

2026

Virginia Hunger Study

An extension of the 2026 CAFB-NORC Hunger Survey



BACKGROUND

Food is essential for all people to maintain health and wellbeing. Yet for a large number of Virginians, putting enough food on the table can be a challenge. Food insecurity—which occurs when people have inadequate or uncertain access to adequate, safe, and nutritious food—is a major issue in the Commonwealth.

To better understand the scope of this problem, a coalition of hunger relief and academic organizations recently partnered to commission the first ever CAFB-NORC Hunger Survey for Virginia.

The findings of the study, the first of its kind in the state, are the result of a general population survey that is based on direct interviews with over 5,600 Virginians using the USDA's screener for food insecurity. General population surveys provide a rigorous measure of the prevalence of key issues in the context of broader society.

The work was commissioned through a partnership between the Federation of Virginia Food Banks, the Virginia Department of Social Services, Virginia Tech, and No Kid Hungry Virginia. The survey was conducted by the independent social research organization NORC at the University of Chicago.

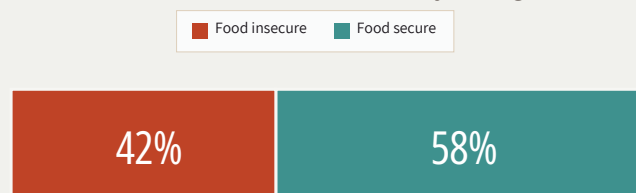
The survey's methodology offers a new level of precision that captures the extent of food insecurity across the state. Key findings of the survey are included in this executive summary.

Key Findings

PREVALENCE OF FOOD INSECURITY

- **42% of Virginia households were food insecure** in the 12 months between May 2025–May 2026.
- Prevalence rates range throughout the state, with Southwest Virginia seeing the highest levels at 55%. Even in Northern Virginia, the area with the lowest rates, nearly one in three households—32%—had experienced food insecurity during the year.

Prevalence of food insecurity in Virginia



Source: CAFB-NORC Hunger Survey conducted May 4–16, 2026 with 5,621 adults age 18 and older in Virginia.

LEVELS OF FOOD INSECURITY

- **Over a quarter (26%) of households in the state are experiencing very low food security**, the most severe form. In this category, individuals are facing disruptions in the amount of food they consume and the regularity of their eating patterns.
- Another **15% experienced low food security** (reducing the quality, variety, and desirability of their diets) and **13% experienced marginal food security** (experiencing periodic issues with, or worry about, accessing food).
- The percentage of households with “high food security,” meaning they experience virtually no issues with or concerns about putting food on the table, constitute fewer than half (45%) of those in the state.

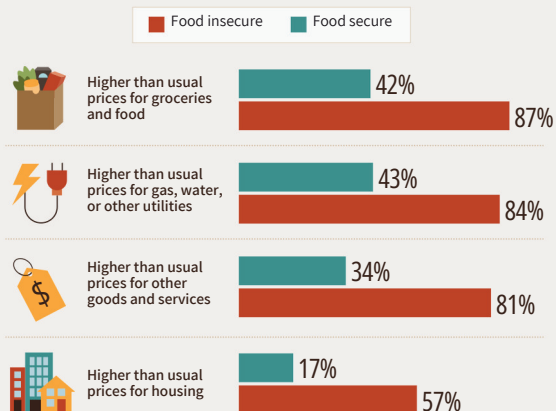
PATTERNS AND DRIVERS OF FOOD INSECURITY

- **Over half (51%) of all households with children** statewide are food insecure.
- **Black and Hispanic Virginians experienced food insecurity at significantly higher rates** than their white neighbors. Prevalence of food insecurity among various populations is:
 - 33% among white households
 - 63% among Black households
 - 53% among Hispanic households
- **Inflation is hitting food insecure families hardest.** 87% say grocery/food price increases have had a major impact on their finances. Only 42% of food secure families say the same.

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

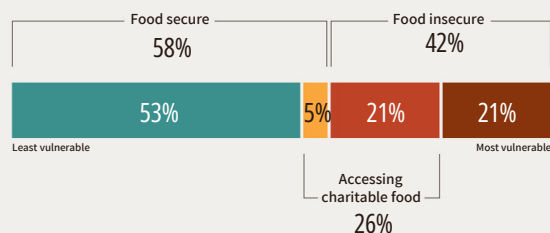
- **Government benefits are playing a significant role in supporting households' food budgets.** According to SNAP recipients who responded to the CAFB-NORC survey, government benefits account for **52%** of their monthly spending on groceries.
- **Only 27% of food insecure households in Virginia are enrolled in SNAP.** 31% receive no government benefits at all.
 - Confusion over eligibility and awareness of services are major barriers to accessing charitable food.
 - Half of food insecure people who do not receive SNAP report their income as the reason they are not enrolled.
- **The charitable food system will be the first line of defense when households experience SNAP cuts.** Respondents to the survey who are enrolled in SNAP report that their first resort if their benefits were cut would be to seek out additional charitable food sources like food pantries, along with shifting to less expensive or less healthy groceries to cut food costs.
- **The charitable food system is acting as a significant buffer to food insecurity.** For those who receive charitable food, it is offsetting about **\$108** worth of groceries per month.

Major causes of financial strain for households in Virginia



Question: In the last 12 months, since May of last year, how much of an impact have each of the following had on your household's financial situation? (Major impact)
Source: CAFB-NORC Hunger Survey conducted May 4–16, 2026 with 5,621 adults age 18 and older in Virginia.

Spectrum of access to food in Virginia



Source: CAFB-NORC Hunger Survey conducted May 4–16, 2026 with 5,621 adults age 18 and older in Virginia.

Note: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

IMPACTS ON HEALTH AND NUTRITION

- **77% of adults experiencing food insecurity find it somewhat or very difficult to access healthy food.**
- Food secure people are twice as likely to eat at least one serving of vegetables a day, compared to their food insecure counterparts.
- Adults experiencing food insecurity are more likely than food secure adults to have visited an emergency room or urgent care facility at least once in the past year (60% vs. 46%).
- Food insecure adults are more likely to suffer from one or more chronic health conditions.

For more information, visit vafoodbanks.org