

## Food Hardship – Questions and Answers

### **What is food hardship?**

FRAC is using the term “food hardship” to describe a “yes” answer by a respondent household to the Gallup question “Have there been times in the past twelve months when you did not have enough money to buy food that you or your family needed?” FRAC uses this phrase to avoid confusion with the Census Bureau/USDA study that produces “food insecurity” numbers. The concepts are comparable – in the end, both studies give us similar numbers for how many Americans are struggling to put food on the table.

### **Where do the data come from?**

These data are provided to and analyzed by FRAC. They come from Gallup’s partnership with Healthways that is interviewing 1,000 households per day almost every day, year-round, and has done so since January 2, 2008. People have been asked a series of questions on a range of topics, including emotional health, physical health, healthy behavior, work environment and access to basic services.

### **How does this compare to USDA’s food security study?**

Since Gallup’s question is very similar to one of the questions asked by the federal government in its annual survey of food security, there is a basis for concluding that the two are measuring food insecurity in quite similar ways. While the Census Bureau/USDA’s additional questions allow a more nuanced view of the depth of food insecurity, the very large Gallup sample allows a closer, more localized and more recent look at food hardship. USDA’s data lag almost a year and do not go below the state level; even at the state level, they use three-year averages. Gallup’s data come out faster and provide data from the national level to congressional districts.

### **Why are some data for one year only (e.g., national) and other data for two or three years combined (e.g., MSA and Congressional Districts)?**

For each piece of analysis, FRAC uses time periods long enough to assure a large enough sample size.

### **Why can’t I compare different years of data?**

You shouldn’t compare 2008-2009 data to 2009-2010, for example, because of the overlap in sample years – both estimates contain data from 2009. As FRAC collects more data in the coming years, we will be able to produce estimates that do not overlap and can be compared.

### **Hunger’s not a problem in my community. My MSA/Congressional District has among the lowest rates.**

Ranking among “the best” on this list shouldn’t be a point of pride. Even better states, MSAs and congressional districts have rates of food hardship that are much too high. What this list shows is that food hardship is a problem in every corner of America, and should be a concern for every Member of Congress, Governor, Mayor, and public servant. No MSA and only a handful of Congressional Districts even had fewer than one in 10 households experiencing food hardship. It’s not a question of who is at the top and who is at the bottom. It boils down to the fact that in this extraordinarily wealthy nation, far too many people are not able to afford enough food for their families. This is a national problem demanding a national solution.