

Hunger in the United States of America

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**Abstract**

This paper aims to find the reasons why people go hungry in the United States of America as well as solutions to those problems. Hunger, in this paper is defined as: when an individual does not get the necessary nutrition that is required to be healthy, or they are not even given the opportunity to eat because of a lack of food security. Our research team concluded that food waste, accessibility and affordability, and poverty are the primary contributors to hunger in the United States and are directly caused by the negative food system within the nation. To find solutions to these problems we conducted in-depth research and found that solutions can be most easily accomplished in the areas of education and community to help alleviate hunger. Through observing the effects of multiple points of pressure that cause hunger to develop in the United States, the paper dove into accurately discussing major impacts and what solutions may lessen the effects of hunger.

## **Introduction**

It was the late Mahatma Gandhi who said, “A nation’s greatness is measured by how it treats its weakest members” (Warren, 2012). To truly advance a country into the future, it must also bring along those who are its weakest members. Hunger is a threat that is faced within the walls of every nation, and preys on the vulnerable within. But why does such a resource-rich country such as the United States of America contain so many people who face food instability? Feeding America, one of the largest hunger non-profit organizations in the nation, reports that more than 37 million people in the United States exists in some kind of food instability (People Facing Hunger, 2020). Even with the many organizations that work to aid those who are affected by hunger, there seems to be no end to it and no solution towards the root causes of hunger. Through issues such as food waste, access, and affordability, food instability seem to be directly caused by many root issues within the dynamics of food contributors and food consumers.

When looking at food waste, meals upon meals are constantly being wasted throughout the production line. These outlets leave food that is undesirable to be wasted, rather than salvaged for those who could use it. While many organizations work to collect these unwanted foods, so that those who need it may get it, their efforts may be going to waste as it becomes more costly and inefficient to collect those goods from around the country.

Food affordability and accessibility can go hand in hand when causing hunger due to the fact that many families who are hungry have trouble affording food and having access to nutritious foods that keeps them healthy and saves them money in the long run. Depending on where someone lives, food shopping may cost more or less money because of local pricing on food. While prices vary from place to place, and as markets sway, beneficial aids such as SNAP Benefits will stay the same, causing trouble for those who rely on it for the monthly meals. Now,

the COVID pandemic decimates the many safeties that kept most families above the poverty level. Now-so more than ever, there are those in the U.S who have gotten a first-hand experience of how razor-thin most families' safety net is. Emma Mehrabi, the director of poverty at the nonprofit organization, The Children's Defense Fund, has reported that there has been an increase of 21 million individuals who are facing poverty in 2020 (Mehrabi, 2020). With all-time highs such as these, it is dangerous to be as imprudent as society is on what is going on and how to fix the damaged system that allows for food instability to worsen. Though when discussing this topic, it is not about the pandemic experience, but more about how it is able to show the thin line many Americans are treading on in their daily lives. It is time to take actions into the hands of those of the local and state level, so that detailed and precise responses could be done on the issues of hunger.

### **Bold Statement**

In the year 2020, no individual living in the United States of America should go hungry.

### **Purpose(s) for/Significance of Research**

Hunger is such a widespread problem, not only in just the United States but in the whole world. If we can figure out how to reduce the effect of hunger on a local level, others may be able to take some of those ideas and apply them to other regions. The goal we are striving towards is the reduction of hunger in the United States; as of 2018, over 11% of all Americans were food insecure (Food Security and Nutrition Assistance, 2019). The purpose of this research is to find potential, viable solutions which would reduce the number of people who are food insecure.

**Theoretical Framework/Background Information**

To thoroughly understand why food waste occurs in household's knowledge on food labels and their meaning is critical. "Best use by" dates indicate when the manufacturer believes the product will be at peak quality or taste; "sell-by" dates are for inventory management in retail stores; and "use-by dates" are the latest recommended date that the manufacturer believes the customer should use while at peak quality (Expiration Dates, 2020). With the exception of baby formula with use-by dates, none of these dates indicate the safety of food.

Programs such as SSI and SSDI aim to give a boost to those with a work inhibiting disability financially. The SSI—Social Security Income—provides an extra source of income for those dealing with a work-inhibiting disability as long as the individual meets certain income and asset thresholds. This program has much stricter financial requirements than the SSDI and aims to assist those who generally can't afford everyday necessities. The SSDI—Social Security Disability Insurance—aims to provide insurance and access to Medicare (federal health insurance program) for those with a disability who have paid into the Social Security System for at least 10 years or work. This program has much looser requirements and focuses on those who can work (Three, 2020). These social services aim to give assistance to those living in poverty-like situations with low incomes. Those in this sort of situation are most vulnerable to hunger and dealing with its ramifications.

In regard to the SSI program, you must meet a certain asset limit to qualify and stay in the program. In this context, assets include money in the bank, investments or any kind, real estate, personal property and household goods; this also includes any joint properties or accounts you may be a partial owner of.

Because of the vastness of terms such as hunger and poverty and how their definitions change from person to person, defining these terms in context of our research and scope was needed. Hunger for our purposes can be defined as: more specifically chronic hunger, when people do not have the opportunity or option to eat in order to get the essential nutrients they need (What is Hunger, 2020). Not everyone facing poverty experiences hunger, but everyone facing hunger lives in poverty. Hunger is the “critical manifestation of poverty” (Poverty • The Hunger Project, 2019). In defining the term “poverty,” a financial approach was taken to define it as when the total household income of a family is below the poverty threshold based on the family’s size and number of children (under 18). These guidelines are not an indication of a family’s need or what they need to live, it is utilized as a statistical yardstick (Table 1).

### **Literature Review**

Hunger in the United States stems from a multitude of places which is why the problem is so complex; through our research we have found some of the greater problems when it comes to hunger include food waste, food price, and poverty. While food waste is a clear outlier in terms of how each of these subtopics intertwine with each other, it is a major contributor to hunger in the United States. The USDA reports that, “In the United States, food waste is estimated at between 30–40 percent of the food supply. This figure, based on estimates from USDA’s Economic Research Service of 31 percent food loss at the retail and consumer levels, corresponded to approximately 133 billion pounds and \$161 billion worth of food in 2010 (USDA, 2020).” Nearly 20 percent of this waste comes from farms who will throw away perfectly good food because the retailers do not believe customers will buy them. Items with odd shapes, colors, and blemishes can cause a good amount of food to be thrown away (Why We

Waste: Ugly Food, Expiration Dates and More, 2020). People throw away perfectly good food because it looks strange while there are others who are starving who need that food to survive.

Though it is true that this is a problem it is far from the greatest culprit. Taber reveals that, "The vast majority of waste — more than 80 percent — is generated by homes and consumer-facing businesses like grocery stores and restaurants" (Taber, 2020). Household waste contributes about 43 billion dollars of food each year (Foodnavigator, 2004). Between homes and retailers over 100 billion pounds of food is wasted each year; much of this food waste can be contributed directly to confusion about food labels. This household waste is found to be mainly due to dates on foods, which not all states regulate or require. According to How Food Expiration Dates Contribute to Food Waste, "This date really is a marketing tool. Food companies want you to consume their foods when they are at their peak taste and/or in a timely manner so that you will go out and 're-stock' up. The date may accurately reflect how long the manufacturer believes their product will be of best quality but that's about it. For most dry foods many people would have a difficult time discerning the difference between food that is past this date or not (How Food Expiration Dates Contribute to Food Waste, 2019)." In a study at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, they found that 84 percent of those surveyed "at least occasionally" disposed of food on or near the package date, another 37 percent noted that they "usually"/"always" discard the food, not paying attention to the words around the date (Povich, 2020). This study shows that many people do not even know what these dates mean, and this lack of food education must be addressed if we are going to alleviate some of this household food wastage.

When it comes to hunger, food pricing and accessibility play an exceptional role within what causes hunger. Supermarkets find themselves in impoverished areas where many of their clients are on financial aid of some sorts, and thus they tend to stock their shelves with less expensive foods. While many may not care about how many expensive and organic options are available on the shelves at Walmart, it becomes more daunting when they realize that lean meats and fresh produce are seen as some of these “more expensive” items. This leaves many of these families without a clear place to purchase their foods. As authors Karen Jetter and Diana Cassady, at the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, describe in their research, “The lack of availability in small grocery stores located in low-income neighborhoods, and the higher costs of the healthier market basket may be a deterrent to eating healthier among low-income consumers” (Jetter, 2006). Consumers in these areas have less access to whole wheat, lean meats, and fresh produce, making them more reliant on food pantries for these needs.

Lack of availability is also directly associated with the unaffordable prices of healthy foods, and the inaccurate allotted money that is given via federal aid. For a family of two, they may receive an allotted amount of \$357 a month towards food (Food Stamps, 2017). This number does not change unless the amounts of household members change. This number stays the same even if the family lives in Iowa, New Jersey, or California. Because the price of living in certain locations is not getting accounted for when families are receiving financial aid, it could leave families with little to no money that would accurately be sustainable for them. Furthermore, this can cause issues because of how little the amount of money they receive. While in some states, this may barely keep them fed, in other places it may last them at most a week or two. It causes families to strain on what they must buy and how much of it they can afford.

Food pricing of food is one of the major causes of hunger, because while a loaf of white bread may cost \$3.75 in Amityville, New York, that same white bread only costs \$1.56 in Baytown, Texas (Food Prices, 2020). Using data from the website Numbeo, a website that shares prices of foods in many cities from around the country, its data can show how ineffective government assistance can be for families who use it as their main source of food money. The website goes on to evaluate food prices of other foods as well, such as the price of buying poultry, apples, rice, and fresh produce. It is clear by just where someone lives can have a huge impact on what they are able to afford. This strain that it causes can be seen as to why many people in poverty fail to leave their situation of hunger.

Poverty, hunger, and food prices are all closely linked together; poverty causes hunger, as hunger is a critical manifestation of poverty. Those who live in poverty are already limited in the income and resources they need. As people delve deeper into poverty good, nutritious food along with supplies to grow their own food are scarce resources. This results in those in poverty falling into hunger and suffering from malnourishment and poor nutrition. An increase in food price keeps families from getting out of hunger as food is too expensive to afford (Poverty • The Hunger Project, 2019). Poverty is an issue that plagues the United States, as its presence is known in each state, district, and even county. This phenomenon is not equally distributed among the Nation, rather it is concentrated in certain focal points. Concentrated poverty contributes to poor housing, poor health conditions, higher crime, higher dropout rates, and employment dislocation. Hunger is the critical stage of poverty, where those living in these concentrated areas of poverty are most likely to feel these effects of hunger. By identifying the areas and types of households dealing with this concentrated poverty, we can better understand who is affected by hunger and why.

According to a study conducted by the Oxford Academic, the two main factors contributing to poverty are locational and household factors. From place to place, the prices of everyday goods, services, homes/apartments and especially food vary. For those who live in poverty this locational factor plays a huge role in their likeness of food security, "...food prices significantly affect food security for households participating in SNAP that have household incomes of 200% or less of the federal poverty line" (Gregory, 2013). The same study by the Oxford Academic found that there was in fact a correlation between an increase of food price per month and food insecurity, "Our results suggest that a \$10 increase in the price of our TFP basket will lead to 2.5 percentage point increase in household food insecurity, a 2.4 percentage point increase in adult food insecurity, and a 3.1 percentage point increase in child food insecurity" (Gregory, C., & Coleman-Jensen, 2013). The TFP basket refers to the selection of foods indicated by the Federal Government that reflect dietary recommendations and consumption patterns. SNAP benefits for food are often uniform nation-wide and only vary due to family size and the household's expected contribution to food; these benefits however do not take local prices into account (A Quick, 2020). For families with a limited income, a small variance in local food prices could have catastrophic economic consequences on families, leading them down the road to hunger. While someone in Oklahoma may have more affordable food prices and therefore a better access to nutritious foods, someone living in California may struggle to find any affordable food at all.

There are a majority of household factors that, along with locational factors, can increase one's likelihood of dealing with hunger and poverty. According to the same Oxford study mentioned earlier, "[Household] Factors that increase the likelihood of food insecurity include having attained less than a high school education, the number of persons in the household, the

number of children in the household, and being a single parent.” All of these factors deal with one household having too low of a quantity of incomes (from working, assets, or community help) to be able to support their family. This can be mostly seen when focusing on single parents, more specifically single mothers. Single mothers often fall into a state of poverty due to the imbalance of time when taking care of a child and working. To get these families out of poverty, they need a stable and sustainable source of income. Those who receive social service benefits, especially in states with high levels of social service benefits, do not look for employment or reduce their work effort in return. The children living in single-parent households are likely to continue living in poverty as they resultantly have less economic mobility (Effects, 2019). This case introduces the issues and flaws of the United States of America’s social service systems and how they discourage those relying on the system to achieve economic mobility. However, addressing the issues of the general social service system is outside the scope of this study. This case of struggling single mothers does present another issue, a lack of resources and opportunities to assist those falling into poverty. Whereas families stuck in the generational poverty cycle have more experience with the available resources and help, those falling in and out of poverty and those who first delve into poverty likely have less knowledge on the resources available.

Education, one of Oxford’s household factors in food insecurity, likely plays the biggest role in the generational cycle of poverty. The United States Census Bureau analyzed how household income and poverty rates have changed over time in regard to ethnicity, race, age, sex, location, and education. Earnings and household incomes all increased at various rates or did not statistically change regardless of race, age, or sex. Poverty rates also decreased for households that lived in almost every part of the United States—including any metropolitan/principal areas

and the Northeast, Midwest, and West)—those with a disability, those with some college education, and those with a female house-head. The only group with a noticeable increase in poverty rates are those older than 25 without a high school diploma (Bureau, 2020). Students living in poverty often enter school with a readiness gap with those with wealthier backgrounds, with this gap growing as students age. This lack of school readiness comes from poor physical health and motor skills, a diminished ability to concentrate and remember information, and reduces attentiveness, curiosity, and motivation all due to hunger. Because of this, students from lower-income families are more likely to have lower test scores and to drop out of school. There is a significant correlation between obtaining a high school degree and where one's life goes from there. From there it can be inferred that through not finishing high school or pursuing any secondary education, they will remain in the cycle of poverty with these circumstances being passed down to any kids; creating the generational poverty cycle (The Effects of, 2013). Education arguably, can be noted as the heaviest factor in whether individuals fall into the cycle of generational poverty or climb out of it.

One group who is disproportionately affected by poverty and more at risk of food insecurity and hunger are those with a disability or work inhibiting ability. Those dealing with a work limitation average a household income, employment rate and the poverty rate well below the average for the rest of working adults (Fesslerm 2015). Those living with a disability deal with job loss, reduced earnings, barriers to education and skills development, additional medical expenses, and other challenges leading to economic hardship. Because of this, the poverty-rate for those with a disability is twice as high than those without. The same also goes for those raising and taking care of a child with a disability. Those who try to work often encounter the same challenges, a lack of reliable accessible transportation, issues obtaining affordable housing,

and roadblocks to smartly save money. The Supplemental Security Income program provides a modest income to individuals with significant disabilities and very low incomes and assets.

When the program was created in 1972, any individual participating in the program must have less than \$2,000 of assets. Today, this maximum asset value still rests at \$2,000 and has not taken inflation as a factor. So, for those individuals who rely on this extra income, they are forced to spend money instead of saving for any life-changing events (Vallas, 2018). According to research by the Food Research and Action Center, “A number of other factors limit access to disability benefits, from a lack of sustained work history for SSDI, to restrictive income exclusions and asset limits in SSI, to overly complicated work incentives that discourage applicants by making it unclear how attempting to work will impact recipients’ benefits.” (SNAP, 2015). This excerpt from their paper highlights the many issues with federal disability programs as they are restrictive in how to be eligible for the programs such as SSI and SSDI that in return disincentivize those with a disability from achieving both their own economic gain and food stability.

### **Research Design/Methodology**

When approaching the topic of hunger in the United States, our team broke up this main topic into three subtopics: food waste, food affordability, and poverty. Because of how large of an issue hunger is, the best way to research this topic is to focus on its sub-topics and find the key details and issues with them. In this stage of research, online resources such as scholarly articles, federal websites and past studies were utilized in our resource gathering. To refine our ideas, research, and resources; virtual mentors, consultants, peers, and experts reviewed our work to strengthen our base research.

### **Design Thinking Methodology and Steps**

The design thinking methodology applied to this research project came from the Illinois Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning (Design, 2020). This design thinking methodology utilizes five steps: Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test. When first identifying all aspects of an issue as large and prevalent as hunger, emphasizing with all of those dealing with this issue directly or indirectly allowed for a deep understanding of the challenges of solving hunger. This led to identifying main “players” of hunger: those in poverty directly being affected by hunger, farmers, companies, and restaurants to name a few. After the Empathize stage, clearly defining the research topic, goals, and scope along with any clarifications that should be noted would provide a base of what questions the research should answer. In this beginning state, research focused around the three subtopics of hunger established, and finding as much detail into the “why” of the existence of each problem encountered. Through this process, our research was able to clearly define and defend the wide variety of problems and smaller issues discovered.

After the beginning stages of identifying and defining all the problems found within each team member’s subtopic of hunger, the next stage of the design process started—Prototype. In this stage, identifying possible solutions to each of our issues, regardless of the cost or practicality of thus solutions, was key; so that creativity in this brainstorming process was not hindered. Once these potential solutions were defined, the team’s focus shifted to the final stage of the design thinking process—Test. Just how waves smoothen out rocks, testing did the same with our potential solutions. After speaking with peers, virtual mentors, virtual experts, and the program consultant and administrator, the viability of each solution was tested. Especially after discussing the economic consequences and effects of each solution, some of these solutions were

found to be not viable. This refining of solutions ultimately leads to a change in the scope of the research and solutions. The process of refining current solutions continued until all of the solutions were found to be viable and not to be easily disproved.

### **Research Tools/Materials Used**

During our research, a variety of our tools and materials came online. Whether it was scholarly articles, informative videos, company websites, federal websites, or other physical sources of information, they were found online. To ensure the credibility of the data and arguments made by these resources, extra resources were sought out to both challenge and defend the argument to test if it was grounded enough to remain in our research.

### **Proposed Solution/Big Idea(s)**

Through the research conducted in this study, solving the issue of hunger revolves around two big ideas—education and community growth. Each of the following proposed solutions all revolve around tackling the broad topic of hunger by focusing on smaller changes on local, state, and national scale to promote education and community growth. These solutions also aim for the Asset Based Community Development model that takes a more proactive approach to the issue.

Hunger is an enormous topic as far as scope, which is why our solution is to make many small changes to help alleviate the problem of hunger. From the angle of food waste, one of the greatest problems is household waste due to confusion with food labels. Our solution to this problem would be to make all food labels standardized to the “best by” date labeling, and general information about food wastage and how you can limit how much food you waste. This would mean that food products can have other dates on them like sell by dates, but at the very least they must have a best by date. Currently in the United States the only food date that is safety-related is baby formula, this means that when you see a food item with a date on it, it can mean many

different things. For example, some foods only have a sell by date which is only for store shelf purposes and not at all for safety; if someone looks at this date they may throw it away at/before the date because they believe the food is bad. If retailers were to standardize this to be the best by dates nationwide and people were properly educated, those people would be less likely to throw away food that is still healthy.

Since most food wastage happens in households, it is the job of each household to monitor their food wastage and this can only be done if they are properly educated. This information can range from what the dates on food mean to where to donate food if they bought too much, and even how to make sure you are not wasting food. If the household still finds that they do not want to eat the food after the best by date, they should have the resources and knowledge to donate said items to food banks as long as they show no signs of spoilage.

While the solution to affordable and accessible food may be tricky when taking an overview of the entire situation, it is not impossible to solve. What has been chosen for this issue is a community-based solution that will work long-term for the community, bring in fresh produce so that it is accessible for those who need it, and sell the rest of those produce at affordable prices. The proposed solution to this issue is that of a community garden. This is because while they are simplistic in nature, they are steady and reliant on payback in the long run. If the right foods are being planted for a quick and optimal harvest, and as long as the harvested foods are being distributed properly, then a community garden can be an extremely good asset when it comes to feeding a community.

When looking at community gardens, there seems to be an overwhelming success rate when proper effort is being put into the project. An example of a well-balanced small-scale community garden would be one from Roanoke Rapids in North Carolina. There, on a 1-acre

piece of land, the Roanoke Church produces around 500 pounds of fresh produce weekly to give to those in need around their community (Hicks, 2018). This volunteer-led community garden feeds about 50 families weekly with the amount of fresh produce harvested on the property. The creation of this garden can be thanked by the community, grants, local churches, and other resources that allowed for them to get their idea off the ground. This success also furthers the validity of what community gardens can accomplish. The Roanoke Rapids garden produced 500 pounds of produce weekly, donated to families and through the Angels food pantry, gained enough volunteers to actively keep the garden thriving, and was able to learn how to take care of their garden and get tools donated to them through Health Matters (an organization that works to help assist and educate the communities with Intellectual and developmental disabilities). With support from a little bit of everywhere, this garden can support a whole community with nutritious foods for years to come.

Another example that takes a slightly different and off-handed approach would be the Garden of Eden community garden in St. Louis, Missouri. There, they work to sustain the community garden through basic procedures, where gardeners actively rent out plots for growing purposes. The community garden acts like any other, though it also collects donated foods from their gardeners and donates it to the Harvey Kornblum Jewish Food Pantry (Community, 2017). Since gardeners tend to grow more produce than they can consume, it is common for some gardeners to donate their extra or to even leave some crops unharvested. To combat this, the Garden of Eden sets up places where gardeners could donate extra produce to send over to the local pantry nearby. Through simple donations alone, the pantry is able to give families in need the fresh produce they, the clients, want.

So, while using the resource around from local gardeners, the community is able to receive the fresh and nutritious produce they need. The food is accessible, the food is free, and it brings the community together in hopes of educating everyone on how to make what they can with what they have. This education, while done in the community, could also be beneficial if brought into the educational system as well.

On the state and county level, schools should take on more responsibility in better preparing their students' general education and nutrition. Providing after-school programs that run longer and provide hands-on tutoring allows students in poverty or hunger-like situations to have a workplace to concentrate and excel in school. Along with this, instituting a three meal a day program for those who are in need would supply the nutritional boost to keep students healthier, happier, and better-minded to learn. A combination of both of these programs provides a support network focused on shrinking the high school pass rate gap between those who are and aren't in a poverty/hunger situation.

Alongside this student support network, providing students with education and resources focused on financial literacy and everyday information would supply students with real-life skills, something many lack when they enter the "real world." While there are resources available that aid students in developing these real-life skills, many do not search them out or even know that they are available. By mandating classes, standards, lectures, etc. that revolve around these sorts of skills, students entering the real-world will become much more adept at making smart financial decisions. This in return, sets these new adults in the right step in working for a prosperous life, rid of hunger. To support those who no longer are in the education system, these resources such as the classes and lectures should be made available to them, so that

they can work smarter and not harder to bring themselves out of any situation of poverty and hunger.

The SSI and SSDI programs deal with social services and are not the main focus of the study; however, a few small changes may be made to these programs without revamping the entire program in order to assist those with a disability. For individuals to qualify for SSI benefits, they must own less than \$2,000 of assets which was originally set in 1972. With costs of living and inflation increasing and the purchasing power of a dollar decreasing from 1972, this \$2,000 asset limit must be adjusted to deal with these factors; with the asset limit reaching around \$12,000 (Coinnews Media Group, 2020). This would allow the beneficiaries of the SSI program to save for their future, keep more of their earnings, and set themselves up for a more independent livelihood. In regard to the SSDI program, loosening up the restrictions on how individuals may qualify for this program still promotes individuals to work while allowing those who used to fall through the SSDI restrictions to be caught by this needed safety net. While these two changes do not fix the many issues typically seen in social services, they do however provide a larger coverage to those who need the assistance while promoting growing to being independent through the promotion of working and saving.

To account for locational/geographic factors such as variance in food prices, SNAP should also be slightly adjusted to take local food prices into account. This would shift the program to be on a more need-based and equity level of focus. For those in areas with lower food prices, benefits should not be decreased by too much so that these benefits do not become inadequate in those areas. Any changes made to SNAP should not result in too much of a shift in benefits, while only those on the polar ends of local food prices are affected.

**Implementation Plan for Proposed Solution**

To efficiently implement a change to the food dates that would standardize all food dates to best by dates, the best course of action would be to do it in waves of certain foods. To start this process the retailers will have to empty their inventories of the items that still have the old dating. Retailers would have six months to sell their old inventories which have the old dating style, as well as start the change of the manufacturing so that it works with the new labeling. This is the optimal approach because it will give plenty of time for people to get used to these new labels. While this is going on each state should be doing their best to educate the public about these changes; this can be done through public service announcements so the general public gets the update swiftly and can adapt accordingly. These public service announcements may be different across states but should contain the following: the update on how to read food dates and what they mean, and how to take care of their food.

When it comes to promoting community gardens, and bringing them into the community, there are only small obstacles the town or city may experience when creating them. These obstacles are the costs it takes to create the gardens, who will take care of the gardens, and how the garden will function once it is set in motion. Though with quite a few options, it will not be as difficult of a task as many think.

When implementing the community garden, the first obstacle the community wants to think about is where the garden will go. Ideally, it would be on its own designated property with its own building to work out of, though this is an unrealistic standard for many communities. Because of this, many community gardens in low-income towns tend to share plot residence with a church or organization that is willing to care for it. Other times, when the community does decide they wish to have the gardens plotted on its own land, they repurpose abandoned areas

such as unused parking lots and empty and unkempt areas. The properties that once blemished the face of the town are then turned into community gardens where those around know they can get something clean to eat and help with others by volunteering at the garden themselves. Either will work considerably well, though it may cost more for when creating the gardens on its own and may need to take a different route when it comes to care.

Once it is settled as to where the garden should go, it is time to bring it to fruition. Here, is where the garden will begin being set up, and where most of the costs will go. For costs, it becomes manageable once those who are creating it knows the resources around them that are willing to help them. Donations and sponsorships are how the local community can help with creating the community gardens. There are also plenty of grants available from non-profit organizations that are there to actively help create these community gardens. Organizations such as: Annie's Grants for Gardens, Herb Society of American Grants for Educators, and The Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust (Public Gardens, 2020) work to give grants towards communities that wish to share the knowledge of agriculture and nutrition within an area. With availability such as numerous grants and community efforts, it is very possible for a community to raise enough money for a garden. A community garden can begin small, and grow in time as well, which cuts its beginning costs as well. Another way for these communities to collect money towards their gardens are through farmers' markets. While they collect some of their produce and donate it to pantries, the rest of their produce can be sold at local farmers markets at affordable prices. Community gardens can even begin with planting fast-growing crops such as carrots, salad greens, spinach, and radishes, which all take about one to two months to reach maturity. Smart planting and smart organization allow for the gardens to make profit early on and sets a structured base for years later to come.

Another way the community gardens can make money to support themselves early-on would be to divide out plots of lands and rent them out to gardeners in the area. There, they will get monthly profit to go towards keeping the gardens open, and still get donations of food if their patrons are kind enough to donate. While this may cause donations to not begin until the community gardens are in the right position to give back, it still reinforces the structure of the community garden, and therefore will allow for it to gain stability before it works to help the community long-term. After the challenge of money is out of the way, the rest is going to be easier from there.

After the completion of the community garden, the garden donations would be run by volunteers, either those associated with the partnering organizations, or those who are donating from their garden. While focusing on volunteers to manage the garden, a worry that did come up was if volunteer service would be a valid and trustable source of work. To this, there has been no mention of negative experiences through the use of volunteers, and they have gotten high appraisal from the example of community gardens that use them. Though for any community garden that will be opening, it is highly advised to have working officials that will keep track of volunteer workers and management of the farms.

Thus, there are accurate and affordable ways to build the community gardens and take care of them so that fresh and affordable produce is created for the local areas and those who are in need of those nutritious fruits and vegetables. Community gardens are a fantastic way to bring the community together, grow healthy foods in the backyards of the town, and to supply those who are hungry with foods they need. Community gardens also play a role in educating the community through their gardening and teach adults and children alike how to take initiative on how to care for their community and fight hunger at its source.

To better serve the educational and nutritional needs of students, schools can implement more extensive after-school programs that can provide those dealing with poverty and hunger alongside those who simply are searching for extra school help with scholastic and nutritional support. This scholastic support would involve tutoring from teachers, school staff, volunteer students, and even volunteer parents and adults in the community. This in return starts to build a sense of community and family with those who work together as a simple side effect of extra educational assistance. In regard to nutritional support, schools should offer a three-meal-a-day program that aims to provide good nutrition to those who may lack it otherwise. While this would lead to an increase in school costs, there are ways to get around this issue. Partnering with local community gardens, businesses, and restaurants to supply these extra meals would be a cost-effective strategy. 4 Roots, an organization located in Central Florida, aims to supply nutritious food to schools and those in need while promoting agricultural education. One of the schools 4 Roots is partnered with is Ocoee High School. The foundation renovated a shade house and a greenhouse along with a new vertical growing system for the school's horticulture department. Because of this renovation, food is now grown in the horticulture department, which is then processed and served in the cafeteria (4 Roots). This proactive approach taken to tackling hunger and poor nutrition is ultimately sustainable and provides better nutrition.

In addition, schools should give resources to students that focus on financial literacy, food education, and "real-world skills." As education is a state issue, this solution should be focused on a state and county level; due to every school having different students and needs. This education can be focused and taught either in classes, standards, or even class-wide or open-for-anybody lectures. How these resources are implemented are solely up to the schools, counties, or districts, but presenting them in any capacity would leave a positive imprint on

students' lives. These resources should be given and implemented in school ideally from kindergarten to twelfth grade; starting with basic concepts and comprehension early on and more advanced topics and real-life skills as students get older. The Youth For Youth program run by the U.S. Department of Education provides free resources about financial literacy for students of all age levels. These resources could easily be implemented in the classroom and have the ultimate goal of helping students graduate while teaching them useful financial skills (Youth For Youth). While the Youth For Youth program does not include information on the topics of food education/waste and basic life skills, it offers the baseline as to what resources schools should offer and it gives a strong base as well. The resources that are supplied to students can also be available to any adults in that school district, allowing those looking to increase their financial literacy and education the opportunity to.

Small alterations can be made to both the SSI and SSDI social services programs to make them more effective at their goal of empowering and assisting those with a disability. With the SSI program, changing how asset limitations work could allow for economic empowerment. While the asset limit to qualify for the program may stay at \$2,000—to keep the number of people enrolled in the program and general costs from increasing—the asset limit to stay in the program once qualified should increase to around \$12,000. This increase in the asset cap to stay in the program would promote individuals to invest, save money, and plan for their future; ultimately leading those in the program down a route of economic independence. In regard to the SSDI program, lowering the requirements for the recent and duration work tests would allow more individuals in need to qualify for the program. The program decides enrolability on a credit-based program, in which you may earn up to four credits a year if you make the benchmark income. In some cases, individuals can obtain these credits in a short period of time

while it may take someone else who works the same amount of time all year to obtain these credits; putting emphasis on the quality of job payment over time worked (Social Security Administration). Those with a work inhibiting disability often face discrimination in the job market and have lower paying jobs because of it alongside transportation issues that may prevent them from working. Focusing on an hour-based program opposed to a credit-based one would incentivize individuals to simply work whatever job they can in hopes of applying for SSDI benefits, instead of being preoccupied on whether they can reach the sometimes demanded credit system.

Slight redistributions of benefits in the SNAP program would lead to it being a more effective program. As prices vary from place to place, SNAP benefits should be redistributed in a way that those who live in areas with higher food prices have a slight increase in benefits. This could be done by analyzing the local food prices by county or district; decreasing benefits for the 30% in low-food-price areas while using those cuts to increase benefits for the upper 30% in high-food-price areas. These cuts/increases in benefits should only stay around the \$10-\$20 range per month. The simple rearrangement of benefits would keep the costs of the program from increasing while also giving a slight boost to those in high-food-price areas while others see either no or a small decrease in benefits.

### **Research Challenges/Limitations**

Research challenges and limitations were mostly prompted up front rather than later on, which allowed them to be manageable. Some of the biggest challenges to face were timing and general researching. Timing was a constraint because of just how broad the topic of hunger in America is. Time had constrained what could and could not be dwelled on, and therefore, left the research broader than desired. Another limitation was one of how complicated and intertwined

hunger was with other issues in the country. That being the case, it made it difficult to research hunger without falling too far into other subjects that connect with it.

While in the stages of preliminary research to gain a better understanding of our topic and issues, a slight problem was met due to a lack of data in some cases. The most notable being the locations of grocery stores and supermarket-type stores nationwide. This data would have been used to calculate whether the spread of food-serving stores per state had any relation to food insecurity or poverty levels in that state. Because of this lack of information, we had to readjust the scope of our research to take this out of account.

### **Next Steps**

Hunger is such a broad issue and topic, stretching from every corner of our everyday life. Because of this, the research conducted for this study highlighted other issues and topics that could not be further analyzed to keep the scope of our study from becoming too broad. By analyzing the issues, problems. Solutions and shortcomings found with depth and precision; a proactive approach can be taken to solving many of the large issues facing our nation.

Something else that can be done is looking further into food waste. More research can be done on the environmental aspects of food waste and how much of the food waste goes to landfills which in turn turns into greenhouse gasses. Finding a more environmentally friendly way to fix this issue will be imperative to the sustainability of the human race as a whole.

Social services and all the programs that deal with this topic all have some sort of flaw, whether big or small. Further research into the effectiveness of each program in its ability to provide quality assistance to those in need and in its ability to promote independence in climbing out of social service assistance. If these programs can find a delicate balance between providing

enough assistance and promoting independence, the effectiveness of these programs will improve greatly; ultimately leading to less people and households relying on this assistance.

As mentioned earlier as one of limitations of research, there was a lack of information about the spread of grocery and convenience stores in the US, keeping us from analyzing any correlation or causation between this spread with poverty rates and population per state. Further research in the spread of these food-supplying stores in the US would give an indication if there is any correlation between access to food from stores and food insecurity and poverty rates in those areas. Finding a correlation between the two would bring about solutions that focus on availability and access to food.

## **Conclusion**

While it is true that hunger is not a problem that can be solved through simple methods, there are actions that can be done to alleviate the hunger occurring in society. It is possible to standardize labels, create community gardens, reforming public programs (such as: SSI, SSDI, SNAP), after-school programs, and through the expansion of food related education and PSAs. If these kinds of reforms are put into place, hunger would go down exponentially, though there would still be much left to be done. Hunger is a fight that needs to be tackled from multiple angles, and even though this paper tackles three angles, it is up to society to bring these changes into fruition and to make changes in adjacent problems that affect hunger. While the fight is yet to be over, those who join can begin helping through: donating to a local food pantry, getting involved with the community, and helping with food wastage by making sure they take proper care of the perfectly good food so that it doesn't end up in the trash. Through these efforts combined and implemented into modern society, the United States of America would be able to begin healing from the dread of hunger that has plagued it long past its due.

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**Other Research Outputs****Table 1***2020 Poverty Guidelines for the 48 Contiguous States and the District of Columbia*

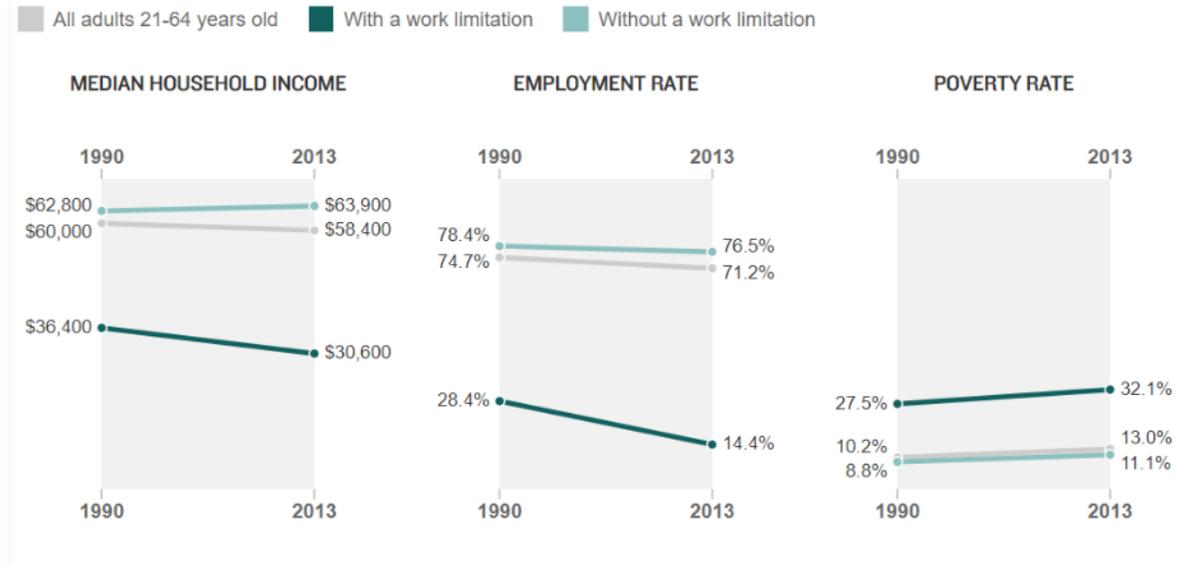
Persons in Family/Household	Poverty Guideline
1	\$12,760
2	\$17,240
3	\$21,720
4	\$26,200
5	\$30,680
6	\$35,160
7	\$39,640
8	\$44,120

For families/households with more than 8 persons, add \$4,4480 for each additional person

*Note.* The poverty guidelines vary accordingly based on the number of members in a household. Adapted from “2020 Poverty Guidelines for the 48 Contiguous State and the District of Columbia” by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2020, *Poverty Guidelines*, (<https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines>). In the Public Domain

**Figure 1**

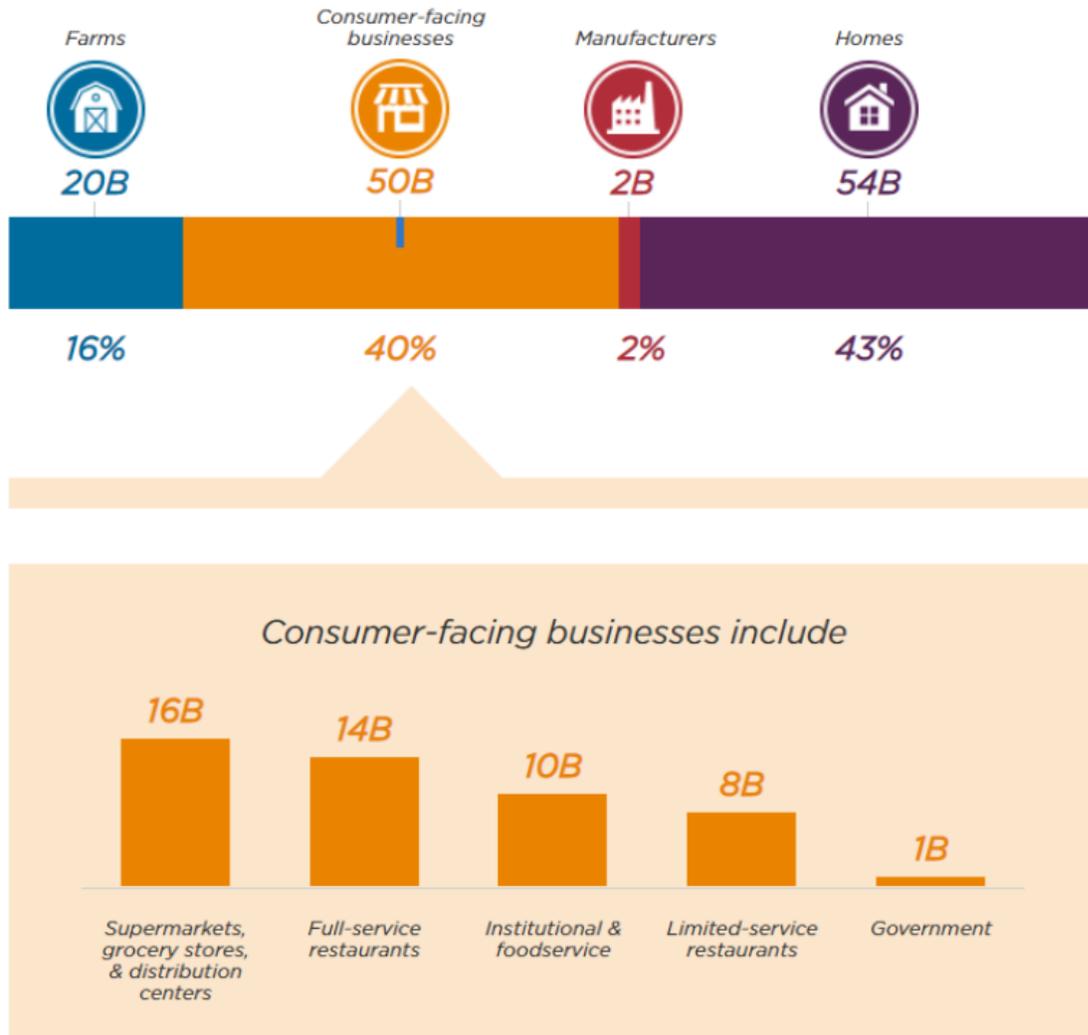
*Wealth Disparities Between Those With and Without a Work Limitation*



*Notes.* The charts in the figure above show the wealth, employment, and poverty-rate gap that exists between adults with and without a work-limiting disability. Median household income: Adjusted for inflation to 2013 dollars. Poverty rate: Share of people in families with incomes below the poverty line. Adapted from “Poverty, Disability, and Unemployment” by Pam Fessler, 2015, *Why Disability and Poverty Still Go Hand In Hand 25 Years After Landmark Law*, (<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2015/07/23/424990474/why-disability-and-poverty-still-go-hand-in-hand-25-years-after-landmark-law>). Copyright 2015 by the NPR.

**Figure 2**

*Sources of Food Wastage*



*Notes.* A majority of food wastage comes from consumer-facing businesses and homes, not farms and manufacturers. Source: ReFED. Adapted from *How We Fight Food Waste in the US* by Feeding America, 2020, (<https://www.feedingamerica.org/our-work/our-approach/reduce-food-waste>). Copyright 2020 by Feeding America