



News Release

For Immediate Release

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People Facing Hunger Call for Change *Feeding America report highlights unity needed to end hunger*

SIKESTON, Mo. (Sept. 10, 2024) – As food insecurity continued to rise in 2023, people facing hunger are calling on the nation to join together to take bold steps to end hunger.

The number of people living in food insecure households in the United States in 2023 increased to 47 million, including nearly 14 million children, according to a report released last week by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This is an increase from 44 million, including 13 million children, from the previous year and the highest rate and number of individuals and children since 2014.

Despite some signs of an improving economy, high costs for food and other essentials like rent have intensified food insecurity for many families. According to Feeding America's nationally representative 2024 Elevating Voices: Insights Report, people facing hunger shared that rising food costs (81%), having a low income or no income (66%), and the high cost of rent or buying a home (63%) ranked as the top issues they say are the main drivers of food insecurity in the U.S.

"As the richest country in the history of civilization, it should be unacceptable for [USDA food insecurity number] human beings not to have access to the food they need to thrive," said Claire Babineaux-Fontenot, CEO of Feeding America. "Though we are all unique individuals, we can be united by a common vision: an America without food insecurity. We know what it takes to end hunger for good; including embracing community-based solutions, collaborating across sectors and listening to people experiencing hunger — the true experts — to help identify the best pathways forward."

Southeast Missouri Food Bank plans to use the report to help inform solutions for ending hunger in southeast Missouri.

"We value the insight of neighbors with lived experience of food insecurity," said Joey Keys, CEO of SEMO Food Bank. "The men and women facing difficult choices every day are the ones who know what they need to be lifted up. That's one of the reasons we formed an Action Council comprised of neighbors in recent years. They've shared the barriers they face and are working to help us address them."

While the experiences of neighbors facing hunger vary, they work hard and find resourceful ways to put food on the table. They remain optimistic about the future, and that hope, paired with their lived expertise, is represented in the Elevating Voices: Insights Report, which outlines bold steps for ending hunger:

- Neighbors should be able to choose the food they need and prefer. We all should have the freedom to choose the foods that meet our personal and cultural preferences without restrictive policies. According to the report, 84% of neighbors surveyed say anti-hunger policies should support people's dignity and choices in what they feed their families.
- Federal food assistance programs should keep up with changing economic realities. Federal food assistance programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are essential resources and must evolve with changing economic circumstances. The report shows that 85% of neighbors surveyed say it's important that anti-hunger policies increase monthly SNAP assistance to keep up with inflation and high food prices.
- Food insecurity should be tackled at the root. Ending food insecurity must involve changing the systems, policies and practices that hold people back. According to the report, 86% of neighbors surveyed agree that reducing food insecurity must include the government, the private sector, nonprofits, local institutions like schools and churches and communities joining forces.
- People should call for elected leaders to prioritize ending food insecurity. Creating a hunger-free nation requires supporting and electing leaders committed to food security. Lawmakers who care about investing in food assistance policies and programs must be at decision-making tables led by neighbors. According to the report, 93% of neighbors surveyed, regardless of political affiliation, say they want Congress to make food insecurity a priority.

To learn more about the specific focus areas identified by neighbors — such as prioritizing dignity, expanding opportunity, improving health, and increasing access — please visit FeedingAmerica.org/ElevatingVoices. For more information about Southeast Missouri Food Bank, visit semofoodbank.org.

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About Elevating Voices

Elevating Voices is Feeding America's platform for consistently engaging with and amplifying the experiences and expertise of people with lived experience of food insecurity to advance new understandings and narratives of food insecurity driven by the people closest to the issue.

The Elevating Voices: Insights Report is an annual Feeding America publication that provides a nationally representative snapshot of the experiences, concerns and policy views of people facing hunger in the U.S. In collaboration with the nonpartisan research firm PerryUndem, Feeding America designed and deployed an 18-minute national survey of neighbors, defined as those who reported their household received charitable food assistance and/or experienced food insecurity within the past two years. The

survey, offered in English and Spanish, was conducted using NORC's nationally representative online panel and was fielded from March 20 to April 9, 2024 with 1,495 adults participating. The survey included respondents from all 50 states and Washington D.C. The survey oversampled Black adults, Latino adults, Asian American and Pacific Islander adults, Native American adults and adults who have visited a food bank in the past two years.

About Feeding America

Feeding America is committed to an America where no one is hungry. We support tens of millions of people who experience food insecurity to get the food and resources they say they need to thrive as part of a nationwide network of food banks, statewide food bank associations, food pantries and meal programs. We also invest in innovative solutions to increase equitable access to nutritious food, advocate for legislation that improves food security and work to address factors that impact food security, such as health, cost of living and employment. We partner with people experiencing food insecurity, policymakers, organizations, and supporters, united with them in a movement to end hunger. Visit www.FeedingAmerica.org to learn more.

About Southeast Missouri Food Bank

The mission of Southeast Missouri Food Bank is to end hunger and leverage the power of food to build healthy communities. The food bank provides food to 140 charitable and disaster relief programs in Southeast Missouri. These member agencies include food pantries, soup kitchens, domestic violence and homeless shelters. Southeast Missouri Food Bank also holds regular mobile food distributions and provides monthly boxes of food to 5,575 senior citizens and weekend backpacks of food during the school year to 1,200 students in area school districts. The food bank's 16-county coverage area includes Bollinger, Butler, Cape Girardeau, Carter, Dunklin, Madison, Mississippi, New Madrid, Pemiscot, Perry, Reynolds, Ripley, Scott, Ste. Genevieve, Stoddard and Wayne counties. Those interested in helping can do so by making a tax-deductible contribution, donating food, or scheduling a time to volunteer. Visit semofoodbank.org for more information.