

# IDAHO AT A GLANCE

## Food Security in Idaho

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### Highlights

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Food insecurity has serious long-term consequences for health, educational outcomes, workforce participation, and income.<sup>a</sup> Despite considerable resources devoted to reducing hunger, 22% of Idaho's children were food insecure in 2012<sup>b</sup> and 14% of Idaho households were food insecure during the period 2010—2012.<sup>c</sup> Rates of food insecurity are especially severe among children and in rural Idaho.

The goal of this policy brief is to create a base of common information and stimulate partnerships to address the food security challenge. A full research report on food security in Idaho is available on the McClure Center's website (see below).

In Idaho and other states, there are five approaches to improving food security:

- ◆ **Federal food and nutrition programs** provide financial assistance, supplemental food, and other services to families. They are administered by the state of Idaho.
- ◆ **Charitable organizations** use donations from individuals and companies to provide emergency food assistance and other services.
- ◆ **Nutrition education programs** are funded from federal and other sources to encourage more nutritious eating, primarily among low-income families.
- ◆ **Advocacy and policy approaches** promote changes in the principles and priorities that guide laws and programs.
- ◆ **Market-based approaches** work to connect local food producers with low-income consumers, sometimes through or with subsidies from nonprofit or public agencies.

Our analysis points toward four priorities that should guide policy and programs aimed at improving long-term food security: collaboration, focusing on children first, stimulating new markets wherever possible, and using evidence-based education strategies.

### Defining food insecurity

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The USDA considers a household to be **food secure** if, at all times over the course of the previous year, all members of the household had access to "enough food for an active, healthy lifestyle." A household is **food insecure** if, at any time during the previous year, it was difficult to provide enough food for all members due to a lack of resources.

**Low food security** means a household had a hard time accessing food, but food intake was not reduced. **Very low food security** means one or more members of a household had reduced food intake or disrupted eating patterns due to insufficient funds or resources for accessing food.<sup>c</sup>

## Food security matters

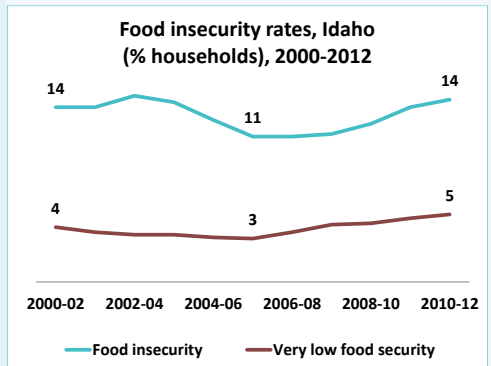
People from all backgrounds experience food insecurity, but rates are especially high among particular groups. Nationwide in 2012, 35% of single-female headed households with children were food insecure, compared to 15% for all households. Among Hispanic households, the rate was 23%.<sup>d</sup> Children experience food insecurity at much higher rates than adults: 22% of the nation's children lived in food insecure households in 2012, compared to 14% of adults.<sup>b</sup>

High rates of food insecurity cause multiple, long-term problems for individuals and society as a whole. People who don't have nutritious diets are much more likely to experience poor overall health status, activity-limiting health impairments, depression and other mental health issues.<sup>a</sup> Children with poor diets experience compromised health and development and are less likely to succeed in school. People with poor diets are also more vulnerable to being overweight and obese. Those with lower incomes have less access to affordable, healthy foods and fewer options for physical activity.<sup>e</sup>

## Idaho's challenge

Like the rest of the nation, Idaho entered a severe economic downturn in late 2007. The state's unemployment rate rose from 3.0% in 2007 to 8.7% in 2011. In 2013, the rate was 6.2%, still more than double its pre-recession level.<sup>f</sup>

Not surprisingly, Idaho's overall rates of food insecurity went up during the recession, from 11.4% of all households in 2005-2007 to 14.3% in 2010-2012.



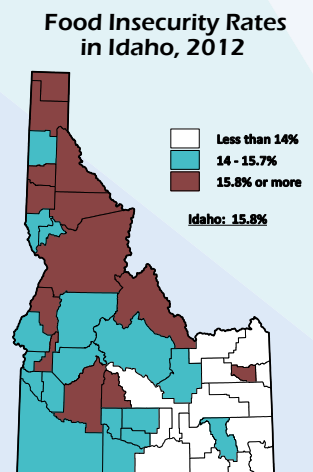
SOURCE: USDA, Economic Research Service

Rates of very low food security increased as well, from 3.4% to 5.3%.<sup>c</sup> The recession caused food insecurity to rise in Idaho and rates have not returned to pre-recession levels. And as would be expected, counties in which poverty rates are highest are also those with the highest rates of food insecurity.

## Food insecurity varies across the state

In 2012, the greatest numbers of food insecure people lived in Ada and Canyon counties: 57,040 and 29,570, respectively. However, the state's highest rates of food insecurity occurred in more rural counties, including Adams (18%), Latah (18%), Shoshone (19%), and Madison (21%). Regional differences are stark: rates are highest in northern and central Idaho and lowest in the southeast.<sup>b</sup>

Food insecurity rates are higher among the state's children: 22% of Idaho's children (91,730 children) were food insecure, compared to 14% of Idaho's adults and 4% of the state's seniors. The highest rates of child food insecurity were in Owyhee (25%), Shoshone (25%) and Lemhi (27%) counties, all of which are rural.<sup>b</sup>



SOURCE: Feeding America

# Approach 1: Federal programs

Idaho participates in several large, federally-funded food and nutrition programs intended to increase food security among low-income populations. These programs are income-based and administered by the state.

## Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SNAP, known as “food stamps” in Idaho, is the first and most generously funded line of defense against food insecurity. SNAP provides monthly monetary assistance for food purchases in the form of prepaid cards that can be used at eligible retailers.

- ◆ Idaho funding: \$347 million (2013)
- ◆ Idaho participants: 227,000 (2013)<sup>e</sup>

## School-based nutrition programs

Programs include the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the School Breakfast Program, and the Summer Food Service Program.

- ◆ Idaho funding for NSLP: \$54.9 million (2012)
- ◆ Idaho NSLP eligible: 136,000, or 49% of Idaho’s K-12 public school students, are eligible for free and reduced-price meals (2011-12)<sup>h</sup>

## Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)

WIC provides grants to states for supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education. It serves low-income women who are pregnant, just had a baby, or are breastfeeding a baby under one year of age; infants; and children under age five.<sup>i</sup>

- ◆ Idaho funding: \$19 million, average monthly benefits of \$36.82 (2013)
- ◆ Idaho participants: 43,000 per month (2013)<sup>j</sup>

## The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

TEFAP is the largest federal provider of emergency food and supplements emergency food agencies’ donated food items. In Idaho, it is administered by Community Action Partnership of Idaho.

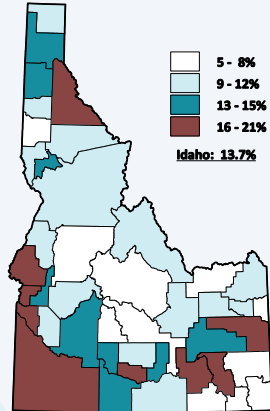
- ◆ Idaho funding: \$2 million (FY2012)<sup>k</sup>
- ◆ Idaho participants: N/A

## Income-based eligibility for federal programs

Eligibility for federal food and nutrition programs is based on household income relative to the poverty threshold, which in 2014 is \$23,850 for a four-person household.

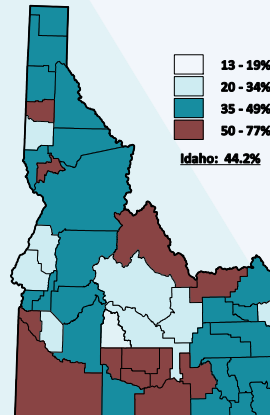
- ◆ Households with **income below 130%** of the poverty level (below \$31,005) are eligible for SNAP, WIC and free school meals.
- ◆ Households with **income between 130% and 185%** of the poverty level (\$31,005 to \$44,123) are eligible for WIC and reduced-price (but not free) school meals.
- ◆ Households with **income above 185%** of the poverty level (above \$44,123) are **ineligible** for federal programs, even if they are food insecure.<sup>b</sup>

Food Stamp Use in Idaho, % of residents, January 2014



SOURCE: ID Department of Health & Welfare

Mothers Accessing WIC During Pregnancy (%), 2011



SOURCE: ID Department of Health & Welfare

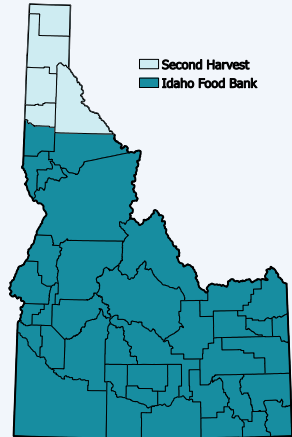
## Approach 2: Charitable programs

Many food insecure households turn to charitable programs when they do not qualify for federal programs or when benefits are not enough to meet food needs.

The largest emergency food provider in Idaho is The Idaho Foodbank, which works with a network of 220 partner agencies to distribute free emergency food to people in need. In FY2013, The Idaho Foodbank distributed 10.6 million meals (serving about 106,000 people per month), a 12% increase from the year before. Of those served by The Idaho Foodbank's partner agencies, 26% were children, 54% were working age adults, and 20% were seniors.<sup>l</sup>

Second Harvest is Idaho's next largest provider of emergency food. It works with 250 local food banks and meal centers throughout the state's five northern counties and counties in eastern Washington. In FY2013 Second Harvest distributed almost 3.3 million pounds of food in Northern Idaho (up from 2.7 million in FY2012). Second Harvest estimates that 40% of its food bank clients are children and 10% are seniors.<sup>m</sup>

Food Bank Service Areas



## Approach 3: Nutrition education programs

Nutrition education programs are designed to encourage more nutritious eating, primarily among low-income households. Programs are geared toward SNAP and WIC recipients as well as others at risk of being food insecure. The common themes in Idaho's nutrition education programs are shopping, cooking, eating healthy food on a limited budget, and using SNAP and WIC benefits wisely.

Idaho's largest nutrition education program is *Eat Smart Idaho*. Through *Eat Smart Idaho*, University of Idaho Extension faculty members deliver nutrition and food resource management education in 39 Idaho counties. Another nutrition education program is *Cooking Matters*<sup>TM</sup>, a six-week course developed by Share our Strength and delivered by The Idaho Foodbank. *Cooking Matters* participants learn how to select and prepare meals from fresh, healthy ingredients.<sup>n</sup>

## Approach 4: Advocacy & policy approaches

Many organizations in Idaho advocate for policy changes related to food security. They sometimes provide direct food assistance and organize community programs as their primary or secondary missions. One example is the Idaho Hunger Relief Task Force. Every other year, IHRTF holds a statewide Hunger Summit at which participants share information and collaboratively decide on action items for the next two years. The 2010 Summit identified establishment of a childhood hunger coalition as one of its next steps. The coalition, *Nourishing Idaho's Children*, was formed with leadership from Idaho Voices for Children.

Other organizations active in policy advocacy include Catholic Charities of Idaho, the Idaho Interfaith Roundtable, and The Idaho Foodbank.

## Approach 5: Market-based approaches

Consumer interest in purchasing local food and buying directly from producers is growing in Idaho and across the nation as a whole. Especially since the recession began, nonprofit organizations and entrepreneurs have been exploring how local food production might be used to improve food security among low-income households. Examples in Idaho include:

- ◆ **SNAP benefits at farmers markets.** This leverages federal nutrition dollars to stimulate local food production. As of April 2014, 17 of Idaho's 48 farmers markets were authorized to process SNAP benefits.<sup>o</sup>
- ◆ **Wholesome Wave.** A national nonprofit that doubles the value of federal nutrition benefits at the Capital City Public Market in Boise.<sup>p</sup>
- ◆ **Farm to School.** A joint program between Idaho's departments of education and agriculture that coordinates a set of strategies to connect healthy local food and agriculture with school children.<sup>q</sup> Fifty school districts currently participate. Items purchased most often include fruit, vegetables and fluid milk.<sup>r</sup>

## Where do we go from here

Our analysis indicates that focusing on four priorities offer the greatest potential for improving food security in the long-term: collaboration; focusing on children first; stimulating new markets wherever possible; and using evidence-based education strategies. The University of Idaho can contribute to addressing Idaho's food security challenge through basic and applied research; consumer and producer education; convening stakeholders; and partnering with other organizations on developing strategies, grant proposals, and high-impact initiatives. For a more complete discussion of these priorities, please see our full research report on food security at the McClure Center's website ([www.uidaho.edu/class/mcclurecenter](http://www.uidaho.edu/class/mcclurecenter)).

### DATA SOURCES:

- a—Center for American Progress, *Hunger in America: Suffering We Are All Paying For*
- b—Feeding America, *Map the Meal Gap*
- c—USDA, Economic Research Service, *Household Food Security in the United States*
- d—USDA, Economic Research Service, *Food Security in the U.S., Key Statistics & Graphics*
- e—Food Research and Action Center, *Why Low-Income and Food Insecure People are Vulnerable to Overweight and Obesity*
- f—U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics
- g—USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, Program Data
- h—National Center for Educational Statistics, Elementary/Secondary Information System
- i—Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, *What is WIC?*
- j—USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, Program Data, WIC Program
- k—Community Action Partnership of Idaho
- l—The Idaho Foodbank, Latest Statistics
- m—2nd Harvest. About Us.
- n—University of Idaho Extension, IMPACT, Eat Smart Idaho: healthy people – healthy communities, personal communication, manuscript in preparation
- o—USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, *Learn how you can accept SNAP benefits at farmers' markets*
- p—McFadden, Dawn Thilmany, and Sarah A. Low, *Will Local Foods Influence American Diets?*
- q—Idaho Dept. of Education, Child Nutrition Programs, *Growing Farm to School: Results from the Idaho Farm to School Pilot*
- r—USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, *The Farm to School Census: Idaho*
- s—U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates
- t—U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Data, Local Area Personal Income

<i>Selected indicators</i>	IDAHO	UNITED STATES
<b>FOOD INSECURITY</b>		
Overall food insecurity rate (% of households) <sup>c</sup>		
2010-2012	14.3	14.7
2005-2007	11.4	11.0
Overall very low food security rate (% of households) <sup>c</sup>		
2010-2012	5.3	5.6
2005-2007	3.4	4.0
Child food insecurity rate (% of children under age 18) <sup>b</sup>		
2012	21.6	21.6
2009	23.4	23.2
SNAP participation (# of persons) <sup>g</sup>		
FY 2013	227,006	47.6 million
FY 2007	87,068	26.4 million
WIC participation (# of women, infants and children) <sup>j</sup>		
FY 2013	43,292	8.7 million
FY 2009	46,175	9.1 million
<b>POVERTY AND INCOME</b>		
Overall poverty rate (%) <sup>s</sup>		
2012	16.0	15.9
2007	12.1	13.0
Child poverty rate (%) <sup>s</sup>		
2012	21.3	22.6
2007	15.9	18.0
Median household income, adjusted for inflation (2013 Real \$) <sup>s</sup>		
2012	45,959	52,123
2007	51,836	57,008
<b>ECONOMY</b>		
Average annual unemployment rate (%) <sup>f</sup>		
2013	6.2	8.1
2007	3.0	4.6
Average wage per job, adjusted for inflation (2013 Real \$) <sup>t</sup>		
2011	37,751	50,023
2007	38,640	50,213

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