

One in seven Americans receiving federal food assistance

James Brewer
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According to statistics released by the US Department of Agriculture, 44.2 million Americans, 14.3 percent of the population, are regularly receiving food stamps. This figure is up 11.6 percent from the previous year.

The *Wall Street Journal* published the figures with state-by-state breakdowns on Tuesday. The latest figures are from last February and show both monthly and yearly comparisons. What is starkly revealed is that the most densely populated areas have the highest increases in food stamp usage over the last year.

States that have been particularly hard hit in the last year are New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland and Florida—all with an increase in food stamp usage of more than 20 percent between February 2010 and February 2011. These states have all had recent spikes in the unemployment rate. In Florida, with more than 2.5 million food stamp recipients, the state Senate has responded by passing a bill to reduce unemployment benefits.

States with the highest rates of food stamp usage are Mississippi, Oregon, Tennessee, New Mexico, Michigan and Louisiana—all with more than 19 percent of the population on federal food assistance. Unemployment rates in these states have been higher for a longer period than in other states.

In Michigan, an onslaught on the wages and benefits of auto workers in the name of “saving the auto industry” has been touted by the Obama administration as its great success. The new figures reveal that 19.4 percent of Michigan’s population, or 1.75 million people, are receiving food assistance.

These figures belie what is widely reported in the media as an economic recovery. They constitute an indictment of the policies of the Obama administration.

What is behind the record number of people driven to

seek regular food assistance is the fact that nothing has been done to alleviate chronic mass unemployment. On the contrary, the rise in unemployment has been used as a bludgeon against the working class as wages, benefits, health care and pensions have been slashed.

The so-called “recovery” represents an increase in the wealth of those at the top at the expense of the living conditions of the vast majority. The two-party system is the means by which the working class is prevented from having any democratic say in policy decisions.

In the face of the soaring need for food assistance as expressed in these figures, both Republican and Democratic congressmen are proposing cuts to the federal food stamp program, now called Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan’s plan is to eliminate the program altogether and replace it with a state block grant program.

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “Paul Ryan’s budget plan would cut the SNAP program by \$127 billion—almost 20 percent—which could throw millions of low-income families off the rolls, cut benefits by thousands of dollars a year, or some combination of the two. ...

“Whether he intends for Congress to impose these cuts or for states to do so as they redesign the program under a much smaller block grant program, policymakers could not possibly achieve cuts of this magnitude without scaling back SNAP eligibility or reducing benefits deeply, with serious effects on families and individuals.”

In roughly the same period covered by the USDA food assistance report, US grocery (food at home) prices have increased by 3.6 percent, according to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), while all items averaged a 2.9 percent increase. Gasoline was up 27.5 percent, but

since the latest CPI report gas prices have increased another 15 percent and are still skyrocketing.



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