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Percentage of 'food insecure' households high, but steady

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Millions continue to struggle with hunger both locally and nationwide, according to a new federal report.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture report indicates that 14.5 percent of Americans live in "food insecure" households," or in homes in they often didn't know where their next meal would come from.

That translates to about 49 million people, including 16 million children. The federal agency said the numbers of people in the U.S. who don't know where their next food will come from have not changed much since 2008.

"Poverty and high unemployment have persisted, but food insecurity rates have not increased significantly since 2008" when the Great Recession began, Rev. David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World, said.

On the front lines of providing food to hungry people locally, Lisa Sherrill of the Food Bank of Napa and Solano said the new USDA statistics are not surprising.

"It's seems there is still a general sense of increase in demand" at the local food pantries, she said.

"The Food Bank and our partners are still serving more people than ever before and seeing new faces each month," she said.

In California, about 15.6 percent of households struggle with hunger, a slight increase over previous years.

Demand remains high at the food bank's food pantries in Vallejo and other local areas.

The food bank is seeing a lot of people take advantage of its new fresh produce stands in which families are able to take home about 20 pounds of produce.

Food bank officials and others are worried that the numbers of people living in "food insecure" households will increase when benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are cut in November.

Sherrill said a temporary federal boost to the benefits, otherwise known as food stamps, expires at that time. The reduction could lead to the program being slashed by \$40 billion.

For the average family that could result in a loss of \$25 per month, Sherrill said.

The USDA report indicates that 42 percent of those in food insecure households receive food stamps to get by.

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