



THE STATE OF **FOOD INSECURITY** **IN HAWAI'I** 2024-2025

Executive Summary

RELEASED NOVEMBER 2025



Food insecurity – the lack of access to enough food for an active, healthy life – remains one of Hawai‘i’s most urgent challenges. It reflects more than a shortage of food; it reveals the financial trade-offs and systemic inequities that prevent residents from meeting basic needs such as housing, healthcare and transportation.

UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUE

Food insecurity is associated with numerous adverse social and health outcomes and is increasingly considered a critical public health issue and a significant social determinant of health. Key drivers of food insecurity include cost of living, unemployment, insufficient income, unexpected income shocks and other factors that can prevent adequate access to food.

Food insecurity manifests in different ways – ranging from concerns about running out of food before there is money to buy more, to the inability to afford a balanced diet, reducing food intake, missing meals altogether, and, in extreme cases, not eating for whole days because of a lack of food and money.

Food insecurity in Hawai‘i is a complex issue, deeply connected to issues of affordability and equity. Effective solutions will require a profound understanding of the challenges facing communities, innovation, and a cross-sector collaborative approach to succeed.





ABOUT THE STUDY

The impacts of food insecurity are widespread and pervasive. In *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World*, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimates that 28% of the global population – 2.3 billion people – were moderately or severely food insecure in 2024. At the same time, Feeding America’s *Map the Meal Gap* reports that food insecurity currently exists in 100% of counties and congressional districts in the United States.

While macrolevel data can help tell a broad story about food insecurity, experiences differ by population and place. This holds especially true in Hawai’i. As one of the most expensive and diverse places in the world, it is not unusual for local data to vary from what is reported on the national level.

To measure the depth and reach of food insecurity across Hawai’i, **Hawai’i Foodbank Kaua’i**, **Hawai’i Foodbank**, **Maui Food Bank**, and **The Food Basket Inc., Hawai’i Island’s Food Bank** commissioned the second annual State of Food Insecurity in Hawai’i report.

Conducted by Ward Research and analyzed by Pirkle Epidemiology and Evaluation Consulting LLC, the survey used the U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module (US-HFSSM), widely considered to be the gold standard in measurement tools, to assess food insecurity between mid-2024 and mid-2025.

The survey included 1,079 residents statewide with county quotas to ensure sufficient representation from Hawai’i, Maui, Kaua’i, and Honolulu Counties. Weighting procedures allowed the results to be generalized to the state population, as well as to the specific counties.

Results from this survey will help guide programmatic distribution and implementation efforts, as well as improve the understanding of which populations are most in need of food support services. It provides an update to the 2023 estimates and allows for the tracking of changes in household food insecurity over time.

KEY FINDINGS

Overall Food Insecurity

Thirty-two percent of Hawai'i households – approximately 463,000 individuals – were food insecure in 2024–25. This is virtually unchanged from 30% in 2023, underscoring a persistent statewide crisis. Of these households, 11% experienced low food security and 21% very low food security. An additional 16% were marginally food secure, indicating ongoing anxiety about running out of food.

In more than a quarter of Hawai'i households, one or more members cut or skipped meals. Additionally, in one in five households, one or more members were hungry, but did not eat because there was not enough money for food. Eleven percent of households went a whole day without food at least once during the year, with nearly all of them having had this happen for some months or nearly every month.

Households with **LOW** food security reduce dietary quality and variety, whereas households with **VERY LOW** food security reduce their food intake, skip meals, or go whole days without eating.

32%

of Hawai'i households
were food insecure
in 2024–2025

11%

of households went
**A WHOLE DAY
WITHOUT FOOD**
at least once during
the year



**1 in 5 households experience
VERY LOW FOOD SECURITY,**
the most severe category of food insecurity.



Kaua'i County

32% food insecure households
(23,000 individuals)



Honolulu County

25% food insecure households
(247,000 individuals)



Maui County

41% food insecure households
(67,000 individuals)

GEOGRAPHY

Food insecurity remains high statewide, with Hawai'i Island and Maui County continuing to experience the highest levels.



Hawai'i County

43% food insecure households
(90,000 individuals)

DEMOGRAPHICS AT HIGHER RISK



53%

of young adults ages 18-29 were affected by food insecurity



58%

of those currently enrolled in higher education were food insecure



41%

of those identifying as LGBTQIA+ were food insecure



44%

of households earning less than \$90,000 were food insecure
(compared to 16% of households earning above \$90,000)

47% of FILIPINO HOUSEHOLDS
experience food insecurity



41% of HISPANIC HOUSEHOLDS
experience food insecurity



**36% of NATIVE HAWAIIAN /
PACIFIC ISLANDER* HOUSEHOLDS**
experience food insecurity



RACE & ETHNICITY

The prevalence of food insecurity can vary widely for different racial and ethnic populations.

Filipino households have particularly high rates of food insecurity at 47% in the 2024-2025 survey, as well as in 2023. Hispanic household food insecurity was also over 40%, followed by Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander* household food insecurity at 36%. Food insecurity was lowest among Chinese, Japanese, and Korean households. These discrepancies stress the importance of considering each community independently.

* Pacific Islanders were combined with Native Hawaiians due to the small number of Pacific Islanders in the sample (n=21).

HEALTH IMPACTS

Food insecurity was strongly associated with chronic health conditions including anxiety, depression and gastrointestinal issues. Conditions or health concerns that restricted the ability to go to the store to get food, such as mobility disabilities and fear of falling, were also associated with household food insecurity. Delaying or skipping medical care due to financial strain was common among food-insecure households.

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that food-insecure individuals face higher rates of chronic disease, increased hospitalizations, and greater overall healthcare costs. Health and food security are inextricably linked, and these findings further emphasize the need to view access to nutritious food as essential to improving health outcomes and curbing rising healthcare costs. Integrating new approaches in the 'food is medicine' space for food insecure individuals will be an important part of the overall solution.



37% of ADULTS
in food insecure households
have anxiety or depression
as compared to **20%** in
food secure households

17% of ADULTS
in food insecure households
have gastrointestinal problems
as compared to **8%** in
food secure households



41% of ADULTS
in food insecure households
delayed or skipped
medical treatment or care
as compared to **15%** in
food secure households

KEIKI & FAMILIES



Households with Children

Thirty-four percent of children experienced food insecurity (up from 29% in 2023). One in five children lived in homes where they did not eat enough because of financial constraints. Eleven percent of children lived in households where one or more children were hungry, but the family could not afford more food.

In households with children, food insecurity among adults was especially high at 45% (up from 38% in 2023), and those with young children found themselves most susceptible – indicative that parents and caregivers will sacrifice their own food security before letting their children go without food. Households with two or more children and multigenerational families remain especially vulnerable.

Overall, there is a concerning trend across indicators suggesting an increase in food insecurity in households with children that needs to be closely monitored.



34% OF CHILDREN experienced food insecurity



11% OF CHILDREN lived in households where one or more children were hungry



School and Summer Food Programs

For children, it is clear that free or reduced-price meals at school are very important to buffering against food insecurity. Food insecurity among households receiving free or reduced-price school meals was more than twice as high as those not participating, emphasizing on the value of school-based support.

Although eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch or breakfast is the same, not all families use both services. Forty-one percent of households with children participated in free or reduced-price school lunch programs while only 31% participated in school breakfast programs, indicating **opportunities to increase access and participation in school breakfast.**

Sixty-eight percent of those who wanted summer food support but did not receive it were also food insecure. **Findings reinforce the critical role of year-round child nutrition programs as a mechanism for keeping children food secure, as well as the need to expand food support programs during summer.**



41%

of households with children participated in free or reduced-price school lunch programs, while only



31%

participated in school breakfast programs



68%

of those who wanted summer food support but **did not receive it** were food insecure





83%

denied SNAP benefits were
FOOD INSECURE

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE & BARRIERS

Sixteen percent of Hawai'i residents applied for SNAP, formerly known as food stamps, in the past year: 11% were enrolled, while 5% were denied.

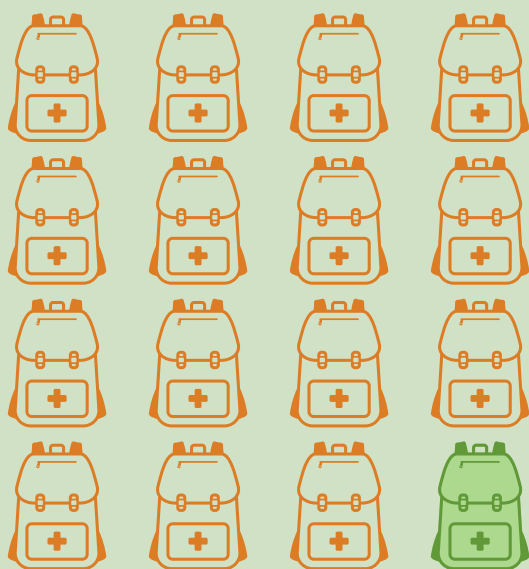
Of those denied SNAP benefits, 83% were food insecure, highlighting serious gaps in the social safety net.

COMMUNITY FOOD ACCESS

This survey also provided insights on the use of free food services through the food banks' hunger-relief networks, including opportunities like food pantries, school pantry or backpack programs, community organizations, and churches. Twenty percent of households had at least one member who received free groceries from one of these places, but most did so only a handful of times a year.

Half of residents statewide, regardless of food security status, know where to get free groceries or meals if needed; however, these numbers varied widely by county. In addition, feelings of shame or embarrassment remain significant barriers to seeking help across the state.





ONLY 6%

of food insecure households
feel prepared for a disaster

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Statewide, only 15% of Hawai'i adult residents feel prepared for a disaster; among food insecure households, only 6% feel prepared. The most common barrier to disaster preparation was lack of storage space, followed by lack of financial resources, and then a lack of knowledge about which supplies are needed. Among those residing in food insecure households, the most important barrier was lack of financial resources. In fact, nearly eight times as many individuals living in food insecure households experience this barrier compared to those in food secure households.

GROWING, HUNTING & SHARING FOOD

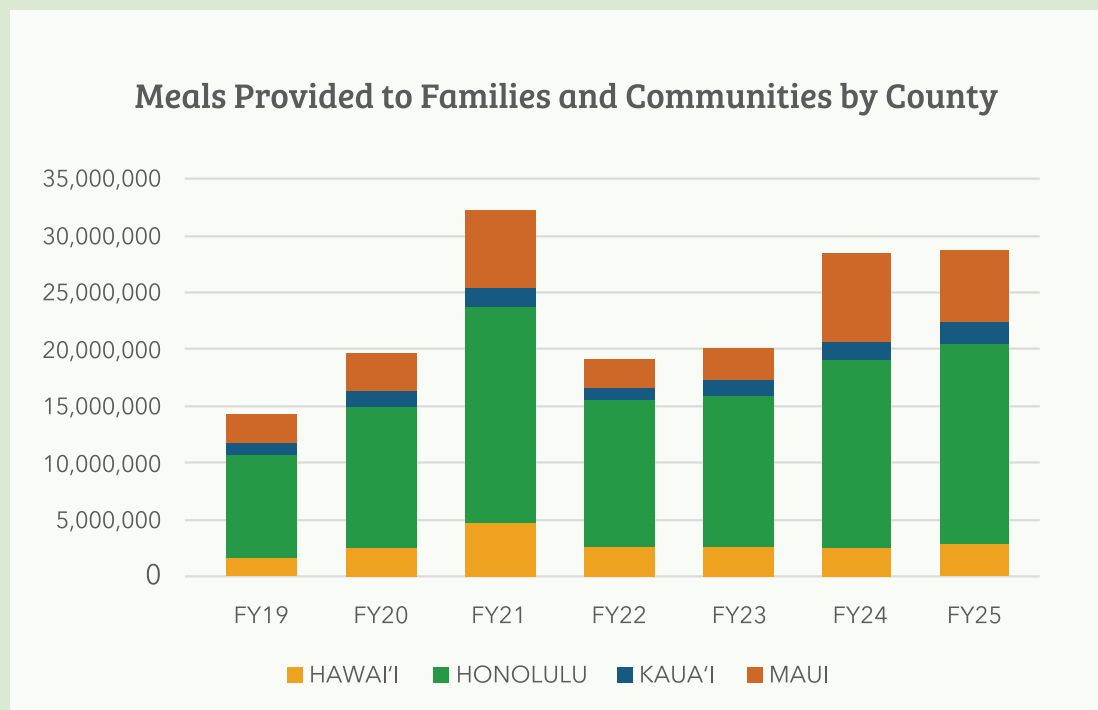
Food insecurity is linked to both necessity and resilience. Food-insecure households are significantly more likely to hunt, fish, or raise animals to supplement their diets. Community sharing networks like gifted or exchanged foods such as fruits, vegetables, chickens, and venison also play a vital role in helping families make ends meet.



CONCLUSION

Hawai'i's 2024-2025 data confirm that food insecurity remains alarmingly high, affecting approximately one in three households statewide and often forcing families to choose between food and essential expenses. Particularly concerning is the finding that statewide food insecurity may be increasing in households with children.

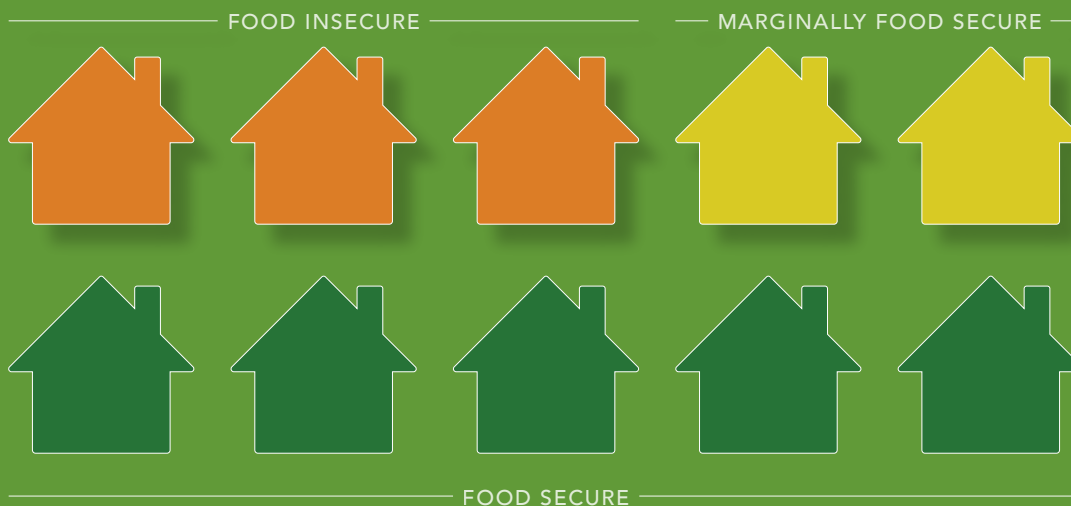
Hawai'i Foodbank, Hawai'i Foodbank Kaua'i, Maui Food Bank, and The Food Basket Inc., Hawai'i Island's Food Bank are committed to providing high quality estimates of food insecurity statewide to guide their programmatic efforts and to evaluate program successes and shortcomings. However, with a third of the population of the state experiencing food insecurity, structural solutions are essential for reducing food insecurity in Hawai'i.



Last year, Hawai'i's Food Bank Hui connected families and communities with nearly **29 MILLION MEALS**, close to the peak of the pandemic.

1 in 3 HOUSEHOLDS IN HAWAI'I ARE FOOD INSECURE

and many more are just one paycheck away



32% of households in Hawai'i are food insecure, and nearly 2 in 10 are one or two paychecks away from needing help, even among those families who are food secure.

THE LARGER CONTEXT OF FOOD INSECURITY

Hawai'i is the most costly state in the U.S. in which to live, with salaries incongruent with the elevated costs of living in the state. As witnessed during the 2025 federal shutdown, many households are just one or two paychecks away from needing help, even among those families who are food secure. These challenges are compounded by recent cuts to SNAP and Medicaid at the federal level through the budget reconciliation law (H.R. 1) passed in July 2025. H.R. 1 included the largest cuts to these programs in U.S. history, and will amplify risks to the most vulnerable populations, including Hawai'i's keiki and kūpuna.

Even before these cuts, Hawai'i Foodbank, Hawai'i Foodbank Kaua'i, Maui Food Bank, and The Food Basket Inc., Hawai'i Island's Food Bank were facing unprecedented demand—serving the same number of people as during the height of the pandemic and approximately twice as many people as prior to the pandemic. Federal funding cuts to food distribution programs that occurred in early 2025, including cuts to The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), are further intensifying the challenges facing food banks.

In this current context, it is inevitable that demand for support from the charitable food network will only increase. Meeting those needs will require innovative local solutions and partnerships.



CREATING SOLUTIONS

To ensure that every resident, regardless of income, location, or background, has access to enough nutritious food for a healthy, active life requires creative and collaborative solutions. A strengthened social safety net, expanded food access for our keiki, streamlined benefit systems, innovative programs that reflect the important role food plays in health and social outcomes, and continued investment in Hawai'i's charitable food network are all essential.

Ending hunger is more than meeting a basic need—it is a catalyst for healthier communities and a more equitable Hawai'i. By ensuring consistent access to nutritious food for all our communities, we can improve health outcomes, reduce healthcare costs, and strengthen overall well-being across generations. While achieving this vision will require sustained commitment and coordinated action across sectors, recent crises have demonstrated that collective action in Hawai'i is possible, and powerful.

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