

# We Have the Programs!

## Why are children still going hungry in America

**Presented By**

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# Dataset Overview

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-environment-atlas>

## USDA Food Environment Atlas (2019-2023)

The Atlas currently includes over 275 indicators of the food environment, covering three broad categories:

- **Food Choices** (grocery access, nutrition assistance, food prices)
- **Health and Wellbeing** (food insecurity, diabetes, obesity rates)
- **Community Characteristics** (demographics, income, poverty)



# Variables and Calculations

## Metro Areas Chart

### **LACCESS\_CHILD19**

*Children with low food access*

### **CHILDPOVRATE21**

*Child poverty rate (income-eligible)*

### **LACCESS\_SNAP19**

*SNAP recipients with low access*

### **LACCESS\_POP19**

*Total population with low access*

## State Heat Map

### **CHILDPOVRATE21**

*Child poverty rate (income-eligible)*

### **LACCESS\_SNAP19**

*Children on SNAP with low access*

### **State**

*State identifier*

## School Meal Programs

### **state\_child\_rate\_21**

*Child poverty rate by state*

### **nslp\_pct\_21**

*NSLP participation %*

### **sfsp\_pct\_21**

*SFSP participation %*

### **State**

*State identifier*

## Calculated Variable:

### **Pct\_Children\_SNAP\_Gap**

=  $CHILDPOVRATE21 - (LACCESS\_SNAP19 \div Total\_Population \times 100)$

### **state\_child\_rate\_21**

=  $(Total\_Poor\_Children\_21 \div Total\_Children\_2020) \times 100$  <- (POP2020, PCT\_18YOUNGER20 and CHILDPOVRATE21)

### **Total\_Population**

=  $LACCESS\_POP19 / (PCT\_LACCESS\_POP19 / 100)$



# SNAP Program

**SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program)** is a federal food assistance program that provides monthly benefits to low-income individuals and families to purchase food at authorized retailers. It is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and is the largest domestic food assistance program in the United States.

## Purpose

Help low-income people buy nutritious food for themselves and their families

## Who Qualifies

Individuals and families with income at or below 130% of the federal poverty line

## How it Works

Monthly benefits are loaded on an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card that works like a debit card

## What Can Be Bought

Fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy, meat, poultry, fish, and snacks

## Cannot Buy With SNAP

Hot or prepared foods · Alcohol · Tobacco · Non-food items · Vitamins or medicines

## Funding & Administration

Federal government provides funding; administered through state agencies in collaboration with USDA



# Understanding Food Insecurity

Child food insecurity occurs when children cannot consistently access adequate food for healthy, active lives. This is not about occasional hunger—it's a systemic problem affecting educational outcomes, health, and future opportunities.

## Causes

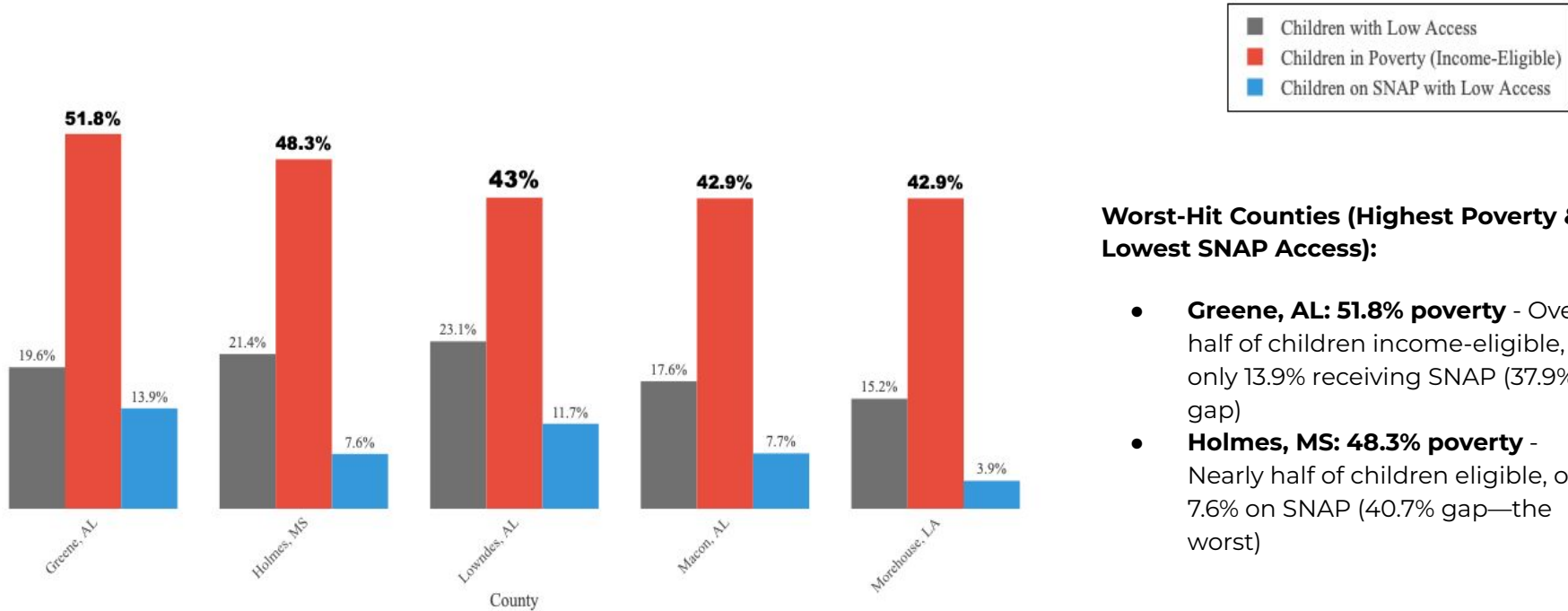
- Poverty and low wages
- Limited SNAP participation
- Geographic food deserts
- Systemic inequities

## Consequences

- Poor school performance
- Health complications
- Developmental delays
- Intergenerational poverty

# Low Access Does Not Mean Poverty

Top 5 Metro Areas: Children & SNAP Access

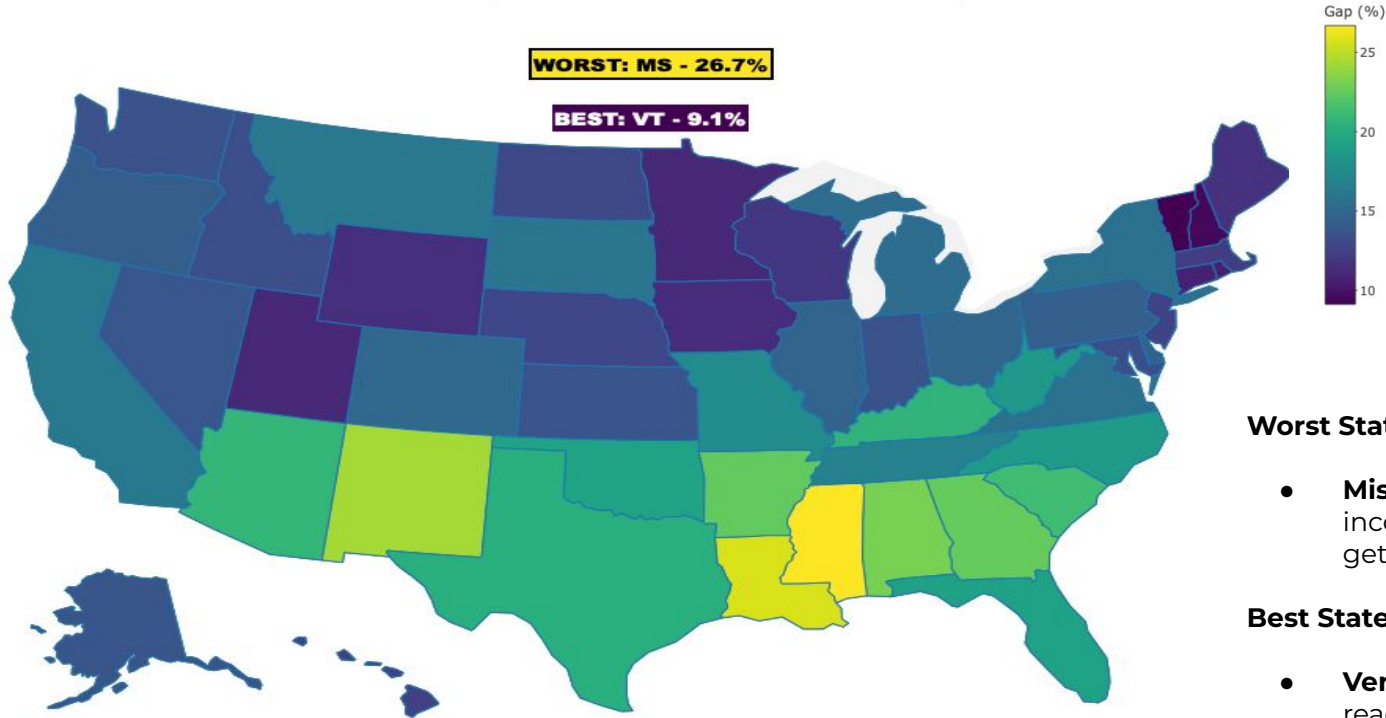


## Worst-Hit Counties (Highest Poverty & Lowest SNAP Access):

- **Greene, AL: 51.8% poverty** - Over half of children income-eligible, only 13.9% receiving SNAP (37.9% gap)
- **Holmes, MS: 48.3% poverty** - Nearly half of children eligible, only 7.6% on SNAP (40.7% gap—the worst)

# National View: SNAP Eligibility Gap by State

Children Eligible for SNAP But Not On It: By State




## Worst States (Highest Gap - Yellow):

- **Mississippi: 26.7%** - Over a quarter of income-eligible children aren't getting SNAP

## Best States (Lowest Gap - Dark Purple):

- **Vermont: 9.1%** - Doing the best job reaching eligible children



# National School Lunches Program and Summer Food Service Program

**NSLP and SFSP** are programs that give school aged children access to free and reduced meals based on family income.

## Who Qualifies

- **NSLP:** Children in households with incomes up to **130% of the federal poverty line** qualify for **free** school lunches, and those up to **185% of poverty** qualify for **reduced-price** lunches.
- **SFSP:** Children in low-income areas, or individual children from households meeting similar income thresholds (generally up to **185% of the federal poverty line**), are eligible for **free summer meals**.

## How it Works

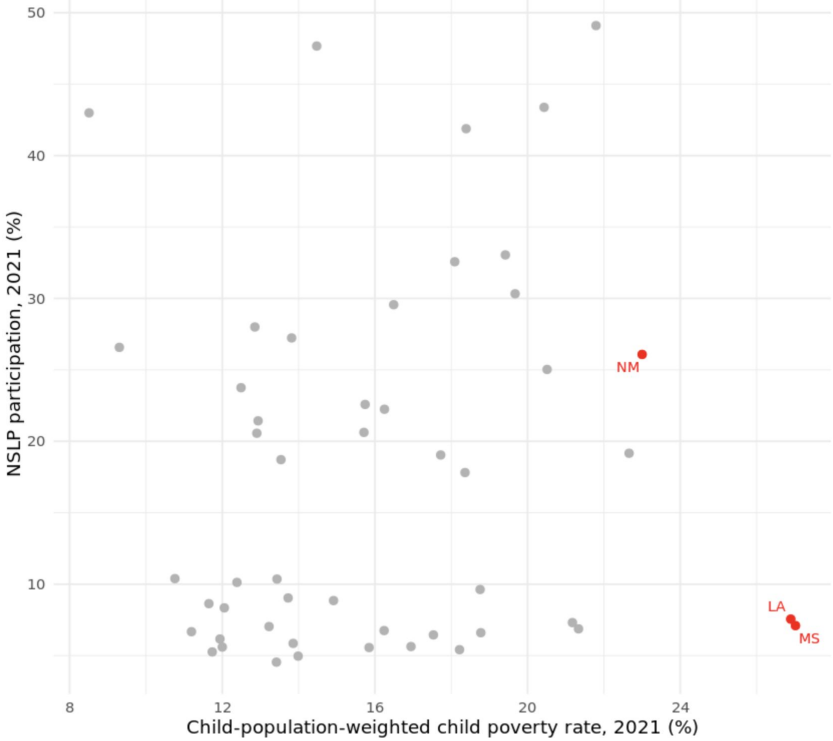
- **NSLP:** During the **school year**, schools serve reimbursable meals that must meet federal nutrition standards; families apply (or are directly certified through other benefits like SNAP), and eligible students receive free or reduced-price lunches at school.
- **SFSP:** When school is out, **sponsors** (schools, community groups, parks, etc.) run meal sites where any eligible child can show up and receive **free meals and snacks**, with costs reimbursed by the federal government.

# School Meal Programs Don't Reach High-Need States

- NSLP & SFSP participation don't show expected relationships with child poverty
- States with HIGHEST child poverty (20-24%) have lower program participation than we would expect.
  - Mississippi: ~27% poverty, only 7% NSLP participation and 8% SFSP participation
  - Louisiana: ~27% poverty, only 8% NSLP participation and 12% SFSP participation
  - New Mexico: ~23% poverty, only 26% NSLP participation and 5% SFSP participation
- Key Insight: Programs exist but don't effectively reach the regions that need them most.

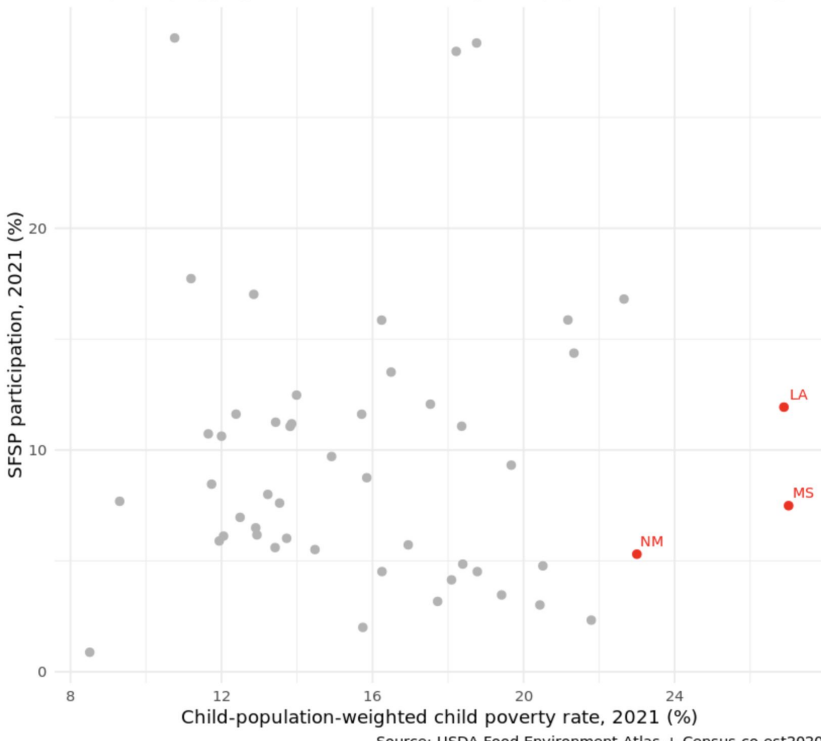
# School Provided Food Program Participation

State Child Poverty vs National School Lunch Program Participation (2021)  
Child poverty aggregated from counties using child population (2020) as weights



Source: USDA Food Environment Atlas + Census co-est2020

State Child Poverty vs Summer Food Service Program Participation (2021)  
Child poverty aggregated from counties using child population (2020) as weights



Source: USDA Food Environment Atlas + Census co-est2020

# Key Findings



## **Finding 1: The SNAP Eligibility Gap**

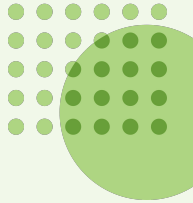
30-36% of children in crisis counties are income-eligible but only 8-13% receive SNAP assistance. This reveals a critical gap between program availability and actual assistance.

## **Finding 2: Geographic Disparities**

'Low access' means living 1+ mile from grocery store. A county can have 100% low access but very low poverty rates – showing that access  $\neq$  affordability or program enrollment.

## **Finding 3: Program Insufficiency**

SNAP program existence does not correlate with reduced food insecurity. The same sentiment applies for school food programs. This suggests current benefits are inadequate, administrative barriers exist, or programs fail to reach vulnerable populations.



# Policy Implications and Solutions

## **Increase SNAP Benefits**

25-30% increase to adequately address food insecurity

## **Simplify Access & Remove Barriers**

Auto-enrollment, mobile application centers, streamlined process

## **Increasing awareness around School Programs**

Year-round school meals, community feeding centers. Bringing more awareness, especially to summer programs

## **Address Geographic Disparities**

Targeted federal investment in high-poverty regions

**Having programs isn't enough.  
We need adequate funding, accessible pathways, and political will to ensure every child eats.**