



Vermont Food Security: Roadmap to 2035

Documents for January 24, 2024 Testimony

House Agriculture, Food Resilience, and Forestry Committee; Senate Agriculture Committee

The pdf contains the following documents:

From Vermont Department of Health:

- Food insecurity data from the 2019/2020 Vermont Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System
- “Living with Food Insecurity: Risk Factors, Quality of Life, and Chronic Disease Rates”
- 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey data

From Vermont Foodbank:

- Funding request to address the sustained, increased need for access to food in communities throughout Vermont

From Hunger Free Vermont:

- Give 3SquaresVT a Boost policy summary

Food Insecurity

Seven percent of Vermont adults report that in the past year they have always, usually or sometimes bought food that did not last and did not have money to get more.

- Additionally, one in ten adults report that they received food stamps in the past year (10%).

Males and females report statistically similar rates of always, usually or sometimes buying food that did not last and not having money to get more.

There are no statistical differences in food insecurity by age.

Food insecurity is higher among adults with less education and lower household incomes.

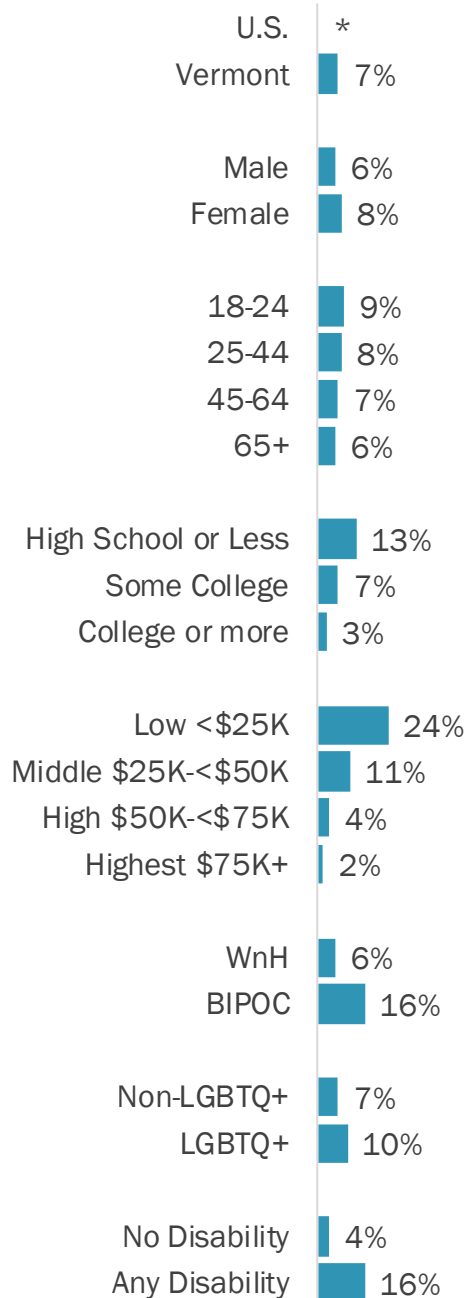
- All differences by education level are statistically significant.
- All differences by household income level are statistically significant, except between adults in homes with high and highest incomes.

BIPOC adults and adults with a disability are statistically more likely to experience food insecurity in the past year than white, non-Hispanic adults and those with a disability.

There are no statistical differences in food insecurity by sexual orientation and gender identity.

Note: 2022 is the first year data was collected for this measure, so trend and county-level data are not available.

Vermont Adults who Always/Usually/Sometimes Bought Food that Did Not Last, 2022



*No national estimate available.

Food insecurity is the inability to consistently access enough affordable food, regardless of nutritional quality. In 2020, 5% of Vermont adults were worried they or someone in their home would not have enough food to eat. The experience of food insecurity has many harmful consequences, including increased risk of chronic disease and related risk factors, as well as poor mental and physical well-being. Socioeconomic factors such as education, income, and employment are closely linked to the risk of being food insecure.

Socioeconomic Characteristics

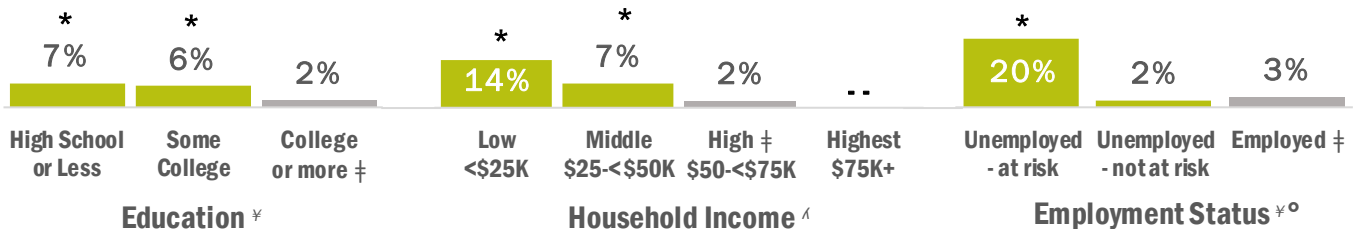
Compared to Vermont adults with a college education or more, adults with some college or less are statistically more likely to be food insecure. Adults in low-income households are seven times as likely as those in high-income households and two times as likely as those in middle-income households to report being worried about not having enough food. Vermonters who are unemployed or unable to work (unemployed-at risk) are statistically more likely to be food insecure than those who are employed or those who are unemployed but not at risk (homemaker, student, or retired).

KEY POINTS

- Food insecurity decreases as education, household income level, and employment increase.
- Vermont adults who are food insecure have higher rates of chronic disease, health risk factors, and poorer quality of life compared to adults who are food secure.



Socioeconomic Characteristics among Vermont Adults who are Food Insecure



Data Source: †Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), 2020; †BRFSS, 2018 & 2020

‡ Reference group *Statistical difference from reference group

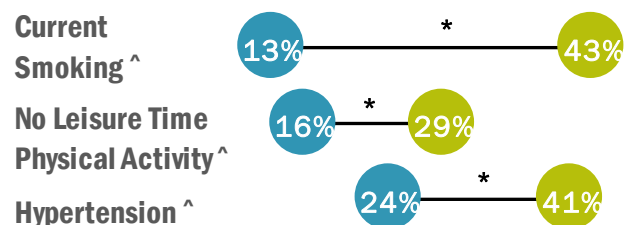
° Unemployed-at risk defined as out of work or unable to work; not at risk defined as homemaker, student, or retired

-- Value suppressed because sample size is too small or relative standard error (RSE) is >30

Risk Factors for Chronic Disease

Vermont adults who worried about not having enough food to eat are more than three times as likely to currently smoke and nearly two times as likely to report no leisure time physical activity than those who are food secure, both significant differences. Vermonters who are food insecure are also statistically more likely to have hypertension when compared to those who are food secure (41% vs. 24%, respectively).

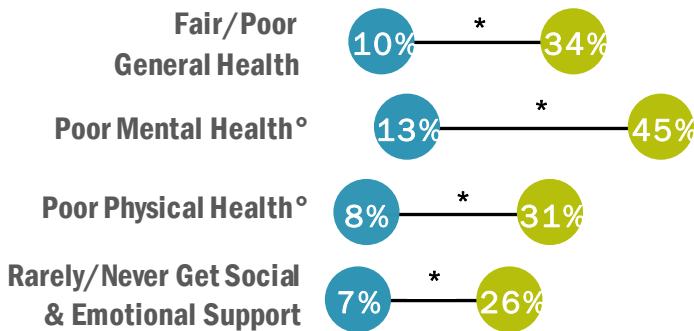
Risk Factors among Vermont Adults who are Food Secure and Food Insecure



Data Source: BRFSS, 2020 *Statistical difference ^ Age-adjusted to the U.S. 2000 population

Food Insecurity – Risk Factors, Quality of Life, & Chronic Disease

Percent of Food Secure and Food Insecure Vermont Adults who report...



*Statistically significant difference ° Defined as 14+ days in the last 30 where health was self-reported as not good

Quality of Life Indicators

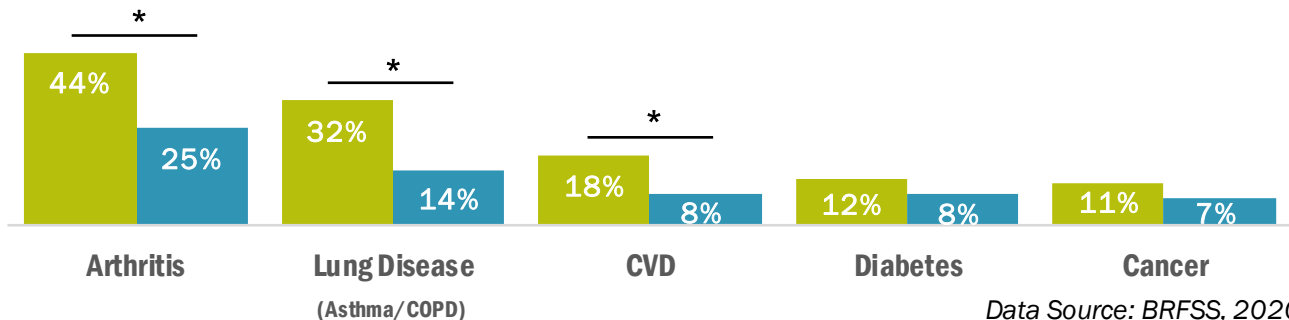
- One in three (34%) Vermont adults who are food insecure report having fair or poor general health.
- Food insecure adults are three and a half times more likely to report poor mental health and poor physical health than food secure adults.
- Food insecure adults are significantly more likely than food secure adults to rarely or never get social and emotional support.

Data Source: BRFSS, 2020

Rates of Chronic Disease

The development of chronic disease is complex and multifaceted. Food insecurity is one of the many social determinants of health that contribute to chronic disease risk. Compared to adults who are food secure, those who are food insecure experience higher rates of arthritis; more than twice the rate of lung disease, largely driven by asthma; and more than twice the rate of cardiovascular disease (CVD); all significant differences. Adults who are food insecure have higher rates of diabetes and cancer than those who are food secure, though these differences are not statistically significant.

Rates of Chronic Disease among Vermont Adults who are Food Secure and Food Insecure



Data Source: BRFSS, 2020

*Statistically significant difference

Key Takeaways

Food insecurity is associated with increased disease burden and negative health outcomes, though socioeconomic disparities exist in regard to those who are at higher risk. Beyond advancing access to having enough food, working towards nutrition security will ensure that individuals have sustained and equitable access to nutritious food for optimal health and well-being. Recognizing the social and structural determinants that influence food and nutrition insecurity status, including health care access, housing insecurity, and transportation, can help inform efforts to target poor nutrition and address diet-related diseases.

For more information: Paul Meddaugh, paul.meddaugh@vermont.gov

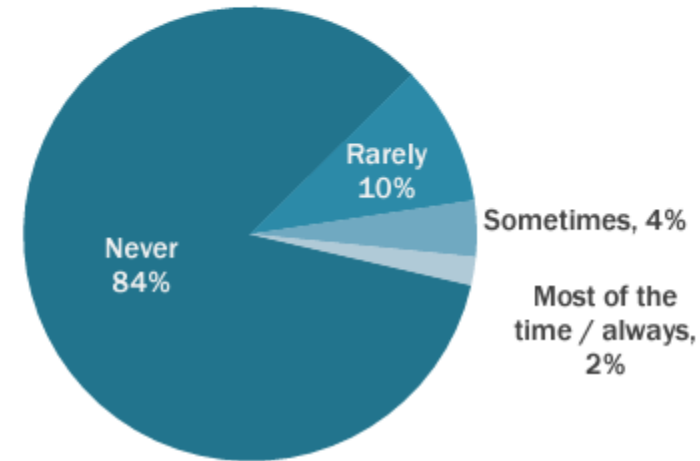
Food Insecurity

During the past month, 2% of high school students went hungry always or most of the time because there was not enough food available; 84% never went hungry during the previous month.

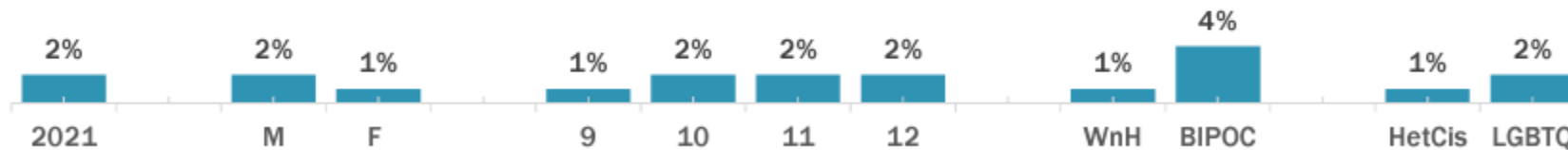
The following students are significantly more likely to go hungry at least most of the time:

- Male students,
- BIPOC students, and
- LGBTQ+ students.

Went Hungry, Past 30 Days



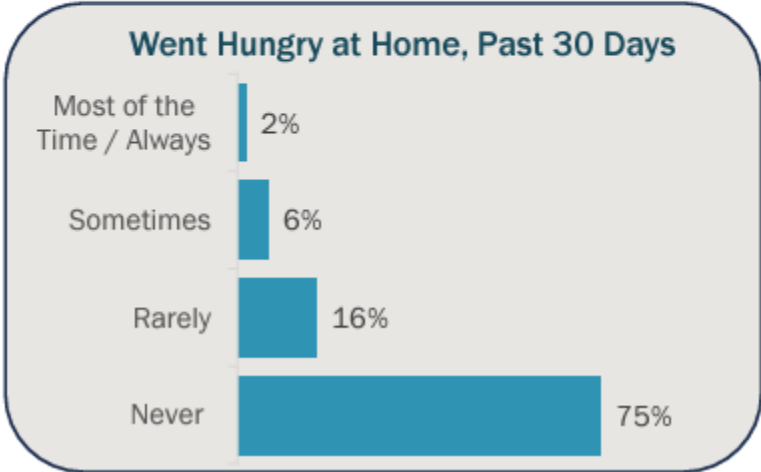
High School Students who Always or Most of the Time Went Hungry Because There was Not Enough Food in Their Home, Past 30 Days



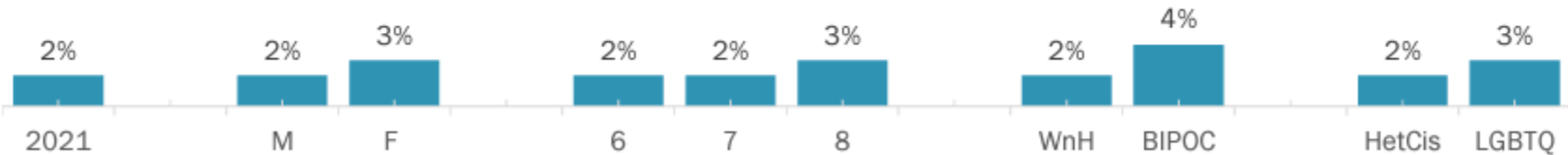
Food Insecurity

During the past 30 days, 2% of middle school students went hungry most of the time or always because there was not enough food at home. Three-quarters of students never went hungry.

- Going hungry always or most of the time because there was not enough food at home does not differ by sex or grade level.
- BIPOC students are nearly eight times more likely than white, non-Hispanic students to go hungry always or most of the time because there was not enough food at home.
- LGBTQ+ students significantly more likely than heterosexual cisgender students to go hungry always or most of the time because there was not enough food at home.



Middle School Students who Always or Most of the Time Went Hungry, Past 30 Days



The Vermont Foodbank (VF) is seeking \$5 million dollars in base funding to address the sustained, increased need for access to food in communities throughout Vermont.

- \$2 million in FY24 Budget Adjustment to address immediate needs
- An additional \$3 million in FY25 to address ongoing needs

This summer's catastrophic flooding around the state created an additional, cascading crisis for our neighbors experiencing hunger and has put additional pressure on the charitable and emergency food network. This level of need is beyond what our network of community organizations was built to address.

- We know from Hurricane Irene that there is a long tail to disaster recovery and many people who did not need help before these disasters will now need help for months, maybe years, to come.
- The recent increased need for food in communities builds on the economic devastation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which was exacerbated by inflation in 2022.
- The need was made starker with the end of federal pandemic-era programs supporting our neighbors' nutrition needs. This was felt particularly strongly among neighbors who are least able to adjust quickly to these changing circumstances.
 - Since SNAP (3SquaresVT) Emergency Allotments ended in April 2023 (an average of \$500/month in lost benefits per family, affecting 40,000 households), the Foodbank's network of food pantries, food shelves, and meal sites has seen a marked increase in visits.

To keep the response going, VF needs \$2 million in base funding right now, in the Budget Adjustment process.

In June 2023, VF distributed 988,913 lbs. of food. In August it was 1.42 million lbs. – a 44% increase. We anticipate that this level of need will continue to remain high, especially in flood impacted regions.

\$2 million in base funding as part of the Budget Adjustment for FY24 means we can:

- Continue to purchase adequate amounts of food for distribution to local community organizations across the state
- Find new sources of produce to replace the local produce lost to flooding
- Address increased operating costs due to the larger, heavier truckloads of food VF is distributing statewide
- Ensure that culturally relevant food is available in communities to replace home-grown or locally grown foods destroyed by flooding
- Immediately and continuously get food to those most impacted by flooding, job loss, or other impacts of these disasters



An additional \$3 million in base funding in the FY25 budget will ensure that VF can continue this work as long as necessary as people all over Vermont recover from these cascading crises.

Teddy Waszazak
Legislative Policy Lead
Hunger Free Vermont
twaszazak@hungerfreevt.org
781-219-8770



Over the past year, individuals have been hit with a series of cascading crises; the historic floods of July 2023, rising costs and inflation, the housing crisis, and the end of many federal supports including the expanded SNAP/3SquaresVT emergency allotments.

In April of 2023, **72,000 Vermonters saw a significant drop in their monthly SNAP benefits as Congress ended the pandemic Emergency Allotments.** These Emergency Allotments, totaling around \$6.5 million each month, boosted monthly benefits for all households receiving 3SquaresVT. When these allotments ended, most households experienced a monthly loss of benefits ranging from \$100 to \$500, while some faced even greater cuts of up to \$2,000 each month. Many older adults saw a drop in benefits from \$280 to a mere \$23. This change happened abruptly, and gave families little time to prepare. The loss in benefits hit at a devastating time of high food and energy costs, and families are still struggling to recover.

During the past year, Hunger Free Vermont identified additional concern, through conversations with lawmakers, community members, and other stakeholders, to support those communities who are most-impacted by these challenges. These communities include: older Vermonters, homeless individuals, college students, single parents with children, and 3SquaresVT recipients generally.

To address these concerns, we are proposing to “Give 3SquaresVT a Boost!” through the following 3 actions listed on the reverse side:





Action 1: The College Student Option:

In addition to income and other eligibility criteria, college and graduate students enrolled at least half-time in an institute of higher education must meet or prove they are exempt from a harsh and burdensome student work requirement. This “work for food” rule requires, for example, students to report employment for an average of 20 hours/week. While states have the authority to exempt community college students from this rule, we currently do not have this practice in Vermont, and therefore are missing an important opportunity to support students who are the future of Vermont’s workforce—and more importantly, deserve to not go hungry.

Hunger Free Vermont is working with the Administration and other interested stakeholders to implement this option.

Legislative ask:

No legislative action necessary.



Action 2: The Restaurant Meals Program:

The Restaurant Meals Program is run through the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), and allows certain SNAP recipients to use their benefits at approved restaurants.

To qualify, the SNAP recipients must be:

- Elderly (*60 years of age or older*);
- Disabled (*receives disability or blindness payments or receives disability retirement benefits from a governmental agency because of a disability considered permanent*);
- Homeless;
- or be the spouse of a SNAP recipient who meets one of the above criteria

For restaurants to qualify, they must get approval from the State of Vermont as well as FNS. Each State can set their own rules for how many and which restaurants can participate.

Legislative ask:

Adequate staffing for AHS to implement the Restaurant Meals Program, and financial support for onboarding restaurants, including TA, equipment, and software costs.



Action 3: Give 3SquaresVT a Boost:

The existing formula for calculating the SNAP Minimum Benefit is inadequate, outdated, and only guaranteed for household sizes of one and two. The current guaranteed minimum benefit is a mere \$23 monthly, while households greater than two may receive a benefit as low as \$1 each month. To address this, we are proposing raising the minimum benefit by changing the formula to the following:

- Calculate the Minimum Benefit based on the USDA Moderate Food Plan, consistent with the Joint Fiscal Office Basic Needs Budget.
- The Minimum Benefit will represent 30% of the cost of the Moderate Food Plan
- ALL SNAP household benefits will be raised to ensure each household receives a monthly amount no less than 30% of the Moderate Food Plan

Legislative ask:

Pass legislation enshrining this formula into statute.