

Food Insecurity in the California Central Valley: An investigation between Consumer Choices and Nutrition

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Food Insecurity Facts

Food Insecure People in the Central Valley: 908,220

Total for California

Food Insecure Individuals 4,885,220

Total for Central Valley

Total Food Insecurity 908,220

Average percentage 14.38%

Average per County 56,764

Food Budget Shortfall \$491,578,000

Average Meal Cost \$3.06

Food Insecure Children 421,600

Average percentage 24.82%

Average per County 26,350

Ineligible Food Insecure People 11.75%

Eligible Food Insecure People 92.63%

Percentages above are based on counties: Butte, Colusa, Fresno, Glenn, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Sutter, Tehama, Tulare, Yolo and Yuba

California Food Insecurity Population 4,885,220

California Food Insecurity Percentage 12.5%

California Budget Shortfall \$2,750,484,000

California Average Meal Cost \$3.14

California Child Food Insecure Population 1,890,050

California Child Food Insecure Percentage 20.7%

What is Food Insecurity?

The term “Food Insecurity” is widely known as a state of economic disadvantage that inhibits an individual from maintaining consistent access to food or proper nutrition. Although food insecurity may be commonly mistaken as “hunger,” these two terms are mutually exclusive. Where hunger represents the complete inability to have access to food whereas food insecurity only representing the lack thereof; thus making these two terms different although widely related.

Causes of Food Insecurity

Because the state of California is far from seeing hunger on an aggregate level, this study’s focal point will center itself around nutrition. And with a country that is no shy from abundance or surplus, food insecurity could possibly imply problems with government’s infrastructure in regards to the population’s health.

According to the National Coalition for the Homeless (2011), food insecurity, particularly in developed countries, often arise from problems concerning unemployment, high housing costs, high medical costs, poverty, low wages and ineligibility for government aid. Because access to food in the United States is made available through monetary exchange, instability with income will often bring difficulties in accessing food. Food shortages are an unrealistic situation for a state like California which can easily translate how the lack of food or nutrition may instead come from the inability to afford it.

Methods

The first part in carrying out this research will be through interviews conducted with members of food bank organizations in order to gain a better understanding of what kinds of needs food bank recipients tend to have. Questions to be asked for these interviews will identify a person or household’s level of need, if that need sustains the person or household for the expected period of time, and how much demand there is within a region or zipcode area. Participants for the interview will be from one food bank in Sacramento County, the San Joaquin County, and one in Fresno County. After the interviews, surveys will be created based on the feedback and will ask the following questions to willing participants regarding their food choices. These questions will be specifically designed to prevent the most harm. The actual questions for the survey will depend on the feedback I receive from the interviews and will also be based on which questions the IRB would allow as ethical. I will also include observational research, to be conducted at the distribution centers in order to see what kinds of choices people make and scale how healthy their selected items are.

Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and CalFresh

The SNAP program is a federally funded nutrition program that was previously known as the “food stamp” program. SNAP provides households and individuals the ability to expand their grocery budget every month (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, 2017). SNAP benefits come in the form of an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card which works like a debit card however these money on these cards are allowed to be spent on specific grocery items that typically promote a healthier lifestyle. The state SNAP program in California is formally known as CalFresh. These programs were created with the intention of reducing food insecurity as well as a means to create economic stimulus into local and state economies.

Eligibility is based on income and distributed on a supplementary basis, meaning that it cannot act as an individual’s sole source of income. Ineligible food insecure households could also seek help through non-profit organizations and food banks that help aid to low-income families.

Many problems have come up with these federal assistance programs such as underutilization. The California Association of Food Banks (2012) discovered how billions of dollars in federal food aid assistance have gone unused by eligible participants. This could impose potential problems with the policies regulating the CalFresh program. Additionally, research has also found a strange relationship between food insecurity and obesity (Young, 2012) which seems like a complete paradox, however It is important to keep in mind how food insecurity can also be defined by innutrition; and although California, at large, is a food basket, we must consider the variables that prevent people from having access to healthy ingredients. Perhaps families must rely on unhealthy choices to make ends meet. America today has allowed consumers to have access to a wide variety of food, however much of the choices we have are limited in nutrition and cannot fulfil the requirements of an ideal diet. For Americans, it is becoming more and more of a common thing for populations to have heart disease and diabetes.

Expected Findings

With close consideration of how federal food aid is being underutilized, quantity might not be as big as a problem as the quality that lacks in the meals food insecure individuals eat. Thus, the findings of this study will try to approximate a relationship between food insecurity and diet choices within consumers.

References

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