



# Hunger in America: Scarcity in the Land of Plentiful

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## Abstract:

*This research article aims to analyze the systemic patterns of hunger in the United States, especially in New York State as well. As well known, food insecurity is on the basic every day needs of all sources of life for stability, and survival. More than 1 million people are affected by the epidemic of hunger and leaves people living in poverty, and struggling to afford basic necessities such as rent, and medical care while trying to put food on their tables. The need for food security and the solution to solving its problems for the many difficulties can be remunerated by political advocacy and educational awareness for lower income households. In a land of plenty, hunger plagues the lives of families, adults and children. Hunger displays the need for basic sustenance that assist people in ways to improve their lives.*

**Keywords:** *Hunger in the United States, Scarcity of land*

## Policy

As the US economy grows, metrics used to analyze progressive success of maintaining a stable economy, job rates and unemployment are examined. Most statistical data relates to how the economy operates in a positive or negative manner. One may believe that if there is an increase in employment, and the claims for unemployment benefits decrease, then more Americans are enjoying at time of peaceful prosperity. However, one of the most nationalized indicators of economic progress would be the stock market. As many perceive, when the stock market does well, the entire nation benefits from its success. According to “The latest official poverty data and hunger data from the census bureaus and the US Department of Agriculture are for 2006, and they tell us that even as the economy grew in the early part of this decade, lower income Americans were receiving a shrinking share of the economic pie” (LaBue, 2009, p. 1). The disparaging contrast of income inequality can be found between the corporations that employ people and the people or person that own the corporation.

When there is success in a business, competition ensues, and corporations benefit from sustainable markets that provide longevity in an industry. The question that should arise is whether or not the common American who is employed by businesses is actually benefiting from the success or growth of an economy. The everyday citizen may not benefit from the success of corporations and businesses. Proportionately, as businesses and corporations grow, salary and worker pay remains at a stagnant halt. This reproachful fact can contribute to the widening economic gap between upper and lower class Americans. The increase in the economy does not positively affect lower income families since they do not participate in the distribution of wealth within corporate ownership.

As data is evaluated, there are several social and economic factors to consider when calculating food prices, and the accessibility for Americans to be able to purchase enough food for their households.

Understanding these different factors can lead to the consideration of how food prices can be one of the underlying issues everyday Americans face. According to LaBue “for much of the last year the economic data have been dominated by rising food and energy prices, stagnant or declining wages, and growing unemployment, as well as severe housing problems” (2009, p. 2). The change in energy prices significantly impacts the cost of food and the accessibility lower income families have in maintaining a sustainable home. With current policy and legislation changes, the prices of food can be inadvertently affected. With an increase of energy production within the U.S. there is a possibility that the prices of food will go down. In the most recent turn of events as of the presidential election of 2016, there is a possibility of a change in energy prices as the U.S. adopts more pro-energy policies; essentially there can be a decrease in energy cost. In contrast, increasing the use of energy supply in fossil fuel and coal usage can lead to contributing factors of climate control. In a recent change of administrations there is a possibility that energy cost may change based on the policy of energy adopted by the White House.

Many of the other factors of food insecurity households experience include high housing cost, lack of decent wage paying employment, and insufficient work force opportunities. These economic factors can be considered underlying barriers to food security. On a daily basis, lower income families make decisions based on having to choose from paying rent, utilities, housing items, clothing, and food. With a lack of sufficient household income, lower income families are forced to choose from the aforementioned with food being one of the most likely to forego. Since lower income families need flexibility in their spending, in most cases household budgets for food is likely to be cut to make economic room for housing stability in ensuring that rent payments are made. Now with an ever increase in housing cost increase, cost of living and lack of affordable housing, as prices for these elements rise, flexible spending for food budgets dwindle for lower income families. In response to government reaction to food insecurity in the nation, they have approved an increase of SNAP benefits to alleviate the chronic issue of hunger in the country. LaBue writes:

“For example, the food research and action center estimates that the monthly cost of the Thrifty Food Plan (the food stamp market basket) has grown \$40 for a family of four since food stamp benefits were last adjusted for inflation- a huge impact on low- income families that already had inadequate resources to purchase a healthy diet” (2009, p. 2).

Already acknowledging that there are inadequate resources to assist lower income families who are experiencing food insecurity, national government pushed to increase SNAP benefits due to inflation. Although this is a protective measure in assisting these families, much more attention, legislation, and action is required to combat hunger. Families may get by on the “Thrifty Food Plan” there needs to be a distinction on whether household budgets for lower income families are sufficient and nutritional to meet the needs of both parents and children in families. There is a response in government to increase the allotment of SNAP benefits; the nation’s subsidy in purchasing food for lower income families. What is needed to assist this population is additional funding, services, and legislation to prevent the negative impact of food insecurity on lower income American families. The government’s reaction to these problems conveys the notion that lawmakers understand that the cost of food and inflation are to be adjusted whenever deemed necessary.

To understand the government’s policy on alleviating the negative impact on hunger in America, SNAP benefits provide economic stimulus to the country, and therefore eligible lower income American families should be encouraged to participate in the program. According to the USDA’s Economic Research Service, each \$1 billion of retail generated by SNAP creates \$340 million in farm production, \$110 million in farm value- added and 3,300 farm jobs. An additional \$5 of SNAP benefits generates \$9 in total economic activity. 84% of SNAP benefits, equal to \$53.4 billion, were spent at 36,000 super markets around the U.S.; the remaining 17% was spent at 180,000 small retail stores (including grocery stores, farmers markets, wholesalers, and meal services), for a total of \$11

billion dollars. An increase in SNAP participation by 5% would result in 2.1 million low-income Americans receiving \$973 million in SNAP benefits, generating \$1.8 billion in new economic activity (Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, 2011).

Understanding the approach government and legislation has taken to alleviate the effects of hunger also conveys the strategy to boost economic activity. Much advocacy and education is needed to push for reaching all lower income American families to ensure that not only is there an alleviation to food insecurity, but the nation as a whole experiences the economic boost much desperately needed in the country. LaBue also writes:

“Most important, in the short run, is the need for a temporary boost in food stamp benefits. This is not only will help low-income families grapple with weak economic conditions, including rapidly rising food prices, but also will provide real economic stimulus to the nation’s food stamps benefits because they get into the economy so fast: USDA and the states can get them quickly onto beneficiaries’ Electronic Benefit Transfer cards, and hard-pressed beneficiaries will spend the boost quickly.” (2009, p. 3).

On both sides of the spectrum, not only will lower income families benefit from the usage of SNAP benefits, but communities, supermarkets, grocery stores, and retail stores also reap the remunerations of this subsidy. A subsidy is meant to be utilized as a sum of money granted by the government or public body to assist an industry or business so that the price of a commodity or service may remain low or competitive. One of the unforeseen benefits of utilizing subsidy benefits such as SNAP is that it keeps the price of food down and affordable. Without the subsidy of SNAP benefits, prices of food will increase due to the fact that demand will decrease because lower income families cannot afford the cost. With the use of SNAP benefits, more eligible consumers enter into the market of purchasing food, which correlates to a decrease in the prices of food and accessibility. As stated by LaBue “but the food stamp program in particular must be strengthening further so we can truly move towards eradicating hunger and food insecurity in the midst of our great affluence” (2009, p. 4). SNAP benefits is an avenue for providing relief from hunger to lower income families. This benefit allows families accessibility to food in which they would not have on a regular basis.

One of the more obscure methodologies of understanding hunger and the inaccessibility of food for lower income families would be the disenfranchising of the impoverished communities. In regards to anti-hunger legislation, vague national light is shed on this disparaging issue. As stated by Winne “one reason that national anti-hunger policies may stir so little interest is the disempowerment of the poor” (2009, p. 167). Living in a capitalist free economy country, the view is that one has the freedom to survive socially and economically. Much national attention goes to other domestic and foreign topics, such as energy, and employment, due to the fact that the country believes that the disenfranchised should solve their own problems or have the ability to do so. In this, lower income families feel marginalized by greater society. Others may believe that the lower income Americans do not have a say in anti-hunger policies because they are citizens that do not contribute to the economy while other Americans who are self-sustained, employed, or business owners are worthy to make decisions.

Understanding poverty, lower income families, and paradigm patterns of lifestyles calls for researchers to cognize the culture behind political representation for this population. In many cases, have politicians campaigned for more political rights for the lower income families but not championed change since. The morbid history of poverty continues to alienate and plague the same impoverished communities for years. Although public administrators are tasked with strategizing new and innovative methods of producing change to bring a resolution to quality of life issues, we rarely see change when it comes to the disenfranchised population. As New York City’s Joel Berg has said “Politicians spend the last week of their election campaigns appealing to the lower-income

voters and their entire term in office ignoring them (Winne, 2009, p.167). It is difficult to seek assistance for the lower income families who essentially are not involved in politics or have attained the understanding of what political representation is. The difficulty of political representation is that fundamentally, the elected official is vehemently required to work and pass laws, legislation, or provide funding for the citizens who elect them into office.

Advocacy is necessary for the lower income population. However, this demographic population statistically lacks education and understanding the political realm. Therefore, in many recent elections, the lower income population may feel that they do not require political attention, or do not warrant such attention due to their lack of contribution and influence to the economic society they live in. Winne also states that:

“Without a continual drumbeat of public concern and mobilization by those directly affected by food by food and poverty programs, few politicians will advocate aggressively to end poverty and hunger. And elected officials also have told me over the years that they don’t hear from the poor, a group that traditionally has low voter turnout (2009 p. 167).

The disenfranchised population requires unity and accord to bring about change. Awareness and understanding of how political representation surmounts revolution will allow this demographic group the ability to attain the tools they need in order to bring about change through one voice. Due to low voter turnout of lower income families and individuals, very few politicians have actually championed for the rights of the lower income population and all the programs that support them. Some political representatives also feel that they do not adequately hear from the lower income populations and, therefore feel the need not to be able to provide extensive delegation for this demographic. It is understood that less and less legislation is being passed in a country that has a capitalist economy to support lower income families.

There is a lack of apathy that society has towards the hungry and impoverished. Thus, very few hunger programs, advocacy, and representation exist. Many feel that hunger is an issue faced on an individual basis and those communities, societies, and economics are not responsible for individuals’ way of life. As many people struggle to solve their own problems, hunger for the lower income families becomes a benign issue. As stated by Winne “community apathy toward poverty contributes to low public support for anti-hunger programs (2009 pg.). Advocacy for anti-programs rarely exist due to the public’s lack of support. Existing programs rarely received the support and resources needed to run efficiently due to a scarcity of resources. Very few programs that support anti-hunger imitative exist and do not receive satisfactory sustenance in combating hunger and its underlying causes. This lack of community support along with a privation of advocacy nurtures a foundation for failure in ending hunger. A desire from community not wanting to solve the issue creates a delay in combating hunger, which in turn also allows the effects of food insecurity to last causing long term health, social, and economic issues.

Down to public assistance, there is also a stigmatic view on people who receive assistance through federal funded programs. With vetting systems, some lower income families who qualify for the assistance occasionally do not apply for it for various reasons. Some feel that the system is set up to keep lower income Americans into the system or make it in a way that has them dependent on state and national program benefits. Many argue that if it is a benefit, it is not even enough to cover the cost of adequate and sufficient living. The evolution of our social welfare system from a down-home, albeit stingy, arbitrary, form of charity to one that is highly institutionalized, bureaucratized, and effectively removed from the sight of most Americans has changed our perception of human need (Winne, 2009, p.168). With all the difficulties in applying for public assistance, lack of resources, funding, stigmatic views of public assistance recipients, and bureaucracy, we see that there are the complications with state and federal public assistance support.

Although short term mediatory propositions have been made to combat hunger, government has not had an immediate response to bringing the problem to an end. Due to unresponsive actions of government in bringing an end to hunger, momentum has decreased from bringing about change. Both on a national, state, and local level the response for anti-hunger programs and apathy towards the population in need of those services have dwindled down tremendously. Winne also states “but when social problems such as hunger and poverty, and our confusing national response to them are as abstract as they are today, it is easy to unplug our hearts and minds from them” (2009, p. 169). Revitalization of policies and legislation is needed in the public eye to reignite passion in combating hunger. Unity and accordance within the lower income population is needed in order to bring effective legislation, programs, and projects to these areas of much need. Without proper awareness and advocacy, communities that experience high levels of poverty, food insecurity, and hunger will remain in its vicious cycle of deteriorating state.

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