



FADING TO INVISIBLE: WHY ENDING THE USDA FOOD SECURITY REPORT MAKES HUNGER IN AMERICA INVISIBLE

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The federal government may be shut down, but hunger in America hasn't taken a break. While the nation's attention is understandably focused on the shutdown's immediate fallout, we can't lose sight of a deeply consequential decision that has slipped under the radar: the final release of the **U.S. Department of Agriculture's**¹ (USDA) long-standing Household Food Security report.

This decision comes on the heels of sweeping, **harmful cuts**² to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)—cuts that will make it harder for millions of people to afford food. By eliminating the only comprehensive, government-backed survey that tracks food insecurity in the United States, the USDA is effectively ensuring that the devastating consequences of these cuts will be harder to measure and easier to ignore.

What the Report Is and Why It Matters

For nearly 30 years, the **USDA's Household Food Security Report**³ has been the backbone of how hunger is measured in this country, giving the clearest and most consistent picture of who is going hungry and why. The report uses data from the **Current Population Survey**,⁴ a joint project between the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, which reaches about 60,000 households every month through phone calls and in-person interviews. Every December, the survey adds a special set of food security questions that allow the USDA to measure how many people are struggling to afford

food.

For less than \$1 million a year, the government has been able to produce a report that informs more than \$100 billion in nutrition funding, including SNAP, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and school meal programs. This is data that drives real policy, helping advocates, researchers, and lawmakers track hunger over time, evaluate whether our safety net programs are actually working, and hold the government accountable to its promises. No other dataset has the same credibility or reach.

The Food Security report isn't just a spreadsheet. It's the foundation for how we understand hunger in America. **Other national surveys**⁵ touch on food hardship, but none come close in scale or depth. Even if the existing surveys were merged, it would take years to rebuild what the USDA report provided in a single release.

Despite this, the Trump Administration has dismissed the report as **"redundant, costly, politicized, and extraneous,"**⁶ claiming it offers nothing more than "subjective, liberal fodder." That framing couldn't be further from the truth. The report has consistently shown that hunger in America rises and falls with policy decisions and economic conditions, not political spin. Ending this report now, in the same moment as historic SNAP cuts, doesn't just feel suspicious— it's strategic.

This is a devastating loss for transparency and accountability. Without this report, we lose our ability to measure the real impact of policy decisions on people's lives. It means the stories and struggles of millions of families facing hunger—families who are already working, caregiving, and doing everything they can to survive—will become invisible in the data. **And when something isn't measured, it becomes easier to deny that it exists.**

THE HISTORICAL AND SYSTEMIC CONTEXT OF DATA SUPPRESSION

We must not ignore the truth behind ending this report. This decision is part of a long-standing pattern of restricting or eliminating data collection when it exposes inequities or challenges political narratives. Throughout history, the suppression or manipulation of data has been used to hide inequality rather than confront it.

For example, U.S. Census data has repeatedly misrepresented or erased entire communities of color. In **1930**,⁷ "Mexican" was briefly listed as a separate racial category before being removed in 1940, effectively classifying Mexican Americans as white and masking the discrimination they faced. Native Americans who were not taxed were excluded from the Census until **1924**,⁸ when they were granted citizenship, and many Asian and multiracial groups **were not**⁹ accurately counted until decades later. These omissions have distorted our understanding of poverty, health, housing, and other inequities across racial and ethnic lines.

The same pattern played out during the COVID-19 pandemic, when cases and deaths were **not reported**¹⁰ with racial or ethnic data, delaying efforts to address the disproportionate impact of the virus. Black, Hispanic, American Indian or Alaska Native, and other populations of color experienced higher rates of COVID-19 cases and deaths than white people. However, incomplete data collection, particularly a lack of demographic information, hid the full impact of the pandemic on communities of color.

Historically, marginalized communities are the first to be erased when data disappears. When we stop measuring hunger, we effectively make hunger invisible in the public debate, even though it continues to exist.

THE HARM OF ENDING THE REPORT

Ending this report right now is not a coincidence. It's intentional. At a time when SNAP is facing some of the harshest cuts we've seen in decades, the timing speaks volumes.

Without this report, it becomes almost impossible to measure how many people are being pushed deeper into hunger by these recent policy changes. Even more concerning is how the USDA justified the decision, **saying**:¹¹

"For 30 years, this study—initially created by the Clinton administration as a means to support the increase of SNAP eligibility and benefit allotments—failed to present anything more than subjective, liberal fodder. Trends in the prevalence of food insecurity have remained virtually unchanged, regardless of an over 87% increase in SNAP spending between 2019–2023."

That statement completely misses the point of the data, whose purpose was never to make hunger disappear overnight. Rather, it was to make sure hunger couldn't be ignored. The report has consistently helped shape stronger nutrition programs and policy decisions that reflect reality. **If hunger has remained persistent, that's not because of the data but because policymakers haven't done enough with what the data shows.** Blaming the report for ongoing hunger is like blaming a thermometer for the fever. **The numbers don't create the problem—they reveal it.** It's Congress's responsibility to act on what the data exposes, not to silence it.

Ignoring the realities of hunger doesn't make them disappear; it just magnifies their consequences. The inability to consistently afford nutritious food doesn't just affect what's on a family's table; it affects their health, their stability, and their futures. People living in food-insecure homes are more likely to face **chronic illnesses**¹² like diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease, and they experience higher rates of anxiety and depression. For **older adults**,¹³ hunger accelerates physical decline and

increases hospitalizations. For **children**,¹⁴ it hinders brain development, academic performance, and long-term opportunity. All of this comes at a cost not just to individuals and families, but to our entire health care system, which is already strained and overburdened. According to research from **Feeding America**,¹⁵ the ripple effects of hunger and poor nutrition drive up medical spending and emergency care use, especially in communities already facing systemic barriers to accessing health care.

When we stop collecting data on hunger, we're not just losing sight of a social issue—we're ignoring a public health crisis. By ending this report, advocates lose one of the most powerful tools we have to hold lawmakers accountable for decisions that deepen hunger. States and local agencies lose the baseline data they need to design programs that actually respond to people's needs. And communities lose their visibility in a system that already struggles to see them clearly.

This decision will harm the very people already most impacted by systemic inequities. Communities of color continue to face disproportionately high rates of hunger because of deep-rooted barriers in housing, wages, and employment—barriers that didn't appear by accident. Decades of discriminatory policies, from redlining and wage exploitation to unequal access to education and credit, have stripped wealth and opportunity from Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color. Those harms compound over generations, leaving families with fewer buffers against rising food costs and economic instability. Without reliable federal data, those disparities become easier to ignore and harder to address. Immigrant families, particularly mixed-status households, risk becoming even more invisible. Fear and misinformation already keep many from applying for food assistance, and removing the data that captures their struggles erases them from the national conversation entirely. Tribal and rural communities, which often experience the highest rates of food insecurity but have the least access to local research or advocacy infrastructure, will see their experiences further minimized or dismissed. And women-headed households—especially Black and Latina single mothers—will be among the hardest hit. Without consistent, credible data to track these inequities, the stories behind the statistics fade from view, and policy debates lose the grounding they need to reflect real life.

The USDA's claim that this report is "redundant" simply isn't true. No other survey offers the same breadth, history, or reliability. Alternative sources like food bank surveys or limited state data are valuable but not nationally representative—they cannot replace this federal benchmark.

This isn't bureaucratic streamlining; it's data suppression disguised as efficiency. And the outcome is the same every time: the people closest to hunger—families with low incomes, people of color, disabled and older adults, and rural communities—are made invisible just when the nation needs to see them most clearly.

Call to Action

The USDA must reinstate the Household Food Security Report and its data collection immediately. Every day that this report remains silent, the truth about hunger in America slips further out of sight.

Hunger cannot be solved if it is hidden. This report isn't just numbers on a spreadsheet—it's a reflection of real people, real families, and real lives. It tells the story of parents skipping meals so their children can eat, of seniors stretching fixed incomes, and of workers who are employed full-time but still can't afford groceries. When we stop collecting that data, we're not just losing information, we're choosing not to see.

Lawmakers, advocates, and the public deserve to know the truth about how many people in America, one of the richest countries in the world, are going without enough to eat. **Data is accountability.** It's a mirror that forces us to confront what's broken and gives us the tools to build something better, if we choose to.

Transparency isn't a political choice, but a moral one that should be upheld no matter the administration. If we truly believe in building a nation where everyone can thrive, then we must have the courage to face the facts, no matter how uncomfortable they are. Restoring this report is not just about research—it's about restoring the visibility and dignity of the millions of people whose hunger should never be invisible.

Endnotes

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- ⁴ "Current Population Survey," U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, page last modified January 24, 2023, https://www.bls.gov/cex/cecomparison/cps_profile.htm.
- ⁵ "National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey," National Center for Health Statistics, CDC, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhanes/index.html>.
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- ⁷ Beverly M. Pratt, Lindsay Hixson, and Nicholas A. Jones, "Measuring Race and Ethnicity Across the Decades: 1790–2010," U.S. Census Bureau, last revised September 4, 2015, https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/race/MREAD_1790_2010.html
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- ¹¹ "USDA Terminates," U.S. Department of Agriculture, September 20, 2025.
- ¹² "Key Considerations: Prioritizing Health Equity & Food Security: Spotlight on the Social Determinants of Health," Feeding America, updated Spring 2024, https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/FA_HealthEQ_SocDeter_d2.pdf.
- ¹³ "Key Considerations: Prioritizing Health Equity & Food Security: Spotlight on Older Americans," Feeding America, updated Spring 2024, https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/FA_HealthEQ_OlderAdults_2024_f.pdf.
- ¹⁴ "Key Considerations: Prioritizing Health Equity & Food Security: Spotlight on Child Health and Nutrition," Feeding America, updated Spring 2024, https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/FA_HealthEQ_AHG_2024_f.pdf.
- ¹⁵ "Key Considerations: Prioritizing Health Equity & Food Security: Spotlight on the Social Determinants of Health," Feeding America.