What is food security?

Food security refers to having access to enough food for an active, healthy life. Americans living with food insecurity are uncertain of having enough food for all household members because of insufficient money or other resources for food. According to definitions established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, very low food security is a form of food insecurity in which access to food is severely limited. Hunger, a description of physical discomfort from not eating, can be experienced episodically but can also result from severe or protracted food insecurity. Hunger in this sense is not directly assessed in national-level surveys.

How many people in Mississippi are affected?

As of 2007—the most current year for which data are available:

- Very low food security affected 7.5% of Mississippi households at some time during the previous year.
- Altogether, 477,000 people in Mississippi were in households that experienced food insecurity in the previous year.
- The risk of a Mississippi household experiencing food insecurity in the previous month was 8.7%.
- The prevalence of very low food security is increasing (see side 2).
In 2007, one out of five children in Mississippi (21.4%) lived in households with food insecurity.

What are the trends?
Between 2000 and 2006, the number of Mississippi households with food insecurity increased from approximately 145,000 to 207,000. The number declined to 192,000 between 2006 and 2007; data for 2008 and later are not yet available.

Who is affected?
Children: In 2007, 73,200 (10.1%) children in Mississippi experienced food insecurity at some time in the previous year (or lived with another child who did).

Minorities: In 2007, food insecurity was experienced by 9.1% of non-Hispanic white households in Mississippi but by 28.8% of non-Hispanic black households.

The Poor: In 2007, among Mississippi households with an income less than the Federal poverty threshold, about one out of three (33.5%) experienced food insecurity.

Households With Less Education: Whereas food insecurity existed in 28.7% of Mississippi households in which no one had completed high school or its equivalent, food insecurity affected only 5.4% of households in which a member had obtained a college degree or higher.

Single-Parent Households: In 2007, among Mississippi households with children, the risk of food insecurity was lower for families with married couples (11.9%) than for homes with a male head of household but no spouse (21.1%) or a female head of household and no spouse (34.5%).

THE VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY CENTER ON HUMAN NEEDS (www.humanneeds.vcu.edu) was chartered in 2007 to provide the public and policymakers with information about the prevalence of societal distress in the United States. Its mission is to document how many Americans confront food insecurity, precarious housing or homelessness, inadequate health and health care, inferior education, and inadequate income/poverty.

For more details visit www.humanneeds.vcu.edu.