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## Community Survey Food Report 2006

Community Research Institute-Johnson Center

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*Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey Briefing:*

# *Food Security*



## Food: Economics, Nutrition, Health, and Education

Many individuals throughout the United States have limited access to food (i.e. food insecurity) according to the United States Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service. Research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows that food insecurity contributes to malnutrition, which exacerbates disease, increases disability, and decreases resistance to infection. Compromised food choices can lead to poor nutrition affecting the health status of many individuals. According to the CDC, the effects of insufficient nutrition may go beyond obesity, diabetes, and heart disease to improper brain development and behavioral disorders. Food insecurity, over time, may result in a decreased ability to grow, work, and learn. Economic disparities account for much of the problem. Initiatives such as the Food Assistance Program and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) seek to alleviate economically rooted nutritional hardship. Lack of education and access to information can also contribute to inadequate nutrition and the health issues surrounding it. Many new initiatives seek to educate the public, in order to quell the negative effects associated with improper nutrition.

### Food Security and Health Status

Data from the 2005/2006 Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey show a relationship between food security and health status. Respondents who showed signs of food insecurity due to financial hardship were more likely than others to rate their health as 'fair' or 'poor'. Only 11% of people who had skipped or reduced the size of a meal considered themselves to be in excellent health, whereas 30% of people who did not face food insecurity indicated being in excellent health (see graph below).

#### RESPONDENTS' RATINGS OF THEIR HEALTH BY WHETHER THEY HAD SKIPPED OR CUT THE SIZE OF MEALS IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS

HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR HEALTH?

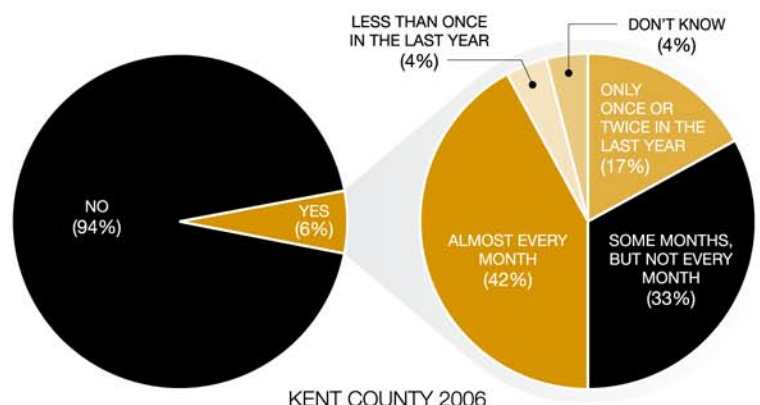


### Food Security in Kent County

The 2005/2006 Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey was designed, in part, to assess the food security of Kent County. Economic stress affects the nutrition-related behaviors of Kent County residents. Six percent of respondents stated that they had skipped meals or cut meal size due to a lack of money for food (see Indicator 1). Of those who had skipped or reduced meals, three-quarters said that they had done so multiple times in the past year. More than a quarter of survey respondents indicated that they worry, at least occasionally, about being able to afford food or clothing (see Indicator 2).

INDICATOR 1:

**IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS, DID YOU OR OTHERS IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD EVER CUT THE SIZE OF YOUR MEALS OR SKIP MEALS BECAUSE THERE WASN'T ENOUGH MONEY FOR FOOD? IF "YES", HOW OFTEN DID THIS HAPPEN?**



## Who is Going Hungry in Kent County?

The food insecurity described above does not affect all groups of people equally. Food security data and demographic information—including sex, weight, marital status, income, race/ethnicity—were analyzed to determine the segments of the Kent County population most at risk of food insecurity. There was no correlation between gender and skipping meals for economic reasons. The average weight of those skipping meals and those not skipping meals was nearly the same. According to survey responses, those who are married are less likely to skip meals. People living below the poverty line are more likely than wealthier individuals to skip meals because of financial hardship. The average (mean) number of people living in a household had no relationship with skipping meals. Homeownership is directly related to food security. In terms of race, 22% of those indicating that they had skipped meals were white, meaning that most food insecurity occurs among minority populations. While many residents of Grand Rapids had skipped or reduced the size of a meal, the rural population was proportionally more likely to do so. One reason for this may be that residents of rural areas may have less access to social services and food programs than city residents. Those skipping meals in rural areas are predominately white, while those in urban settings are in minority groups. One use of the data regarding food insecurity in Kent County could be social services providers' improved ability to target specific populations in trying to remedy and prevent malnutrition.

## What is Kent County Eating?

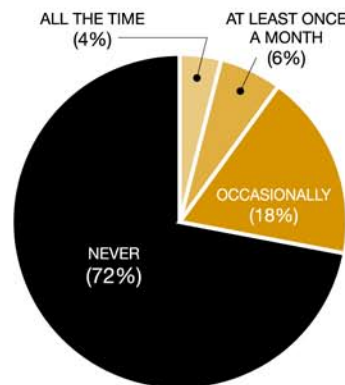
The majority of Kent County residents surveyed indicated that they did not eat five servings of fruits and vegetables daily (see Indicator 3). Men were less likely than women to eat five servings of fruits and vegetables. The average weight of those eating fruits and vegetable is less than those who do not, regardless of sex. Racial and ethnic differences exist as well: Asian Americans and Latin Americans are more likely to eat five servings of fruits and vegetables each day than Caucasians, while African Americans are less likely to do so.

## Food Security and Children



INDICATOR 2:

**HOW OFTEN DO YOU WORRY ABOUT RUNNING OUT OF MONEY FOR FOOD OR CLOTHING?**

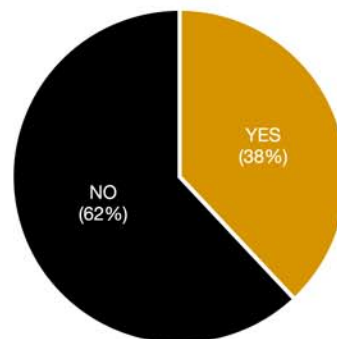


KENT COUNTY 2006

Survey data point to an emerging relationship between parenting status and food insecurity. Eight percent of respondents who were parents of at least one child under the age of 18 indicated having reduced a meal size or skipped a meal due to economic difficulties. Among those who were not parents, 5.8% had skipped or cut the size of a meal. The data also show that as family size grows, the likelihood of food insecurity increases.

INDICATOR 3:

**DO YOU EAT 5 SERVINGS OF FRUITS AND VEGETABLES EVERY DAY?**



KENT COUNTY 2006

The most dramatic relationship between parenting and food insecurity is among single parents. Nearly 17% of single parents skipped or reduced the size of a meal in the past year. Among single mothers, this percentage increases to 18.4%. These data illustrate the need for programs alleviating food insecurity among single mothers, since nearly one in every five single mothers and her children face the negative effects of this problem.

The Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey, now in its sixth year, assesses citizen opinions, perceptions, and behaviors as they relate to quality of life in the Greater Grand Rapids Area (Kent County). More specifically, the community survey provides population, economic, community and public opinion data to present a picture of the Kent County community as a place to live. The 2006 Survey is a collaborative effort between the Community Research Institute of the Johnson Center at Grand Valley State University (CRI), Grand Rapids Community Foundation, Heart of West Michigan United Way, and the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation.

This report is part of a series of briefing papers. It is available online at [www.cridata.org/publications](http://www.cridata.org/publications), along with the rest of the series and the 2005/2006 Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey report.



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