



Hunger and the Farm Bill Fact Sheet

July 2007

In the Ten Commandments we are directed “thou shalt not kill.” Martin Luther wrote and the ELCA social statements reflect that this encompasses more than ending someone’s life: “If you see anyone suffer hunger and do not feed [them], you have let [them] starve.”

As Lutherans, we have a responsibility to *actively* respond to those deprived of food and nourishment. If we allow hunger to exist, we effectively commit an injustice as grave as harming the life of another human being.

"Where Have I Seen You Hungry?"

Since the advent of national nutrition programs, hunger in the United States has changed. It’s rarely chronic and very few people are undernourished. The way we describe hunger has even shifted from the *availability* of adequate food resources in a given population, to an individual’s ability to *obtain* food from safe sources on a regular basis. People in our country who were once designated as hungry are now described as *food insecure* when they do not have a dependable source of food.

And yet the **reality of hunger has not changed.** To feel hungry, to be without a meal or constantly worried about where one’s food comes from is physically, mentally and emotionally agonizing. 11% of our American community is food insecure, an increase in recent years. This is 35.1 million households, 10.7 million whose source of food is so sporadic that they suffer the gravest level of hunger designated by the USDA (very low food security.)

The Scriptures declare thematically God’s special concern for the poor and oppressed. Who then are the hungry, and where can we seek justice in our society by imitating Jesus’ ministry to our neighbors in need?

The Hungry Among Us

Prevalence of Household Food Insecurity

- All households: **11.0%**
- Households with children under 18: **15.6%**
- With children under 6: **16.7%**
- Elderly living alone: **6.4%**

2005 Household Food Insecurity Rate by Region

- Inside metropolitan area: **10.8%**
- Outside metropolitan areas: **12.0%**

Children

- In food insecure households: **12.4 million**

Working Poor

- In 2002, 1 in 4 low-income families (incomes at 200% of the federal poverty level) with one full-time, full-year worker was food insecure and housing insecure.

*U.S. Department of Agriculture,
Household Food Security in the United States, 2005*

Responding to Need

Food assistance programs were born of the Great Depression and grew in capacity during the 1960s and 1970s when hunger and food access became an issue of national concern. Our role as a public church encourages us to engage government institutions which care for the vulnerable and support the well being of our society.

Federal nutrition programs reach millions of Americans that qualify for assistance. They are often the first response our nation has against hunger.



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Farm Bill and Hunger

One important piece of legislation that impacts hungry people is the Farm Bill, which is currently being debated in Congress. Included in this legislation is a nutrition title which covers the Food Stamp program, food for food banks and pantries (TEFAP), and community grants to local anti-hunger initiatives. These programs are vital to our country's response to hunger and Congress must ensure that they are strong and adequately funded.

Federal Food Assistance in the Farm Bill (2006)

Food Stamp Program

- Average monthly participation: **26.7 million**
U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2006,
http://www.fns.usda.gov/cga/FactSheets/FSP_Quick_Facts.htm
- Over half of all food stamp recipients are children and another quarter are elderly or disabled persons.
The Almanac of Hunger and Poverty, 2007,
America's Second Harvest
- USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) estimates that each \$1 billion of retail demand by food stamps generates \$340 million in farm production, \$110 million in farm value-added, and 3,300 farm jobs; and each \$5 of food stamps generates almost \$10 in total economic activity.
U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2002,
<http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/GeneralEconomy/linkages.htm>

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

- Percentage of food distributed by America's Second Harvest members from the TEFAP program: **10-40%**
America's Second Harvest, 2007,
www.secondharvest.org/learn_about_hunger/public_policy/tefap.html
- Pounds of food made available: **434 million**
U.S. Department of Agriculture, June 2007,
Leading the Fight Against Hunger

Take Action!

This is your opportunity to use your voice to help end hunger in the U.S. Urge Congress to:

- Increase food stamp access and benefits so that more low-income families can participate and can afford to purchase healthier foods.
- Eliminate restrictions in the Food Stamp program that disadvantage savings accounts.
- Remove the five year waiting period for eligible legal immigrants for food stamps.
- Fund community food security grants that support local initiatives to combat hunger.