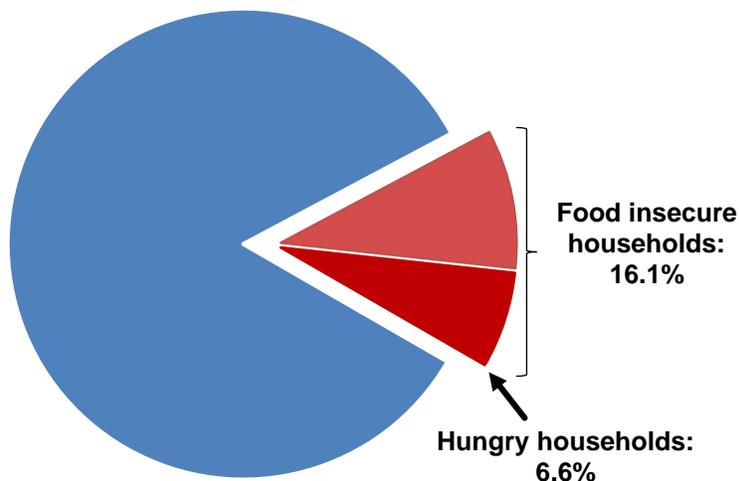


## Oregon's Spike in Food Insecurity Worst Among All States

### *A View of the State of Working Oregon*

Oregon recorded the sharpest increase in food insecurity of any state, even as nationally the share of families struggling to put food on the table declined and the Oregon economy grew. The most recent data showed that nearly one in every six Oregonians lived without knowing where their next meal was coming from or went hungry. To put that in perspective, there were about the same number of Oregonians who struggled to put food on the table as lived in Portland, the state's largest city.

#### Nearly 1 in 6 Oregon households food insecure



2013-15 share of Oregon households with food insecurity.  
Source: OCCP analysis of USDA data.

Nearly one in six (16.1 percent) of Oregon households were “food insecure” during the three-year period of 2013-15.<sup>1</sup> These families found it hard to put food on the table, often not knowing where their next meal would come from.

For some of these families, their food insecurity was so severe that it qualified as “hunger.” These families skipped meals or ate too little because they were not able to afford ample food.

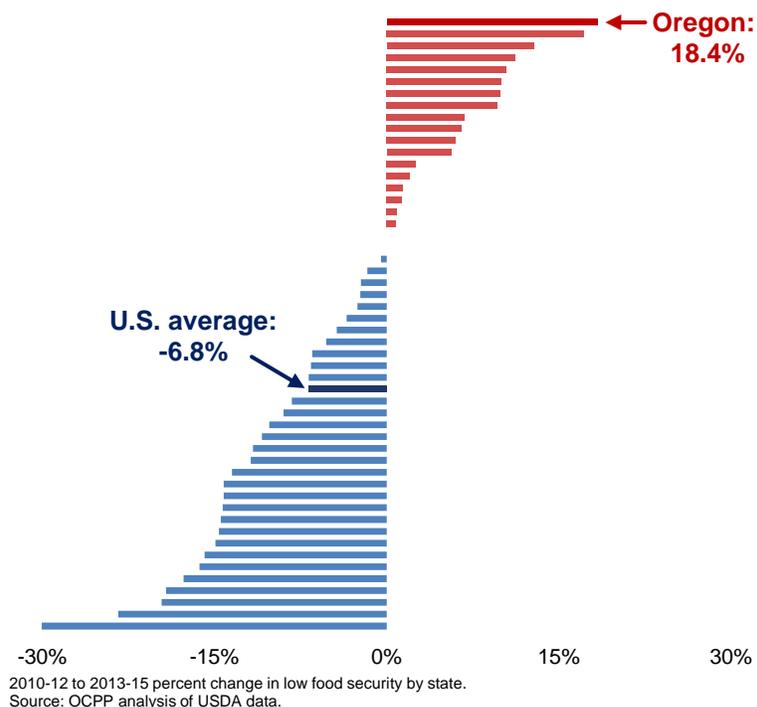
In 2013-15, 6.6 percent of Oregon households experienced hunger.

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*A View of the State of Working Oregon* is a series of occasional OCCP fact sheets explaining Oregon's economy from the perspective of working families.

## Oregon's Spike in Food Insecurity Worst Among All States

### Oregon food insecurity spike highest in nation



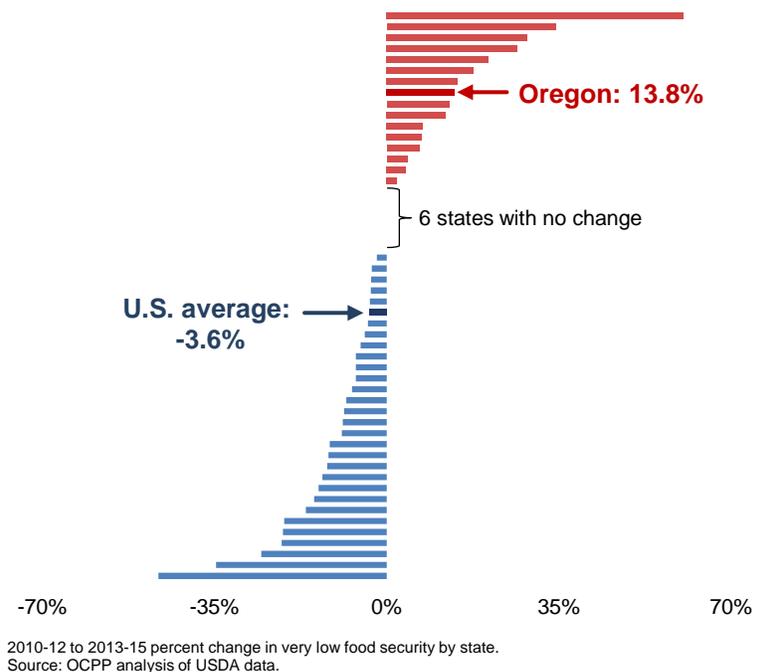
Since the recovery from the Great Recession began, Oregon has seen the largest increase in food insecurity.

Comparing the most recent period for which there is data (2013-15) to the early years of the recovery (2010-12), food insecurity in Oregon spiked 18.4 percent. That increase was the highest among all states.

Meanwhile, food insecurity decreased nationally. Over that same time period, food insecurity across the United States declined by 6.8 percent.

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### Hunger rises in Oregon, decreases nationally



Oregonians are increasingly going hungry. These families are having to skip meals or eat less overall because they are unable to afford or access enough food.

From the early years of the economic recovery to the most recent period, hunger in Oregon increased by 13.8 percent, the eighth highest increase among all states during that time.

Nationwide, hunger decreased by 3.6 percent from the 2010-12 time period to the 2013-15 period.

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## Oregon food insecurity and hunger among nation's highest



2013-15 Oregon low and very low food security rankings among all states and D.C.  
Source: OCPP analysis of USDA data.

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Food insecurity and hunger have increased to such an extent that Oregon now has some of the highest rates of each among all states.

During the 2013-15 period, food insecurity in Oregon ranked sixth worst among all states.

Oregon had the eighth worst rate of hunger during that same time period.

## More Oregonians food insecure than live in Oregon's largest cities



Estimated 2014 Oregon population food insecure and living in cities, rounded to nearest thousand.  
Source: OCPP analysis of Feeding America and Portland State University Population Center estimates.

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More Oregonians are food insecure than live in the state's largest cities.

In 2014, an estimated 605,000 Oregonians were food insecure.<sup>2</sup> That was about the same as the population of Portland, Oregon's largest city.

That same year, an estimated 210,000 Oregon children were food insecure. That was more than the 161,000 Oregonians that lived in Eugene, Oregon's second largest city.

### **Rising food insecurity underscores need to confront poverty**

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That food insecurity and hunger would worsen at a time when Oregon's economy and job market have performed well underscores the need for lawmakers to focus their efforts on reducing poverty.<sup>3</sup> Lawmakers can help Oregonians meet their basic needs by:

- **Confronting Oregon's housing crisis:**

It is widely acknowledged that Oregon is in the midst of a housing affordability crisis, with rising rents squeezing the budgets of many Oregon families. To keep a roof over their heads, cash-strapped families cut back where they can, which can include skimping on food.<sup>4</sup> Confronting Oregon's housing affordability crisis is an important step in addressing food insecurity.

Addressing Oregon's housing crisis requires many policy reforms, and among those at the top of the list must be reforming Oregon's biggest housing subsidy — the mortgage interest deduction. This tax deduction primarily subsidizes well-off homeowners rather than helping those who truly need help affording a home.<sup>5</sup> Reforming the mortgage interest deduction would free up resources for the state to invest in homeownership and housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income Oregonians.

- **Expanding access to affordable child care:**

Child care in Oregon is among the least affordable in the country.<sup>6</sup> Many working parents, oftentimes mothers, who cannot afford the rising cost of care, drop out of the workforce to take care of their children, thereby foregoing income that would help put food on the table. Making investments that expand access to affordable child care would allow those parents to remain in the workforce, while easing the burden that child care can have on family budgets.

- **Boosting assistance to the most vulnerable families:**

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is Oregon's primary safety net for families in poverty. It helps families that have fallen on hard times, including women and children escaping abuse, to avoid homelessness and get back on their feet through modest cash assistance. Unfortunately, because it is not adjusted for inflation, the value of that assistance has eroded over time.<sup>7</sup> Boosting the TANF grant amount and adjusting it each year to account for changes in the cost of living would enable more families living in the most dire circumstances to put food on the table.<sup>8</sup>

- **Increasing the TANF income limit:**

Each year, it gets harder for poor families who may experience food insecurity to qualify for temporary assistance from TANF because the Oregon legislature has left frozen for a quarter of a century the income limit required to qualify for assistance.<sup>9</sup> To be eligible for assistance from TANF, a family of three cannot earn more than \$616 per month, a threshold unchanged since it was set in 1991. This means that today, a single parent with

two children who works two days per week at the minimum wage earns too much to get help. Lawmakers should increase the TANF income limit to allow the many families living in poverty who are currently shut out of the program to receive help.

- **Creating more work opportunities for those affected by SNAP time limits:**

Federal time limits for Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs) in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly “food stamps,” were implemented in Multnomah and Washington counties in 2016, after they had been waived for many years due to a poor economy. Unless these individuals meet certain work requirements or exemptions, Oregonians identified as ABAWDs in these counties are limited to just three months of SNAP food assistance in a 36-month period. These time limits will apply to ABAWDs in Clackamas County in 2017.<sup>10</sup> Unemployment is still high enough in the remaining Oregon counties that the federal time limits are waived.

Lawmakers can prevent Oregonians from being cut off of food assistance by expanding Oregon’s “workfare” opportunities. Workfare sites allow Oregonians subject to time limits to volunteer at non-profit organizations in partnership with the Department of Human Services. These opportunities allow people considered ABAWDs to meet federal work requirements while maintaining their food benefits and potentially gaining new work skills.

## Oregon's Spike in Food Insecurity Worst Among All States

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all figures in this fact sheet are OCPP analysis of United States Department of Agriculture data.

<sup>2</sup> OCPP analysis of Feeding America and Portland State University Population Research Center data. Feeding America's annual report, *Map the Meal Gap*, provides annual estimates of food insecurity, child food insecurity and other measures at the state and local levels. Their model draws on Current Population Survey, American Community Survey and Bureau of Labor Statistics data. For more on their methodology see, *Map the Meal Gap 2016: Technical Brief*, Feeding America, 2016, available at <http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/our-research/map-the-meal-gap/2014/2014-map-the-meal-gap-tech-brief.pdf>. Also see *Data by County in Each State*, Feeding America, 2016, available at <http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/our-research/map-the-meal-gap/data-by-county-in-each-state.html>.

<sup>3</sup> For more on the Oregon economy see *Oregon's Fast-Growing Economy Leaves Many Workers Behind*, Oregon Center for Public Policy, February 8, 2016, available at <http://www.ocpp.org/2016/02/08/fs20160208-oregon-economy-fast-growth-workers/>. For more on Oregon's labor market see Oregon Center for Public Policy, *Oregon's Labor Market: Still Room for Improvement*, August 31, 2016, available at <http://www.ocpp.org/2016/08/31/fs20160831-oregon-labor-market-improvement/>.

<sup>4</sup> *The State of Nation's Housing*, 2015, Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University, p. 31, available at <http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/jchs.harvard.edu/files/jchs-sonhr-2015-full.pdf>; Fletcher, Jason M., et. al. "Assessing the Effect of Increasing Housing Costs on Food Insecurity," Social Science Research Network, September 9, 2009, available at [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1503043](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1503043).

<sup>5</sup> *The Mortgage Interest Deduction: Oregon's Biggest (and Ineffective) Housing Subsidy*, Oregon Center for Public Policy, May 4, 2015, available at <http://www.ocpp.org/2015/05/04/fs20150504-oregon-mortgage-interest-deduction/>.

<sup>6</sup> Oregon had the second highest average annual rate for center-based infant care and the fourth highest for four year-old care in 2014. *Parents and the High Cost of Child Care*, Child Care Aware of America, 2015, p. 27, available at <http://usa.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Parents-and-the-High-Cost-of-Child-Care-2015-FINAL.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> *Eroding Cash Assistance Puts Oregon Children at Risk*, Oregon Center for Public Policy and the Oregon TANF Alliance, October 19, 2016, available at <http://www.ocpp.org/2016/10/19/fs20161019-tanf-oregon-grant-limit-erode/>.

<sup>8</sup> In general, families eligible for TANF are also eligible for SNAP food assistance benefits. While those benefits are vital to families meeting their nutritional needs, they are often insufficient. For example, SNAP benefits (\$474 per month) for one parent and two children without other income receiving Oregon TANF cash assistance is more than 20 percent below an adequate food budget for an Oregon household of that configuration, as determined by the Economic Policy Institute. OCPP calculation based on data from Stanley, Megan and Floyd, Ife, *TANF Cash Benefits Have Fallen by More Than 20 Percent in Most States and Continue to Erode*, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, October 17, 2016, available at <http://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/tanf-cash-benefits-have-fallen-by-more-than-20-percent-in-most-states>; and the Family Budget Calculator, Economic Policy Institute, available at <http://www.epi.org/resources/budget/>.

<sup>9</sup> *Oregon's Largest Anti-Poverty Program Increasingly Shuts Out Working Families*, Oregon Center for Public Policy, February 24, 2015, available at <http://www.ocpp.org/2015/02/24/fs20150224-oregon-anti-poverty-working-families/>.

<sup>10</sup> Oregon Department of Human Services email to Oregon Center for Public Policy, July 29, 2016.

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