



Association of Arizona Food Banks

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Arizona Sees Poverty Levels, Demands on Food Banks Increase

PHOENIX, ARIZONA: Survey results just released by Feeding America, the nation's largest domestic hunger relief charity, along with newly released Census data on 2008 poverty, income and health insurance data combine to paint a stark picture of poverty and hunger in Arizona.

The Census data shows a striking 16.1% of Arizonans lived in poverty over 2007-08, compared to 13.2% in 2000-01. This seven-year change is a historically significant increase for Arizona, culminating in 1,172,000 people living in poverty. During that same time period, median household income in Arizona dropped 6% from \$50,839 to \$47,942, compared to only a 3.6% dip nationwide. In 2009, federal poverty guidelines are set at an annual gross income of \$22,050 for a family of four.

According to the Feeding America survey conducted late this summer, food banks nationwide report the current recession and continuing rise in unemployment are having a profound effect on their ability to feed those living at risk of hunger. In Arizona, food banks distributed 42.2% more food in the first two quarters of 2009 versus 2008 while also seeing demand for emergency food boxes, a 3-5 day supply of food for a family of four, increase by 23.2%. Some food banks have reduced the frequency of emergency food box distribution so that newcomers aren't turned away.

The struggles are particularly evident in more rural parts of Arizona, as reported in the survey by the Yuma Community Food Bank: "[we have] had 40 businesses close since January, 9,000 laid off and more have lost their job completely. We now have 24% unemployment and the demand for food is at the highest level it ever has been in 15 years."

Arizona's increases mirror survey results reported nationwide: 99% of food banks reported a significant surge in demand for emergency food over the past year. The increase is driven by first-time users and more people who have recently lost their jobs. More than half (56%) of the country's food banks reported that they are seeing more children as clients. One in five Arizona children struggle with hunger, which is the sixth highest rate in the country.

"It's becoming increasingly difficult for many food banks and their agencies to meet the needs of their clients, especially when new clients arrive all the time," said Vicki Escarra, president and CEO of Feeding America. "This is especially sobering when you consider our network delivered a record-breaking amount of food this past year—more than 2.6 billion pounds between July 2008 and June 2009—an increase of 21.4% over the previous year."

Rising poverty is also evident in the surge of participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps), the largest federal nutrition program. SNAP reached an all-time record of 35 million recipients nationally in June 2009, representing a 22% increase over June 2008. Over that same time

period, participation rates in Arizona have grown nearly 36% to a record 894,269 people due to rising unemployment and economic uncertainty.

Established in 1984, the Association of Arizona Food Banks is a private, non-profit organization serving five-member regional food bank warehouses (Community Food Bank, Desert Mission Food Bank, St. Mary's Food Bank Alliance, United Food Bank, Yuma Community Food Bank) and a network of nearly 1,700 food pantries and agencies. As one of the first state associations in the nation, AAFB was instrumental in the development of a statewide gleaning project, and our advocacy efforts have brought about beneficial state and federal legislation for our member food banks and the people they serve. For more information, to find a food bank or pantry in your area, or to learn more about donation and volunteer opportunities, please visit www.azfoodbanks.org.

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