Background
Food insecurity is associated with high rates of obesity and morbidity and mortality. The goal of food programs is to reduce food insecurity. Inaccurate data and decreased participation in food programs minimizes impact. Rural Appalachia has disproportionately higher rates of food insecurity than non-Appalachian areas. This region also has unique cultural norms that pose challenges in addressing food-insecurity issues.

Methods
Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants (N=13) to elicit perceptions of assessments of food insecurity. Content analysis was conducted. Open and axial coding were used to identify and interconnect major themes.

Results
Stigma related to self-reliance expectations emerged as a major barrier to reporting food insecurity, childhood hunger, and participation of children in food-assistance programs. These expectations resulted in the fear of being perceived as having poor parenting skills, not providing food for children, fear that child protective services would take their children away due to lack of proper food, concerns about breaking cultural norms of not accepting charity or publicly “airing laundry” and mistrust of government authority.

Conclusion
This study suggests that responses to food security assessments are likely influenced by self-reliance, respect for privacy, and need for earned trust, all characteristics of the Appalachian culture. Assessment of food security should be culturally sensitive in order to obtain accurate baseline and post intervention data and increase participation in programs. Potential improvements to address stigma-related barriers in data collection and intervention design include omitting questions specific to children since general questions on the HFSSM accurately measure household food insecurity.

Abstract
The purpose of this qualitative study in rural Appalachia was to explore cultural issues related to food insecurity and childhood hunger. Qualitative interviews were conducted with participants living in rural Appalachia (N=13). Stigma related to cultural expectations emerged as a major barrier to reporting food insecurity, childhood hunger, and participation of children in food-assistance programs.