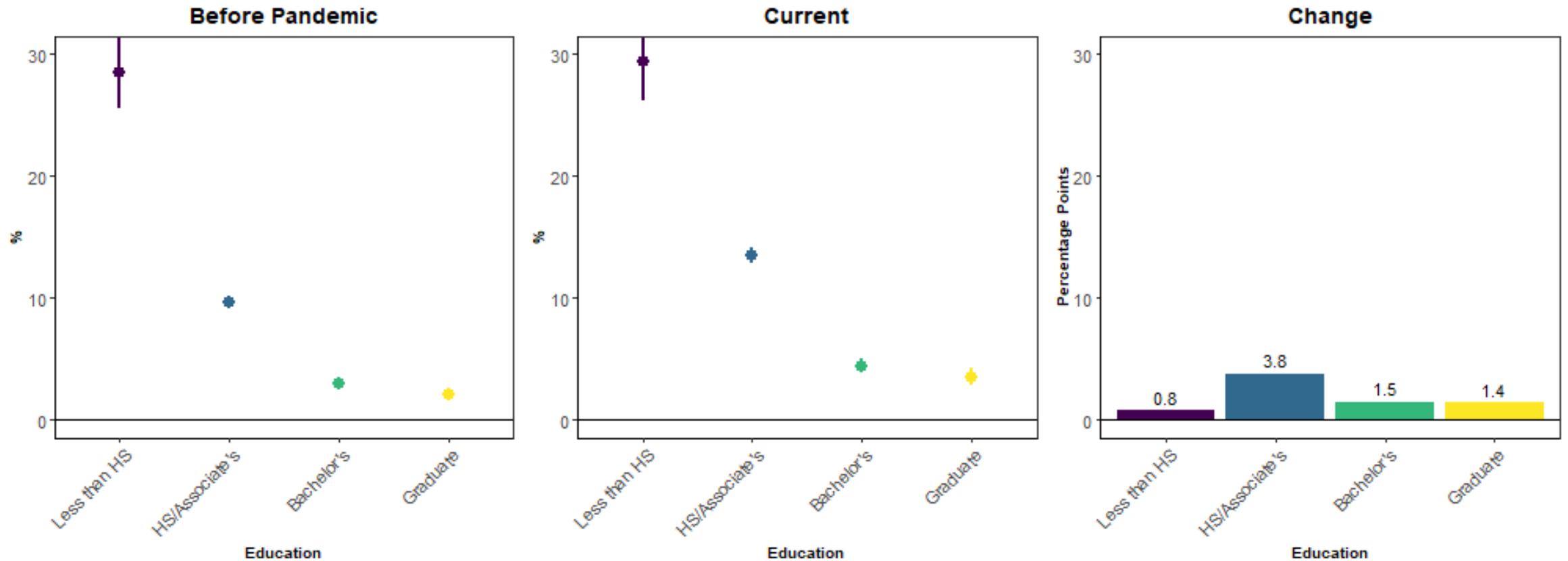
National Food Insecurity by Race and Ethnicity, July 16-21



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Household Pulse Survey

# Bachelor's Degree Strongly Associated With Security

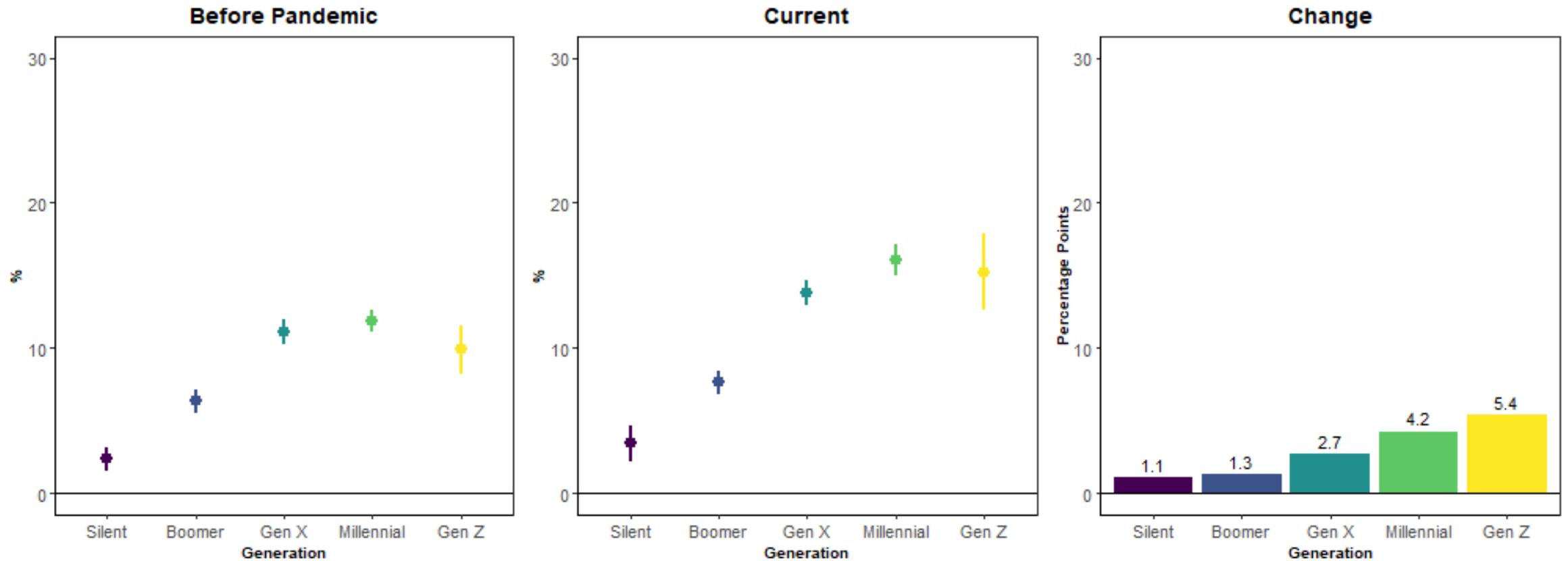
National Food Insecurity by Education, July 16-21



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Household Pulse Survey

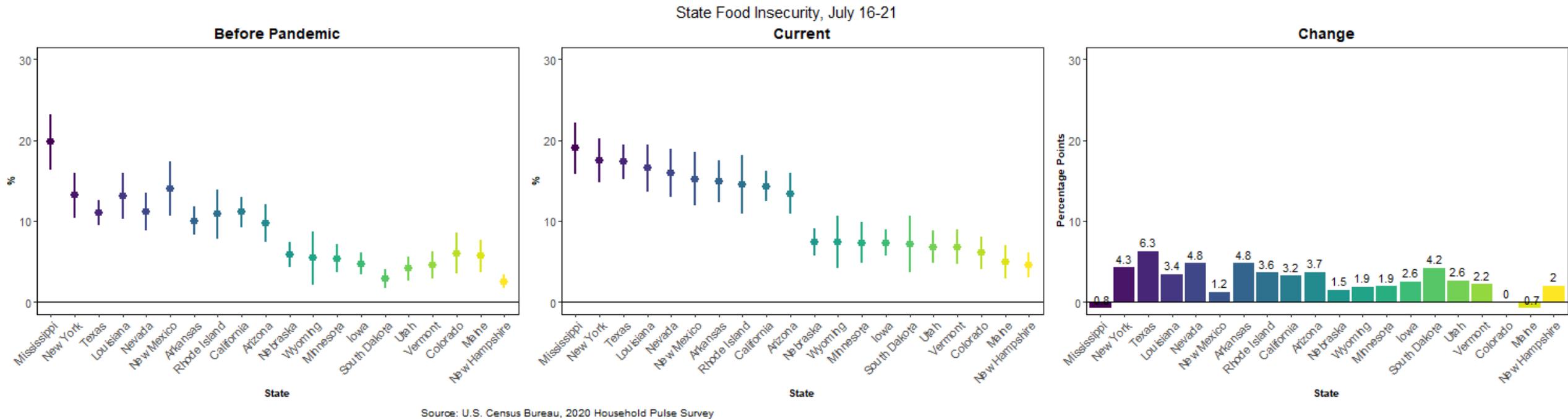
# Despite Their Age, Gen X Shows Instability

National Food Insecurity by Generation, July 16-21

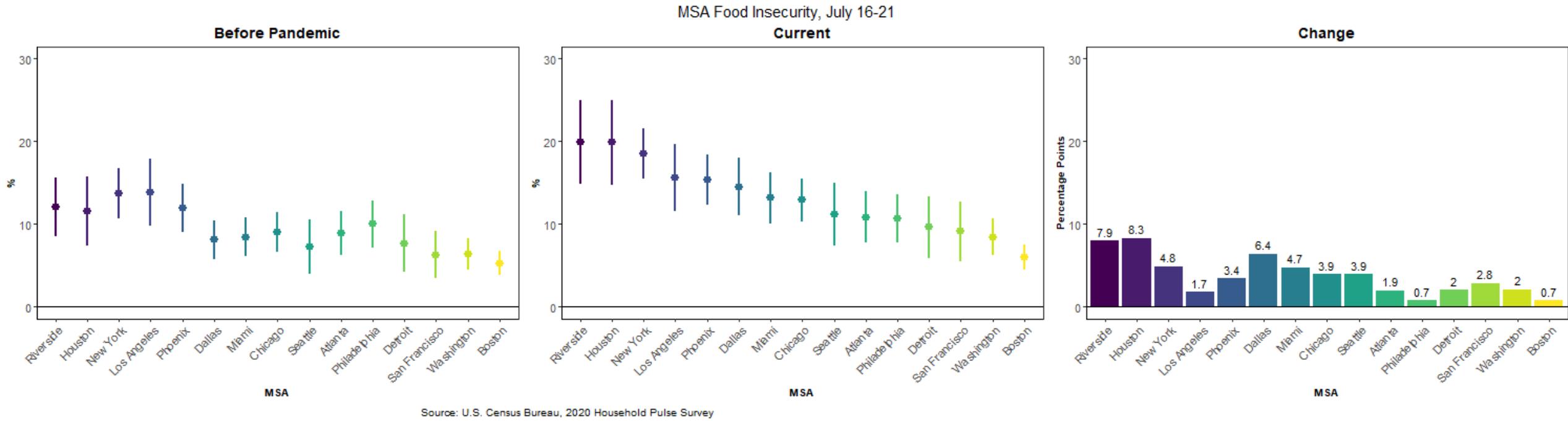


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Household Pulse Survey

# States Across Regions Experienced Sharp Rise in Food Insecurity



# Similar Rates Across Diverse Range of Metro Areas



Note: Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA) names have been abbreviated here due to space restrictions.

# Conclusion

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- Despite evidence of some labor market recovery, levels of food insecurity remained elevated.
- While demographic groups exhibit long-standing disparities, even the better off groups show signs of increased distress.
- Communities across the United States are grappling with a shared crisis.
- Discontinued federal benefits, coupled with the Pulse Survey pause, raises concerns about current status.

## *Operation Food Search's Response to the Increased Need During the COVID-19 Crisis*



**Kristen Wild**  
Executive Director  
Operation Food Search





**Our Mission:**

To nourish and educate our neighbors in need to heal the hurt of hunger.

**Our Vision:**

All children and families have the nutrition, food, and skills they need to lead a healthy life.

- Hunger relief organization established in 1981
- Provides food and services to 200,000 individuals per month
- 330 community partners in 30 Missouri and Illinois counties
- Partners include food pantries, shelters, community sites
- Strategic focus on addressing the root causes of food insecurity

## INCREASE IN NEED

- Many people already living with the burden of food insecurity feel increased anxiety for themselves and their families.
- Others, due to unexpected job layoffs, are experiencing food insecurity for the first time.
- We have increased our response to provide more than one million additional meals in the past four months.

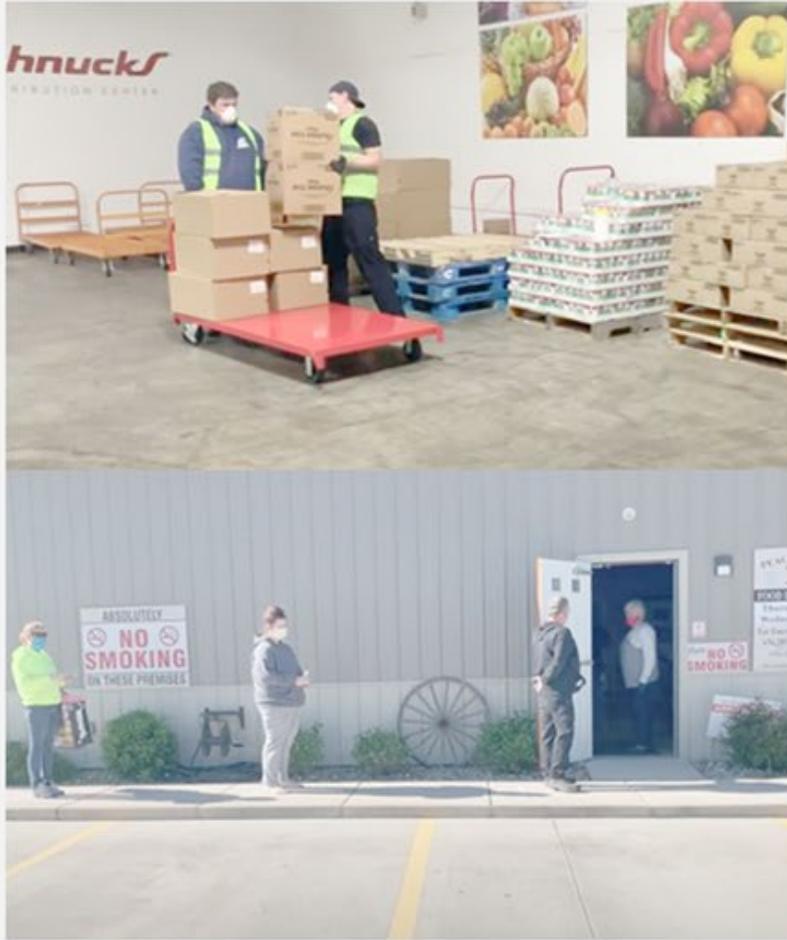
# EMERGENCY RESPONSE 2020

Operation Food Search's  
Response to the Increased Need  
During the COVID-19 Crisis



Operation  
Food Search

## FOOD DISTRIBUTION AND RESCUE



We have continued our regular food distribution to 200,000 people/month.

We work with restaurants and farmers to rescue food that would otherwise be wasted.

The USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program has provided 6,392 boxes of produce and dairy weekly since mid-May.

Many partner agencies shifted to drive-through service or made other adaptations.

## CHILD NUTRITION

We have addressed the crucial need to feed children while schools are out in several ways:

1. Providing **grab 'n go meals** to children ages 18 and younger at library branches and community locations
2. Distributing **emergency food packs** at school districts, independent schools, and community locations
3. Adapting our **summer meal program** to include rural partnerships, drive-through meal pick up, and mobile meal routes

We have provided more than 500,000 nutritious breakfasts and lunches to kids at 40 locations in the bistate region since the end of March.



## ADDITIONAL FOOD DISTRIBUTION

### 1. CARES Act funds:

- St. Louis County awarded Operation Food Search (OFS) \$1.3 million of its CARES Act funds.
- These funds are being used to purchase and deliver family meal boxes to 21 locations.
- Sites were identified based on locations where incomes fall below the federal poverty level, school districts where the percent of students on free or reduced lunch is high, zip codes where COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact, and zip codes where African Americans make up a significant proportion of the population.

### 2. Ongoing partnerships for drive-thru meal distribution:

- School districts and numerous community organizations, including:
  - St. Louis County Library
  - Urban League
  - Catholic Charities
  - Beyond Housing

## NUTRITION EDUCATION

As part of our mission to heal hunger, the OFS Nutrition Education Team teaches families how to cook delicious, nutrient-rich food on a budget.

- Operation CHEF—working on a virtual curriculum
- Cooking with Carmen—Facebook live
- Virtual grocery store tours
- Food demos in the OFS warehouse



## FOOD AS MEDICINE



We are continuing to support our Fresh Rx program participants with weekly shares of fresh produce and other food, kitchen essentials, and nutrition education.

Many participants are experiencing layoffs and other hardships. Our services include counseling and community referrals.

## POLICY AND ADVOCACY

### REGIONAL LEADERSHIP

OFS plays a leadership role on the COVID-19 Regional Response Team that represents five major jurisdictions: St. Louis City, St. Louis County, St. Charles County, St. Clair County, and Madison County.

We coordinate with regional leaders to address the needs of at-risk populations, low-income communities, first responders, and other essential personnel.

### FOOD ACCESS POLICY

Our policy team analyzes the rapidly changing policy landscape so the people we serve can understand new resources available to them, such as extended SNAP and WIC benefits.

Our team also shares policy information with our community partners to help them understand how regulations and state waivers may impact their daily operations.

OFS, a respected leader in food access policy, actively seeks opportunities to share our expertise with state and local elected officials to educate them about the hardships people are experiencing due to COVID-19.

## RESOURCES PROVIDED

### FAMILY FOOD FINDER



- Regional and state-wide information on food locations, SNAP, and WIC
- Translated into Spanish, Vietnamese, Somali, Burmese, Chinese, and Arabic

### CHILD MEALS MAP



- Centralized map of meal sites where families can access free meals for kids ages 18 and younger across the St. Louis Region during the COVID-19 emergency
- Provided in addition to our Find Food Map, which covers all ages

### STOCK UP FOR SUMMER



- A resource to help families make the most of Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) by stocking up on suggested items
- Contains information on accessing P-EBT
- Includes recipes

## HOW TO HELP

### FINANCIAL DONATIONS

One-time gifts and recurring gifts make it possible to continue to provide food and services to 200,000 people per month. Matching gifts are encouraged! Donate at [www.operationfoodsearch.org](http://www.operationfoodsearch.org).

### FOOD DONATIONS

(St. Louis area)  
Non-perishable food and household supplies can be dropped off in the outside bin at OFS, 1644 Lotsie Blvd., Overland, MO 63132 at any time of the day or night (please, no glass).

### VOLUNTEER

(St. Louis area)  
Visit our volunteer hub to explore ways to help at [www.operationfoodsearch.org](http://www.operationfoodsearch.org).

### BECOME HUNGER-INFORMED

Take our online course, Healing Hunger in the Community. Just login at [www.Learn.OperationFoodSearch.org](http://www.Learn.OperationFoodSearch.org) with username **ofslern** and password **ofspilot**.

### SPREAD THE WORD

Follow us for updates and share our posts:  
Facebook.com/OperationFoodSearch  
Instagram.com/opfoodsearch  
Twitter.com/opfoodsearch  
LinkedIn.com/company/863906

**Learn more at [www.OperationFoodSearch.org](http://www.OperationFoodSearch.org)**

# *Using Policy Levers to Tackle Food Insecurity During the Pandemic*



**Elaine Waxman, PhD**  
Senior Fellow  
Income and Benefits Policy Center



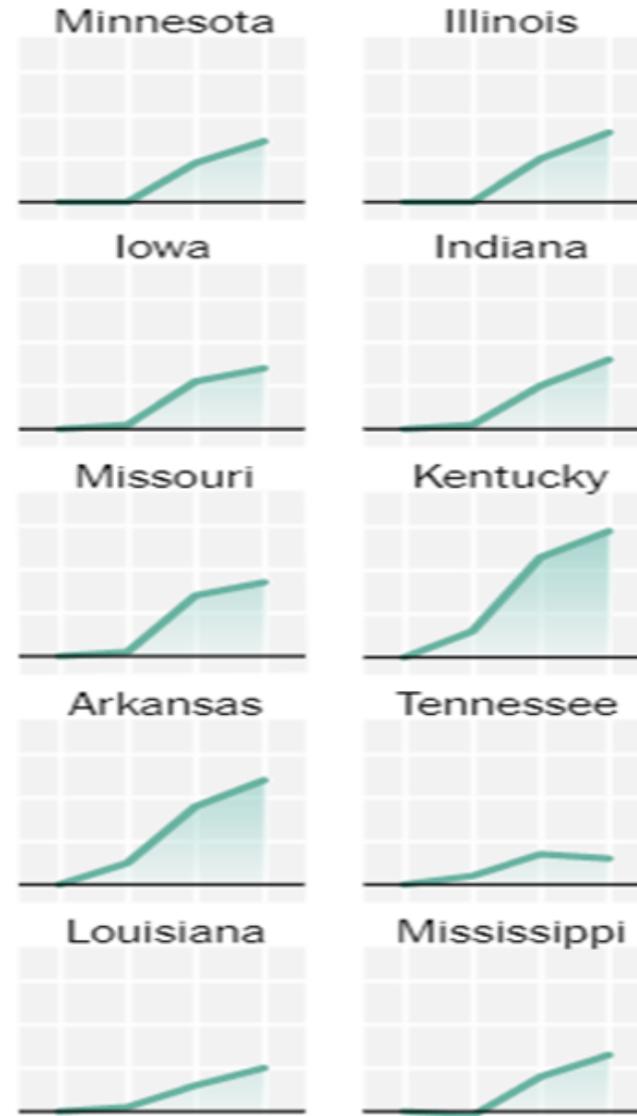
# Key Provisions of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act

- Increased SNAP funds and gave states flexibility to give households the maximum monthly benefit
- Temporarily halted SNAP work requirements for unemployed adults under age 50 without children in their household
- Provided flexibility for states to offer out-of-school meals in a variety of ways
- Created new Pandemic-EBT program to replace value of out-of-school meals through an electronic benefit card (e.g., existing SNAP or new card for this purpose)

## SNAP Response in the First Months of the Pandemic

- In first 3 months following shutdowns due to the pandemic, more than 6 million people enrolled in SNAP.
- Prior research indicates that SNAP is an important countercyclical tool and an economic multiplier, returning between \$1.50 and \$1.80 for every SNAP dollar spent.

## Percent change in food stamp recipients

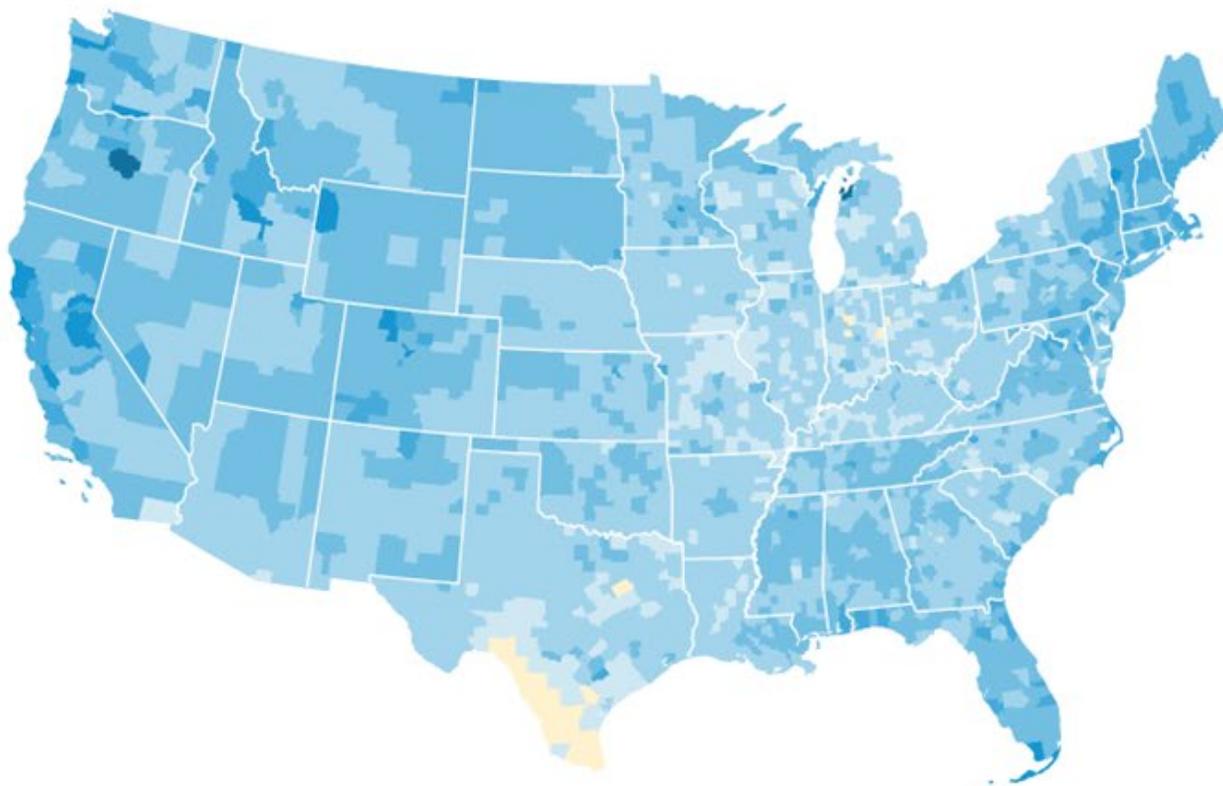
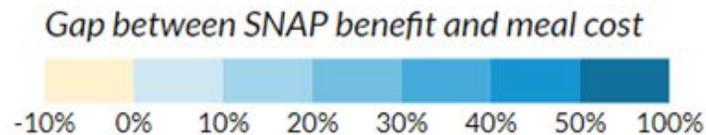


Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/19/us/politics/coronavirus-food-stamps.html>

# Why Does SNAP Matter?

- It is our first line of defense—a national program, not restricted to certain age groups, and allows participation in mainstream economy.
- It reduces food insecurity and lifts many people out of poverty.
- It is associated with better health outcomes and lower health expenses.
- During the Great Recession, the maximum SNAP benefit was increased across the United States. Research shows it helped buffer food insecurity (evidence-based policy tool).

# Even in Better Times, SNAP Falls Short of Covering the Cost of a Low-Income Meal



## National average



The average cost of a meal is **\$2.36**, 27% more than the SNAP benefit.

URBAN INSTITUTE

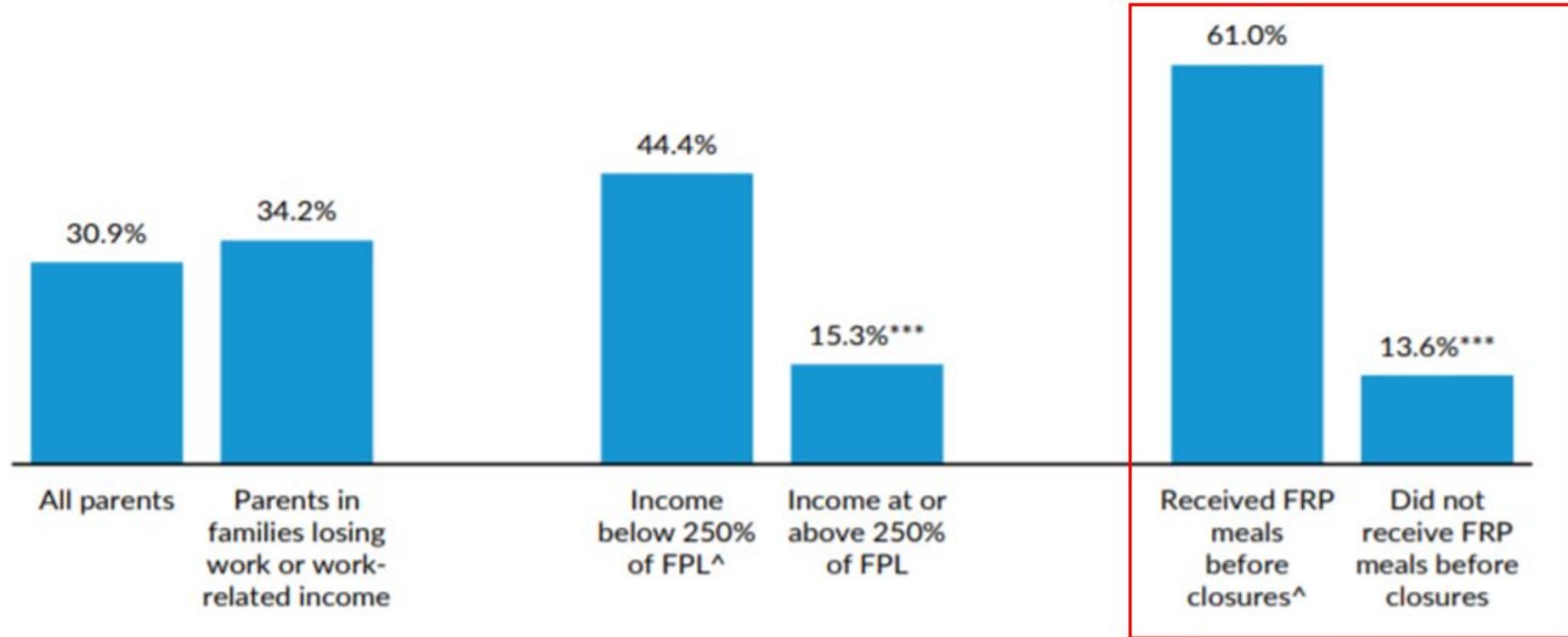
# SNAP Policy Direction Going Forward Is Uncertain

- Emergency allotments may not continue into Fall 2020.
- HEROES Act includes provision to increase maximum SNAP benefit by 15 percent; HEALS Act does not address this.
- Recent Urban analysis suggests that 1.7 million more people would be kept out of poverty for the second half of 2020 if the maximum benefit was increased.

# Out-of-School Feeding Strategies in Early Months

- Major USDA waivers made it possible to serve kids during closures.
- Grab and Go meals: Parents and caregivers show up at schools and community sites to pick up meals for children.
- Community hubs for meal distribution
- Bus routes model
- Partnership model to provide home delivery between rural districts and nonprofits or other vendors (Emergency Meals-to-You).

# Share of Parents Whose School-Age Children Have Received School-Based Meals During School Closures, Overall and by Family Income and Receipt of Free or Reduced-Price Meals Before School Closures, May 2020



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Urban Institute Coronavirus Tracking Survey, wave 1.

Notes: FPL is federal poverty level. FRP is free or reduced-price. School-age children are ages 6 through 18. The survey was conducted May 14 through 27, 2020.

\*/\*\*/\*\* Estimate differs significantly from reference group (^) at the 0.10/0.05/0.01 level, using two-tailed tests.

# A New Strategy Rolled Out This Summer: P-EBT

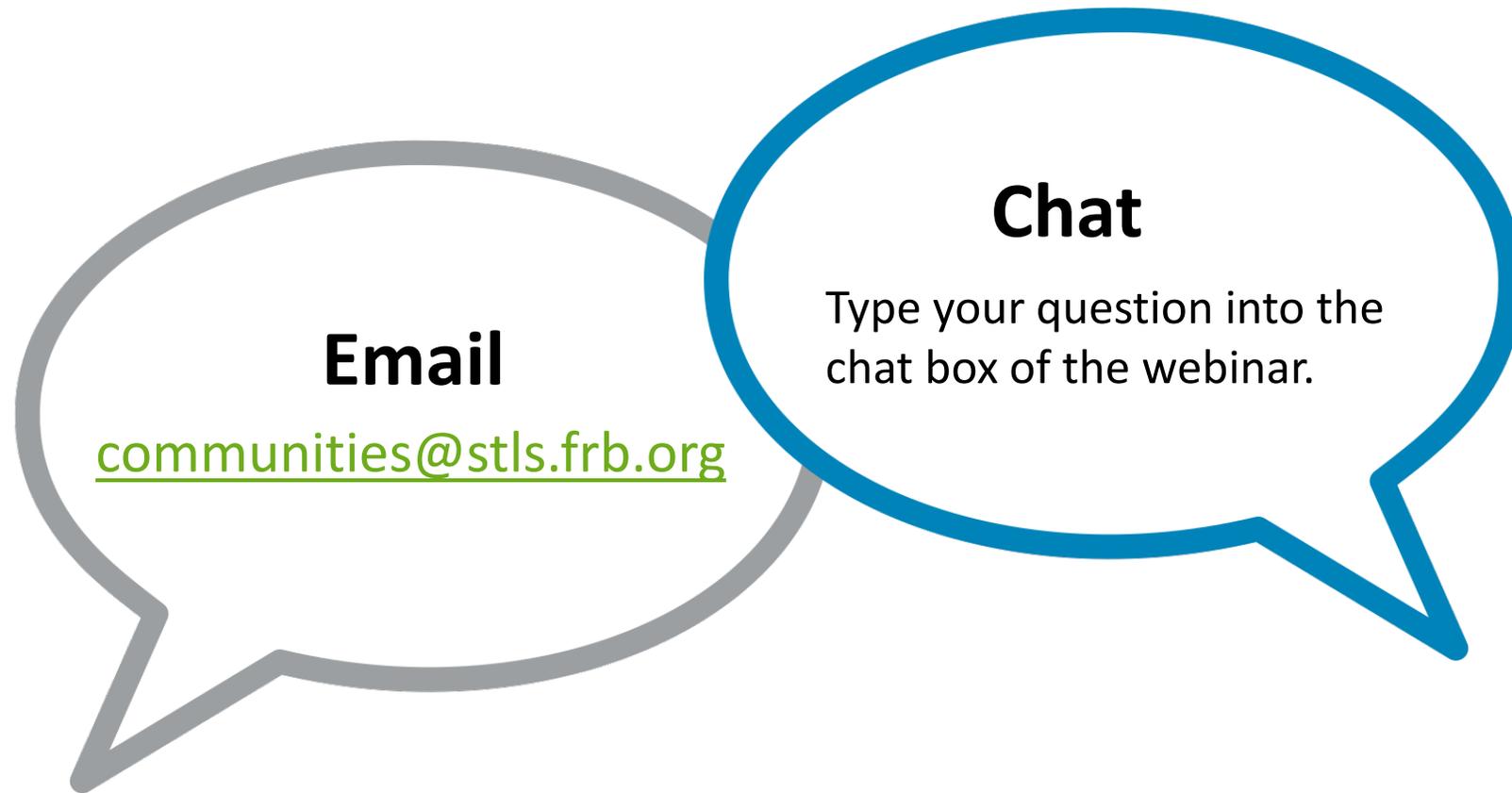
- Enables states to enact emergency standards of eligibility for children who have lost access to free- or reduced-price meals because their schools closed for at least five consecutive days
- An allotment of federal funds equal to the daily reimbursement amount for free breakfast and lunch in the state is loaded onto a household's EBT card
- 50 states and D.C. have been approved to operate P-EBT
- Advantages:
  - Addresses health and staffing concerns associated with Grab and Go; allows families to shop for their specific food needs; and redeeming benefits can support local food stores
- Disadvantages:
  - Uneven implementation; concerns about “public charge” dampening participation among some immigrant households; and currently not authorized to continue into the fall

# Looking Ahead: Key Considerations

- Following the Great Recession, it took a decade for food insecurity rates to return to pre-recession levels.
- SNAP is critical, but strategies are unclear at the moment.
- As schools reopen with mixed models, it will be important to consider preparations for feeding kids both in and out of school.
- The pandemic has revealed marked racial and ethnic disparities in food security and resource allotment, requiring proactive attention moving forward—doing the same thing for all communities will not tackle disparities.

# Questions

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# Next Steps

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- All session materials are available on our website and, in the next few days, we will post an audio file of today's session.
- If you have topical suggestions for future sessions, or any questions about this program, please feel free to contact us at [communities@stls.frb.org](mailto:communities@stls.frb.org).
- Information about future sessions will be posted on our website, along with archived materials from past sessions: <https://bsr.stlouisfed.org/connectingcommunities>.