



## **2022 UTAS Student and Staff Sustainability Survey Prevalence of Food Insecurity**

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## 2022 UTAS Student and Staff Sustainability Survey Prevalence of Food Insecurity

The 2022 University of Tasmania Student and Staff Sustainability Surveys were open to all staff and students from 11-20 March 2022. In this short report, 6 food security questions from the student survey and the same 6 food security questions from the staff survey have been analysed and interpreted. This is the second time that food security has been included in the Tasmanian Student Sustainability Survey, the first in 2020, with the intention to continue to monitor the prevalence of food insecurity among our students and to inform the need to transition to more equitable and sustainable food systems across our UTAS campuses

### What is food insecurity?

A person is food insecure when they lack regular access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life. This may be due to unavailability of food and/or lack of resources to obtain food. Food insecurity can be experienced at different levels of severity.

Using the USDA 6-item Household Food Security Short Form (6-item HFSSM) we can determine the severity of food insecurity faced by UTAS staff and students (see survey form in Appendix 1). From the number of affirmative responses to this survey, we are able to determine how many survey respondents experience food insecurity, and to what extent they are affected.

#### Food Security

- *High food security*: no reported indications of food-access problems or limitations.

#### Food Insecurity

- *Marginal food security*: one or two reported indications—typically of anxiety over a shortage of food in the house.
- *Low food security*: two to four reported indications—reports of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet.
- *Very low food security*: five or six reported indications— reports of multiple times of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.

### Summary of findings of the UTAS Staff and Student Sustainability Survey 2022

- **The prevalence of food insecurity among UTAS students responding to the survey is 42%** with 8% of students having marginal food security, 17% of students having low food security and 17% of students having very low food security.
- **The prevalence of food insecurity among UTAS staff responding to this survey is 17%** with 4% of staff having marginal food security, 6% of staff with low food security and 7% of staff with very low food security.

- There is a clear need to address the issue of food insecurity for both UTAS students and staff. This analysis points to specific groups of students and staff that are at increased risk of food who should be the focus of food security initiatives at the University of Tasmania.

## Summary of actions in-progress

UTAS recognises the need for a plan to transition to more equitable and sustainable food systems for our students and staff across our campuses.

*Actions in-progress at the campus level include:*

- The recent appointment of our community garden coordinator to embed a sustainable food systems approach within our new \$300m campus developments and operations
- The co-design of a UTAS Sustainable Food Strategy with students and staff
- Transition to small catering contractors on-campus rather than one multinational contractor
- The establishment of the Sustainability Committee's Sustainable Food Systems Working Group
- Monitoring of the University's food environment using the Uni-Food Assessment Tool to benchmark its healthiness, equity, and environmental Sustainability<sup>1</sup>

*Actions in-progress at the community level include:*

- The transition towards student-led food solutions such as the student gardening and cooking societies supported by our community gardening coordinator
- The co-design of a food-skills program for students
- Working alongside Tasmanian University Student Association (TUSA) to establish the Freshie vegetable bag scheme for students
- UTAS community days providing opportunities for students to connect with others and share a weekly free meal

## UTAS Student Food Security

### Key Findings:

- **The prevalence of food insecurity among UTAS students who responded to the survey was 42%**, with most food insecure students experiencing low and very low food security, meaning they are regularly running out of food and experiencing hunger.
- The prevalence of food insecurity is higher than in 2020 where 38% of UTAS student respondents were food insecure.
- Food insecurity was higher among students aged <35 years, international students, students who do not identify as either male or female, first year students and on-campus enrolled students.
- Of those students who were food insecure, most (82%) had low or very low food security.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/18/22/11895>

## Food Security Status

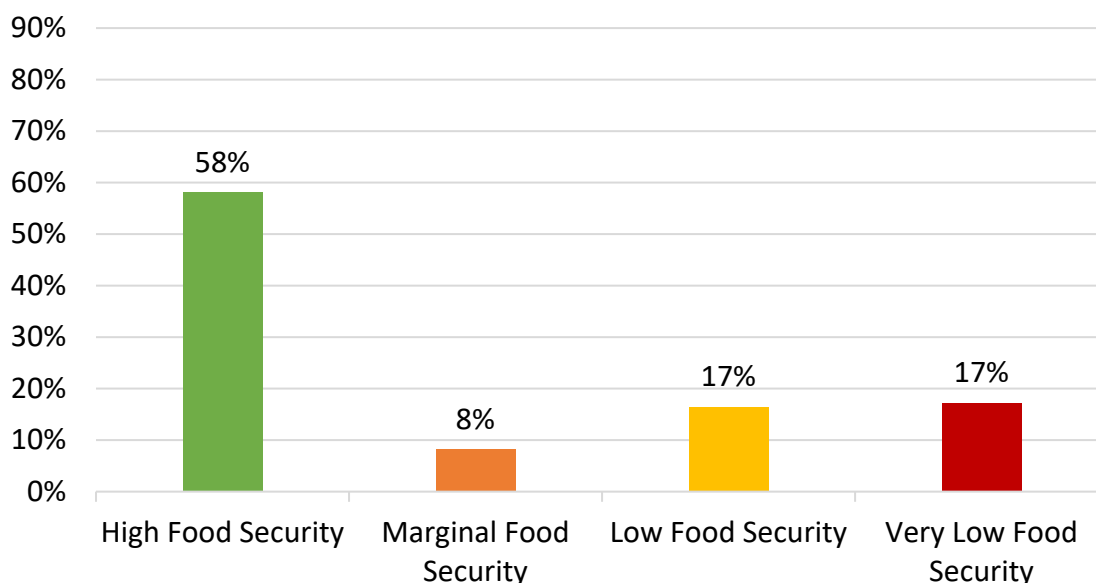


Figure 1 Student Food Security Status according to the 6-item HFSSM (n=1,256)

Of the 1,256 valid survey responses to the 6-item HFSSM, 42% (n=527) student respondents were classified as experiencing food insecurity. Of these, 8% of students marginally food secure meaning they are worried about keeping food on the table. A further 17% of students were classified as having low food security, meaning they are eating less or lower quality food than they would like as a result of food insecurity. Concerningly, a further 17% of students experienced very low food security which means they are regularly skipping meals and going without food.

These statistics are higher in comparison to the 2020 UTAS Sustainability survey which reported that 38% of students were food insecure. However, the 2020 survey utilised a single-item screening tool which is not directly comparable to the 2022 survey, which uses a more sensitive tool that can classify according to the severity of food insecurity.

### Students at higher risk of food insecurity

The groups of students at highest risk of food insecurity were determined using multivariate binary logistic regression, identifying that food insecurity was higher in students aged <35 years, international students, students who do not identify as either male or female, first year students and on-campus enrolled students.

- The prevalence of food insecurity was 48% for students aged 18-24, and 47% for students aged 25-34. In comparison with students aged 35 years and over, younger students aged 18–24 years were 2.6 times more likely to be food insecure and students aged 25–34 years were 2.3 times more likely to be food insecure, adjusting for other factors.
- Most students (69%) who did **not** identify as either male or female reported being food insecure. In comparison to male and female identifying students, they were 3.5 times more likely to be food insecure after accounting for other factors.
- Most international students (61%) were classified as food insecure compared with 34% of domestic students. International students were 2.1 times more likely to be food insecure compared to domestic enrolled students in the multivariate regression.

- Nearly half (48%) of on campus students were food insecure compared to a third (33%) of distance enrolled students. This was related to domestic/international enrolment in the multivariate analysis and when considered in isolation from this variable, on campus students were 60% more likely to be food insecure compared to distance enrolled students.
- 45% of first year students were classified as food insecure compared with 41% of second year and 38% of third year students. First year students were 40% more likely to be food insecure compared to students who have been studying at UTAS 3 years or more when adjusting for other factors.

## UTAS Staff Food Security

### Key findings

- This survey is the first to determine the prevalence of food insecurity among a sample of staff at UTAS.
- Most staff who responded to the survey (83%) were food secure.
- **The prevalence of food insecurity among UTAS staff who responded to the survey was 17%, with a large proportion of food insecure staff experiencing the most severe type of food insecurity.**
- Food insecurity was highest for casual staff, new staff members, and professional staff.
- Of those staff who were food insecure, most (76%) had low or very low food security.
- This survey showed a similar prevalence to the Tasmanian population<sup>2</sup>

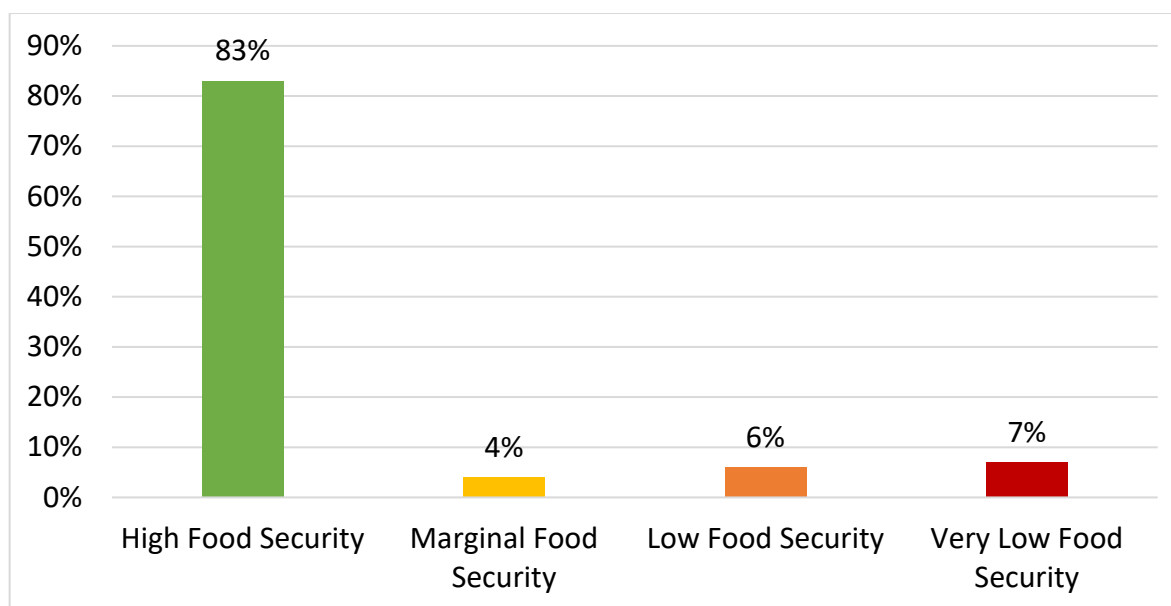


Figure 2 Staff Food Security Status according to the 6-item HFSSM (n=560)

Of the 560 UTAS staff who completed valid survey responses to the 6-item HFSSM, 16% (n=91) of respondents reported experiencing some degree of food insecurity. Of those, 4% experienced marginal food security, 6% experienced low food security and 7% experienced very low food security.

<sup>2</sup> [https://blogs.utas.edu.au/isc/files/2021/06/TTP4-Food-Security\\_Final\\_v3.pdf](https://blogs.utas.edu.au/isc/files/2021/06/TTP4-Food-Security_Final_v3.pdf)

### **Staff members at increased risk of food insecurity**

Professional staff members, casual staff members, and new staff members were at highest risk of food insecurity when analysed using multivariate logistic regression.

- In relation to role type, 19% of professional staff experienced food insecurity and were shown to be 80% more likely to experience food insecurity compared to academic staff members.
- In terms of employment contract type, 35% of casual staff experience food insecurity and were 2.5 times more likely to experience food insecurity compared to tenured or permanent staff.
- Food insecurity differed by length of employment for UTAS staff members, where 31% of staff who had been employed for less than a year reported food insecurity and 25% of staff who were employed for one to three years' experienced food insecurity. In comparison to those who had been employed for ten years or more, staff employed for less than a year were 3.6 times more likely to be food insecure and staff employed for between one to three years were 2.5 times more likely to be food insecure.

## Appendix

Food security questions included in the UTAS Student and Staff Sustainability Survey using the USDA 6-item Household Food Security Short Form (6-item HFSSM)<sup>3</sup>

Please answer the following food access questions in relation to THE PAST 12 MONTHS

1. Was there any time you have run out of food and not been able to purchase more?
  - a) Don't Know
  - b) Never
  - c) In only 1 or 2 months
  - d) Some months but not every month
  - e) Almost every month
  
2. Was there a time you couldn't afford to eat balanced meals?
  - a) Don't Know
  - b) Never
  - c) In only 1 or 2 months
  - d) Some months but not every month
  - e) Almost every month
  
3. Did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food? Yes or no.
  
4. How often did this happen?
  - a) Don't Know
  - b) Never
  - c) In only 1 or 2 months
  - d) Some months but not every month
  - e) Almost every month
  
5. Did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?
  - a) Don't Know
  - b) Never
  - c) In only 1 or 2 months
  - d) Some months but not every month
  - e) Almost every month
  
6. Were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?
  - a) Don't Know
  - b) Never
  - c) In only 1 or 2 months
  - d) Some months but not every month
  - e) Almost every month

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<sup>3</sup> [Six-item Short Form Food Security Survey Module \(usda.gov\)](https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/six-item-short-form-food-security-survey-module)