

**Household Food Security:
What Can It Tell Us about
Poverty and Place?**

Mark Nord
Economic Research Service
USDA

Outline of Presentation

- **Good places to survive**
- **A problem with the U.S. poverty measure**
- **Household food security measurement**
- **Why Oregon?**
- **Does it cost less to live in rural areas?**
- **Does food cost less in rural areas?**

High-Poverty Areas

- **Good places to survive**
- **Poor places to prosper**

A Problem with the U.S. Poverty Measure....

Evidence of cost-of-living differences among geographic areas--such as between metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas--suggests that the poverty thresholds should be adjusted accordingly,

but . . .

inadequate data make it difficult to determine appropriate adjustments.

--Committee on National Statistics, 1995

The CNSTAT Panel recommended...

“The poverty thresholds should be adjusted for differences in the cost of housing across geographic areas of the country...

...for nine regions and, within each region, for several population size categories of metropolitan areas.”

...and further research.

Food Security, Food Insecurity, Hunger Conceptual Definitions (AIN)

Food Security: Access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.

Food Insecurity: Limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.

Hunger: The uneasy or painful sensation caused by a lack of food.
The recurrent and involuntary lack of access to food.

How is food security measured?



Food secure

Food insecure

Hunger

Severe hunger

Examples of Food Security Survey Items

“The food that we bought just didn’t last, and we didn’t have money to get more.” Was that often, sometimes or never true for you in the last 12 months?

In the last 12 months, did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn’t enough money for food?

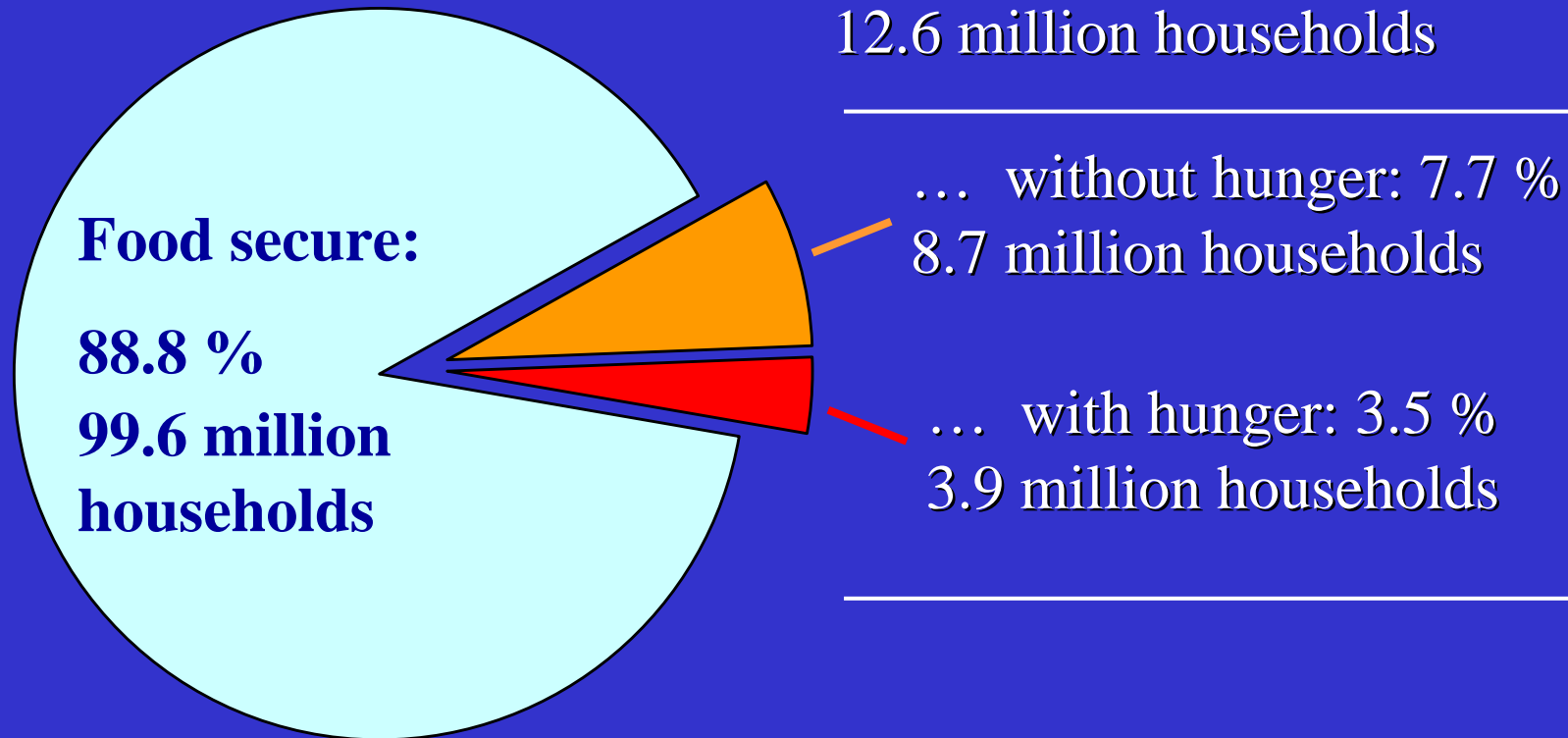
In the last 12 months, did you ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn’t enough money for food?

Categories of food security

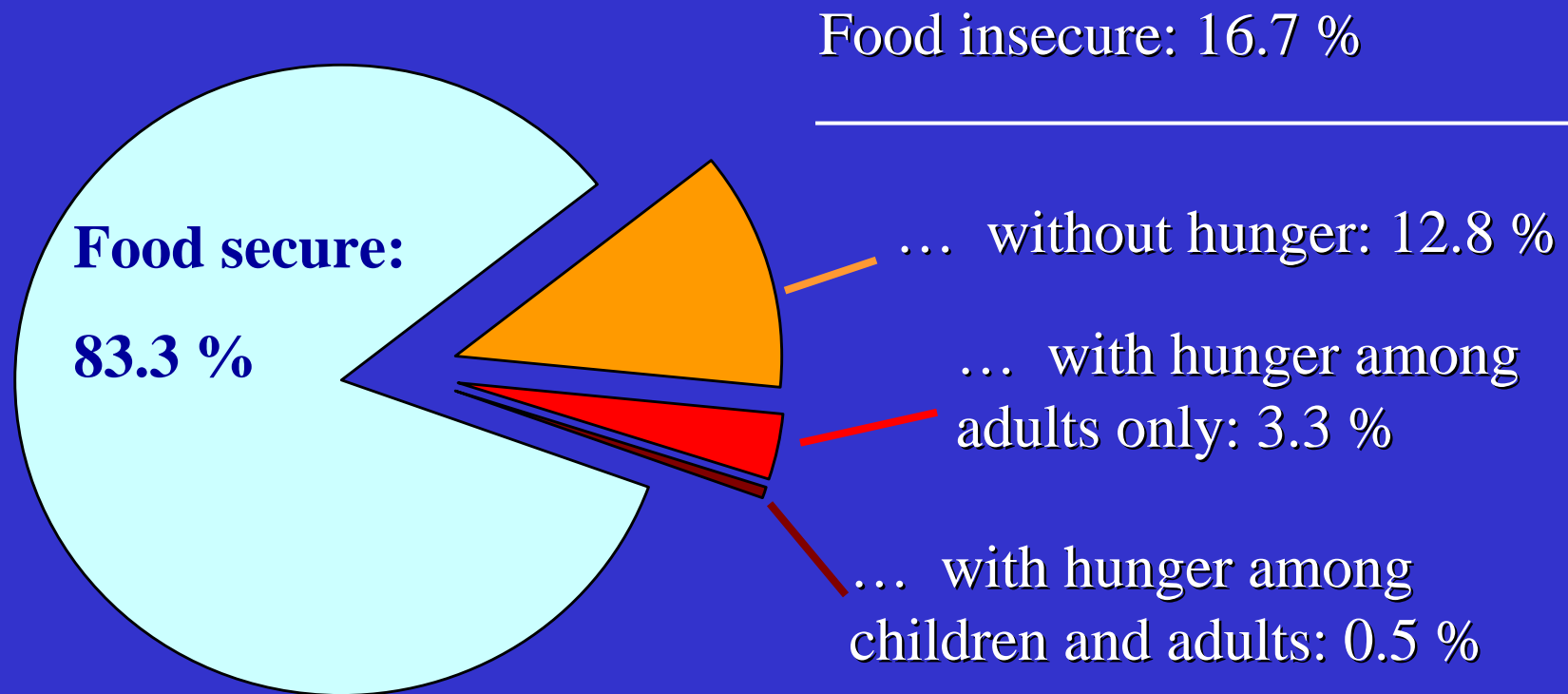
Raw score	
0	Food secure
1	
2	
3	Food insecure without hunger
4	
5	
6	Food insecure with hunger
7	
8	
9	
10	

Food security status of U.S. households, 2003

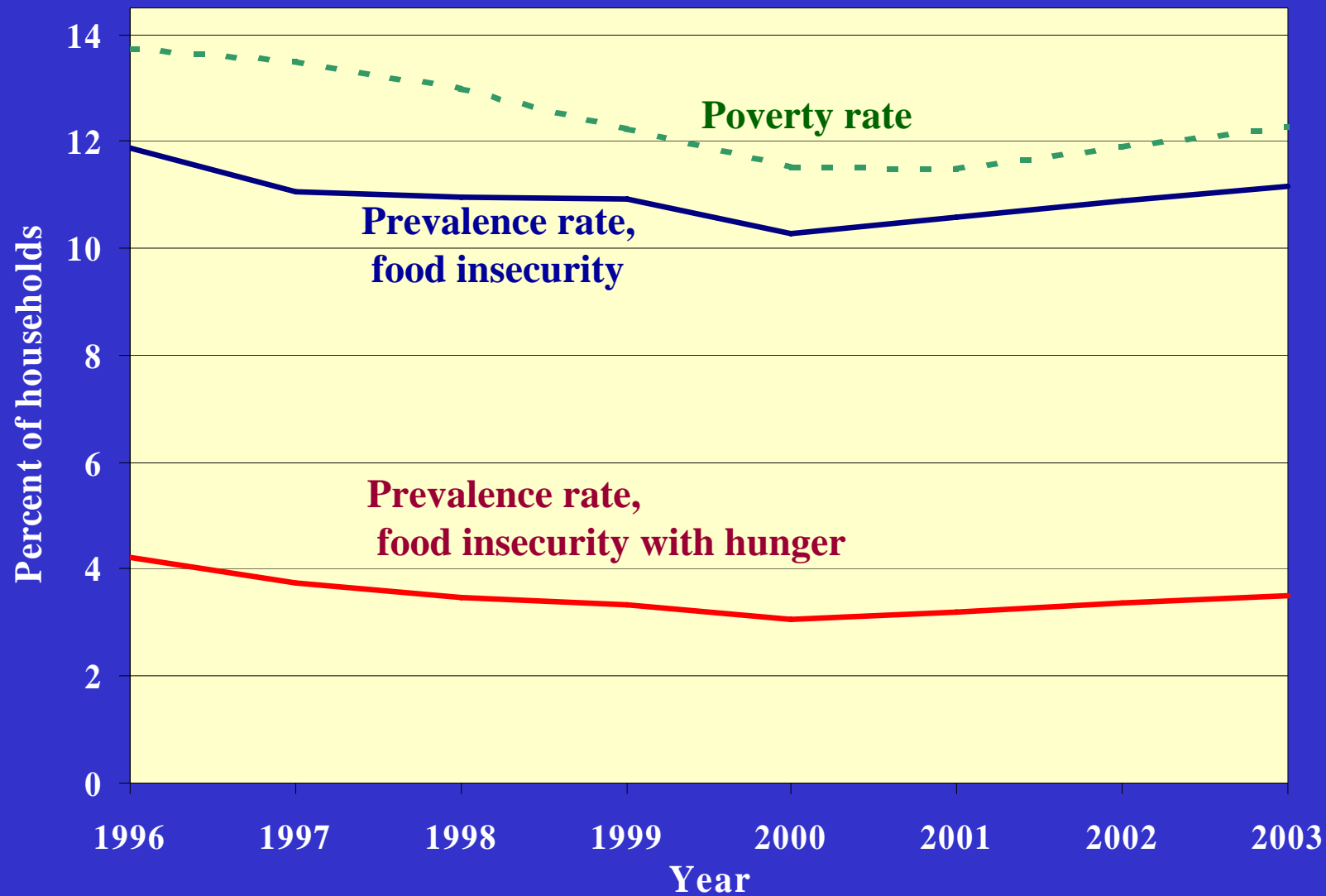
(Nord, Andrews, and Carlson, 2004)



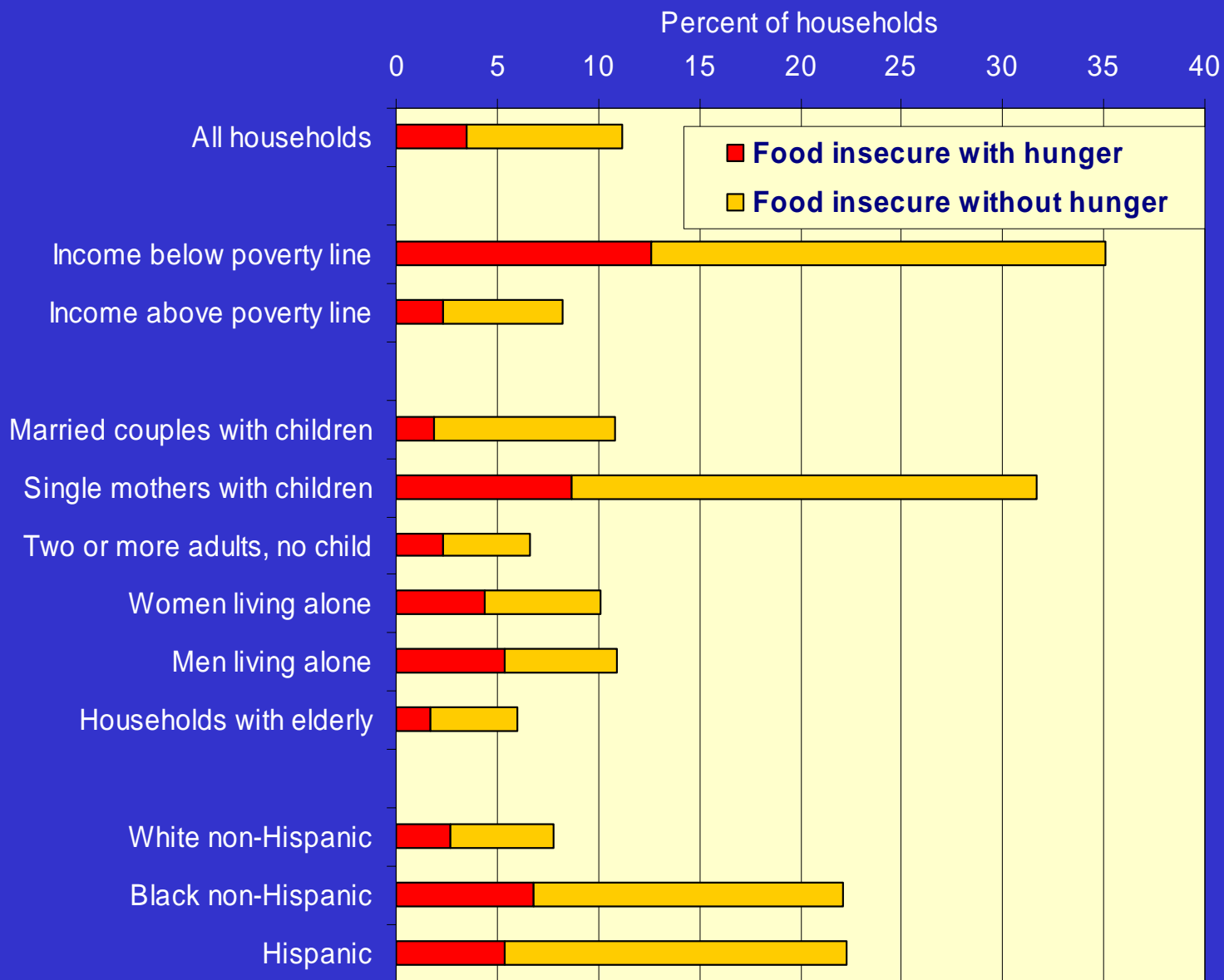
Food security status of U.S. households with children, 2003



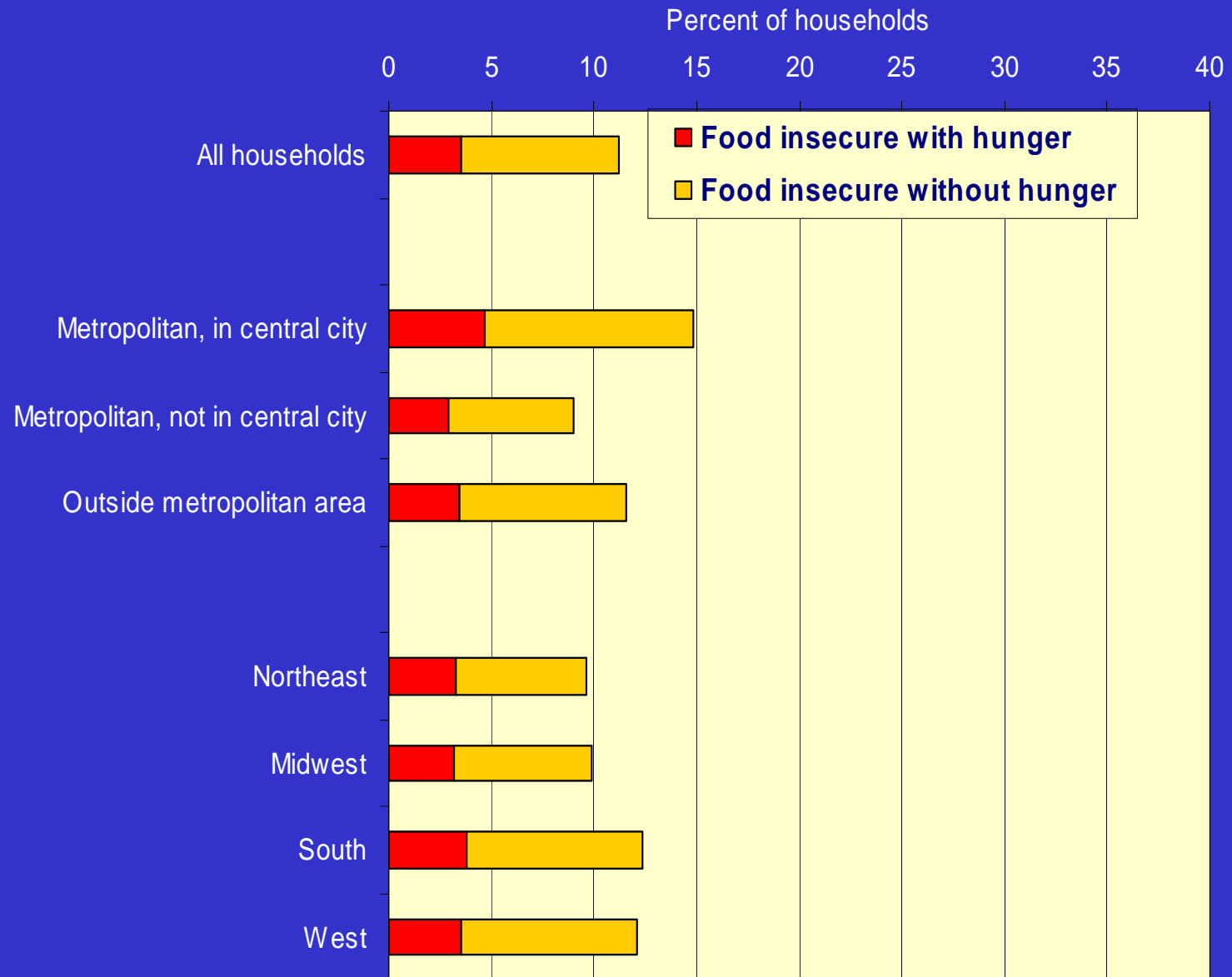
Trends in food insecurity and hunger in the U.S. (2-year averages)



Prevalence of food insecurity by selected household characteristics, 2003



Where were food insecure households located?

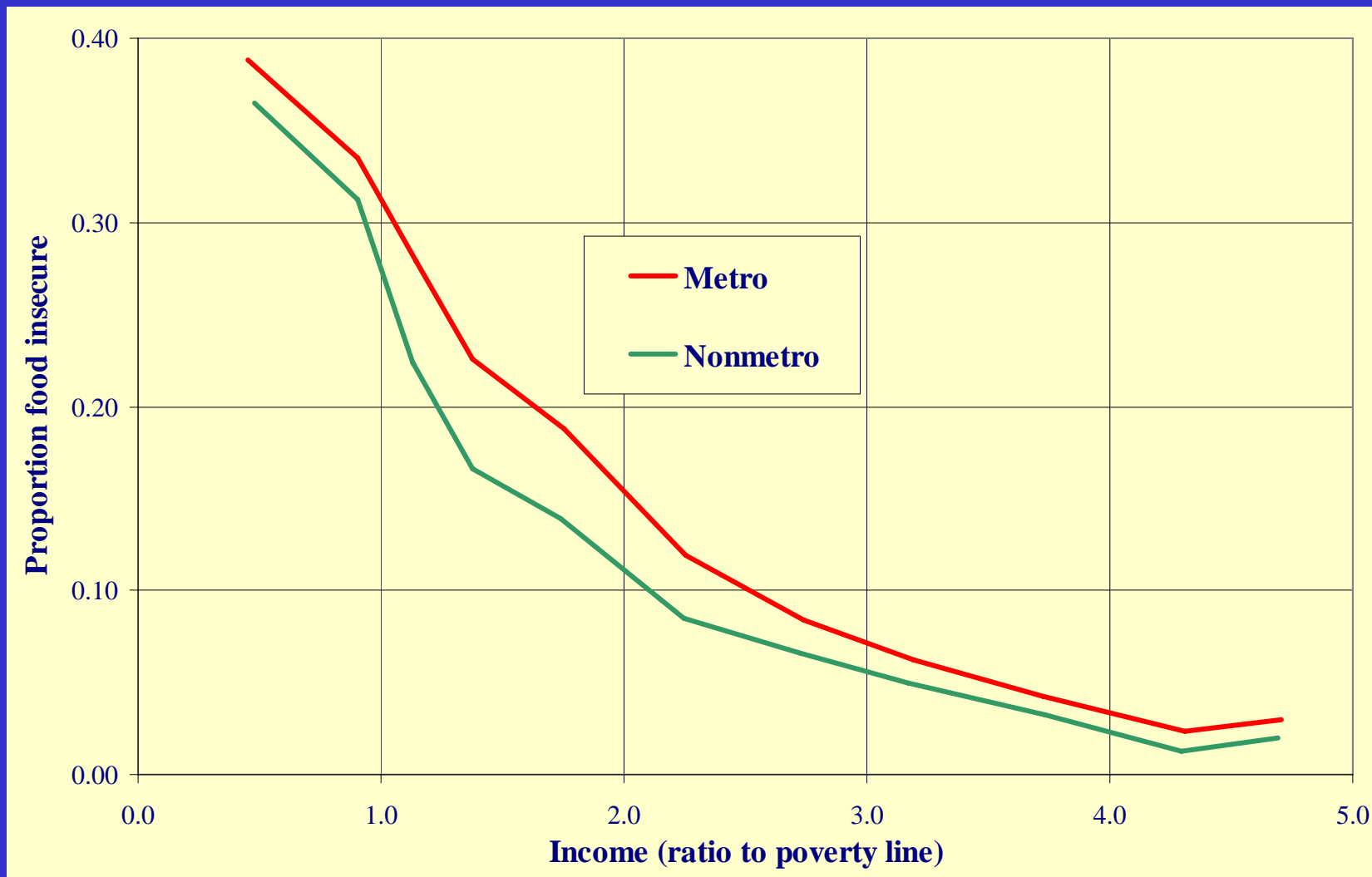


Correlates of State-Level Food Insecurity

(Tapogna et al., forthcoming; Bartfeld and Dunifon, 2004)

- Cost of housing
- Unemployment (and seasonally high unemployment)
- Poverty rate
- Residential mobility
- Proportion under age 18
- Tax burden on low-income
- Accessibility of food assistance programs

Prevalence of food insecurity by income in U.S. households, average 2001-03

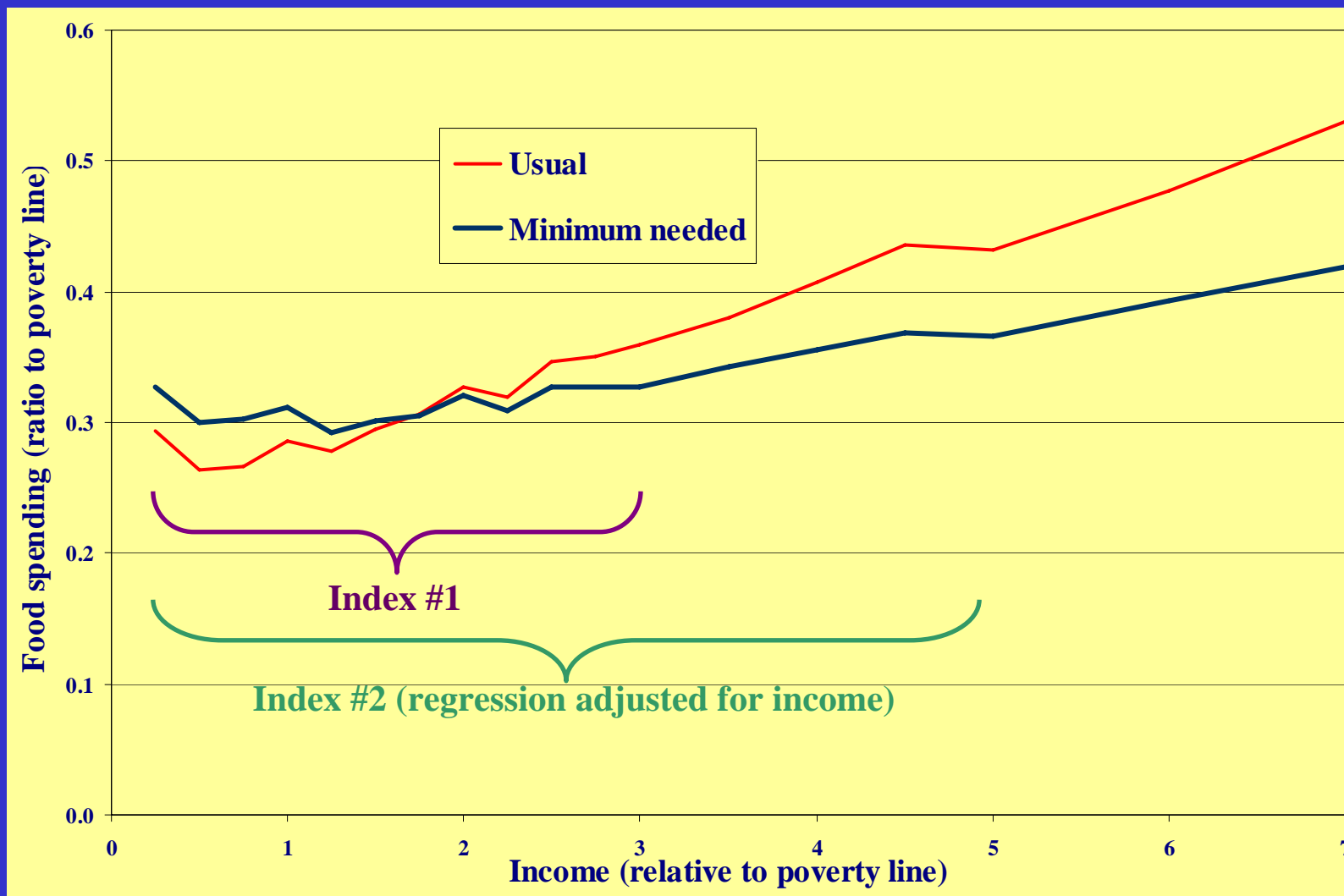


Cost of living: Implications of Food Security

(Nord, 2000)

- It costs about 16 percent less, on average, to live in rural rather than urban areas.
- The official poverty rate overstates rural economic hardship compared with that in urban areas.
- Rural cost of living varies considerably across Census Divisions, from near national average in the Pacific Division to 18 percent below the national average in the South Central Divisions
- Adjustment of the poverty line for housing cost only would over-adjust

Usual food spending and minimum needed food spending in U.S. households, by income (2000-02)



Cost of living: Implications of Minimum Food Spending needed

(Nord and Leibtag, 2004)

- The cost of (“enough”) food is lower in nonmetro than in metro areas:
 - ✓ Difference is between 11 and 14 percent at the national level
 - ✓ True in each of the nine Census Divisions
 - ✓ True in all but a few States
- Income and poverty measures that are not adjusted for cost of living differences overstate the extent of material hardship in nonmetro areas compared with metro areas.
- The lack of interarea price and cost-of-living measures in the U.S. hampers research on regional and rural-urban economic differences.

For more information....

www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/foodsecurity