



UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY
CENTER FOR POVERTY RESEARCH

Food Insecurity in the U.S.

James P. Ziliak, Ph.D.
University of Kentucky



Acknowledgements

- ▶ Much of the work reported here draws from recent surveys co-authored with Craig Gundersen
 - Gundersen C, Ziliak J. 2014. “Childhood Food Insecurity in the U.S.: Trends, Causes, and Policy Options.” *The Future of Children*, Brookings-Princeton.
 - Gundersen C, Ziliak J. 2015. “Food Insecurity and Health Outcomes.” *Health Affairs*, 34(11): 1830-1839.
- ▶ I am grateful for funding from USDA FNS and ERS. All opinions are on my own.



What is Food Insecurity?

- ▶ U.S. Department of Agriculture defines food insecurity as “a household-level economic and social condition of limited access to food.”



Measuring Food Insecurity

- ▶ A household is placed into categories based on responses to 18 questions (10 if no child present) on the Core Food Security Module in the December Current Population Survey
 - A household is food insecure if they answer yes to at least 3 questions
 - A child is further deemed food insecure if the household answers yes to at least 2 child-focused questions



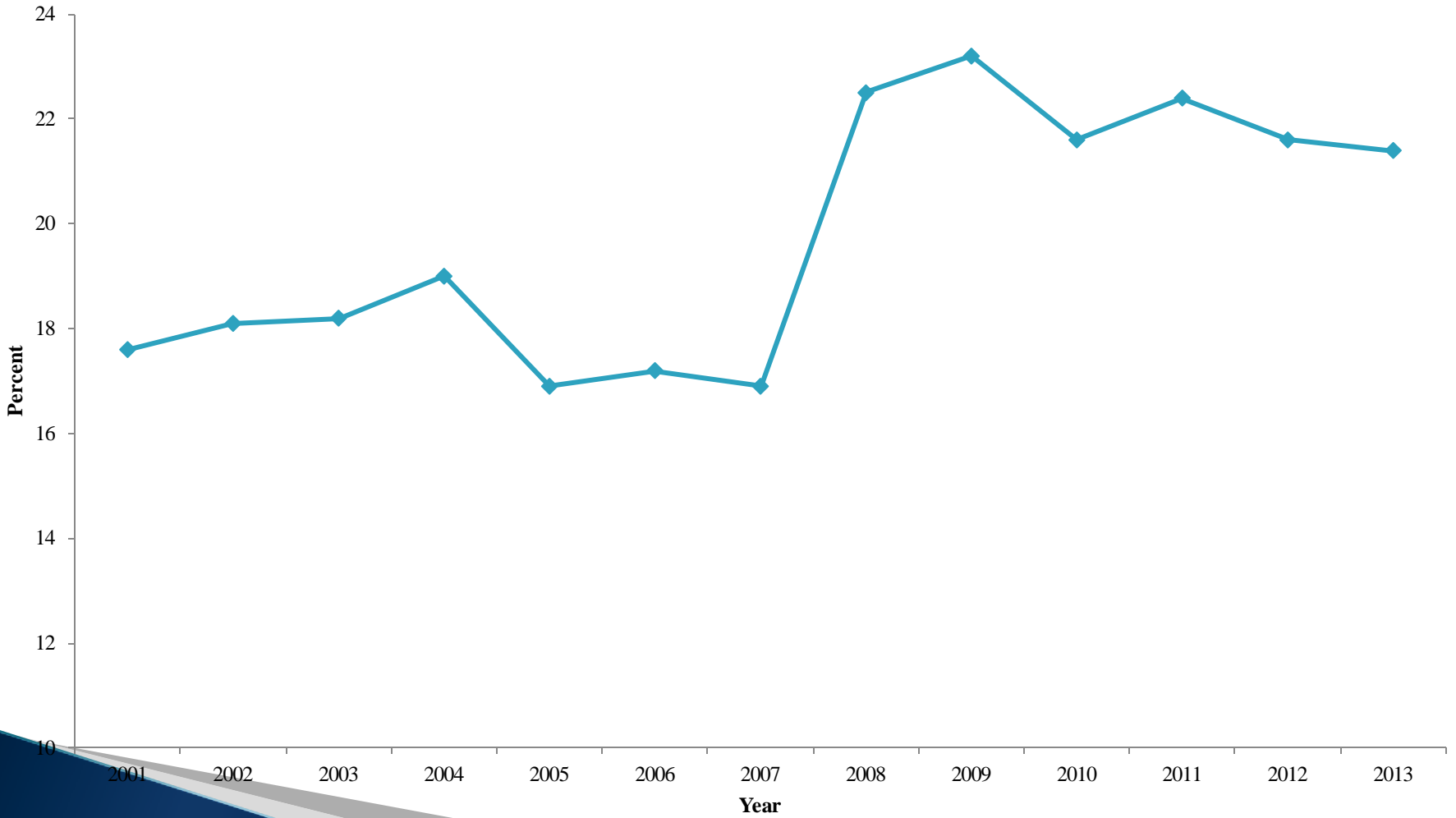
Measuring Food Insecurity

- ▶ Examples of questions
 - “I worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more”
 - “Did you or the other adults in your household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn’t enough money for food”
 - “Did you ever cut the size of any of the children’s meals because there wasn’t enough money for food?”
 - “Did any of the children ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn’t enough money for food?”



More than 1 in 5 Children Live in Food Insecure Households

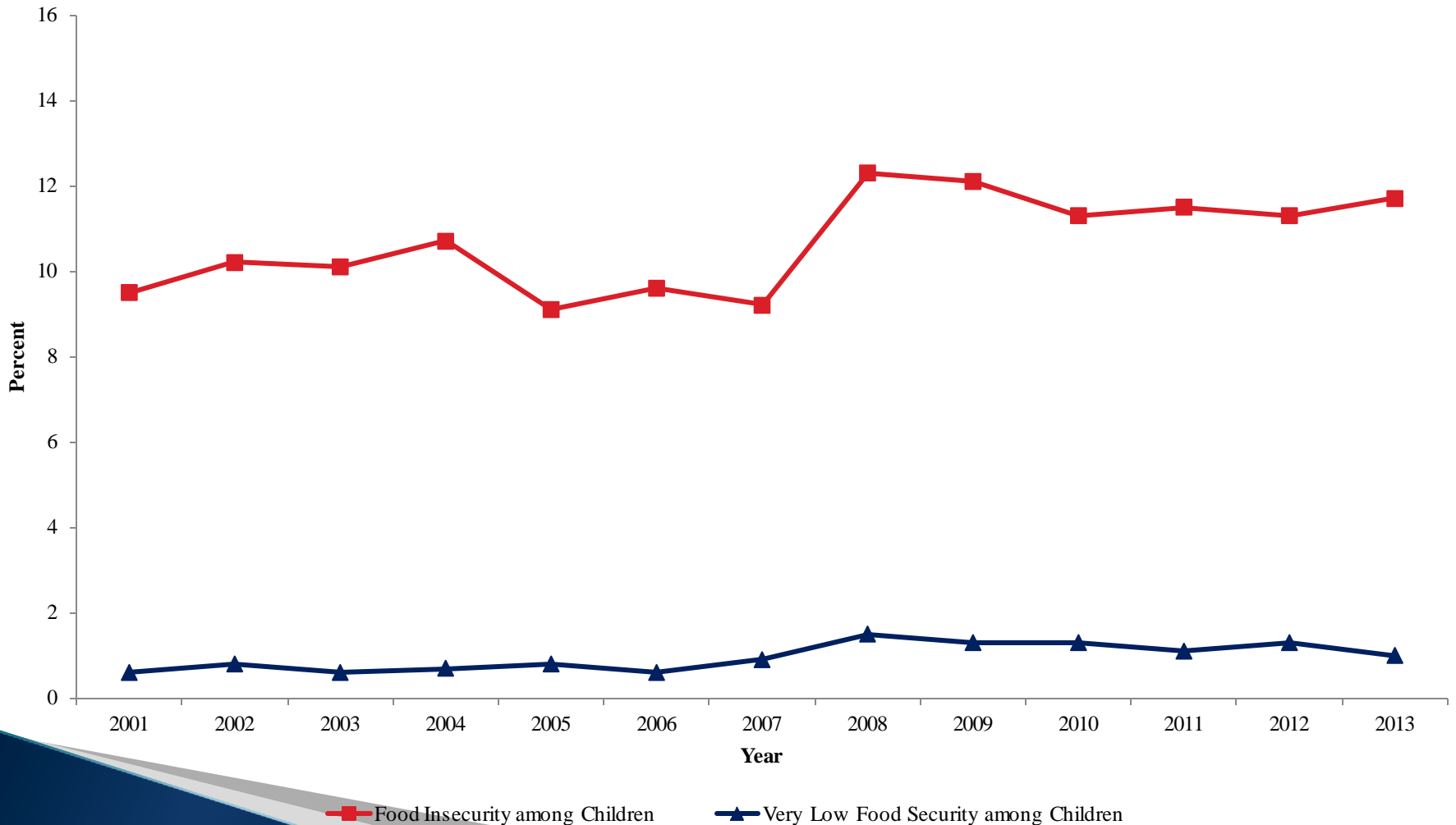
Trends in Food Insecurity among Children





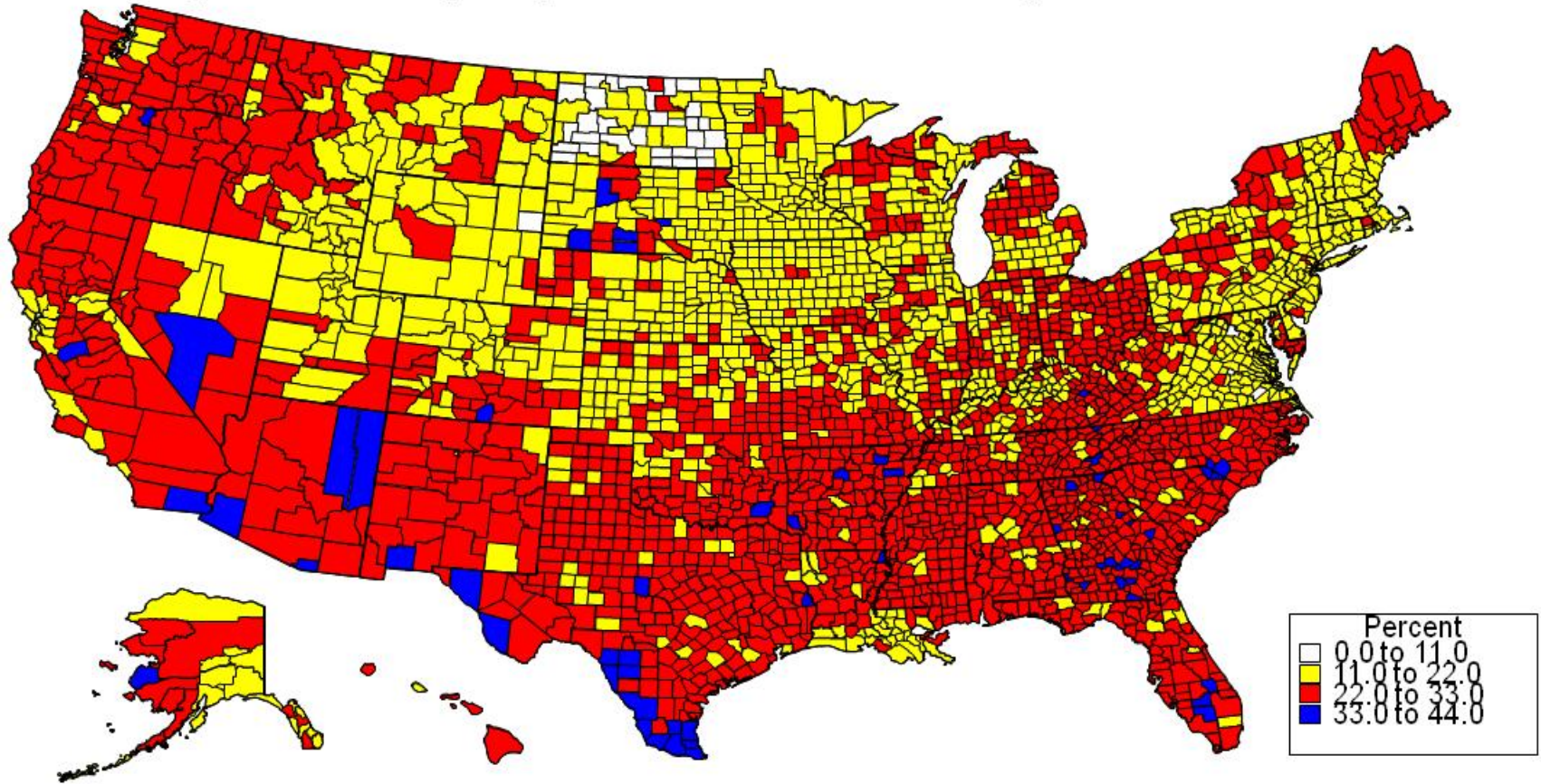
And more than 1 in 9 Children are Food Insecure

Trends in Food Insecurity among Children



Children in Food Insecure Households are Widespread across the U.S.

Figure 2. County Map of Child Food Insecurity Rates in 2012





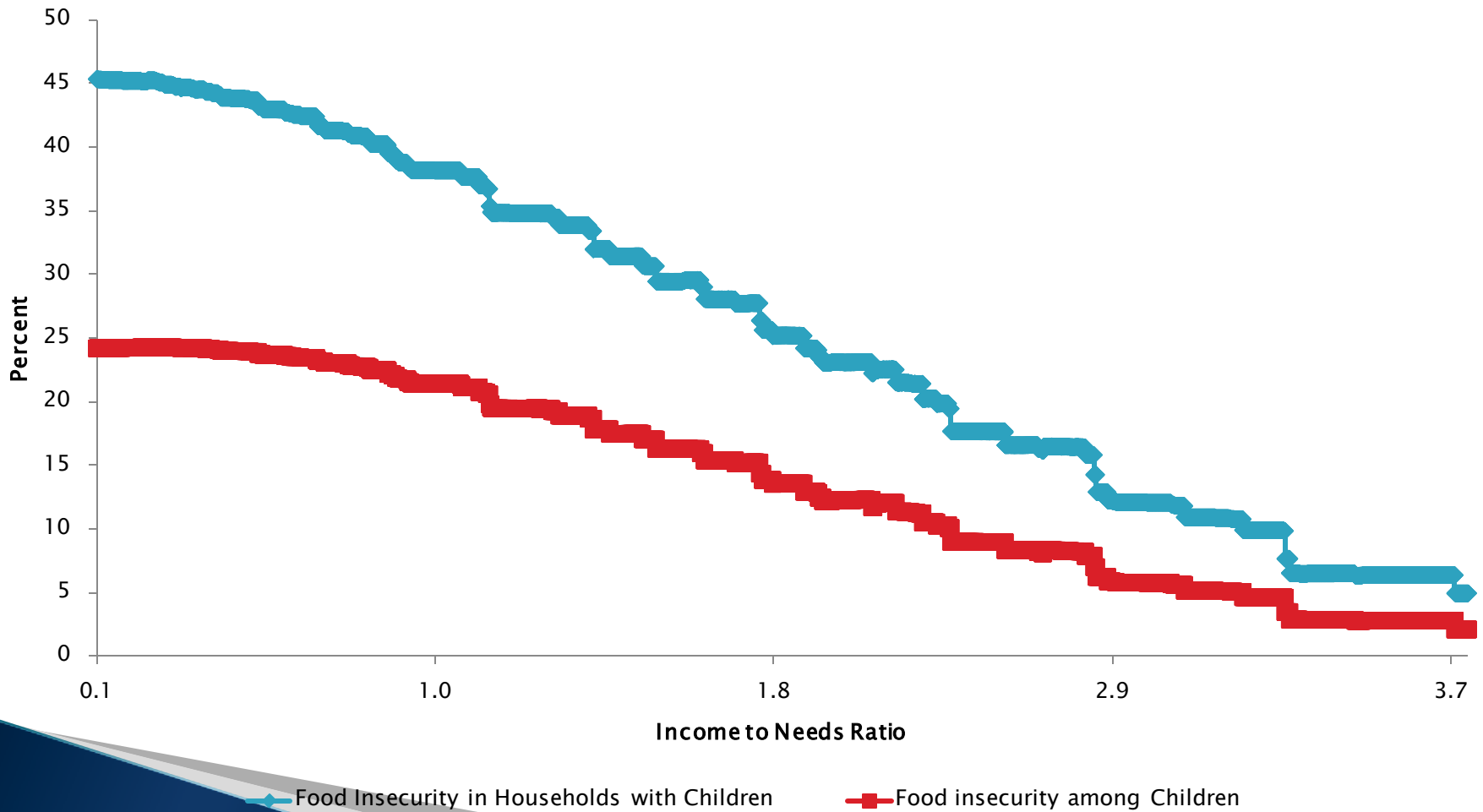
Why?

- ▶ Low incomes are a leading determinant of food insecurity in the U.S.



Low Incomes are a Leading Factor

Figure 3. Relationship Between Food Insecurity among Children and Income, 2012





Why?

- ▶ But income is only part of the story, making any policy response more challenging
- ▶ Series of studies on child food insecurity sponsored by UKCPR since 2010, with underwriting from the Food and Nutrition Service in USDA
 - <http://www.ukcpr.org/research/childhood-hunger>



Among Children other Factors Include

- ▶ Mother's mental health
- ▶ Disability
- ▶ Immigrant status
- ▶ Complex families
- ▶ Inconsistent/Non-existent child support
- ▶ Housing instability
- ▶ Financial management
- ▶ (High) local food prices
- ▶ Summertime



Among Households with Children, Negative Health Consequences Include

- ▶ higher risks of some birth defects
- ▶ lower nutrient intakes
- ▶ greater cognitive problems
- ▶ higher levels of aggression and anxiety
- ▶ poorer general health
- ▶ higher probability of mental health issues
- ▶ higher probability of anemia and asthma
- ▶ higher probability of behavioral problems
- ▶ more instances of oral health problems



Among Seniors other Factors Include

- ▶ Age
- ▶ Disability
- ▶ Education Attainment
- ▶ Race/Ethnicity
- ▶ Marital Status
- ▶ Social Isolation
- ▶ Presence of Grandchildren
- ▶ Home Ownership

- ▶ series of studies by Gundersen and Ziliak (2008, 2009, 2011-2015)



Among Seniors, Food Insecurity is Associated with Worse Nutrient and Health Outcomes, and some of these Effects are Large



Figure 2. Regression-Adjusted Estimates of the Effect of Food Insecurity on Nutrient Intakes of Seniors 60+ (Percent Change Relative to Average of Food Secure Seniors)

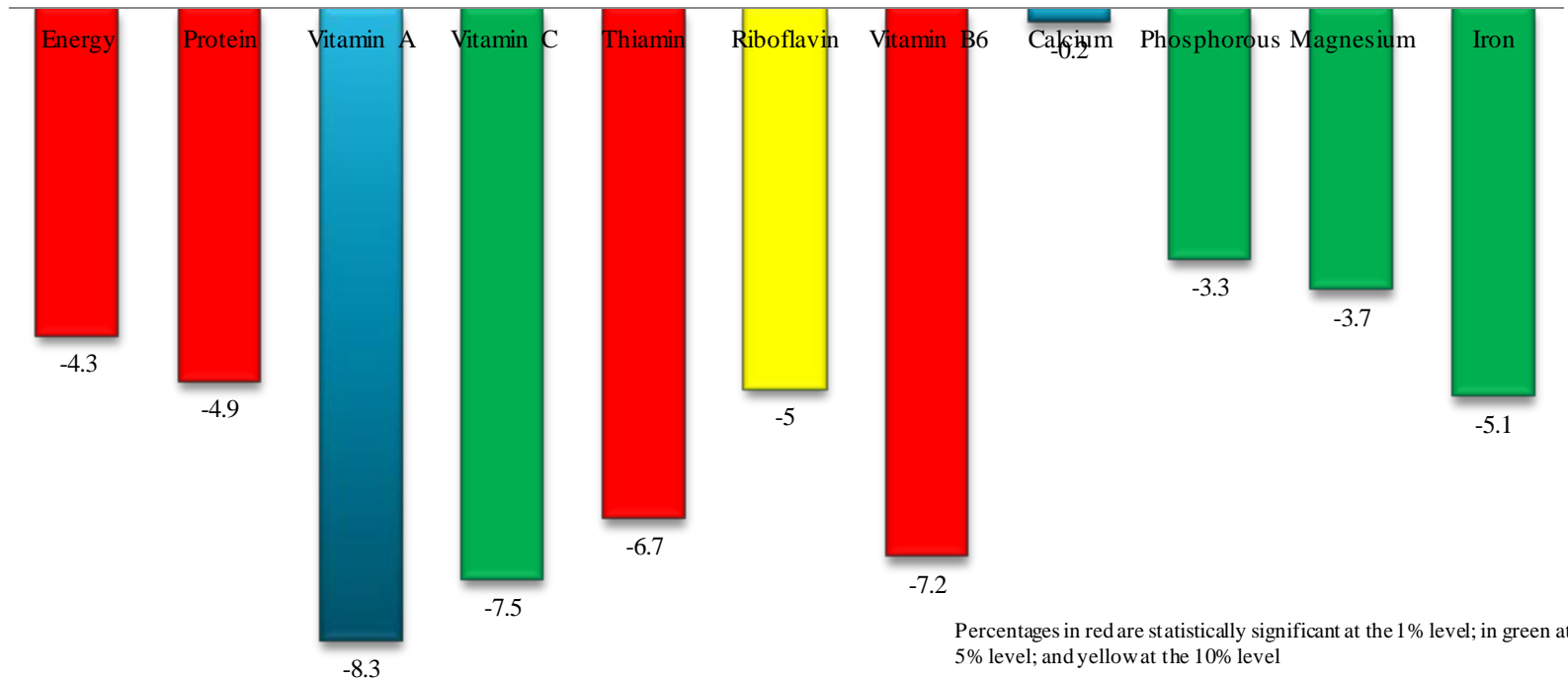
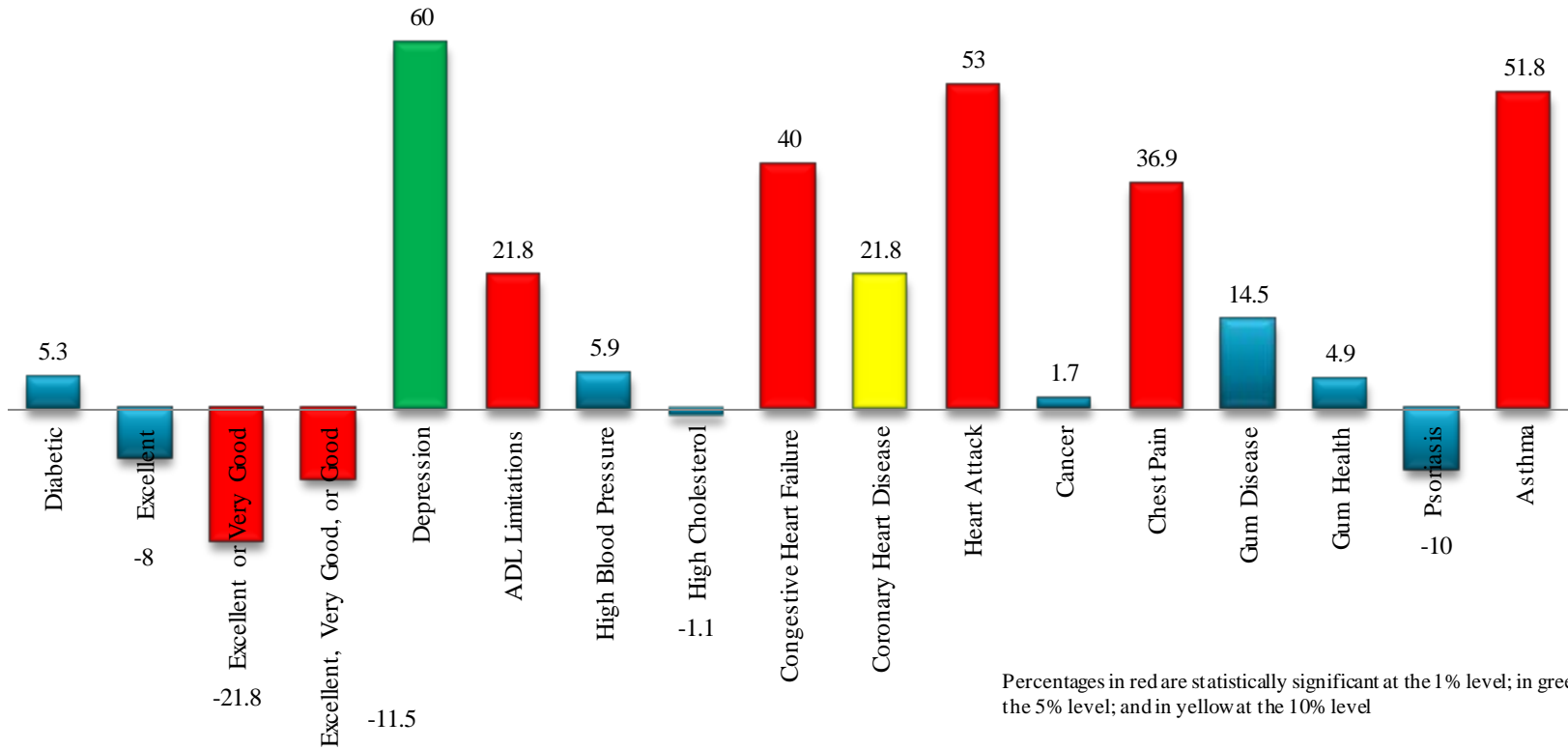




Figure 3. Regression-Adjusted Estimates of the Effect of Food Insecurity on Health Outcomes of Seniors 60+ (Percent Change Relative to Average of Food Secure Seniors)





Policy Response

- ▶ Federal Food Assistance Programs
 - SNAP
 - National School Lunch Program
 - School Breakfast Program
 - WIC
 - Child and Adult Care Food Program

- ▶ Other Safety Net Programs
 - e.g. EITC, refundable CTC
- ▶ Emergency Food Network
- ▶ Colleen will discuss!



Research Needs

- ▶ Causality, especially on health outcomes
 - new NHIS studies funded by UKCPR (ERS/FNS)
- ▶ The role of human capital
- ▶ Vulnerable populations, especially disabled and homeless
 - Efficacy of (two-item) screener in health care settings
- ▶ Longitudinal studies, and data infrastructure
 - FoodAPS, PSID
- ▶ Mixed-methods studies