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New Virginia Hunger Study Shows More Than One in Three Blue Ridge Households Were Food Insecure in the Last Year

Inflation is hitting families who are food-insecure the hardest.

VERONA, Va. – September 21, 2026 – The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank is highlighting findings from the 2026 *Virginia Hunger Study*, released today, which gives us a deeper understanding of how hunger affects families across the Blue Ridge region. According to the study, 1 in 3 (37%) households in the Blue Ridge region were food insecure between May 2025 and May 2026, and 1 in 3 (35%) children in the region experienced food insecurity during the same period.

Across the state of Virginia, the study found that 4 in 10 households (42%) were food insecure - defined as all members of a household lacking consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life. For families with children, half (51%) reported they didn't have enough food.

"The findings are striking, but not surprising," said Kari Diener, CEO of the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank. "This data confirms what we and our network of partners see every day as we serve record numbers of neighbors. Families across our region are working hard, but wages aren't keeping up with rising costs. Parents are skipping meals, older adults are choosing between groceries and medicine, and too many children are going without balanced meals."

Inflation is a major driver of hardship. As the statewide report notes, *"Inflation has had a severe impact on food-insecure households' budgets."* In the Blue Ridge, 8 in 10 families who are food-insecure say higher grocery prices (81%), as well as gasoline and utility costs (79%), have made their finances even worse.

Health impacts are significant. The statewide report found that *"Three out of four food-insecure adults (76%) have been diagnosed with one or more chronic conditions."* In the Blue Ridge area, families report skipping medical care, buying less healthy food, and draining savings to get by.

To meet rising need, the Food Bank is distributing more food than ever—33 million pounds last year—while purchasing additional food, expanding partnerships with schools and clinics, and investing in local agencies to increase access in underserved communities.

“Charitable food alone cannot close this gap,” said **Diener**. “We need strong partnerships, smart policy, and community support to ensure every family in the Blue Ridge can count on consistent access to nutritious food.”

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About the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank

The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank is the largest hunger-relief organization serving western and central Virginia. Founded in 1981, the Food Bank serves 25 counties and 8 cities through distribution centers in Charlottesville, Lynchburg, Winchester, and its headquarters in Verona. Each month, the Food Bank supports an average of 178,700 guest visits, reaching record numbers of Virginians through a network of 300+ community partners and programs, including food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, and program sites. As a partner food bank of Feeding America®, the nation’s largest hunger-relief organization, and a member of the Federation of Virginia Food Banks, the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank pledges to continue innovating and adapting to secure, store, and distribute more food to more individuals, families, children, and seniors experiencing hunger. For more information, visit www.brafb.org.

About the Virginia Hunger Study

The 2026 Virginia Hunger Study is the first statewide, Virginia-specific survey to measure food insecurity using the USDA’s 18-item Household Food Security Survey Module. Conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago in partnership with the Federation of Virginia Food Banks and all 7 food bank members, the Virginia Department of Social Services, Virginia Tech, and No Kid Hungry Virginia, the study includes interviews with more than 5,600 Virginians, conducted in May 2026.

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