

Food Bank of the Southern Tier Hunger in America 2010 Local Report Summary

In 2009, Feeding America collaborated with over 181 Food Banks and Food Rescue Organizations throughout the U.S. to produce *Hunger in America 2010*, the largest, most comprehensive study of its kind ever conducted. Through 62,143 face-to-face client interviews and 37,098 surveys of local charitable agencies, *Hunger in America 2010* provides an extensive profile of the incidence and nature of hunger and food insecurity in the U.S.¹

The statistics, percentages and comments contained in the following summary are based on data collected locally by the Food Bank of the Southern Tier and our network of over 185 member programs. Food Bank staff and community volunteers interviewed 276 emergency food program (EFP) clients throughout our six county service area.

Some key findings from the study include the following:

CLIENT HOUSEHOLD INCOME

The median monthly income among Emergency Food Program (EFP) clients was approximately one quarter of that of the rest of the United States.

- 54% of households have incomes below the Federal Poverty Level.
- The median household income among all EFP clients in the month preceding the interview was \$1170. In contrast, the median monthly income for the U.S. population as a whole in 2008 was nearly four times that amount, at \$4,192.

FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

Families with children do not consistently know from where their next meal will come.

- Thirty three (33%) percent of client households include at least one child under the age of 18.
- Among households with children, 70% are food insecure (inconsistent access to food) and 37% are food insecure with very low food security (changed eating habits or reduced food intake).
- More than half (55%) of households with children (but no seniors) had to choose between paying for food and paying for utilities/heating fuel, and 45% had to choose between food and gas for a car.

THE NEW FACE OF HUNGER

Emergency Feeding Programs are increasingly seeing a change in client demographics.

- More than three-quarters (77%) of emergency feeding program clients have completed high school (or equivalent).
- 41% own their own homes
- Nearly one-third (29%) of those interviewed currently hold or have held managerial or professional jobs.

With approximately 1 out of every 8 residents of the Southern Tier seeking food assistance, the face of hunger is changing in our community. The challenging economic times have forced many to ask for help for the first time. The Food Bank of the Southern Tier is committed to ensuring that no one goes hungry in our community.

¹ The complete national report can be found at www.hungerinamerica.org.

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EMERGENCY FOOD PROGRAM (EFP) CLIENT SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

Client and Client Household Characteristics

- **Household Composition:** Within EFP client households, household members are approximately one-third children (33%), 56% are non-elderly adults, and about 11% percent are seniors. Thirty three percent (33%) of client households include at least one child under the age of 18.
- **Housing:** Slightly more than half (53%) of EFP client households rent their place of residence while 41% own their homes. Among clients who have a place to live, 7% reported being late with last month's rent or mortgage. Only 12% of clients receive Section 8 or Public Housing Assistance.
- **Homelessness:** Three percent (3%) of EFP clients reported not having a place to live, and another 3% reported living free with someone else. This is consistent with the experience of homelessness in rural areas. Since there are fewer shelters in rural areas, people experiencing homelessness usually find themselves living in their vehicles or with friends or relatives in crowded or substandard housing.²
- **Education:** Seventy-seven percent (77%) of EFP clients have received a high school degree or higher. Nearly one-third (30%) of EFP clients have completed some college or obtained a college/graduate degree.
- **Working Poor:** Forty two percent (42%) of EFP client households have one or more adults employed. Among those who have worked before or are currently working, 29% either had or currently have managerial or professional jobs.
- **Income Levels:** Over half (54%) of EFP client households have incomes below the Federal Poverty Level.³ The median monthly household income among all EFP clients in the month preceding the survey was \$1,170. In contrast, the median monthly income for the U.S. population as a whole in 2008 was \$4,192.⁴
- **Sources of Income:** The main sources of EFP client household income in the Southern Tier are employment (23%), Social Security (25%) and SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance) (18%).⁵
- **Public Assistance:** Less than 1% of EFP client households reported public assistance or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) as their main source of income.⁶ Only 17% of all client households received public assistance or TANF within the past two years.

Participation in Food Assistance Programs

- **Food Stamps:** More than one third (35%) of all EFP client households report that they are participating in the federal Food Stamp Program (called SNAP), compared to 41% of EFP client households nationally.⁷ On average, clients indicated that food stamps last for 2.9 weeks.
- **Child Food Nutrition Assistance Programs:** More than two-thirds of client households with school-aged children participate in the School Lunch Program (71%) and nearly two thirds participate in the School Breakfast Program (64%) In contrast, only 9% of eligible EFP client households participate in the Summer Food Service Program.

² National Coalition for the Homeless. Rural Homelessness Fact Sheet. September 2005.

³ In 2009, the Federal Poverty Level for a family of four was \$1,838 a month.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. Income, Poverty & Health Insurance Coverage in the U.S.: 2008. September 2009.

⁵ [Social Security Disability Insurance](#) pays benefits to individuals and certain members of their family if they are "insured," meaning that they have worked long enough and paid Social Security taxes.

⁶ TANF provides temporary cash assistance to needy families with children.

⁷ Feeding America. Hunger in America 2010. http://www.hungerinamerica.org/key_findings/

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Food Insecurity

The following definitions are used to help assess food security levels:⁸

- **Food Security:** “Access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food Security includes at a minimum: (1) the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and (2) an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (e.g., without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies.)”
- **Food Insecurity:** “Limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.”

Previously, Hunger in America studies further classified households and individuals as “Food Insecure without Hunger” or “Food Insecure with Hunger.” In 2006, The Committee on National Statistics recommended the integration of the following new terminology, which aims to more clearly differentiate between access to food and the physical experience of hunger. “Food Insecurity with Low Food Security” (*previously Food Insecurity without Hunger*) refers to individuals or household that lack consistent or certain access to nutritionally adequate food. “Food Insecure with Very Low Food Security” (*previously Food Insecurity with Hunger*) refers to a situation in which one or more individuals in the household have changed their eating patterns or reduced their food intake due to a lack of resources.

- **Food Insecurity:** Fifty nine percent (59%) of EFP client households are food insecure and 25% have very low food security. Among households with children, 70% are food insecure and 37% are experiencing very low food security.
- **Inability to Purchase Food:** Overall, 65% of EFP client households experienced a time during the past year when it was often or sometimes true that the food they bought did not last and they did not have enough money to buy more.
- **Hunger:** More than one-quarter (28%) of EFP client households had an adult who experienced times during the past year when they were hungry but did not eat because they could not afford enough food.
- **Reduction in Food Intake:** Nearly half (47%) of EFP client households had an adult who ate less than they felt they should because there was not enough money to buy food at times throughout the previous 12 months. Nineteen percent (19%) of EFP client households had an adult who experienced times during the past year when they did not eat for a whole day because there was not enough money for food.

Choosing between Food and Other Necessities

- **Heat:** Thirty-nine percent (39%) of EFP client households had to choose between paying for food and utilities/ heating fuel.
- **Rent/Mortgage:** Nearly one-third (29%) of EFP client households had to choose between paying for food and rent/mortgage.
- **Medical Needs:** More than one-third (35%) of EFP client households had to choose between paying for food and medicine/medical care.
- **Households with Children:** More than half (55%) of households with children but no seniors had to choose between paying for food and paying for utilities/heating fuel, and 45% had to choose between food and gas for a car.

⁸ “Core Indicators of Nutritional State for Difficult-to-Sample Populations.” *Journal of Nutrition*, vol. 120, no.11S, November 1990.

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Health Status, Insurance and Access to Medical Care

- More than one quarter (26%) of EFP client households have at least one household member in poor health and nearly half (47%) have unpaid medical or hospital bills.
- The vast majority of client households have at least one member receiving Medicare⁹ or Medicaid.¹⁰ Among EFP client households, 50% receive Medicare and 53% receive Medicaid. Five percent are uninsured.

EMERGENCY FOOD PROGRAMS AGENCY SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

The Food Bank provides food and services to a network of 175 agencies representing 186 food programs. More than half of those programs are EFPs such as pantries, soup kitchens and emergency shelters. Each week, these programs feed approximately 10,700 men, women and children in need.

Agencies and Programs

- One hundred seventy (170) agencies received the agency questionnaire
- One hundred forty-four agencies reported on 236 total programs (food and non-food programs)
- Of these agencies, seventy-six percent (76%) of food pantries and 43% of soup kitchens are operated by faith-based organizations

Changes in Need

- During the past four years, 79% of pantries and 58% of soup kitchens report an increase in the number of clients in need of food assistance.
- EFPs realize that many clients are in need of services other than food. Eighty-four percent (84%) of pantries and 95% of soup kitchens provide some other form of assistance to clients such as clothing, eligibility counseling for food stamps & WIC, and rental or utility assistance.

Program Challenges

- Funding problems that threaten the daily operation of the program are prevalent among EFPs. Fifty-four percent (54%) of pantries, 56% of kitchens, and 63% of shelters identified funding as a major challenge to their continued operation.
- Lack of paid staff threatens the daily operation of many EFPs. The vast majority of EFPs are dependent on unpaid volunteers. Three-quarters of food pantries (75%) and 11% of soup kitchens rely entirely on volunteers to run their operation. Additionally, since most food pantry volunteers are seniors over 70, there are growing concerns about the long-term sustainability of these programs as volunteers age or are unable to continue their work due to illness.

Hunger doesn't discriminate. The challenging economic conditions and historic levels of unemployment are forcing many to seek assistance for the first time. Working families are finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet. This increase in need coupled with limited resources makes the challenge of feeding our neighbors in need more daunting than ever. The Food Bank is committed to working with our network of emergency food providers to achieve food security in the Southern Tier....**because no one should go hungry.**

⁹ Medicare is the universal health insurance program for older Americans and people with permanent disabilities.

¹⁰ Medicaid provides health and long-term care to low-income families and individuals, including children, parents, the elderly, and people with disabilities.