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15 Million — One in Ten — Working Adults in U.S. Struggle Against Hunger, Says New Report

“U.S. Hunger Atlas” Shows One in Six American Children Lived in Food Insecure Households in 2015-2017

New Mexico, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama Have Highest Rates of Hungry Employed Adults

Advocates Say Findings a “Wake-Up Call for Policy Makers”

Nearly 10 percent of employed U.S. adults — a total of nearly 15 million people — lived in homes that couldn't always afford enough food, according to a new report by the national nonprofit Hunger Free America, based on an analysis of federal data. The report — the first ever “Hunger Atlas” of the nation — also found that more than 17 percent of children and nearly 8 percent of older Americans (adults 60 years and older) lived in food insecure households during the same time period.

Joel Berg, CEO of Hunger Free America stated, “While the nation rightfully focuses on whether a blue wave or a red wave changes our political leadership any given year, we must also focus on the reality that, since the 1980s, a red, white, and blue wave of hunger has submerged each of the fifty states of the U.S. in suffering, making America the only Western industrialized democracy with this level of food hardship. We simply cannot let mass deprivation be considered any sort of ‘new normal.’”

The states with the highest rates of food insecurity among employed adults were New Mexico (15.6 percent), Arkansas (13.8 percent), Louisiana (13.5 percent), Mississippi (12.7 percent), and Alabama (12.6 percent), according to the report. Louisiana, Oklahoma, Mississippi, New Mexico, and Alabama were consistently on the lists of the top ten states with the highest rates of food insecurity for employed adults, children, and older Americans.

“It is vital to note that this data comes from 2015-2017, when the economy was still booming,” said Berg. “We can only imagine how much more suffering there will be when the next inevitable recession or depression occurs if we don’t fix the structural flaws in our economy and safety net that cause such mass hunger before then.”

The atlas also reported:

- The states with the highest rates of food insecure children were Arkansas (27.5 percent), New Mexico (27.1 percent), Louisiana (24.7 percent), Wyoming (22.9 percent), and Mississippi (22.1 percent).
- In states with a minimum wage set at \$10 or above, an average of 8.6 percent of employed adults were found to be food insecure — more than a full percentage point below the national average of 9.7 percent. In states with a minimum wage set at \$7.25 or below, an average of 9.9 percent of employed adults were food insecure.
- California is the state with the highest number of food insecure employed adults at more than 1.74 million, followed by Texas (1.45 million), Florida (0.99 million), New York (0.67 million), and Illinois (0.56 million).
- The states with the highest rate of food insecurity among older Americans were Louisiana (13.4 percent), New Mexico (12.1 percent), Mississippi (11.9 percent), Alabama (11.4 percent), and North Carolina (11.2 percent).
- Nationwide, food insecure Americans would need \$21.5 billion in additional food purchasing power each year to meet their basic food needs, spending as much on food as do non-hungry Americans. The increased food purchasing power could take the form of a combination of higher wages and increased federal nutrition assistance spending.

“It’s no surprise that we again found that states with higher minimum wages have less hunger among working people and states with lower minimum wages had more hunger among working people,” Berg added. “The claims of opponents of wage hikes — that such increases will harm employment rates and thus increase poverty and hunger — are clearly unfounded. This report should be a wake-up call to elected and appointed officials at the federal, state, and local levels that we need bold, comprehensive new economic and public policies to raise wages and ensure an adequate anti-hunger and anti-poverty safety net.”

The full report, “The Red, White, and Blue Hunger Wave: A 2019 United States Hunger Atlas” can be found on Hunger Free America’s website, www.HungerFreeAmerica.org, through which anyone can also donate, volunteer, or find food resources for those in need. Anyone needing food can call the USDA Hunger Hotline, managed by Hunger Free America on behalf of the federal government, at 1-866-3-hungry.

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