

Food Security and Insecurity Definitions

Food security—defined informally as access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life—is one of several conditions necessary for a population to be healthy and well-nourished.

Food insecurity, in turn, refers to limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or limited or uncertain ability to acquire food in socially acceptable ways.

In 1990, an expert working group of the American Institute of Nutrition developed the following conceptual definitions of food security, food insecurity and hunger, which were published by the Life Sciences Research Office (LSRO) of the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology.

- **Food Security:** “Access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food security includes at a minimum: (1) the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and (2) an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (e.g., without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies).”
- **Food Insecurity:** “Limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.”
- **Hunger:** “The uneasy or painful sensation caused by a lack of food. The recurrent and involuntary lack of access to food. Hunger may produce malnutrition over time ... Hunger ... is a potential, although not necessary, consequence of food insecurity.”

These conceptual definitions were operationalized, and a scale was developed to measure the operational conditions at the household level in the U.S. population under guidance and sponsorship of the National Center for Health Statistics and the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1995-97.

Consisting of 18 questions, the U.S. Food Security Scale (FSS) is administered annually by the Census Bureau in its Current Population Survey (CPS) with results reported by USDA’s Economic Research Service (ERS). These repeated cycles of the FSS now provide a time series of data on food security, food insecurity and hunger in the U.S. population.

Source: Cook, John and Jeng, Karen, Child Food Insecurity: The Economic Impact on Our Nation. Children’s Health Watch (2009). Available at <https://childrenshealthwatch.org/child-food-security-the-economic-impact-on-our-nation/>