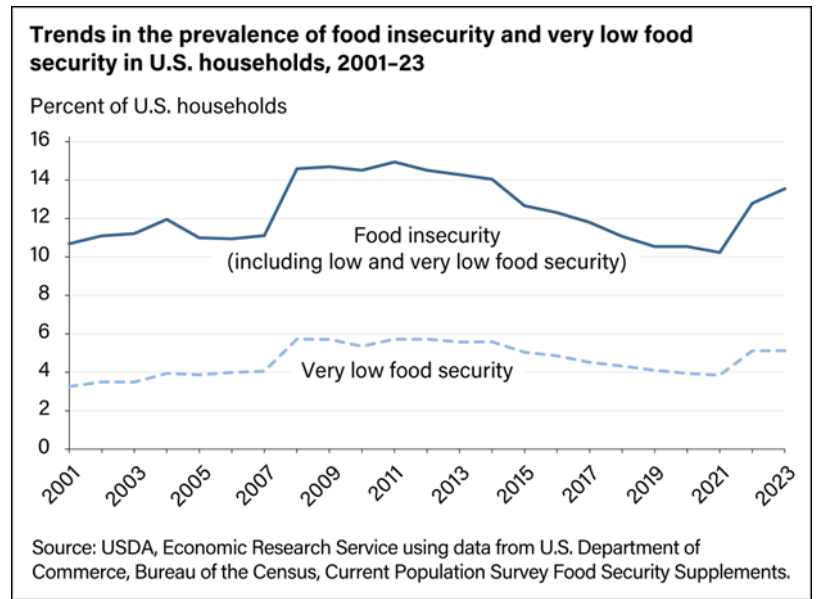


In this time of uncertainty, several stressors are converging in the food assistance marketplace. This means that more support is needed for hunger-focused ministries and related social assistance programs in Georgia. Three of these stressors include the high and escalating rates of food insecurity, the uncertainty of future federal funding for food-related programs, and the use of AI which is impacting food bank donations from grocers.



Food insecurity is a reality for one in eight households in Georgia. We have the 13th highest prevalence of food insecurity in the United States. Nationally, food insecurity increased by 1 million households from 2022 to 2023. Equivalent numbers were not published for states. However, it is likely that food insecurity levels have risen recently in Georgia given that unemployment increased 16.3% from December 2023 to December 2024.

## Governmental Changes

The recent ideological shift in federal government staffing could further increase food insecurity and unemployment rates. As of summer 2024, Georgia had more than 112,000 federal jobs. Numerous restaurants, retailers, and small businesses depend on the patronage of federal workers for their economic stability.

The current administration sought to freeze federal spending. This meant uncertain funding for programs like Meals on Wheels and the National School Lunch Program. While the freeze was rescinded, cutting programs or limiting the scope of work is still at the forefront of the administration's activities. It's too early to speculate where a new normal may settle. Our parishes might consider these changes as a call to action to elevate outreach activities dedicated to food assistance.

## The AI-influence

An additional (and rapidly worsening) challenge in this field is that corporations and businesses are unlikely to be reliable major contributors to feeding the food insecure. In the new AI-driven era of work, companies like Shelf Engine and Afresh are using AI to help grocers make more efficient decisions about their products. On the surface, this seems like a positive use of AI. It helps these businesses have fewer lost profits and food waste.

However, increased efficiency of grocers result in a major loss for food banks. Many food banks, particularly the larger regional food banks which provide food to smaller local food banks, have traditionally depended on corporate donations of surplus products. AI may be creating efficiencies by shrinking the surplus. But the need for donated food on a corporate scale is *not* shrinking . . . it's growing. That means that food banks must bridge the gap in lost corporate donations, oftentimes by purchasing the food that would have previously been donated. Food banks are

faced with seeking even more donations from churches, foundations, and individuals to maintain well-stocked shelves.

## Outreach Opportunities

Parishes and local nonprofits are being called to expand or start hunger-related outreach activities. We must address the increasing need we are seeing as a result of increasing food insecurity, decreasing supply from corporate donations, and federal programs experiencing reductions or even potential elimination.

One way that ECF is issuing the charge is through participation in the [2025 Hunger Walk Run](#) on March 9. Another is through [providing grant funds](#) for hunger-related work with our upcoming Letter of Intent deadline on March 31. To discuss how ECF can help your ministry fight food insecurity, please [contact our Executive Director, Lindsey Hardegree](#).

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Data sources: [USDA's Economic Research Service](#) and [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#).



Following Christ's example and the tradition of The Episcopal Church, we partner with Episcopal communities in the Diocese of Atlanta by providing funding, leadership, and resources to enable Episcopalians to lift up people facing poverty and oppression and to achieve significant, long-lasting change in our communities.

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