



Policy Report: Food Insecurity in Central Pennsylvania, 2022 to 2023

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The following report assesses 2023 food insecurity rates in the 27 counties served by the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank (CPF) and how these rates have changed over the last few years based on Feeding America’s most recent Map the Meal Gap food insecurity estimates, released in May 2025.

It is important to note that while the data in this report are very informative, they should be considered to be lagging indicators, as they describe the food insecurity situation in the CPF’s service area as of 2023. The conclusions written below are therefore not directly reflective of conditions in August 2025. In fact, available proxy metrics, such as partner agency-reported service statistics and order volume, indicate that food insecurity rates in the present are very likely to be as high or higher than Map the Meal Gap reflects. As of calendar year 2024, the number of household-level services provided by CPF and its network of more than 1,100 partner agencies and programs had risen 7% over 2023.

Food insecurity rates across the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank’s service area rose more than a percentage point between 2022 and 2023, continuing a trend that began in 2022. The rise in food insecurity over the last two years is the result of a combination of several factors, including the expiration of key pandemic-related programs like the Expanded Child Tax Credit (CTC) and SNAP Emergency Allotments (EAs) in 2022 and 2023, as well as grocery inflation and continued high prices.

Recent policy changes made in the July 2025 Budget Reconciliation Bill further reduce SNAP and other programs that help food insecure central Pennsylvanians access the resources they need to thrive, meaning that it is likely food insecurity rates will continue to rise for the foreseeable future.

Food Insecurity Rates and Numbers in CPF Counties, 2019-2023

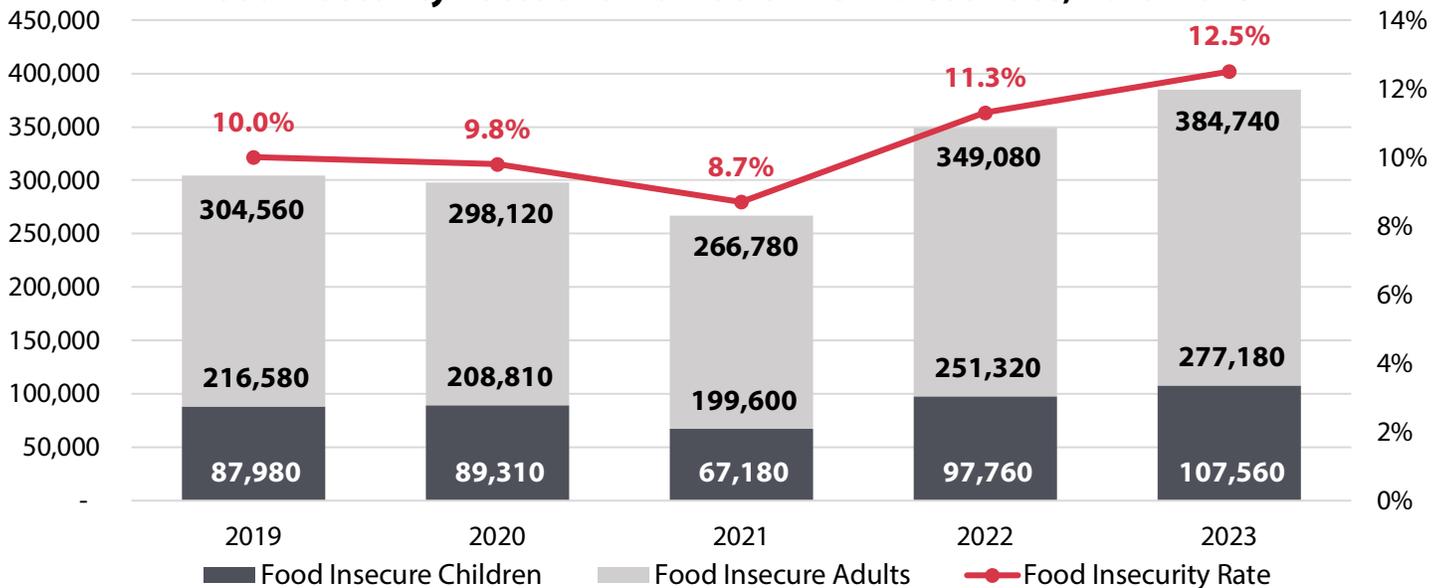


Figure 1. Food insecurity rates and the number of food insecure children/persons between 2019 and 2023 for counties served by the Central PA Food Bank according to Feeding America’s Map the Meal Gap estimates.

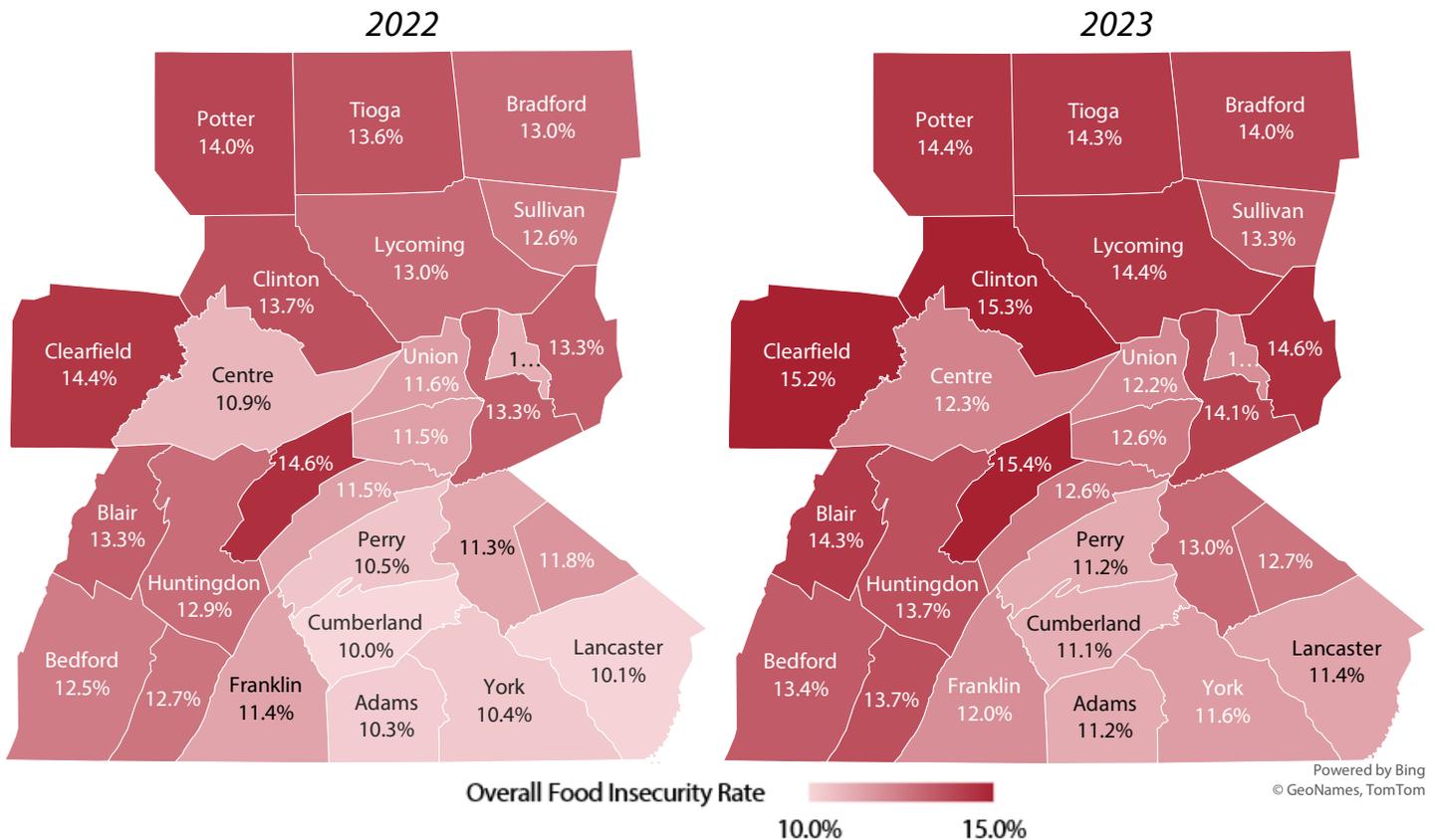
The fall in food insecurity and poverty between 2020 and 2021 and subsequent rise in 2022 and 2023 show that major reductions in food insecurity can be made through robust governmental policy and programmatic responses, if there is the political will to implement them. Public policy is therefore a critical tool in the effort to meet the Feeding America goal of a 5% national food insecurity rate by 2030. Unfortunately, major programmatic cuts made in the July 2025 budget reconciliation bill will make this already ambitious goal even more difficult to reach. These cuts include changes to SNAP eligibility that will cause an [estimated 22,000 central Pennsylvanians](#) to lose access to food assistance.

Overall food insecurity across the CPF’s service territory rose 10.6% between 2022 and 2023,

increasing from 11.3% to 12.5%. One in eight central Pennsylvanians is unsure where their next meal will come from.

The below maps show the all-age food insecurity rate by county in 2022 and 2023.

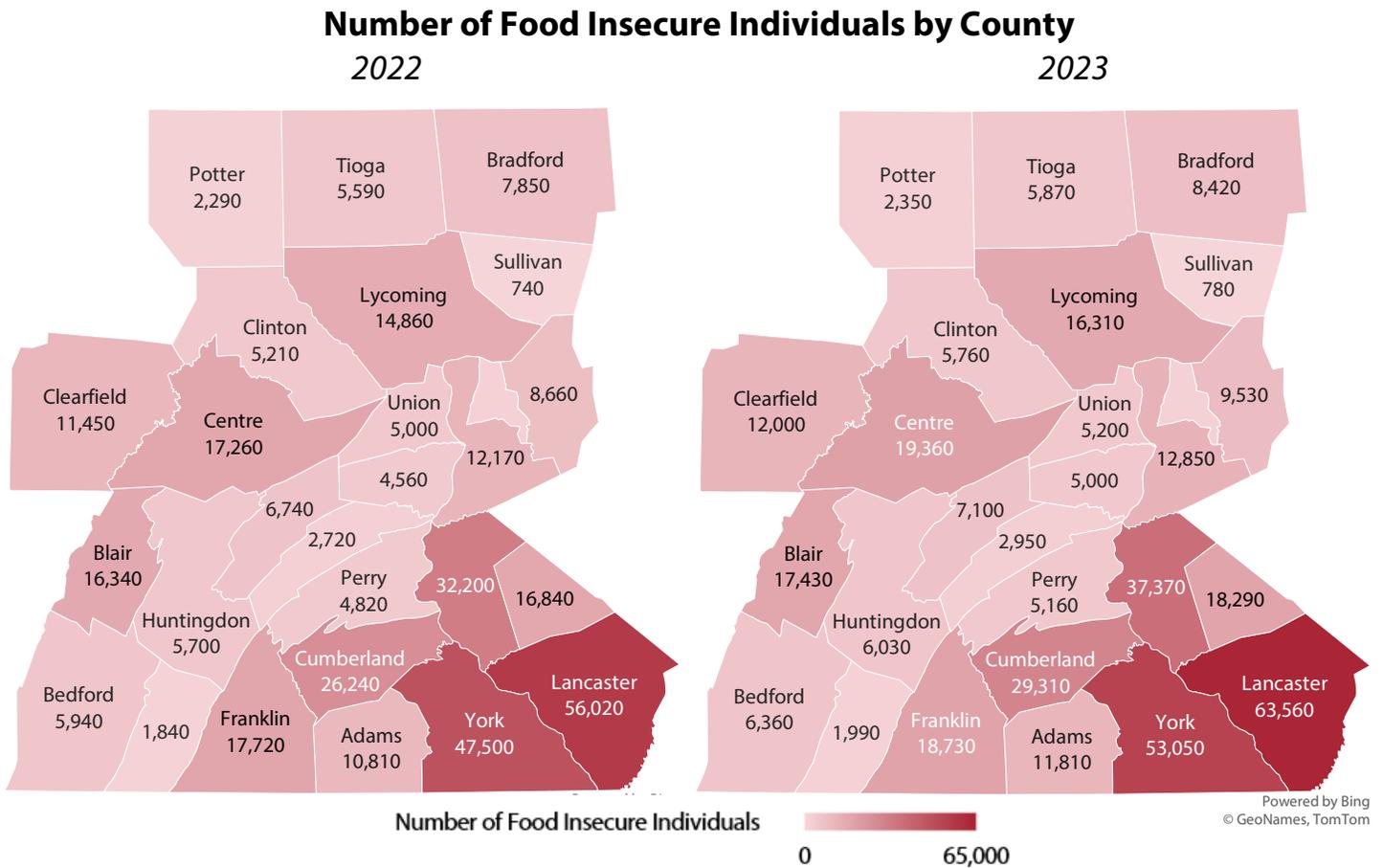
Overall Food Insecurity Rate by County



- Every CPFB county saw an increase in food insecurity; the rate of increase ranged from a low of 2.9% in Potter to a high of 15.0% in Dauphin.
 - Two other counties had increases of 12% or more: Lancaster (12.9%) and Centre (12.8%), while Clinton and York were close behind at 11.7% and 11.5%.
- Food insecurity rates were generally highest in the rural north and west of the CPFB service area, with lower rates in the central Susquehanna Valley and the more suburban southeast.
- Food insecurity is a complex issue with a myriad of root causes; however, the most likely drivers of the recent increase in food insecurity rates are the discontinuation of pandemic-era government assistance programs along with persistent grocery inflation and high prices.
 - In February 2023, SNAP Emergency Allotments (EAs) expired, leading to an [average benefit decrease](#) of \$102 per person per for participants in the CPFB service area. This equates to a nearly 40% reduction in SNAP spending power.
 - Federal statistics show that the cost of food at home (groceries) [rose 24% nationally between January 2020 and January 2023](#), with the sharpest rises in 2022.
 - The same study showed that food is the third largest category of spending for Americans as a whole, and that low-income households spend an average of 32.6% of their income on food. This means high grocery inflation put significant additional strain on already overstretched budgets.

The number of food insecure individuals increased across every county in the CPF’s service territory between 2022 and 2023, with the largest increases seen in the urban and suburban centers in south central Pennsylvania.

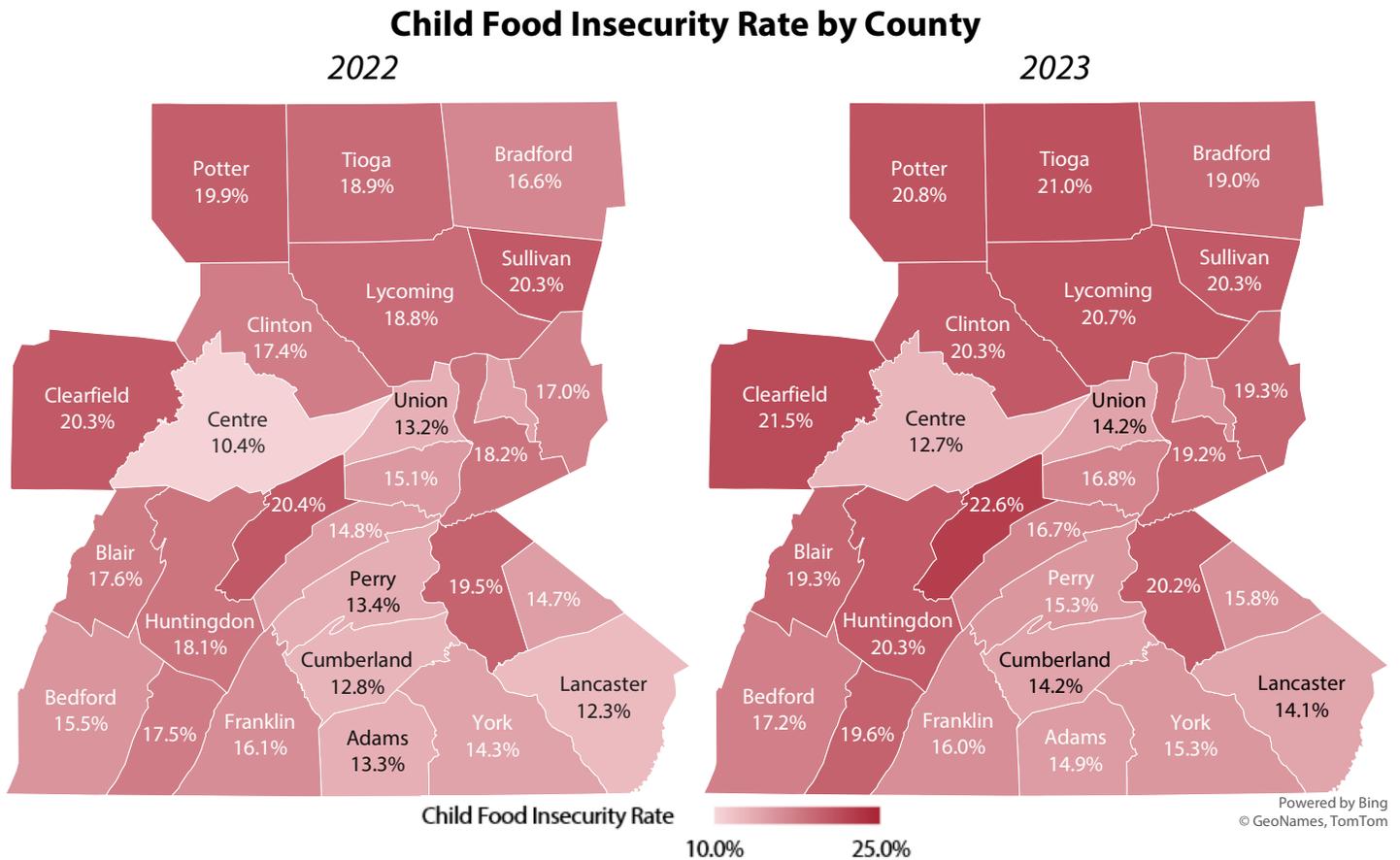
The below maps show the number of food insecure individuals by county in 2022 and 2023.



- Though the southeastern counties of CPF’s service territory generally have lower food insecurity rates than the rural north and west, they are more populous and are therefore home to the largest numbers of food insecure individuals.
 - Slightly less than (47.6%) of the food insecure population of central Pennsylvania resides in just four counties: Lancaster (16.5%), York (13.8%), Dauphin (9.7%), and Cumberland (7.6%). These counties also combine to make up just over half (50.8%) of the overall regional population.
- Every CPF county saw an increase in the number of food insecure individuals, with the most populous counties seeing the largest increases.
 - Lancaster had the largest increase at 7,540 people, followed by York at 5,550 and Dauphin at 5,170.
 - These three counties accounted for the majority (51.2%) of the newly food insecure individuals in 2023. One in five newly food insecure individuals in central Pennsylvania lives in Lancaster County, and about one in seven lives in either York or Dauphin.
 - No other county had more than 5,000 newly food insecure individuals, though Cumberland and Centre both had more than 2,000 with 3,070 and 2,100 people facing food insecurity for the first time respectively.

Child food insecurity rates grew at a slightly slower pace than overall food insecurity in central Pennsylvania, rising 9.2% between 2022 and 2023. However, children are still by far the most likely age demographic to experience food insecurity. Child food insecurity rates in the CPFBS service area stood at 16.6% in 2023, making children and youth under 18 about 30% more likely to be food insecure than adults, who had a food insecurity rate of just 11.4%.

The below maps show 2022 and 2023 child food insecurity rates at the county level.

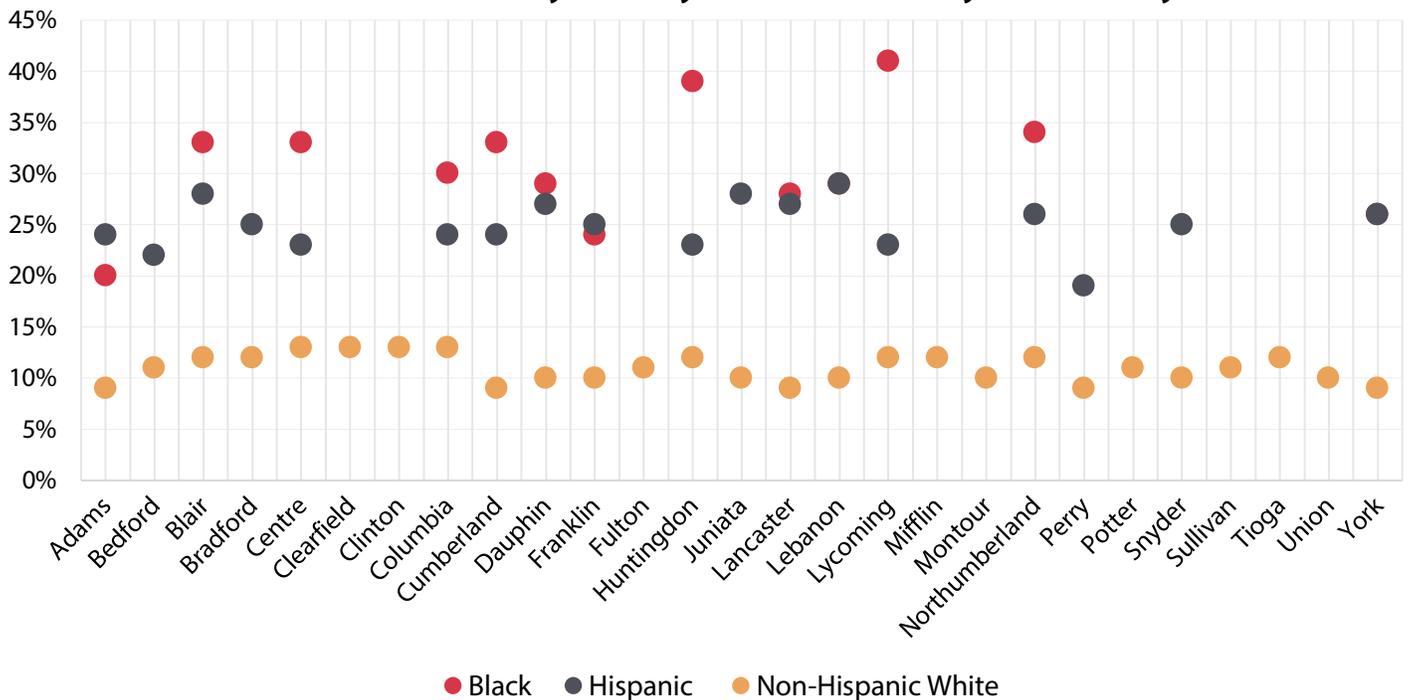


- All but two of the 27 CPFBS counties had increases in child food insecurity in 2023; only Sullivan and Franklin counties showed no change. Ten counties had increases of 12% or more, led by Centre County, which increased 22.1% from 10.4% to 12.7%, although Centre still had the lowest child food insecurity rate of any CPFBS county.
 - Penn State University's main campus in State College is a large and unusual demographic factor that contributes to Centre County's outlier status on this front.
 - The other nine counties with increases of at least 12% were Clinton (16.7%), Lancaster (14.6%), Bradford (14.5%), Perry (14.2%), Columbia (13.5%), Juniata (12.8%), Huntingdon (12.2%), Adams (12.0%) and Fulton (12.0%).
- Nine counties, including Mifflin, Clearfield, Tioga, Potter, Lycoming, Clinton, Huntingdon, Sullivan, and Dauphin, had child food insecurity rates above 20%. Fulton County came in just under 20% at 19.6%, followed by Columbia and Blair counties at 19.3%.
- As with overall food insecurity, it is important to keep in mind that while food insecurity rates tend to be highest in the north and west of CPFBS's service territory, the absolute numbers of food insecure children are highest in the more populous southeast corner of the service area.
 - Lancaster, York, Dauphin, and Cumberland counties are together home to 53.7% of the service territory's children as well as 50.5% of the food insecure children in the region.

As of 2023, food insecurity rates among Hispanic and Black individuals were between two and a half and three times those of white, non-Hispanic individuals in the CPFB’s service territory; one in four Black (29%) or Hispanic (26%) individuals were food insecure compared to only one in ten non-Hispanic white (10%) individuals.

This dramatic disparity in food insecurity by race and ethnicity is the result of inequities in the underlying drivers of food insecurity, such as household income, employment, homeownership and disability status, which themselves are [the direct result of historic, systemic racism and the policies that perpetuate it](#), including housing and employment discrimination and inequitable access to educational opportunities.

2023 Food Insecurity Rate by Race or Ethnicity and County



The chart displays the food insecurity rates among Black, Hispanic, and White, non-Hispanic individuals in Central Pennsylvania Food Bank counties for which estimates are available. Data used in this chart is from the 2025 Feeding America Map the Meal Gap model.

Only 13 of the 27 CPFB counties had sufficient data to estimate 2023 food insecurity rates for Black individuals. Of these, Adams County had the lowest at 20%, while Lycoming had the highest at 41%. Six other counties had rates at or above 30%: Huntingdon (39%), Northumberland (34%), Blair (33%), Centre (33%), Cumberland (33%), and Columbia (30%).

There were 18 counties for which Hispanic food insecurity rates could be calculated in 2023. Perry County had the lowest food insecurity rate among Hispanic individuals at 19%. Lebanon had the highest at 29%. Eight more counties came in at or above 25%: Blair (28%), Juniata (28%), Dauphin (27%), Lancaster (27%), Northumberland (26%), York (26%), Franklin (25%), Bradford (25%), and Snyder (25%).

Methods and Data: This report is an analysis of the change in the food insecurity situation between calendar year 2022 and 2023 using the 2025 Feeding America [Map the Meal Gap](#) model, which estimates food insecurity based on its relationship to multiple demographic and socioeconomic factors such as poverty, unemployment, median income, homeownership rates, and disability status.