

# Hungry for the Holidays: A Primer on Hunger and Food Policy in Texas

November 4, 2011

A Webinar for Media Professionals

Presented by:

The logo features the text "Texas Food Policy Roundtable" in a black, cursive font. The text is centered over a background that includes a red and white checkered pattern on the left and right sides, and a white plate with a perforated edge in the center.

*Texas Food Policy Roundtable*

# The Nutritional State of Texas – A Tale of Two Problems

- Texas is plagued by high rates of food insecurity and obesity.
- Low-income people are at a greater risk for both.
- Almost one in five Texas families (18.8%) struggles to afford food, the second-highest rate in the nation.
- Children are at the highest risk of hunger, with over one in five children (28.2%) in Texas living in a home without enough food.

*Texas Food Policy Roundtable*

SOURCES: “Household Food Security in the United States, 2010,” Mark Nord, Margaret Andrews, and Steven Carlson, Economic Research Service, USDA, September 2011; Texas Food Bank Network

# The Health Consequences of Food Insecurity

- Hungry children suffer from two to four times as many individual health problems, including higher rates of illness; higher infant mortality rate/low birth-weight; and stunting (low height for age) in children
- Exacerbate chronic and acute diseases/speeds the onset of degenerative diseases among the elderly.



SOURCE: Food Research and Action Center.

# The Economic Price Tag of Food Insecurity

- Hunger affects a child's ability to learn, resulting in lost knowledge, brainpower, and productivity for the nation.
- The Center for American Progress estimates that hunger costs our nation at least \$167.5 billion annually—\$542 per citizen—resulting from lost economic productivity, more expensive public education because of poor education outcomes, avoidable health care costs, and the cost of charity to keep families fed.
- A separate estimate found that hunger costs Texas \$9 billion annually.

SOURCES: *Hunger in America: Suffering We all Pay For*, Donald S. Shepard, Elizabeth Setren and Donna Cooper, Center for American Progress, October 2011; and *THE ECONOMIC COST OF DOMESTIC HUNGER, Estimated Annual Burden to the United States*, June 5, 2007, by Dr. J. Larry Brown, Harvard School of Public Health, Dr. Donald Shepard, Brandeis University, Dr. Timothy Martin, Brandeis University, and Dr. John Orwat, Loyola University. An analysis commissioned by the Sodexo Foundation, in partnership with the Public Welfare Foundation and Spunk Fund, Inc.

# Measuring Hunger

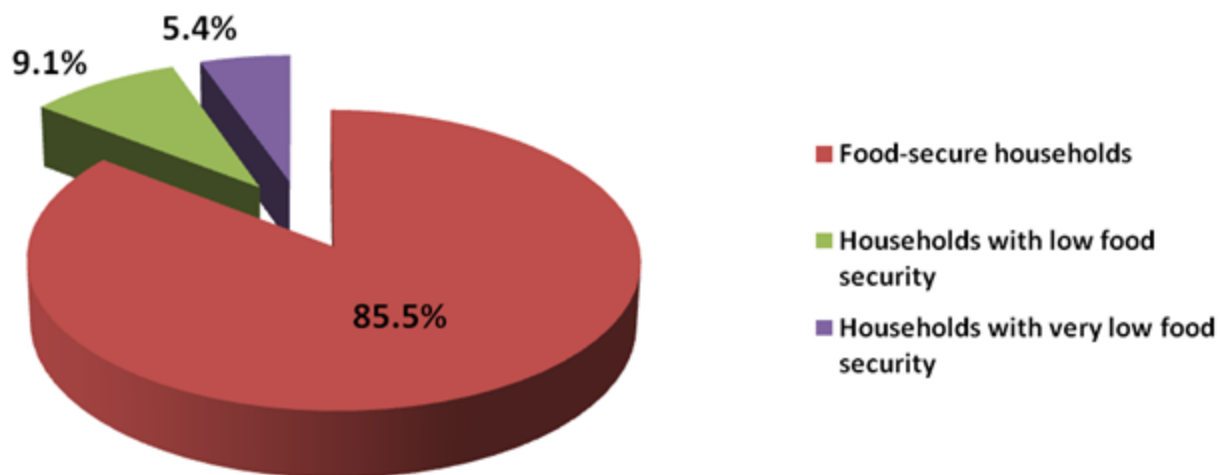
- In an annual survey, the federal government (USDA) measures hunger by asking families whether there was a time in the previous year when they had difficulty meeting their food needs.
- Depending on their response, families are classified as being “food secure” or having “low” or “very low food insecurity.”



SOURCES: *Hunger in America: Suffering We all Pay For*, Donald S. Shepard, Elizabeth Setren and Donna Cooper, Center for American Progress, October 2011; and *THE ECONOMIC COST OF DOMESTIC HUNGER, Estimated Annual Burden to the United States*, June 5, 2007, by Dr. J. Larry Brown, Harvard School of Public Health, Dr. Donald Shepard, Brandeis University, Dr. Timothy Martin, Brandeis University, and Dr. John Orwat, Loyola University. An analysis commissioned by the Sodexo Foundation, in partnership with the Public Welfare Foundation and Spunk Fund, Inc.

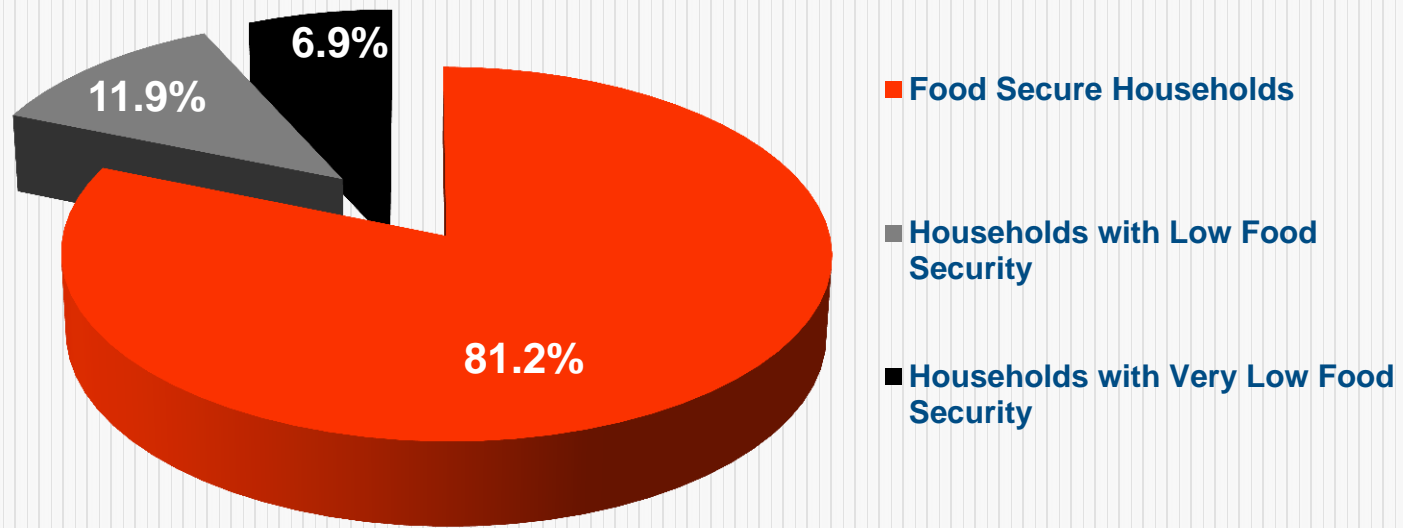
# National Food Security, 2010

Food-security Status of US Households, 2010



Source: USDA Report: Household Food Security in the United States 2010

# Food Security Status of Texas Households, 2010

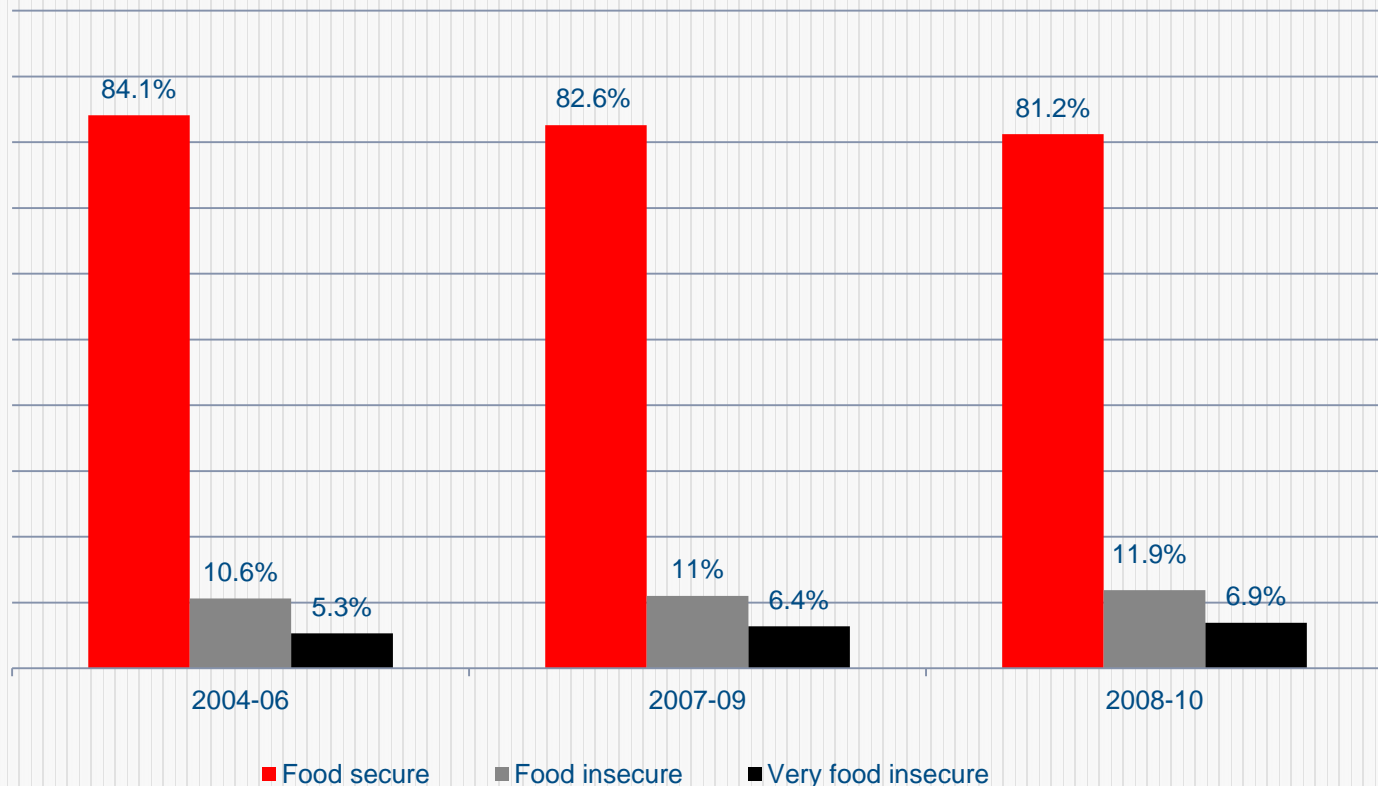


*Texas Food Policy Roundtable*

SOURCE: Food Research and Action Center.

# Food Insecurity Reached Record Highs in 2009

## Remained High in 2010

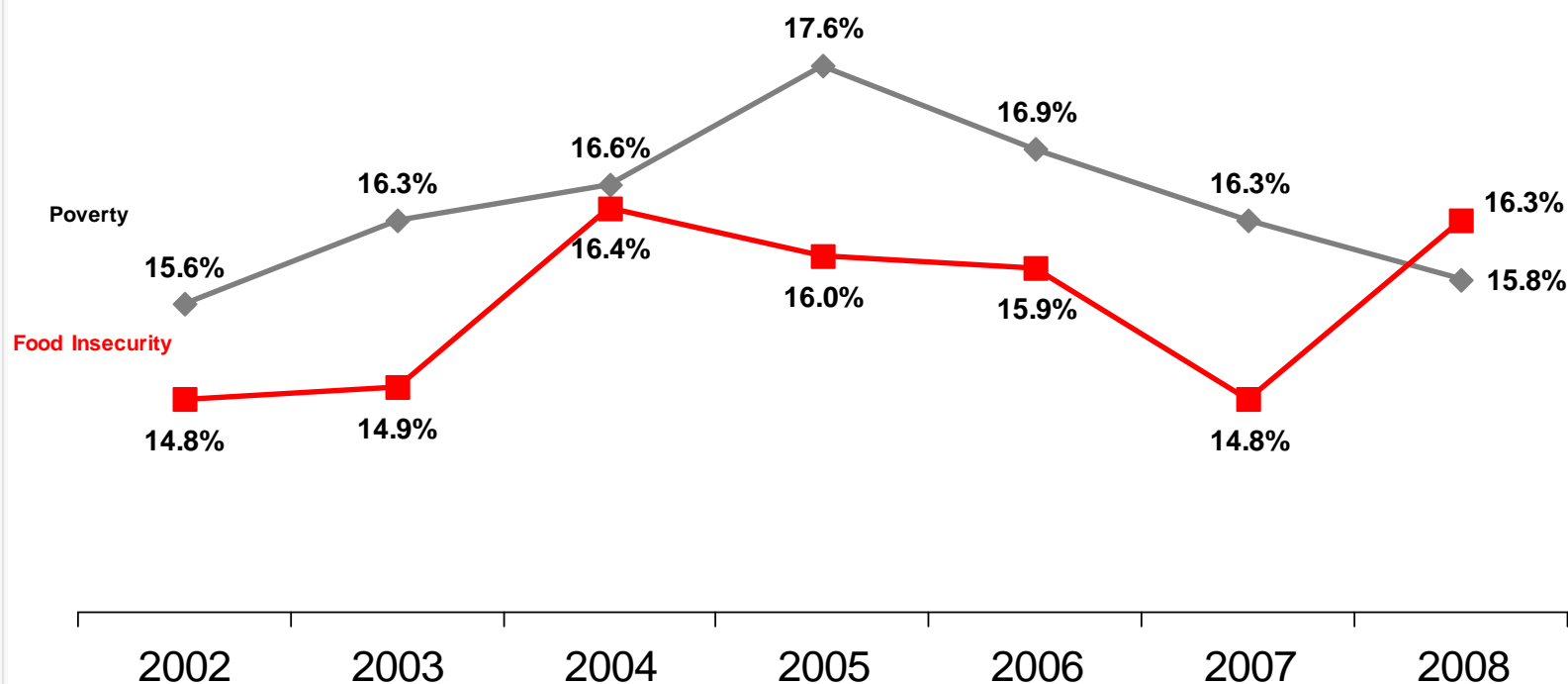


Source: *Household Food Security in the United States in 2010*, Alisha Coleman-Jensen, Mark Nord, Margaret Andrews, and Steven Carlson, Economic Research Report No. (ERR-125), September 2011. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/Err125/>



# Hunger is a Symptom of Poverty

## Food Insecurity and Poverty Rates in Texas



*Texas Food Policy Roundtable*

Sources: Poverty data are one-year estimates from American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau. Food Insecurity data are three-year averages from USDA's Economic Research Service

# The Economic Context

- In low-income families, poor nutrition stems from a lack of financial resources and limited access to nutritious, affordable food.
- Long-term solution must attack the root causes of poverty.
- In the short-term, increasing healthy food access can prevent hunger, fight obesity and improve nutrition.
- Federal nutrition programs offer the best tool for increasing healthy food access.

*Texas Food Policy Roundtable*

# Common Mistakes & Myths

## Myth



These are federal programs. Texas' hands are tied when it comes to improving them.

People use their SNAP benefits to buy unhealthy and/or "luxury" foods.

## Fact



These programs have national standards that Texas must follow. However, state policy choices and administration can make a big difference.

The SNAP benefit is based on USDA's Thrifty Food Plan, which assumes people buy in bulk and rarely eat meat. Research by one Texas retailer found that SNAP recipients use their benefits for largely healthy food purchases at the beginning of the month. As benefits run out, customers buy cheaper, less healthy food.

# Common Mistakes & Myths

## Myth



People use their SNAP benefits to buy unhealthy and/or “luxury” foods.

## Fact



The SNAP benefit is based on USDA’s Thrifty Food Plan, which assumes people buy in bulk and rarely eat meat. Research by one Texas retailer found that SNAP recipients use their benefits for largely healthy food purchases at the beginning of the month. As benefits run out, customers buy cheaper, less healthy food.

# Common Mistakes & Myths

## Myth



SNAP is a program rampant with fraud and waste.

## Fact



SNAP is operating at historically high levels of payment accuracy and low levels of fraud. The *National Journal* named it one of government's top ten successes, citing its high payment accuracy and responsiveness during natural disasters. Texas earned a \$6 million bonus this year for payment accuracy.

# Common Mistakes & Myths

## Myth



The poor in this country have it good compared to less developed nations.

## Fact



Americans who live below the poverty line struggle to afford food, live in substandard housing and unsafe neighborhoods, and can't access affordable health care. These conditions have a wide range of negative effects on the physical and mental health and well-being of our nation's children.

Economists estimate that child poverty costs the U.S. \$500 billion a year in lost productivity in the work force and spending on health care and the criminal justice system.

# Common Mistakes & Myths

## Myth



People are poor because they don't want to work. Instead, they get on SNAP and never get off. SNAP breeds dependence on welfare.

## Fact



Most poor families with children in Texas—60 percent—are working families. In “near-poor” families—those with incomes below twice poverty line—78 percent work. Three-quarters of SNAP recipients are children, seniors, or have disabilities. Most able-bodied adults are required to work. Research shows that people turn to SNAP when they lose a job or experience a loss of earnings. The average time spent on the program is 6 months.