



Association of Arizona Food Banks

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More Arizonans Struggling with Hunger says new USDA Report

PHOENIX, ARIZONA: In Arizona, 329,000 households (13.2%) struggled with hunger during 2006-2008, the 14th highest rate in the country, according to a report released today by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). While that number represents an almost 12% decrease from ten years ago, it's an 8% increase from five years ago. Most alarmingly, the number of households living in very low food security, defined as frequent cutting back or skipping meals based on survey results from the report, increased more than 51% in the last five years.

"These troubling numbers show just how many people do not have regular access to food in Arizona," said Ginny Hildebrand, president and CEO of the Association of Arizona Food Banks (AAFB). "When you then consider the report uses numbers from 2008, and since then we've seen unemployment increase and the economy stagnate, it is very likely there are more food insecure households than this report states."

It is important to note the timing of the report fails to tell the whole story, since the numbers do not take in account the recession's continued impacts in 2009. In Arizona, the numbers are almost undoubtedly worse, as the USDA uses three-year averages to compensate for limited sample sizes. As a result, the state data is an average for 2006-2008, missing much of the recession's most recent local impact.

Nationwide, the report shows more than 49.1 million people lived in food insecure households in 2008, up from 36.2 million in 2007 and 33.2 million in 2000, and the highest number ever recorded by the USDA. More than 17 million are children under the age of 18. An amazing 37% of single-parent, female-headed households with children are food insecure. 2010 is a critical year for issues related to child hunger, as Congress will vote on extending and improving Child Nutrition Reauthorization bills to meet President Obama's goal of ending child hunger by 2015.

The USDA report also confirms what AAFB has previously stated, namely that child hunger remains a serious issue nationwide and within Arizona, where one in five children under age 18 struggle with food insecurity. While AAFB member food banks have kept pace with increased demand by distributing approximately 60% more food in 2009 than in 2008, best estimates show this only meets 62% of the present need.

"We are seeing more and more people seeking out assistance as the economy has worsened," said Cynthia Zwick, executive director of the Arizona Community Action Association. "The food bank network provides a great safety net for families and individuals in need, and many Arizona families are now utilizing SNAP (food stamps), which has seen a 41% increase in household enrollments from October 2008 to October 2009."

The USDA report is based on data the Census Bureau measures annually. Food insecurity is determined through a series of household survey questions about the ability to obtain enough food for an active, healthy life for all members. The full report can be found at www.ers.usda.gov/features/householdfoodsecurity/.

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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