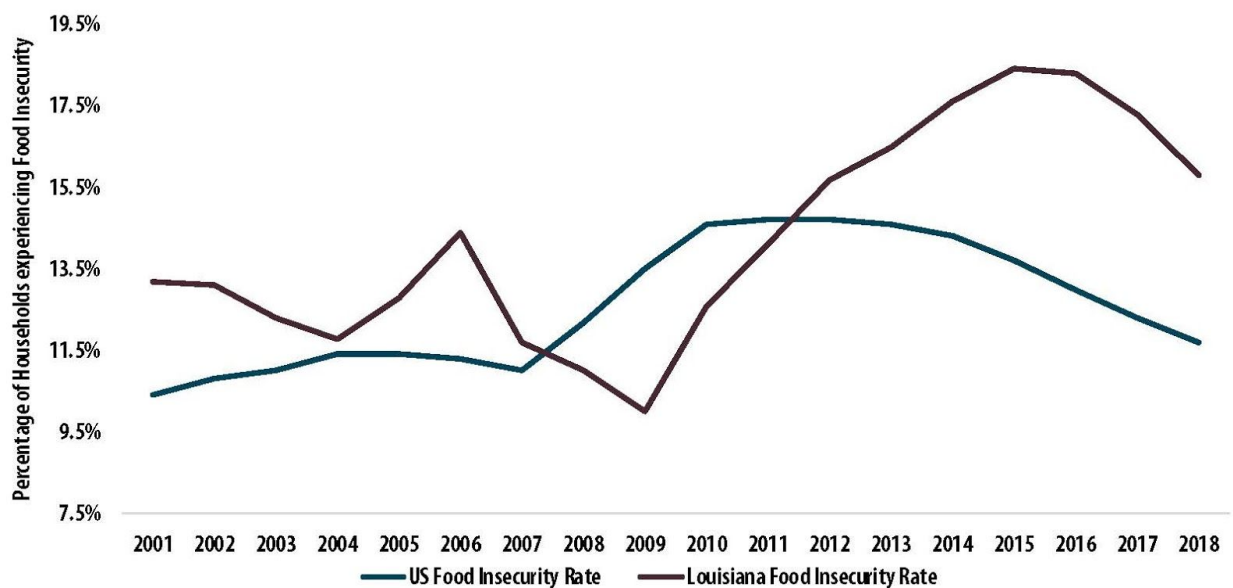


Food insecurity is falling in Louisiana, but is still among the highest rates in the nation

The percentage of households in Louisiana that lack consistent access to enough food for an active and healthy lifestyle has dropped significantly in recent years, according to the latest data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. But Louisiana’s rate of “food insecurity” still remains far above most other states, highlighting the need for continued investments in programs that lift people out of poverty.

The [data from the USDA’s Economic Research Service](#) show that an average of 15.8% of Louisiana households - 293,000 in all - experienced food insecurity between 2016 and 2018. That’s a statistically significant drop from 18.4% of Louisiana households that experienced food insecurity during the 2013-15 period. Households [defined as “food insecure”](#) lack resources to access enough food, consistently, for all of their members to lead an active, healthy life.

Food insecurity is down in Louisiana, but is still above the U.S. average and the state’s pre-Katrina levels



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture-Economic Research Service

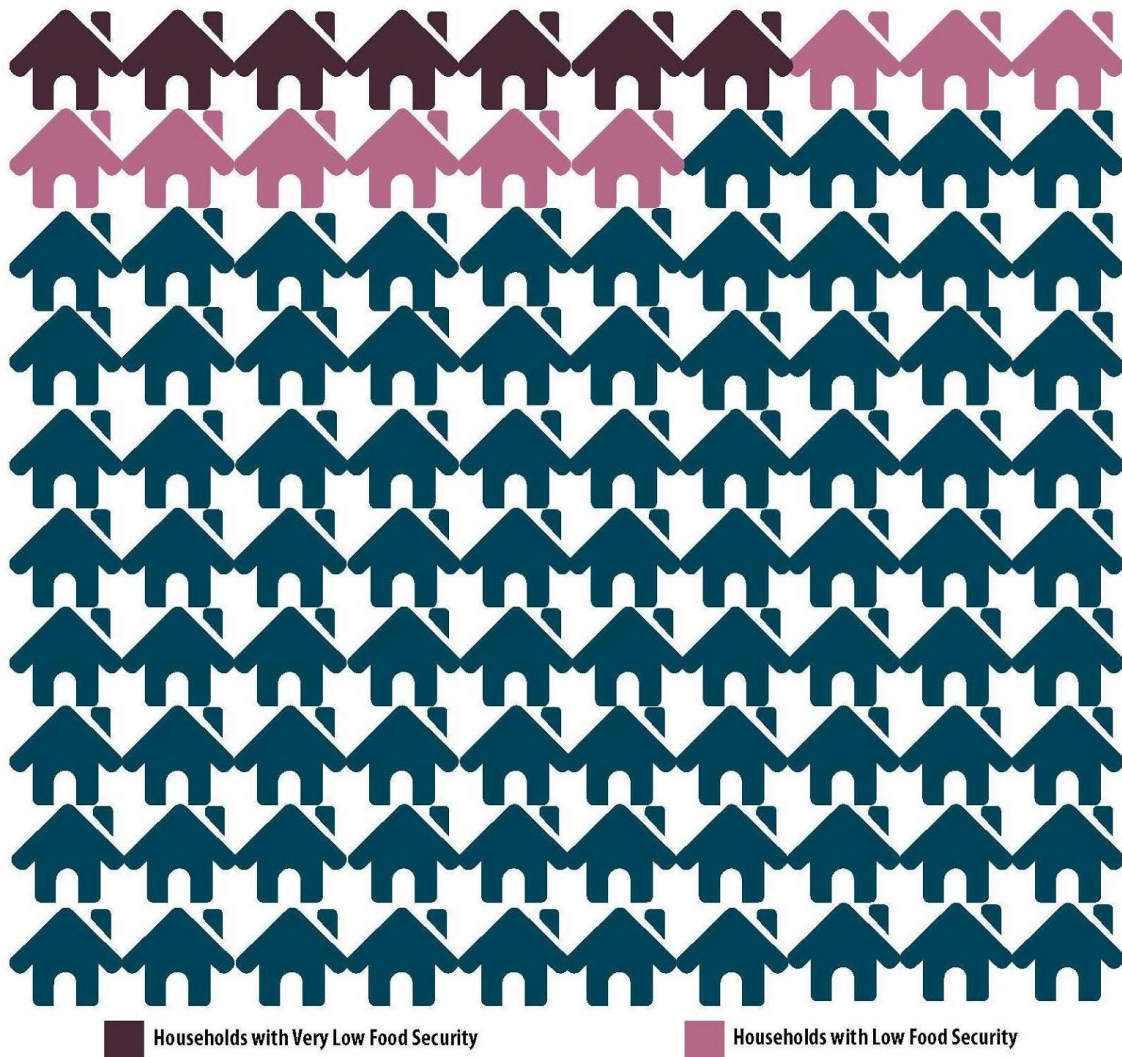
Food insecurity differs from hunger, which is a personal sensation of discomfort from not having enough to eat. Families facing food insecurity are likely to buy less nutritious food than food secure families because they don’t have the resources for healthier alternatives. In some cases family members will skip meals or reduce the size of their meals because there isn’t enough food to go around. Food insecurity is

associated with [a wide variety of negative health outcomes](#) among children, working-age adults, and seniors.

While the drop in Louisiana’s food insecurity rate is welcome news, the latest figures also serve as a vital reminder of the important role that state and federal programs, such as SNAP and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), play in reducing food insecurity and keeping families safe from acute hunger. Last year, [SNAP reduced poverty](#) in Louisiana by 1.9% and child poverty in the state by 3.8%, according to the U.S. Census Bureau — the second largest reductions attributable to SNAP of any state in the nation.

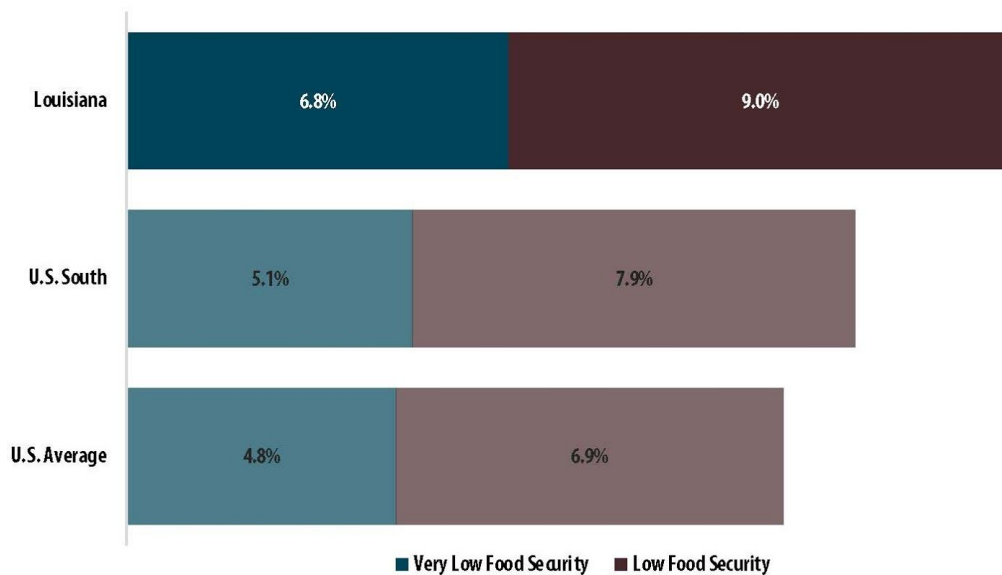
Despite the state’s improvement, Louisiana’s 15.8% food insecurity rate is significantly higher than the national rate of 11.7%, and ranks among the in the nation. Louisiana also outpaces the rest of the South, which has a food insecurity rate of 13%.

16 in 100 Louisiana households experience food insecurity



The USDA’s research did not offer an explanation for Louisiana’s improvement. But the state economy has steadily improved since enduring a brief recession in 2014-16, including a significant drop in the unemployment rate. Louisiana also expanded Medicaid in 2016, which has resulted in [more than 450,000 low-income adults](#) gaining health coverage. National [studies have shown](#) that people who get Medicaid after being uninsured experience less financial hardship.

Louisiana still has significantly higher rates of low and very low food security than the U.S. and Southern averages



Source: LBP analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Economic Research Service

Louisiana also fares poorly on the percentage of households with very low food security, a circumstance in which at least one member of a household skips meals or reduces the size of their meals because they can’t afford to buy enough food while meeting their other expenses. An estimated 6.8% of Louisiana households experience very low food security, compared to 4.6% nationwide, and 5.1% across the South. This represents a modest (but not statistically significant) drop from the estimated 7.1% of Louisiana households that skipped or skimped on meals between 2015 and 2017.

Households headed by single women with children are far more likely than any other group to experience food insecurity. More than 1 in 4 households with children headed by single women were food insecure in 2018, double the rate for all families with children. Racial disparities in food security also mirror broader racial disparities in access to resources. In Louisiana, 8.1% of households headed by a white person were food insecure, compared to 21.2% of black-headed households and 16.2% of Hispanic households.

But just as food insecurity tends to fall when the economy is strong, people are more likely to experience insecurity when the economy tips into recession. This is why a strong, accessible government safety net is so important. Recent [attacks](#) on [SNAP access](#) by the Trump administration threaten

Louisiana's ability to improve food security and mean that families will be more vulnerable during the next economic downturn.

Recently, USDA [proposed a rule change](#) that would take SNAP access away from 3.1 million people, nationwide. You can submit a comment opposing that change [here](#).

-Danny Mintz