

Sixty million in US relied on food banks in 2020

Chase Lawrence
27 September 2021

Sixty million people in the United States, nearly 1 in 5, received assistance from food banks and similar organizations in 2020 according to the nonprofit Feeding America, representing a 50 percent increase over the prior year. According to a research brief by The Conversation, the sharpest increase in the rate of food insufficiency was among so-called middle-income households, households that make \$50,000 to \$75,000 per year, rising from 0.98 percent to 1.48 percent.

Food insufficiency increased among Americans at all income levels according to The Conversation's analysis of Census Bureau survey data after April 23. American households earning less than \$50,000 have the highest level of food insufficiency, with each lower income bracket tracking with a higher level, with 4.4 percent of those under \$25,000 food insecure. That is, this is a problem that affects primarily the working class.

Food insufficiency, according to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), "is a more severe condition than food insecurity and measures whether a household generally has enough to eat. In this way, food insufficiency is closer in severity to very low food security than to overall food insecurity."

As defined by the USDA, "Food insecurity is the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways." The USDA reports that overall food insecurity has rose in the US from 9.5 percent of the population as of April 23, 2020, to 13.4 percent as of December 21, 2020.

As of the end of August, according to the US Census Bureau's weekly Household Pulse survey, more than 7 percent of all households and 9 percent of households with children said they sometimes or often did not have

enough to eat.

Feeding America also projected that 54 million Americans didn't have enough food to eat in 2020, a 46 percent increase over 2019.

As of March 2021 more than 42 million Americans received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, an increase of 5 million from the previous March.

While Congress passed a 15 percent increase to SNAP benefits at the end of last year, which it later extended, this is set to expire September 30, the end of FY 2021. A reassessment of the USDA's "Thrifty Food Plan," which is used to determine SNAP benefits, is set to take effect October 1 as a result of the 2018 Farm Bill, passed under the Trump administration, which stipulates a readjustment of payments for the first time since 2006 according to the USDA.

The Thrifty Food Plan will translate into an average \$11 monthly increase over the current assistance program, from \$240 to \$251, despite the end of some federal benefits to SNAP, though with inflation factored in, using 2020 to 2021 numbers on the Minneapolis Fed's inflation calculator, it will actually amount to a 68 cent decrease. The average amount will drastically decrease in 2022 to \$169 a month before inflation if remaining federal pandemic assistance provisions for SNAP are allowed to expire according to USDA, though the decrease in real terms is likely to be far larger as inflation is expected to continue and accelerate.

According to the key findings section on a USDA study released before July 4 this year "88 percent of SNAP participants reported facing some type of barrier to achieving a healthy diet throughout the month."

The second point states that, "The most common barrier overall, reported by 61 percent of SNAP

participants, was the affordability of foods that are part of a healthy diet.”

The annual projected cost of the Thrifty Food Plan is a mere \$20 billion, one-sixth the cost of the \$120 billion transferred *every month* from the Fed to Wall Street, or about 2.8 percent of the \$715 billion 2022 US military budget being requested by the Biden administration.

Furthermore, food prices are skyrocketing. The Consumer Price Index for food has increased to 2.7 percent for 2021 compared to 2020, with large increases seen in some food groups.

USDA forecasts for wholesale beef, farm-level eggs, farm-level wheat and flour prices were revised upwards this month. Beef is predicted to increase between 17 and 20 percent in 2021 based on data currently available this month, with the same for pork, with wheat rising between 33 and 36 percent and poultry with a 16 to 19 percent increase.

This, along with the disastrous job situation where upwards of 7.5 million unemployed workers have been cut off jobless benefits, millions are at risk of being thrown out of their homes with the lapsing of the national eviction moratorium, accompanied with skyrocketing home and rental costs that are bound to drive both an immiseration and radicalization of the working class.

The growth of hunger during the pandemic is a damning exposure of the incapability of capitalism to provide for even the most basic of social needs and an objective expression of the need for the working class to expropriate the wealth of the capitalist oligarchs and to put it towards the needs of the vast majority of the population.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact