

One in Six Doesn't Have Enough to Eat

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A recent report by **Feeding America** reveals that 50 million Americans at some point in 2009 did not have enough to eat. That's one in six. Despite what we know about hunger and poverty, the nation's policymakers are proposing drastic cuts to nutrition programs as well as poverty-alleviating programs.

The report, **Map the Meal Gap**, is a dynamic tool that allows users to view food insecurity rates by state, county and congressional district.

Given that statistics about hunger and poverty are often spoken about in the abstract, this tool has immense value for revealing just how pervasive hunger is and where and which populations are most affected. For advocates and policymakers alike, the tool may be useful for targeting limited resources to ensure more eligible families receive the supports they need.

The report breaks down populations by income and shows that 29 percent of food insecure Americans live above the poverty threshold but have incomes low enough (up to 185 percent of poverty or \$40,793 for a family of four) to qualify for the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps).

But even this threshold doesn't capture everyone who is in need. About 7.5 million didn't have enough money to buy adequate food, couldn't qualify for SNAP or other nutrition assistance and had to regularly rely on charitable organizations or food banks, according to the report.

In spite of widespread hunger, the House has proposed cuts to vital food and nutrition programs, including WIC, a program that provides nutrition assistance for half the babies born in the United States. **The proposal would also zero out funding for smaller anti-hunger and nutrition programs.**

It is shameful that in a nation with plenty of food, some should go hungry. We have policies in place as well as other supports to help alleviate hunger, and in many respects, these programs do a good job of meeting need. **They should not be cut in the name of deficit reduction.**

As policymakers move forward with the budget negotiations for the remainder of FY2011 and for FY 2012, they should do no harm to programs that help children get the nutrition they need to grow healthy and concentrate in school, and help adults get the daily food they need. Addressing food insecurity is not just a political issue, in this land of plenty, it's a moral one as well.

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