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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **LIFE GETS HARDER FOR SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA'S HUNGRY**

*According to Study, 12.8% of Residents of Southwest Virginia Struggle with Hunger*

**SALEM, VA – May 26, 2017** – [Feeding America Southwest Virginia](#) (FASWVA) announced the release of *Map the Meal Gap 2017*, the latest report by Feeding America® on food insecurity and the cost of food at both the county and congressional district level. *Map the Meal Gap 2017* reveals that food insecurity exists in every county in Feeding America Southwest Virginia's service area. Overall food insecurity ranges from a low of 7.3% percent of the population in Bedford County up to 21.8% percent in Martinsville city. The national average food insecurity rate across all counties is 14%.

The study also finds that people currently facing hunger are likely falling further behind as they continue to struggle to buy enough food to meet their needs. Food-insecure individuals now face, on average, a food budget shortfall of \$17.01 per person each week, up from \$16.56 last year.

"This important research continues to show that Feeding America Southwest Virginia's mission is critical to the lives of those in our region facing hunger," says Pamela Irvine, Feeding America Southwest Virginia's President and CEO. "Residents who were already struggling find themselves struggling even more. In areas such as Virginia's coalfields, the challenging economic conditions mean even more people face food insecurity than in previous years."

Feeding America Southwest Virginia is one of 200 food banks in the Feeding America network that collectively provides food assistance to 46 million Americans struggling with hunger. Serving 26 counties and 9 cities through a network of more than 350 partner programs in Southwest Virginia, FASWVA distributed enough food to provide 14.6 million meals in 2016.

"It is disheartening to realize that millions of hardworking, low-income Americans are finding it increasingly difficult to feed themselves and their families at the same time that our economy is showing many signs of improvement, including a substantial decline in the number of people who are unemployed," said Diana Aviv, CEO of Feeding America. "This study underscores the need for strong federal nutrition programs as well of the importance of charitable food assistance programs, especially the food pantries and meal programs served by the Feeding America network of food banks."



*Map the Meal Gap 2017* uses data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and food price data and analysis provided by Nielsen (NYSE: [NLSN](#)), a global provider of information and insights. The study is supported by founding sponsor [The Howard G. Buffett Foundation](#), [Conagra Brands Foundation](#) and [Nielsen](#).

Key local findings:

- Eight localities in Southwest Virginia saw increases in the percentage of food insecure residents.
- Despite small decreases in food insecurity percentages, Martinsville and Danville remain the two localities with the highest rates of food insecurity in Southwest Virginia.
- Also hard hit are the already challenged coalfield-area counties, with Buchanan, Dickenson, Russell and Scott counties and Norton City seeing an increase in food insecurity.

Dr. Craig Gundersen, Professor of Agricultural and Consumer Economics at the University of Illinois, Executive Director of the National Soybean Research Laboratory and a member of Feeding America's Technical Advisory Group is the lead researcher of *Map the Meal Gap 2017*.

A summary of the findings, an interactive map of the United States, and the full report are available at [map.feedingamerica.org](http://map.feedingamerica.org).

Join the conversation about *Map the Meal Gap 2017* on Twitter using [#MealGap](#).

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### **About Feeding America Southwest Virginia**

Feeding America Southwest Virginia was founded in 1981 and proudly commemorates 36 years of fighting hunger and changing lives through community partnerships. The Food Bank is an affiliate member of Feeding America. For the last three and a half decades, the Food Bank's ultimate mission has remained the same: eliminate hunger in the region. The primary function of the Food Bank is to secure and distribute large quantities of food for the hungry. Approximately \$26.5 million worth of food and grocery related products are channeled annually through a network of more than 330 partner feeding programs in our 26-county, 9-city region that provide food or meals to those in need. Visit [www.faswva.org](http://www.faswva.org) for more information or like us on Facebook.

### **About Feeding America**

Feeding America is a nationwide network of 200 food banks that leads the fight against hunger in the United States. Together, we provide food to more than 46 million people through food pantries and meal programs in communities throughout America. Feeding America also supports programs that improve food security among the people we serve; educates the public about the problem of hunger; and advocates for legislation that protects people from going hungry. Individuals, charities, businesses and government all have a role in ending hunger. Donate. Volunteer. Advocate. Educate. Together we can solve hunger. Visit <http://www.feedingamerica.org/>. Find us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/FeedingAmerica](http://www.facebook.com/FeedingAmerica) or follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/FeedingAmerica](http://www.twitter.com/FeedingAmerica).