

Rural Studies Program Fact Sheet 06-01



Changes in Hunger and Food Insecurity in Oregon

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The table below shows where changes in food insecurity and hunger took place in Oregon's population. The 1999-2001 numbers come from the November 2003 report released by Oregon State University and the newer numbers come from our analysis of the most recent available data (2002-2004).

Oregon Food Insecurity and Hunger Rates for Households, Across Categories, 2000 and 2003 (%)

	1999-2001	2002-2004	1999-2001	2002-2004
	Food Insecurity		Hunger	
Oregon Rate	13.4	11.8	5.2	3.8
National Rate	10.4	11.4	3.1	3.6
Unemployed	24.7	26.6	11.1	9.3
Employed ¹	14.0	10.7	5.5	3.0
Full-year, full-time employed reference person ²	14.0	11.0	5.5	3.0
Dual earner families	7.2	6.8	2.5	1.6
Metro residence	14.3	11.4	5.2	4.1
Non-metro residence ³	11.2	13.3	5.2	3.2
Two parent, w/ kids	19.1	14.1	7.3	3.2
Single mothers	25.0	36.3	9.4	12.0
Home owners	7.3	7.8	3.0	2.2
Renters	25.9	20.2	9.6	6.6
Hispanic ⁴		31.0		10.3
Non-Hispanic		10.5		3.7

1. "Employed" are households without an unemployed adult; unemployed households have at least one unemployed adult.

2. Reference person is the person in whose name is held the title, mortgage, or lease on a house; this person answers questions for the rest of the household members. For dual owners/renters, it can be either person.

3. An earlier release of this report indicated a much lower hunger rate in non-metro Oregon (2.0%). Problems subsequently discovered in the data set used for that analysis have led us to re-analyze the data, yielding this higher estimate (3.2%).

4. Computations for Hispanic/Non-Hispanic reference persons were not completed in the 1999-2001 report. Due to changes made by Census in how they designate race and ethnicity, we include here only the years 2003 and 2004.

Discussion of Table

Unlike the earlier OSU report on hunger (<http://arec.oregonstate.edu/ruralstudies/hunger.pdf>), where we compared Oregon's hunger rate to the national rates, in this analysis we look instead for general patterns of change from the earlier to the later period. The overall rate of hunger has fallen from 5.2%, which was highest in the nation at the beginning of this decade, to 3.8%, much closer to the national average. The food insecurity rate also fell substantially. (See the earlier report for discussion of the concepts and measurement of food insecurity and hunger.)

This decline in Oregon is especially impressive and surprising because the national rates of hunger and of food insecurity were increasing over the same period.

In the right-most columns, there is indication that hunger fell among 9 of 10 analytical categories. (We did not report Hispanic rates of hunger in the earlier report, so no comparisons are made for this 11th category.) Only among single mother households did the hunger rate increase. Largest declines in hunger appear to be among: year-round full-time employed families, renters, two-parent (with children) households, and households in non-metro areas. Of course these are not all mutually exclusive categories. The main observation in this analysis is that *the hunger decline since 2000 was pervasive, across social categories*.

Food insecurity rates showed less consistency in trend. Food insecurity fell for full-time year-round employed households, renters, 2-parent families, and households in metropolitan locations. But food insecurity grew substantially for single mothers, and to a lesser extent among unemployed and non-metro households.

Why did Oregon's hunger and food insecurity rates decline while the U.S. rates increased? We cannot yet know for sure, but we note that while economic conditions remained difficult for Oregonians during the early 2000s, the state's food-stamp outreach and enrollment increased dramatically, nearly doubling, during that time. Perhaps this program expansion had its intended effect.

However, the observed drop in hunger, as the food insecurity rate rose, in non-metropolitan locations demonstrates that food stamp outreach, emergency food delivery, and other program developments may have somewhat different impacts on hunger versus food insecurity. The non-metro pattern we observe supports the hypothesis that food stamps and emergency food deliveries may stave off hunger, but not eliminate food insecurity. Using a similar logic, we note that food insecurity rose substantially for single mothers while their hunger rate rose only modestly. We do not know if food stamp enrollment or emergency food deliveries may have especially helped non-metro residents or single mothers to avoid hunger while facing food insecurity. Further research is needed to see how such programs might affect hunger versus food insecurity.

We cannot compare earlier to later food insecurity and hunger rates for Hispanic residents, but in the newest data we see some of the most dramatic differences across categories in both food insecurity and hunger. The food insecurity and hunger rates among Hispanic residents are approximately three times that of non-Hispanic residents.

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