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Characterizing Food Insecurity at a Northeast Land-grant University

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Characterizing Food Insecurity at a Northeast Land-grant University

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In 2015, 15.8 million U.S. households were food insecure. While nationally food insecurity is assessed at the household and childhood level, university students are not explicitly monitored. The purpose of this study was to determine the prevalence of food insecurity at a northeast land grant university and characterize the contributing factors. A pilot study (n=211) was conducted in fall 2014 among a general nutrition class and found that 12.4% of students were food insecure, with another 5.7% reported marginal food security. A larger, university wide survey among graduate and undergraduate students was conducted in fall 2015 (n=943) and found that 25% of students were food insecure and 9.6% had marginal food security. Students who reported receiving financial aid or identified as a first generation student were more likely to be food insecure (OR 1.84, p=0.007; OR 1.73, p=0.006, respectively). In-person interviews (n=5) found that very low food secure students were frequently eating 1-2 meals a day and were unable to afford fresh produce despite the desire to include in their diet. However, students reported that if things “got worse” they could ask their parents for help. Collectively this work expands our understanding of food insecurity on a university campus.