

Food Security Chartbook: Essex County, New Jersey



Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active life. This definition encompasses six dimensions of food security: availability, access, utilization, stability, agency, and sustainability.

This county-level chart book provides a concise, visual snapshot of key food security metrics drawn from the most recent State of Food Security in New Jersey: A Data Chart Book. It highlights selected determinants, measures, and impacts of food security to support a shared understanding of local conditions. The profile is designed for policymakers, community organizations, service providers, researchers, and residents to inform outreach, planning, advocacy, and research efforts.

Additional data, context, and sources are available in the full State of Food Security in New Jersey: A Data Chart Book.

Six Dimensions of Food Security



Essex County Population

Population (2024)
881,527
Essex County is home to 881,527 residents

2020–2024 Percent Change
+ 2.5%
Essex County's population grew by 2.5% from 2020 to 2024

Social Determinants Impacting Food Security

Food security is shaped by a range of social and economic conditions that influence whether individuals and families can reliably access and afford nutritious food. Social determinants, such as employment, income, housing costs, education, and transportation, affect both the resources households have available for food and the environments in which they obtain it.

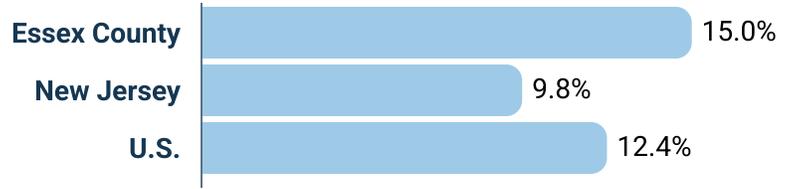


Average Meal Cost (2023)
\$4.35
 The average meal cost in Essex County increased 6.9% from 2019 (\$4.07) to 2023 (\$4.35). The average meal cost in New Jersey in 2023 was \$3.74

Poverty Rate, (2019-2023)

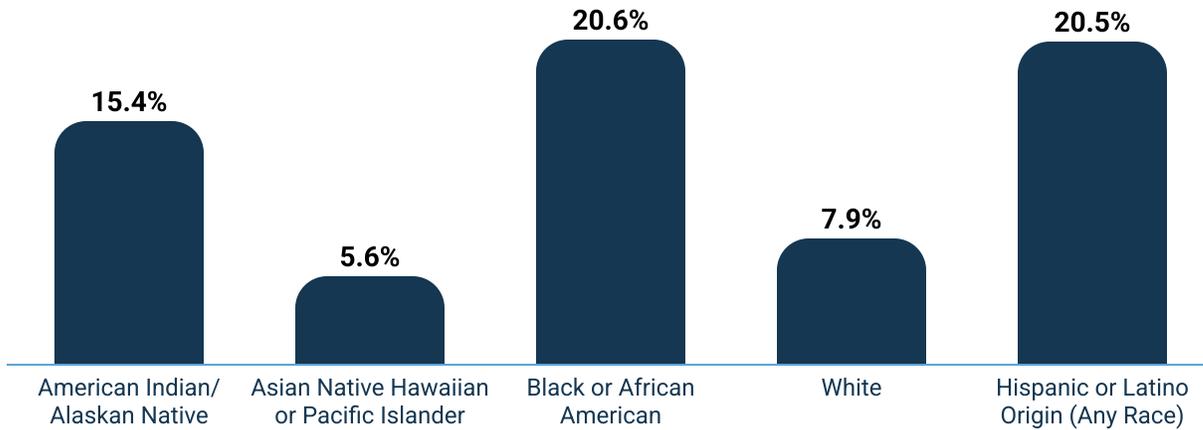


In Essex County, 125,419 people (15.0%) lived with income below the federal poverty line.



With the best (lowest rate) rank being 1, Essex County ranks 20th among New Jersey's 21 counties for poverty rate.

POVERTY RATE, BY RACE & ETHNICITY (2019-2023)



The poverty rate among Black (20.6%), Hispanic or Latino (20.5%), and American Indian or Alaska Native (15.4%) individuals in Essex County is substantially higher than the poverty rate among White individuals (7.9%).

Impacts of Food Insecurity

	 Low Birth Weight Rate (2019-2023)	 Infant Mortality (Deaths per 1000 Live Births) (2018-2022)	 Diabetes Prevalence (2021-2023)	 Adult Obesity Prevalence (2021-2023)
Essex County	9.2%	4.9	10.1%	29.6%
New Jersey	7.8%	3.5	9.1%	28.9%

Measures of Food Security

While social and economic conditions influence food security, food security measurement data provide a direct view of how people experience it in everyday life. There are many ways to define and measure food security with this section presenting a few key indicators.

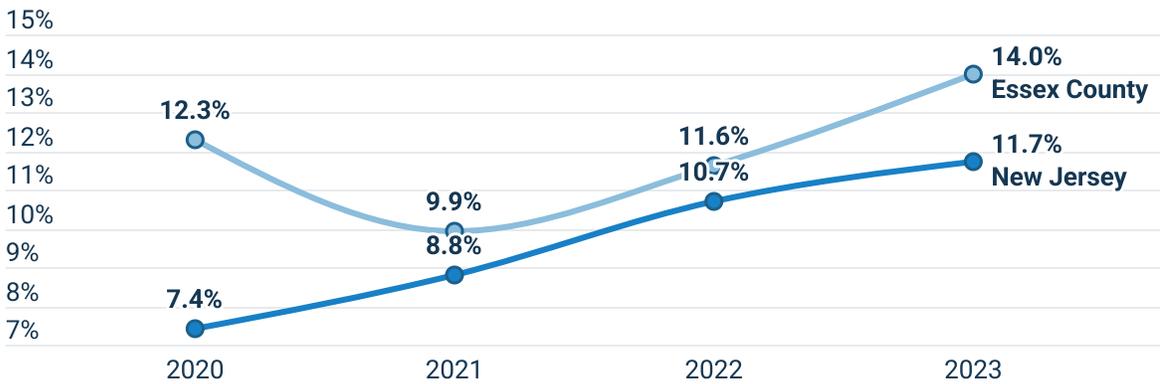


Limited Access to Healthy Food (2019) 1%

In Essex County, 5,869 people (1%) have limited access to healthy food (2019). This represents a 6% increase from 5,536 people in 2015.

Map the Meal Gap Food Insecurity Estimates (2023)

FOOD INSECURITY RATE, 2020 TO 2023



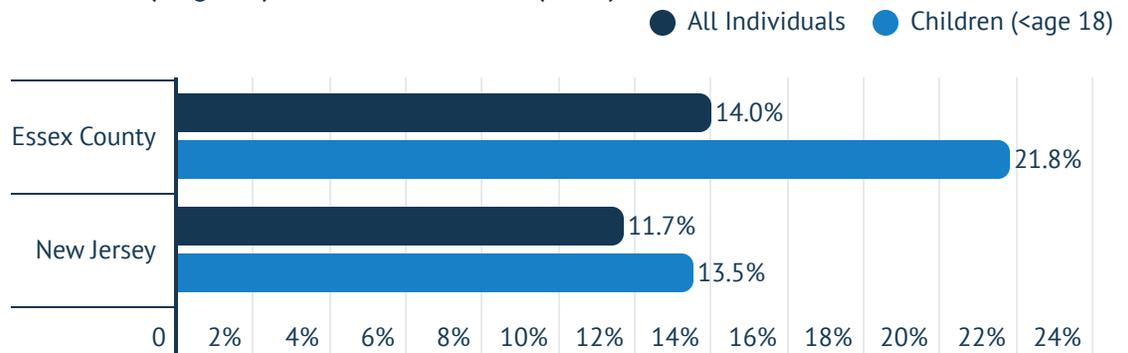
In 2023, an estimated **119,930 (14.0%)** individuals experienced food insecurity in Essex County.

In New Jersey overall, almost **1.1 million (11.7%)** individuals experienced food insecurity in 2023.

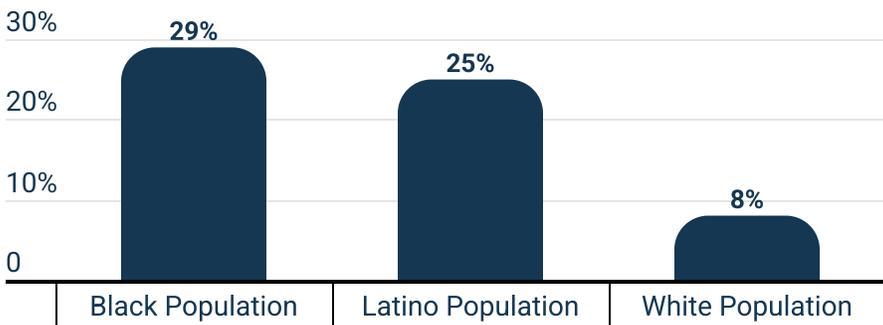
FOOD INSECURITY RATE, BY CHILDREN (< age 18) & ALL INDIVIDUALS (2023)

Across New Jersey, the rate of food insecurity is higher among children (13.5%) compared to the rate among all individuals (11.7%).

In Essex County, the rate of food insecurity among children is 21.8%.



FOOD INSECURITY RATE, BY RACE & ETHNICITY (2023)



3.6x The rate of food insecurity among Black individuals in Essex County is 3.6 times the rate of food insecurity among white individuals.

3.1x The rate of food insecurity among Latino individuals in Essex County is 3.1 times the rate among white individuals.

