

**“The Growing Crisis of Food Insecurity in Arkansas: A Call to Action,”
by Dr. Chris Jones**

As I traveled through all 75 Arkansas counties in 2022, I became even more aware of our state’s problem with food insecurity. Today, it has reached alarming levels, making Arkansas one of the two most *food-insecure* states in the nation. Sadly, our farmers and food industries feed the world every day, yet 1 in 4 Arkansas children go to bed hungry every night.

The *Arkansas Advocate* has published an insightful article with the headline: “Food insecurity in Arkansas worsens, rate ranks second highest nationwide”. This is an issue that affects rural and urban areas, the working poor, and the poverty stricken chronically unemployed and underemployed.

Recent reports from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the hunger-relief organization Feeding America highlight the dire situation faced by many Arkansans. Between 2020 and 2023, an average of 16.6% of Arkansas households experienced food insecurity, significantly higher than the national average of 11.2%. This crisis affects 567,110 people in our state, including 168,430 children, emphasizing the urgent need for collective action.

The situation is not only severe but worsening. The cost of groceries has surged by over 20% between 2020 and 2024, further straining the budgets of families already struggling to make ends meet. The impact of this inflation is devastating, forcing many to choose among essential needs such as food, rent, and medical care.

Food insecurity is more than just a lack of food; it is a complex issue that impacts health, education, and overall well-being. Children in food-insecure households are more likely to suffer from chronic health conditions, including asthma, anemia, and behavioral problems. These children are also much more likely to struggle in school. The stress and uncertainty of not knowing where the next meal will come from can also lead to anxiety and depression, affecting both children and adults.

Our public schools have been able to ease this plight with federal and local programs offering free and reduced-price lunches. But children also need healthy home meals, and so do their parents.

Unfortunately, the Republican dominated Congress has cut the relief provided by pandemic era support programs like the child tax credit, which leaves many families without the means to provide adequate healthy meals.

Thanks to those cuts, participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is at a record low in Arkansas, resulting in more hard choices and more hunger for our most vulnerable.

Last year, the Arkansas Legislature approved a bill raising the asset limit for SNAP from \$2,250 to \$6,000, that is woefully inadequate to address the needs of those on the brink of poverty.

The good news is that there are steps we can take to combat this growing crisis. Here are a few:

- 1. Support and Advocate for SNAP:** SNAP is our most effective tool to combat hunger. Advocating for higher asset limits and expanded eligibility can ensure more families receive the assistance they need.
- 2. Get Involved Locally:** Volunteer at local food banks and support organizations like the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance, the Arkansas Food Bank and the River Valley Regional Food Bank to name a few. These organizations provide crucial resources to those in need.
- 3. Raise Awareness:** September is Hunger Action Month, a time to educate ourselves and others about the realities of food insecurity in Arkansas. Share information, attend local events, and participate in community discussions.

4. **Donate:** Support local hunger relief efforts through donations. Organizations like Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families rely on individual contributions to expand their advocacy, research, and training efforts.

5. **Encourage Legislative Action:** Contact your legislators to support policies that address food insecurity. Legislative change is essential to create long-term solutions for food insecurity in our state.

6. **Elect Better Leaders:** Elect legislators who enact policies that directly address poverty.

The crisis of food insecurity in Arkansas is a call to action for all of us. By working together, supporting effective programs, and advocating for policy changes, we can ensure that no Arkansan goes hungry. It is our collective responsibility to create a community where everyone has access to the food and resources they need to thrive.

Arkansas deserves better. It's up to us to make it so!

Share your thoughts and comments at chrisjoneslistens@gmail.com.