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Household Food Security Survey Module Quick Guide

Overview

The Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program's (GusNIP) Nutrition Incentive Program Training, Technical Assistance, Evaluation, and Information Center (NTAE) is tasked with providing reporting and evaluation support to GusNIP and GusCRR grantees that launch, modify, or expand their programs. Apart from GusNIP Pilot Projects, all GusNIP and GusCRR grantees (e.g., Nutrition Incentive and Produce Prescription Projects) are required to collect a set of core metrics including participant- and firm-level metrics to demonstrate the impact of incentive programs. One of these metrics is **food security status**, as it is a primary outcome of interest for the USDA.

What is the Household Food Security Survey Module?

While there are several different versions of the HFSSM, the GusNIP NTAE utilizes the [6-Item Short Form](#). The 6-Item Short Form was developed by researchers at the National Center for Health Statistics and can be used in place of the longer 10- and 18-item scales to minimize participant burden. The 6-item survey allows for stratification of participants into one of four food security categories based on their responses – high food security, marginal food security, low food security, and very low food security. The HFSSM is used by USDA Economic Research Service to monitor the extent and severity of food insecurity in the U.S.; many other nationally representative surveys also utilize the HFSSM.

Collecting Food Security Data

In PPR and NI projects, food security status is a participant-level core metric that measures the impact of a program on participants. The 6-item HFSSM collects information about whether participants had access to and were able to afford enough food. Data are collected through survey responses from participants. Below are the instructions for the module, questions within the HFSSM, and the response options.

USDA 6-Item Household Food Security Survey Module

Instructions: These next questions are about the food eaten in your household in the last 30 days, and whether you were able to afford the food you need.¹

Items:

- HH3: The food that we bought just didn't last, and we didn't have money to get more. (*Responses: Often true, Sometimes true, Never true*)
- HH4: We couldn't afford to eat balanced meals. (*Responses: Often true, Sometimes true, Never true*)
- AD1: In the last 30 days, did you or other adults in your household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food? (*Responses: Yes, No*)
 - AD1a: In the last 30 days, how many days did this happen? (*Response: # of days*)
- AD2: In the last 30 days, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food? (*Responses: Yes, No*)
- AD3: In the last 30 days, were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food? (*Responses: Yes, No*)

Analyzing Food Security Data

To analyze participant responses, a [scoring rubric](#) developed by the USDA can be applied. The scoring rubric is explained in detail below. The GusNIP NTAE provides each grantee with their participant-level survey results annually, including food security results across participants. If a grantee desires to conduct the analysis independently or do an additional analysis, the GusNIP NTAE recommends working with an external evaluator and/or statistician to follow the steps provided by the USDA.

Coding Responses to Assess Household Food Security Status

Responses of “often true” or “sometimes true” on questions HH3 and HH4, and “yes” on AD1, AD2, and AD3 should be coded as affirmative (i.e., yes). Any number of days more than 3 on question AD1a is coded as affirmative (i.e., yes). The sum of affirmative responses to the six questions comprises the household's raw food security score.

¹ GusNIP and GusCRR surveys should use a 30-day reference period for the HFSSM, as worded here. In some cases, a 12-month reference period is alternatively used. See the [scoring rubric](#) for more information.

For example, a “yes” to the question, “*In the last 30 days, were you ever hungry but didn’t eat because there wasn’t enough money for food?*”, would be counted as one affirmative response. An “often true” to the statement, “*We couldn’t afford to eat balanced meals,*” would be counted as one affirmative response.

Food security status is assigned as follows:

Raw Score	Food security status
0	High food security
1	Marginal food security
2-4	Low food security
5-6	Very low food security

Alternatively, households with raw scores of 0-1 can be described as food secure, while households with raw scores of 2-6 can be described as food insecure.

In summary, the HFSSM allows for categorization of a participant into one of four food security categories based on their survey responses. These categories can be useful in comparing participant food security across time as well as to a [national sample](#). Full information about how to score the HFSSM can be found [here](#).

Questions?

Your Program Advisor is here to support you with any questions related to the Household Food Security Survey Module and you can also recommend additional quantitative and qualitative measures of interest for your evaluation.

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