

Reducing Hunger & Food Insecurity

"I go hungry all too often, but no one knows this – I 'don't look sick.' "
– (signed) Disabled and alone, Tucson, AZ
(www.secondharvest.org/hunger_stories.asp)

The Data

- **Millions of Americans are food insecure.** More than one in every nine households in the U.S. experiences food insecurity, the difficulty of providing enough food for all members, during the year. This represents about 36 million people, including 13 million children. (M. Nord et.al., *Household Food Security in the U.S., 2003*, Economic Research Service, USDA, Oct. 2004)
- **Demand is rising for emergency assistance.** A survey of major U.S. cities shows that demand is increasing for emergency food assistance, but 20% of the requests have gone unmet because of lack of local resources. (*US Conference of Mayors—Sodexo USA Hunger and Homelessness Survey 2004*, www.usmayors.org)
- **Hunger hurts child development.** Even mild under-nutrition experienced by young children during critical periods of growth may lead to reduction in physical growth and affect brain development. (*Childhood Hunger Fact Sheet*, www.secondharvest.org) Inadequate food energy intake and nutrient deficiencies can produce impaired cognitive development and lower academic achievement. (*Differences in Nutrient Adequacy among Poor and Non-Poor Children Fact Sheet*, www.secondharvest.org)

The Issues

- **Poverty limits food expenditures.** Food insecure households spend less on food than food-secure households do. In 2001, the median food-secure household spent \$123 per week compared to \$93 per week by food-insecure households. (*"Putting Food on the Table,"* Amber Waves, February, 2003, www.ers.usda.gov) High housing costs, which are likely to be paid first, exacerbate the problem.
- **Poverty changes food spending and nutrition patterns.** Households without money to buy enough food first change their purchasing and eating habits—relying on cheaper, high caloric foods over more expensive, nutrient-rich foods—before they cut back on the amount of food. Families try to maximize caloric intake for each dollar spent. (www.frac.org/html/hunger_in_the_us/hunger&obesity.htm)
- **Low-income families depend on assistance for food.** In 2001, 3 million households obtained food from food pantries at least once during the year, with 20% using them almost every month. (*"Putting Food on the Table,"* above) When the 16 million children who receive free or reduced price lunches through the School Lunch Program are out in the summer, food pantries and soup kitchens report seeing them more often. (www.hungerday.org/child_hunger_factsheet.html)
- **Lack of access to emergency food supplies.** Among food-insecure households that didn't use a food pantry, 28% reported their community had no such resource, and an additional 19% said they didn't know if there was one. (*"Putting Food on the Table,"* above)

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Options for Philanthropy

- **Providing opportunities for inclusion of those most affected by the issue.**

This effort compels media attention to hunger and brings a grounded perspective to planning and practice. The Hunger Stories shared by America's Second Harvest (www.secondharvest.org/hunger_stories.asp) illustrate the value of hearing from stakeholders.

- **Supporting and testing innovative solutions.** Sometimes small-scale innovations can have profound effects. Activities such as community gardens for residents to raise fresh foods when neighborhood groceries charge too much for low-quality goods (www.communitygarden.org) and grab-and-go school breakfasts to reduce student stigmatization around federally subsidized program participation (<http://tinyurl.com/6gyrf>).
- **Underwriting advocacy to sustain or expand food assistance programs.** Over half of all food-insecure households receives help from either food stamps (25%), school lunches (33%), or the Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (13%) (www.centeronhunger.org). At the same time, welfare regulations have placed bans on food stamp receipt for certain categories of people and time limits on receipt for others. Emergency food services have experienced increased demand because of the insufficiency of governmental supports for hungry families and children.

Key Resources

- **Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.** Provides information on all nutrition assistance from the USDA (Food Stamps, School Lunches, WIC, and more), statistics, current legislation, and regulations. (www.fns.usda.gov/fns)
- **Center on Hunger and Poverty.** At Brandies University, conducts research and policy analysis and public education initiatives and provides data and curricula around issues of hunger. (www.centeronhunger.org)
- **RESULTS.** Focuses on educating the public, the media, and leaders about hunger in order to create the political will to end it. Provides tools, resources, alerts, and updates for grassroots advocacy. (www.results.org)
- **Food Research and Action Center.** A research and policy center working to improve public policies to eradicate hunger and under-nutrition in the U.S. Provides policy- and practice-relevant information for practitioners and advocates. (www.frac.org)



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