



## Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development Office of Domestic Social Development

### FOOD AND NUTRITION PROGRAMS

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#### ISSUE

Today, more than 50 million Americans are facing hunger insecurity in the U.S.; 17.2 million of them are children, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This is a substantial increase from 36.2 million in 2008. In addition, an alarming 17.4 million people lived in homes considered to have very low food security, where one or more people in the household went hungry over the course of the year because they were not able to afford enough food. Even before the great recession, the number of people who suffered from hunger due to insufficient food increased, doubling in number in 2008 as compared to 2000. Essential federal programs address hunger and food insecurity, generally through partnerships between the federal and state governments and cooperating organizations. They provide individuals and families in need with access to food, a healthier diet and nutrition education and they also support agriculture in the United States. A growing number of families facing economic difficulties during the recent recession are helped by these important federal nutrition programs.

#### UPDATE

*The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (S.3307)* was signed into law on December 2, 2010. The legislation is a positive step in promoting nutritional health and hunger security for children. The legislation expands the At-Risk Afterschool Meal Program to all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The program increases access and enhances the Women, Infant and Children (WIC) program. It improves the Summer Food Service Program by furthering outreach efforts and eliminates limits to the number of non-profits that can participate in the program. The legislation also increases grants to expand school breakfast programs and open access for eligible children to school based meals. Unfortunately, the legislation was not without its weaknesses. The legislation was passed with a reduction in food stamp funding (SNAP) that was included in the stimulus bill. The USCCB wrote Congress and supported the improvements to the various programs while expressing its concern and commitment to work towards ensuring that the food stamp dollars would be restored in the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress.

#### NUTRITION BACKGROUND

***The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):*** SNAP, formerly called Food Stamps, is the first line of defense against hunger. It enables low-income families to buy nutritious food. The program serves around 38 million people on a monthly basis, according to USDA estimates. In FY 2009, SNAP served 5.3 million more people, a 22 percent increase, as compared to the previous year. The amount of SNAP benefits given is based on an estimate of how much it costs to buy food to prepare nutritious, low-cost meals for a household. SNAP benefits are expected to supplement a family's food budget. Eligibility is determined by household resources and income.

SNAP benefits have improved and some states have made it easier to apply for benefits. Yet, about 40 percent of those eligible to receive SNAP benefits are not receiving them. Many families leaving welfare may not realize they are eligible for transitional SNAP benefits for at least five months. Both U.S. citizens and some non-citizens are eligible for SNAP benefits. Adult immigrants are eligible only after they have resided in the United States legally for at least five years; legal immigrants who are children or disabled are eligible, regardless of date of entry into the U.S. There are also limits on eligibility for adults 18 to 50 years old without dependent children.

***Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP):*** This program provides support for children through nutritious school meals and nutrition assistance for day care, after school and summer programs, and homeless shelters. Charitable and non-profit community organizations feeding children in these programs can receive reimbursement for food and meal preparation, as well as training in the nutritional needs of children. The program is administered at the federal level by the USDA and at the state level through the State Department of Education or Child Nutrition. In 2009, over three million children received nutritious meals and snacks through CACFP programs at child care centers and family child care homes across the country.

***WIC Program:*** The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) improves the health of mothers and their children by providing supplemental foods, nutrition and breast-feeding education, nutrition

screening and referrals to other social services. WIC serves low-income, nutritionally at risk pregnant women; breast-feeding women; mothers for up to six months after the birth of an infant; infants and children up to their fifth birthday. WIC is a federal grant program that Congress must authorize a specific amount of funds each year. In fiscal year 2009, over nine million women and children participated in WIC.

**Food Distribution Programs:** Food distribution programs strengthen the nutrition safety net through commodity distribution and other nutrition assistance to low-income families, emergency feeding programs, Indian Reservations, and the elderly. For example, children can receive nutritious food through USDA distribution programs such as the National School Lunch and Breakfast programs, the CACFP and the Summer Food Service Program. The USDA makes commodity foods available through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) to food banks and soup kitchens through states and local agencies, allowing low-income people, including elderly people, to receive emergency food and nutrition assistance at no cost. The National School Lunch Program operates in over 101,000 public and non-profit private schools, including Catholic schools, and residential child care institutions. According to USDA, in October 2009, the National School Lunch Program provided nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to 31.2 million children each school day, and over half of these students were eligible to receive lunch at no cost.

### **USCCB POSITION**

In November 2010, Pope Benedict XVI spoke of the “scandal of hunger” that pervades our modern age. In *For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food*, the U.S. bishops reiterated that a primary goal of food and agricultural policy should be providing basic food and nutrition for all. In *Food Policy in a Hungry World*, the bishops called for strengthening the domestic food assistance programs to ensure that no one in America goes hungry or suffers malnutrition. "When the economy fails to provide the jobs and income necessary to prevent hunger and malnutrition, the various local, state, and national food assistance programs must be funded and expanded to provide food to all in need."

### **WHAT YOU CAN DO**

- Contact your Senators and Representative and urge them to support the strongest possible funding levels for critical programs that help provide nutrition and alleviate hunger; ask Congress to restore the cuts to food stamps (SNAP) which was a part of the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act.
- Urge Congress to strengthen access to participation, particularly in underserved communities, enhancing the use of technology to make it easier for families to enroll in programs and close the gap on direct enrollment of families already eligible for federal programs with similar eligibility guidelines.
- Expand education, enrollment and outreach efforts around nutrition in low-income communities, targeting families facing literacy or language barriers, and in particular :
  - ✓ Through strong and adequate funding for the growing numbers of mothers and children receiving food and nutrition services through WIC;
  - ✓ Through Summer Feeding Programs to ensure children are not going hungry when out of school; and
  - ✓ Through Farm-to-School initiatives that provide fresh and locally grown foods, especially to schools where there may be little or no access to fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Work with your local agencies, food banks, parishes, and others that serve low-income families to inform individuals that have exhausted their TANF/welfare benefits and immigrants that, regardless of date of entry to the United States, may be eligible for SNAP benefits.

### **For further information, contact:**

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