



alabamapossible
from the alabama poverty project

POVERTY AND FOOD INSECURITY IN BIRMINGHAM

- **Alabama is the 3rd poorest state in the nation.** 18.9% of Alabamians—including 27.4% of children—live below the poverty threshold. The Census Bureau defines the poverty threshold as household income of **\$21,954** for a family of four.
- **In the city of Birmingham, 29.8% of residents live below the poverty threshold**, according to the US Census Bureau.
- **Approximately 90% of Birmingham school students receive free or reduced lunch**, according to the Alabama Department of Education.
- **Alabama has the fourth lowest rate of food security in the nation** with 18.2% of Alabamians experiencing low or very low food security throughout the year. A household's poverty status has a direct relation to its food security. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food insecurity as "limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways."
- **Alabama and Mississippi are tied for the second highest rate of "very low food security,"** reported as "hunger" in the past, at 7.1% of households.
- **Alabama residents face the second highest rate of food hardship in the nation—23.4%.** The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) defines food hardship as a lack of money to buy food that a family needs.
- **With a food hardship rate of 21.3%, Birmingham ranks 12th highest among the 100 largest Metropolitan Statistical Areas in the nation.**
- **In the city of Birmingham, approximately 40% of residents live in a defined food desert or state of food imbalance.** A recent survey commissioned by Main Street Birmingham and conducted by Mari Gallagher defines a food desert as a large contiguous geographic area that have no or distant mainstream grocery stores. A state of food imbalance is defined as an area distant from mainstream grocers with unhealthy food readily available.
- **Jefferson County has an obesity rate of 31.9% and a diabetes rate of 12.9%.** Recent research by FRAC has uncovered a previously understood counterintuitive result of food insecurity—obesity. Food that is less expensive per calorie, such as refined grains, sugar, and fat is usually much more unhealthy than more expensive foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables. The study also shows that as adults modify their eating behavior in order to feed children they enter into a "feast or famine" situation: at times of plenty the adult will overeat as an answer to the times throughout the month when food is scarce. From this process, parents develop a slower metabolism, and children learn poor eating habits.
- Alabama is also one of only two states left that does not offer any offset, rebate or break on sales tax on food and groceries. As a result, food is more expensive for all Alabamians.