

U.S. hunger rate still at historic high

by [Whitney Jones](#) in the [December 14, 2010](#) issue

The number of Americans struggling with hunger remained stable in 2009 despite the economic downturn but at the highest recorded level, according to new federal figures.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture released statistics November 15 showing that one in seven American households could not buy adequate food last year due to lack of money and other resources.

The number of people suffering from "food insecurity" increased only one-tenth of a percentage point from 2008, but that number is almost more than 4 percentage points higher than it was ten years ago—and the highest since 1995.

"It could be worse," said David Beckmann, a Lutheran minister and president of the ecumenical antihunger group Bread for the World, in an interview with CNN. "I was struck that the numbers did not increase from the end of 2008 to the end of 2009."

Coincidentally, lay and ordained Presbyterians surveyed in February were fairly optimistic about solving domestic hunger problems by 2035. The figures were released November 16 in the latest Presbyterian Panel survey from the 2-million-member Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

About half of members (47 percent) and elders (50 percent) and three in five pastors (60 percent) and nonparish ministers (63 percent) either "strongly agree" or "agree" that the problem of widespread hunger in the U.S. can be solved in the next 25 years.

"Presbyterians demonstrate their commitment to fighting hunger . . . in many ways, notably by supporting food pantries," said Perry Chang, Presbyterian Panel administrator.

In 2009, more than nine in ten Presbyterians in all four groups have given food to a food pantry or other community program for emergency food assistance. In addition, Chang said, about three-quarters gave money to food assistance programs or heard or gave a sermon addressing hunger or poverty.

A Census Bureau report released in September said that the U.S. poverty rate increased by 3.8 million people in 2009—a little more than 1 percent.

The three largest federal nutrition programs—the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps; the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children; and the National School Lunch Program—have all seen an increase in need, the agriculture department said.

Hunger was more prevalent in large cities than in rural areas and suburbs and was substantially higher in black and Hispanic families.