

# HUNGER IN AMERICA 2006

A REPORT ON EMERGENCY FOOD DISTRIBUTION IN THE UNITED STATES IN 2005.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





Permission to use with attribution to:

**HUNGER IN AMERICA 2006**  
**AMERICA'S SECOND HARVEST - THE NATION'S FOOD BANK NETWORK**  
**FOURTH NATIONAL HUNGER STUDY**  
**[www.hungerinamerica.org](http://www.hungerinamerica.org)**

by:

Douglas L. O'Brien  
Halley Torres Aldeen

STATEMENT OF SPONSORSHIP:

Since 1990, the Altria family of companies has been a leading supporter of hunger relief. As the parent company of Kraft Foods, America's largest food and beverage company, the issue of hunger is extremely important to us. Through our grant making programs, we support hundreds of organizations across the nation that provide food and nutritional services to those most in need, including the elderly and people living with HIV/AIDS and other critical illnesses.

America's Second Harvest—The Nation's Food Bank Network is a leading force in the fight against hunger and for twenty years has been a valued friend and partner, which is why we are proud to be the sponsor of the Hunger in America 2006 study. The study provides a comprehensive look at hunger in America today. The information will allow the America's Second Harvest Network of Member food banks and food-rescue organizations to improve their operations and distribution systems so that more food gets to more people.

Food is a basic human need and right. No one should have to go to bed hungry or have to choose between buying groceries and paying rent. We hope this study will inform public policy, energize the response among the public and private sector, and ultimately provide a better understanding of the complex issue of hunger and the millions of people it affects. Hopefully, it will bring us one step closer to ending hunger in America.

# ABOUT AMERICA'S SECOND HARVEST – THE NATION'S FOOD BANK NETWORK

America's Second Harvest – The Nation's Food Bank Network is the largest domestic hunger-relief charity in the United States. The Network consists of more than 200 food banks and food-rescue organizations. The Network, in all, is comprised of approximately 80% of all food banks in the nation, according to USDA.<sup>1</sup> The America's Second Harvest Network secures and distributes more than 2 billion pounds of food and grocery products to 44,000 charitable feeding agencies, including pantries, kitchens, and shelters. Those agencies in turn feed an estimated 25 million Americans in need each year.

The strength of America's Second Harvest comes in its Network of Member food banks and food-rescue organizations. Our Members serve nearly every county in the U.S. including metropolises, suburbs and rural communities. Our Members serve people regardless of their race, their age or their religion. Hunger does not discriminate and neither does the America's Second Harvest Network. For more than twenty-five years, our Members have been meeting the daily needs of low-income Americans.

## TERMS

**AGENCY:** The charitable organization that provides the food supplied by a food bank or food-rescue organization directly to clients in need through various types of programs.

**FOOD BANK:** A charitable organization that solicits, receives, inventories and distributes donated food and grocery products pursuant to grocery industry and appropriate regulatory standards. The products are distributed to charitable human-service agencies, which, in turn, provide the products directly to needy clients through various programs.

**FOOD INSECURITY:** USDA's measure of lack of access, at all times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members; limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods.

**FOOD INSECURITY WITH HUNGER:** An involuntary state that results from not being able to afford enough food.

**FOOD PANTRY: (FOOD SHELF)** A charitable distribution agency that provides its clients food and other grocery products for home preparation and consumption.

**FOOD-RESCUE ORGANIZATION:** A charitable organization that collects prepared and/or perishable foods, from sites such as restaurants, hotels and caterers pursuant to its local health department and/or appropriate regulatory standards. This food is distributed either directly to needy people or to charitable human-service agencies, which, in turn, provide the food to needy clients through various types of programs.

**SHELTER:** A charitable program whose primary purpose is to provide shelter or housing on a short-term or temporary basis to needy clients and typically serves one or more meals a day.

**SOUP KITCHEN:** A charitable program whose primary purpose is to provide prepared meals, served in the kitchen, to clients in need.

### HOW WE WORK

#### THE DONORS

Growers | Processors | Restaurants | Manufacturers | Distributors  
Retailers | Convenience Stores | Wholesalers | Food Industry Associations  
Food Service Operators | Food Drives

#### THE AMERICA'S SECOND HARVEST NETWORK

Using the latest technology, the America's Second Harvest Network distributes and tracks donated food to more than 200 certified Member food banks and food-rescue organizations nationwide

#### THE AGENCIES

Food Pantries | Youth Programs | Community Kitchens  
Soup Kitchens | Senior Centers | Day Care Centers | Rehabilitation Centers | Homeless Shelters | Kids Cafes | Residential Shelters  
Other Charitable Organizations

#### 25 MILLION HUNGRY AMERICANS

Victims of Disaster | Children | Working Poor | Single-Parent Families | Newly Unemployed | Mentally Ill | Homeless | Disabled | Elderly

<sup>1</sup>The Emergency Food Assistance System - Findings: *Provider Survey, 2002*



## ABOUT HUNGER IN AMERICA 2006

**PURPOSE** In order to solve the problem of hunger, first we must understand it. To that end, *Hunger in America 2006*, the largest study of domestic hunger ever conducted, provides an in-depth look at who is in need, how the need is met and by whom.

The America's Second Harvest Network seeks not only to immediately alleviate hunger through distribution of food and grocery products to people in need, but also to solve the problem of hunger in the long-term through public education and advocating changes to programs and policies that support low-income Americans and ultimately end hunger. Integral to long-term efforts is our series of four thorough, in-depth studies of the America's Second Harvest Network charitable food distribution system that have been conducted quadrennially since 1993.

Through 52,000 face-to-face clients interviews and 30,000 surveys of local charitable agencies, *Hunger in America 2006* chronicles the nature and incidence of demand for emergency food assistance which, in turn, helps charitable feeding organizations better address the burgeoning need through program development and refinement. The results also better inform the public policy discourse so that federal nutrition programs can better serve those in need.



*Hunger in America 2006* is the largest, most comprehensive study of its kind ever conducted. The study provides authoritative, comprehensive, and statistically valid data on the national charitable response to hunger and the people served by private hunger-relief agencies.

## METHODOLOGY

*Hunger in America 2006* is the independent research conducted on behalf of America's Second Harvest – The Nation's Food Bank Network by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (MPR), a leading social policy research firm based in Princeton, NJ. MPR is widely recognized for its leading studies on some of society's most pressing social problems. America's Second Harvest contracted with MPR to work with 156 Network Member participants who voluntarily agreed to collect data in their communities.

All aspects of the study were overseen by an independent review team—the Technical Advisory Group (TAG). The TAG is comprised of noted social scientists, including demographers, nutritionists, academics and statisticians, who reviewed everything from the survey instruments to the analysis plan to the final results. The TAG members' impartiality, broad range of expertise and regular critical oversight of the project ensured that the *Hunger in America 2006* project has adhered to the highest standards in survey research.

There are two main data sources for *Hunger in America 2006*: client data and agency data, which were collected in early 2005. The client data was amassed through face-to-face interviews with randomly-selected recipients at emergency feeding sites across the country. Over 52,000 individuals offered to share their stories with us, including the circumstances of what led them to the pantry, kitchen or shelter at which they were interviewed.

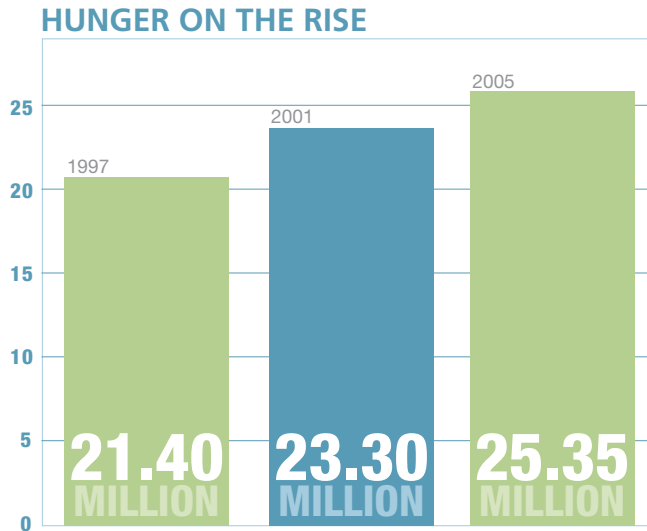
Their generosity makes it possible for us to better understand who seeks emergency food assistance and why. Secondly, we asked participating food banks to mail surveys to each of their member agencies, yielding over 30,000 nationwide. The agency surveys provide information on the services available to low-income Americans, their needs and their stability. The 2005 data collection instruments were based on the questionnaires used in the 2001 study, revised to reflect the 2001 data collection experience and the needs of the America's Second Harvest Network.

Each of the participating food banks helped MPR with the development of the sampling frame and with the data collection. In order to ensure data collection standardization across the country, MPR conducted three regional, two-day, in-depth training sessions for all participating members of the study. MPR also provided technical assistance with the implementation of the agency and client surveys.

The results of *Hunger in America 2006* should be discomfiting. It is difficult to understand how people living in this land of plenty can have to make decisions between paying for food or other household necessities. It is troubling that children and seniors, the country's most vulnerable citizens, may have to forgo their most basic need—the need for food—because of a lack of resources. *Hunger in America 2006* tells the stories of more than 25 million needy Americans.

# HUNGER REMAINS HIGH

The America's Second Harvest Network of food banks and food-rescue organizations provides emergency hunger-relief services to an estimated 25.35 million low-income people each year, or roughly 9% of all Americans. This represents an 8% increase since *Hunger in America 2001* and an 18% increase since *Hunger 1997: The Faces and Facts*.





## WHO SEEKS EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE?

*Hunger in America 2006* shows that America's Second Harvest Network Members serve some of the most vulnerable populations in America. Based on the findings of this study, the millions of people served by our Network do not meet the stereotypical profile of a hungry person. The data show that hunger reaches into virtually all communities across the United States, affecting even the least likely of victims.

### THE POOR AND THE NEEDY

#### Low Income

Clients seeking emergency food assistance from the America's Second Harvest Network are typically part of hard-working families living below the federal poverty line and are forced to make choices between food and everyday necessities. In fact, 66% of all households served by the Network have annual incomes below the federal poverty level, or less than \$15,670 a year for a family of three in 2004 (the time period recorded). The average monthly income for a household served is \$860. 10% of all adults interviewed at emergency feeding sites had no income at all, a significant increase (37%) since *Hunger in America 2001*.

#### Food Insecure

According to the Federal government's own measure of hunger, 70% of all the people served by the America's Second Harvest Network are "food insecure." Since 1995, the U.S. Census Bureau and USDA Economic Research Service have collected information through the annual Current Population Survey on "food insecurity," defined as "not always having access to enough food to meet basic needs." By including a subset of the food insecurity survey questions in the hunger study client survey, we are able to assess that emergency food recipients are indeed vulnerable and reliant upon charitable services. This statement patently dismisses the argument that requests for emergency food are driven simply by the lure of free food.

## Resource Poor

In addition to low incomes, recipients of emergency food typically do not have a lot of resources. 12% are homeless, a 28% increase since 2001. Nearly 47% do not have access to a working car. Only 35% of the clients we serve are currently receiving food stamps; recipients, however, stated that food stamp benefits lasted an average of 2.5 weeks a month.

Additionally, America's Second Harvest Network clients are often faced with difficult choices no one should have to make: choices between food and other basic needs. Too many survey respondents indicated that they indeed had been forced to choose between food and utilities (41%), food and rent or mortgage (35%), and food or medicine or medical care (32%).

## CHILDREN

Children are especially vulnerable to issues of hunger and poverty. Thirteen million, or approximately 17.8% of children in the U.S., live in poverty. The rate of poverty for children under 18 remains higher than those aged 18 to 64 and for those aged 65 and over.<sup>2</sup>

Hunger has long-lasting, devastating effects on the health and development of children. Research indicates that even mild undernutrition experienced by young children during critical periods of growth may lead to reductions in physical growth and affect brain development.<sup>3</sup>

**9 million of the people we serve are children under the age of 18.**  
2 million of those are young children under age 5.

## SENIORS

Scientific evidence supports good nutrition as critical to the health and life quality of America's seniors.<sup>4</sup> Because of issues that relate specifically to age, including decreased mobility and limited outside assistance, the elderly are especially vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition.<sup>5</sup> Because of fixed and low incomes—9.8 percent of the elderly live below the poverty line—the elderly are among America's most vulnerable citizens.<sup>6</sup> An estimated 3.4 million elderly people were poor, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

**Nearly 3 million of the people we serve are ages 65 and older.**



## THE SICK

Poor health not only affects seniors, but working-age adults as well. In fact, fair or poor health can lower job attendance or performance or restrict employment altogether.

Many of the people we serve live in poor health. 46% of the adults interviewed at emergency feeding sites state that their health is "fair" or "poor." Seventeen percent also state that someone else within their household is in poor health.

<sup>2</sup> DeNavas-Walt, Carmn, B.D. Proctor, C.H. Lee U.S. Census Bureau., *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2004 (P60-229)*, August 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Tufts University School of Nutrition Science and Policy, *The Links Between Nutrition and Cognitive Development of Children*, 1998

<sup>4</sup> Nutrition, Aging, and the Continuum of Care, from *The Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 2000, 100:580-595

<sup>5</sup> USDA's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, *Food Insufficiency and the Nutritional Status of the Elderly Population*, May 2000

<sup>6</sup> DeNavas-Walt, Carmn, B.D. Proctor, C.H. Lee. U.S. Census Bureau., *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2004 (P60-229)*, August 2005



## THE WORKING POOR

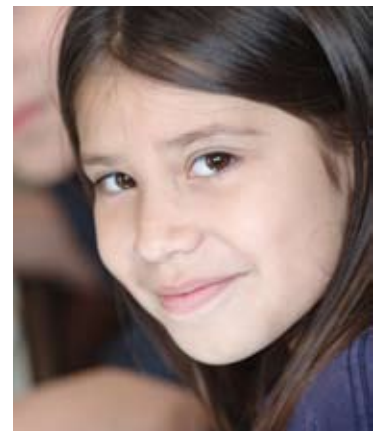
Despite a strong economy in the 1990's and continued recovery from the 2001 recession, Americans are still finding it hard to make ends meet. In 2005, more than one-third (36%) of all households served by the America's Second Harvest Network had one or more adults working, that is nearly 5 million people, or 28% of all adults served through the Network. Of those adults over 18 years of age but younger than 65, more than one-third (32.3%) are currently employed. When considering the employment status of all adults in client households, 14.6% are employed full-time and 13.2% are employed part-time. For those adults not employed, 8% have recently lost a job, having been unemployed for three months or less and 11.5% have been unemployed for one or two years.

One quarter (25.5%) of all households served by the America's Second Harvest Network indicate that a job was their primary source of household income for the previous month. Income

from employment was the most often reported source of income for adults, followed by Social Security (19.3%). A very small percentage of adults (4.2%) reported that traditional "welfare" payments (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or TANF, and/or General Assistance) were the household's primary source of income in the past month.

Unfortunately, for many recipient working households, income from employment is too often not sufficient to make ends meet. **Half of all recipient households (51%) reported incomes of less than \$10,000 in the previous year.** The average household income among all client households was \$11,250 with 75% of all client households with incomes at or below 130% of poverty and 66% of all households with incomes below the federal poverty level.

	2004 POVERTY GUIDELINES: 100%	2004 POVERTY GUIDELINES: 130%
FAMILY OF 3	\$15,670	\$20,371





## SINGLE-FEMALE HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

The overwhelming majority of adults served by the America's Second Harvest Network are women (60%) and single parent households with children represent more than half (54.7%) of all households with children served by the Network. The average household size served by the America's Second Harvest Network is 2.5 persons (typically a female, single parent with a child or children), slightly larger than the average food stamp household size of 2.3 persons and slightly smaller than the average low-income (100% of poverty or below) household size of 3.3 persons.<sup>7</sup>

Whereas female-headed households with children are more prevalent at food pantry sites, single adult males without children are more prevalent at soup kitchen sites. The *Hunger in America 2006* data are consistent with the USDA Food Security studies which show that low-income households with children were more affected by food insecurity than other low-income households and low-income mothers with children were "especially vulnerable to both food insecurity and hunger."<sup>8</sup>

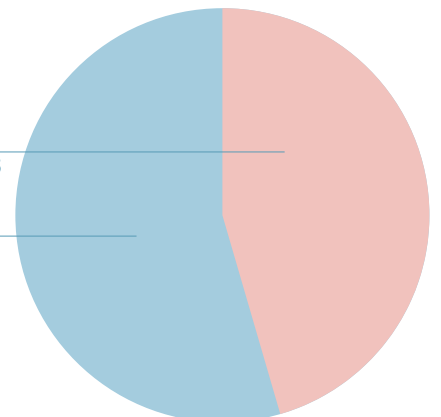
## GEOGRAPHY

*Hunger in America 2006* reveals that nearly half (47%) of all food pantry recipients (typically those families with a permanent residence) reside in rural or suburban areas and 42% of all emergency food recipients reside in rural or suburban areas. Counties with disproportionately high rates of persistent poverty, according to the USDA Economic Research Service, are often rural, with 340 of 386 persistent poverty counties primarily rural. Further, the poverty rate for single, female-headed households is 7.3% greater in rural areas than in central cities.<sup>9</sup>

## WHERE HUNGRY AMERICANS LIVE

42%  
RURAL OR SUBURBAN AREAS

58%  
METRO AREAS



<sup>7</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics and Bureau of the Census *CPS Annual Demographic Survey* – March 2005 Supplement;

<sup>8</sup> USDA-Economic Research Service, 2005, *Household Food Security in the United States: 2004*

<sup>9</sup> USDA Economic Research Service, *Rural Poverty At A Glance*, 2005

## HOUSING STATUS

An estimated 12% of client households – or 3 million persons – served by the America's Second Harvest Network are homeless or without a place to live. Of those, 80% of shelter clients are homeless and 26% of soup kitchen clients are homeless. Of the estimated nearly 88% of emergency food recipients with a place to live, 66% rent their homes, and 6.6% live free with someone else. Of renters, 17% receive Section 8 or similar public housing assistance. Only 25% of client households with a residence own their homes, as compared to the national rate of 69%, according to Census Bureau.<sup>10</sup> Of those emergency food recipients with a place to live (either rent or own), 20% are late in paying the previous month's rent or mortgage.

## ALL RACES AND ETHNICITIES

The faces of the clients we serve are as diverse as the faces of America, yet people of color continue to be disproportionately affected by poverty and hunger. While the African American population accounts for about 13% of the general population, it accounts for 38% of the emergency food recipient population. Since 2001, this has been a 7.6% growth, fairly consistent with growth in poverty. According to the Census Bureau, between 2001 and 2004, the poverty rate among African Americans increased 8.8%, from 22.7% to 24.7%. While the Latino population comprises almost 14% of the total U.S. population, it comprises about 17% of the population served by our Network. Non-Hispanic Whites, however, comprise the plurality of people we serve, or 39.2% of the total clientele. 6.6% of all clients served are Asian, American Indian, Alaskan Native, Hawaiian Native, or other Pacific Islander. 8% identified themselves as "Other."

## EDUCATION, POVERTY AND HUNGER

Attainment of a high school diploma or GED equivalent generally indicates acquisition of basic reading, writing, and mathematics skills necessary for function and advancement in modern American society.<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of Education and Census Bureau statistics indicate a link between education levels and future earnings. **In the general U.S. population, less than 16% of adults have less than a high school diploma or equivalent. By contrast, in the emergency food assistance system, the rate is double the general U.S. population with more than 37% having not completed high school or attaining the equivalent.** For another 37% of emergency food recipient adults, a high school diploma or equivalent is the highest level of education attained. This data strongly suggests a link between low educational attainment and the likelihood of being poor and needing emergency food assistance.

## THE HURRICANE EFFECT

Knowing that the hurricanes had significantly altered the landscape of the Network as well as the face of demand for food assistance, the America's Second Harvest Network sought to quantify such changes in late 2005. Contracting with noted Chicago-based research firm Leo J. Shapiro & Associates, America's Second Harvest conducted research of evacuees at food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters to learn more about the circumstances that led them to seek emergency food assistance and better understand their needs, and to survey provider agencies and food bank representatives to assess how the hurricanes affected service delivery. The end result, *Katrina and Rita Aftermath: The Impact on Emergency Food Distribution and Clients*, is an assessment of the impact of Katrina and Rita on charitable food-assistance delivery that will enable the America's Second Harvest Network to be even more effective in responding to future disasters. The study is available online at [www.seconddharvest.org](http://www.seconddharvest.org).

According to the findings, demands for emergency food assistance in the Gulf Coast states tripled immediately following Hurricane Katrina. As of December 2005, demands remain 50% higher than before the disaster made landfall on Aug. 29, 2005. Additionally, of the 6.4 million Americans who requested emergency food assistance in the impacted states following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, 4.6 million (72%) of them were seeking food assistance for the first time.

Moreover, food banks in the impacted states reported increasing food distribution by up to 100% to meet increased demands and many continued operating at more than 50% above their average monthly food distribution in December 2005.

Many agencies that distribute food from America's Second Harvest Network food banks were wiped out by the hurricanes. Food banks in the primary markets reported more than 85% of the agencies they are currently serving are temporary disaster-relief program. Moreover, of the people receiving food assistance prior to Katrina, 41% reported that the agency where they received assistance is no longer in operation.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *U.S. Homeownership Rate Climbs, 2005*

<sup>11</sup> Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2005*.



## FEDERAL ASSISTANCE AND HUNGER RELIEF

The high level of need for income and nutrition assistance evidenced by emergency food recipients in the America's Second Harvest Network suggests a need for greater participation in Federal food assistance programs, especially the Food Stamp Program.

### FEDERAL NUTRITION PROGRAMS

The Food Stamp Program is the nation's largest Federal food assistance program and the largest non-categorical entitlement program for low-income people. Participation in food stamps is crucial to helping low-income families attain a nutritionally adequate diet and move toward self-sufficiency. Unlike welfare or TANF, food stamps are not time-limited. Food stamps are targeted to reach low-income people who have the most difficulty affording an adequate diet. Approximately 88% of food stamp benefits go to households with incomes below the poverty level.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the important role food stamps serve in reducing hunger, only slightly more than one-third (35%) of emergency food recipient households – 3.8 million in all – participate in the Food Stamp Program even though many more are income eligible. Of the 3.8 million households served by food banks

and enrolled in food stamps, the overwhelming number -- 3.2 million -- are food pantry users. Nationally, 56% of eligible people participate in the Food Stamp Program.<sup>14</sup>

Of emergency food recipients, 68% had at some point applied for food stamps and of those that had applied and are now on the program, half have received benefits for less than two years. Food stamp benefits last three weeks or less for 8 out of 10 food stamp recipients receiving assistance through the America's Second Harvest Network.

For emergency food recipients who did not apply for food stamps, 34.3% believed that they were not eligible due to income. A review of clients' self-reported household income indicates, however, that two-thirds of those households that believe they are not income eligible for food stamps are in fact income eligible for the program.<sup>15</sup>

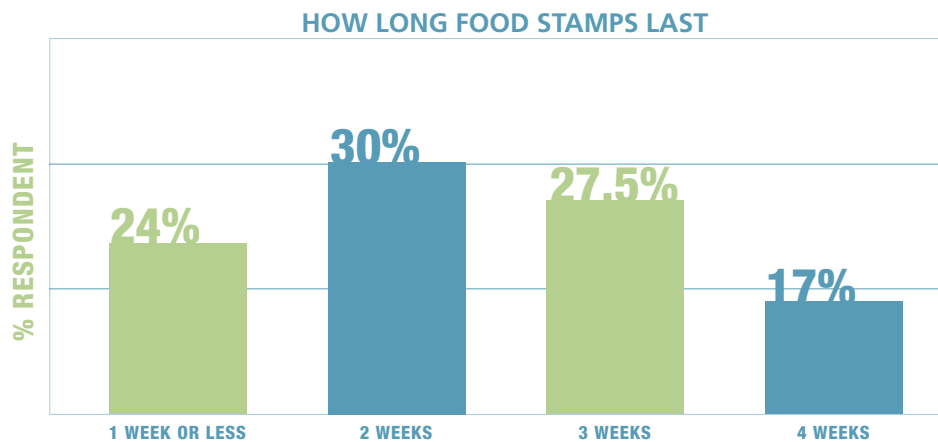
<sup>13</sup> US Department of Agriculture: Food and Nutrition Services. *Characteristics of Food Stamp Households: Fiscal Year 2004*

<sup>14</sup> US Department of Agriculture: Food and Nutrition Services. *Reaching Those in Need*

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides nutritious food, nutrition education and access to health care for low-income pregnant women, mothers, infants and young children to age 5 who are at nutritional risk because of their household income. Of households served by the America's Second Harvest Network with children from birth to age three, 51% participate in the WIC program. 62% of households with children participate in school lunch, 51% in school breakfast programs and 13% in the Summer Food Program.

The findings of the *Hunger in America 2006* study are generally consistent with the Federal government's food security study which estimates that just over half of food insecure households participated in one or more of the three largest Federal food assistance programs: the Food Stamp Program; National School Meals Programs; or WIC.<sup>16</sup>

## On average, food stamp benefits last 2.5 weeks for client households.



<sup>15</sup> Generally, households are eligible for the Food Stamp Program if the household income does not exceed 130% of the poverty level for the household's size. However, food stamp eligibility is also determined by assets and other criteria that were not measured as part of this study.

<sup>16</sup> Household Food Security in the United States, 2004; 2005, USDA-Economic Research Service, pp. 26-31.



## THE STATE OF THE EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE SYSTEM

For the purposes of this study, the emergency food assistance system is defined as those private non-profit agencies that exist primarily to alleviate hunger in their communities. Excluded from this report are the tens of thousands of local agencies that provide after-school meals to low-income children, senior congregate meal sites, and similar local charities that provide food as part of their activities but that do not exist primarily to alleviate hunger.

Of emergency food providers, the America's Second Harvest Network is the largest private charitable system of hunger relief. Food banks provide food and other services to more than 44,000 local agencies of which nearly 22,000 operate at least one food pantry, soup kitchen and/or emergency shelter. For the purposes of this survey, 31,111 agencies provided information on 54,464 programs operated by the agencies.

The *Hunger in America 2006* survey looks at the three main types of "emergency food providers" served by our Network of food banks: pantries; kitchens; and shelters. The food bank is the

primary provider of food and other services to these three main types of local hunger relief agencies.

Pantries (food pantries, emergency pantries, food shelves or church pantries) primarily serve households of more than one person and typically serve households that have a residence where food can be prepared. Pantry food assistance often provides sufficient food for several weeks to a month. The overwhelming majority of local hunger relief agencies, an estimated 30,000, are pantries.

Kitchens (soup kitchens, community kitchens, hot meal sites, urban missions) often serve one person households, which are typically households without a permanent residence or are in transitional or temporary housing. Recipients are typically adult males. Kitchens typically provide meals on site for a specific amount of time and require recipients to return for additional meals at other times during the week. A much smaller number, 5,600, of emergency food assistance agencies are kitchens. Kitchen programs are most often in metropolitan areas.

Shelters (homeless shelters, spousal abuse shelters, transitional shelters) serve smaller households depending on type. Spousal abuse shelters typically serve female-headed households with children whereas homeless and transitional housing shelters are typically populated primarily by single-male households without children.

Substantial resources are required to operate emergency food programs effectively, including community support, food, staff and physical space. **Food banks provide most of the food distributed by the emergency food system, providing 74% of the food distributed by pantries, 49% of the food prepared and served at soup kitchens and 41.5% provided through emergency shelters.** Food banks are also the primary distributor of the Federal (USDA) commodity donations -- The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP). Commodities from the USDA Commodity Distribution Programs are distributed by 68% of pantries, 49% of kitchens and 46% of shelters. Whereas 54% of pantries report purchasing food, 75% of kitchens buy food from retail establishments and 81% of shelters purchase food.

## CRITICAL SUPPORT - VOLUNTEERS

The overwhelming majority of emergency food programs, especially pantries, rely on volunteers to provide food assistance benefits to recipients. **66% of pantries (two-thirds), 40% of kitchens and 11% of shelters rely entirely on volunteers.** Only emergency shelters, owing to the specialized needs of their clients (homelessness, victims of domestic abuse, drug or alcohol addiction), have any substantial number of paid staff. The median number of paid staff was 0 for pantries, 1 paid staff person for kitchens and 7 paid staff for emergency shelters.

The median number of volunteers in any given week is 5 volunteers for pantries, 7 for kitchens, and 3 for shelters. The median number of volunteer hours per week was 35 for pantries, 58 for kitchens, and 51 for shelters. The "hourly wage" value of donated volunteer time at local hunger relief agencies is estimated at more than \$12.5 million in the typical week. Previous studies of the emergency food assistance system estimate that approximately 1 million Americans volunteer at local hunger relief agencies.<sup>17</sup> **An estimated 14% of Americans have reported volunteering at sometime in the past year at a food bank, food pantry, soup kitchen or shelter.** 7 in 10 American adults report contributing food and nearly half report donating money to local hunger relief activities.<sup>18</sup>

## CLIENT SATISFACTION

Emergency food recipients were asked about how satisfied they were with the amount, variety and quality of food provided to them at local agencies. The level of satisfaction is high across all three kinds of emergency food providers (pantries, kitchens, and shelters). 92% of recipients were "very satisfied" (59%) or "somewhat satisfied" (32%) with the amount of food provided to them. Soup kitchen recipients were the most satisfied with the amount of food (62%), followed closely by pantry recipients (59.5%). Nearly 90% of recipients are either "very satisfied" (56%) or "somewhat satisfied" (34%) with the variety of food; and 93% are "very satisfied" (60.5%) or "somewhat satisfied" (32%) with the quality of food provided. Emergency food recipients were also asked how they were treated by the staff or volunteers who distribute the food or serve the meals to them. 83% of recipients say that they are treated with respect "all of the time" by the agency staff.

The *Hunger in America 2006* study also examined the capacity of local hunger relief agencies to meet client needs, including the overall stability and sustainability of the hunger programs. 42% of food pantries, half (50%) of all kitchens, and two-thirds (66%) of shelters referred to funding problems as a threat to their on-going operations. Nearly one-third (31%) of pantries, and nearly one-quarter (23%) of kitchens indicated that inadequate access to food supplies threatened their continued operation. For those programs that needed additional food resources, the median pantry need was 200 additional pounds of food per week, and the median soup kitchen need was 80 meals or meal equivalents per week.

## FAITH AND FEEDING THE NEEDY

The private, local hunger-relief charities served by the America's Second Harvest Network food banks are predominantly faith-based organizations and represent the full and rich gamut of religious belief and practice in American society. More than half (56%) of all agencies served by the food bank Network self-identify as "faith-based" or religion affiliated organizations, but of emergency feeding agencies 68% are faith-based – **73% of all food pantries are faith-based, 65% of soup kitchens and 43% of shelters.** 76% of pantries, slightly more than are faith-based, report receiving food from churches or other religious congregations.

33% of all agencies are non-affiliated community based nonprofits, 3.5% are government operated agencies and 2.6% are Community Action Program (CAP) agencies.

<sup>17</sup> VanAmburg and Associates, 1998. *Hunger 1997: The Faces and Facts*

<sup>18</sup> Leo Shapiro and Associates, November 2005: *America's Second Harvest Benchmark Survey of National Public Opinion on Hunger*



## HOW YOU CAN HELP

America's Second Harvest – The Nation's Food Bank Network relies on the generosity and support of concerned individuals in order to successfully continue serving hungry Americans. If you're interested in joining the legions of volunteers, financial donors and advocates, we welcome you to the America's Second Harvest Family.

### DONATE FUNDS

To learn about giving options, please visit [www.secondharvest.org](http://www.secondharvest.org) or call our Philanthropy Department at 312.263.2303.

### VOLUNTEER

Approximately 1 million volunteers nationwide help sort product, pack grocery bags, answer phones, and staff special events. Call your local food bank to learn about opportunities available to you; visit [www.secondharvest.org](http://www.secondharvest.org) to locate your nearest food bank.

### DONATE FOOD

If you are interested in participating in or organizing a food drive, please contact your local food bank.

### ADVOCATE

America's Second Harvest's online advocacy tool enables you to contact your elected officials to state your support for key policies that help support our clients. Visit [www.hungeractioncenter.org](http://www.hungeractioncenter.org) for further information.

### RAISE AWARENESS

Educate your neighbors about the problem of hunger in America. Visit [www.secondharvest.org](http://www.secondharvest.org) to get information that you can share with your community.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF FINDINGS

This report presents the result of a study conducted in 2005 for the America's Second Harvest Network (A2H), the nation's largest organization of emergency food providers. The study is based on completed in-person interviews with more than 52,000 clients served by the America's Second Harvest Network, as well as on completed questionnaires from more than 30,000 A2H agencies.

### HOW MANY CLIENTS RECEIVE FOOD FROM A2H EMERGENCY FOOD PROVIDERS?

- The A2H system served an estimated 25.35 million different people annually. This includes 22 to 25 million pantry users, 1.2 to 1.4 million kitchen users, and 0.8 million shelter users.
- Approximately 4 million different people receive emergency food assistance from the A2H system in any given week.

### WHO RECEIVES EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE?

A2H agencies serve a broad cross-section of households in America. Key characteristics include:

- 36% of the members of households served by the A2H National Network are children under 18 years old.
- 9% of the members of households are children age 0 to 5 years.
- 11% of the members of households are elderly.
- About 39% of clients are non-Hispanic white; 38% are non-Hispanic black, and the rest are from other racial groups. 17% are Hispanic.
- 36% of households include at least one employed adult.
- 68% have incomes below the official federal poverty level during the previous month.
- 5% are receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and 7% are receiving General Assistance.
- 12% are homeless.

### MANY A2H CLIENTS ARE FOOD INSECURE OR ARE EXPERIENCING HUNGER

- Among all clients of the A2H National Network, 70% are food insecure, according to the U.S. government's official food security scale. This includes clients who are food insecure without hunger and those who are food insecure with hunger.
- 33% of the clients are experiencing hunger.
- Among households with children, 73% are food insecure and 31% are experiencing hunger.

### MANY CLIENTS REPORT HAVING TO CHOOSE BETWEEN FOOD AND OTHER NECESSITIES

- 41% of clients served by the A2H National Network report having to choose between paying for food and paying for utilities or heating fuel.
- 35% had to choose between paying for food and paying their rent or mortgage.
- 32% had to choose between paying for food and paying for medicine or medical care.

### DO A2H CLIENTS ALSO RECEIVE FOOD ASSISTANCE FROM THE GOVERNMENT?

- 35% of client households served by the A2H National Network are receiving Food Stamp Program benefits; however, it is likely that many more are eligible.
- Among households with children ages 0-3 years, 51% participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).
- Among households with school-age children, 62% and 51%, respectively, participate in the federal school lunch and school breakfast programs.

### MANY A2H CLIENTS ARE IN POOR HEALTH

- 29% of households served by the A2H National Network report having at least one household member in poor health.

### MOST CLIENTS ARE SATISFIED WITH THE SERVICES THEY RECEIVE FROM THE AGENCIES OF THE A2H NATIONAL NETWORK

- 92% of adult clients said they were either "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with the amount of food they received from their A2H provider; 93% were satisfied with the quality of the food they received.

### HOW LARGE IS THE A2H NATIONAL NETWORK?

- The A2H National Network includes approximately 44,000 agencies, of which 31,111 have provided usable responses to the agency survey. Of the responding agencies, 21,834 had at least one food pantry, soup kitchen, or emergency shelter.
- The A2H National Network includes approximately 29,600 food pantries, 5,600 soup kitchens and 4,100 emergency shelters.

### WHAT KINDS OF ORGANIZATIONS OPERATE EMERGENCY FOOD PROGRAMS OF THE A2H NATIONAL NETWORK?

- 74% of pantries, 65% of kitchens, and 43% of shelters are run by faith-based agencies affiliated with churches, mosques, synagogues, and other religious organizations.
- At the agency level, 69% of agencies with pantry, kitchen, or shelter and 56% of all agencies including those with other programs are faith-based.
- Private nonprofit organizations with no religious affiliation make up a large share of other types of agencies.

### HAVE AGENCIES BEEN EXPERIENCING CHANGES IN THE NEED FOR THEIR SERVICES?

- 65% of pantries, 61% of kitchens, and 52% of shelters of the A2H National Network reported that there had been an increase since 2001 in the number of clients who come to their emergency food program sites.

### WHERE DO THESE AGENCIES OBTAIN THEIR FOOD?

- Food banks are by far the single most important source of food for the agencies, accounting for 74% of the food distributed by pantries, 49% of the food distributed by kitchens, and 42% of the food distributed by shelters.
- Other important sources of food include religious organizations, government, and direct purchases from wholesalers and retailers.
- 69% of pantries, 49% of kitchens, and 46% of shelters receive food from government commodity programs.

### VOLUNTEERS ARE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT IN THE A2H NETWORK

- As many as 90% of pantries, 86% of kitchens, and 71% of shelters in the A2H National Network use volunteers.
- Many programs rely entirely on volunteers; 66% of pantry programs and 40% of kitchens have no paid staff at all.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Hunger in America 2006* would not have been possible without the generous support of Altria.

Many eyes, hands and hearts went into the production of *Hunger in America 2006*. America's Second Harvest would, in particular, like to thank the staff at Mathematica Policy Research, including Rhoda Cohen, Jim Ohls, and Myoung Kim for their tireless work on behalf of the project. Additionally, we thank Frank Potter, Zhanyun Zhao, Yuhong Zheng, Cathy Lu, Ronette Briefel, Barbara Carlson, John Hall, Donsig Jang, Dan Kasprzyk, Stuart Kerachsky, Daniel Gundersen, Laurie Bach, Shilpa Khambati, Jim Cashion, Marcia Comly, Loring Funaki, Cheryl Lichtenstein, Michael Smith, Marcia Tobias, Lawrence Vittoriano, Susan Golden, Rachel Reed, Jeffrey Holt, Jacob Rugh, Jamilla Henderson, Amy Zambrowski, Carlo Cummings-Caci, William Garrett, and the Staff of Survey Operations Center.

Special thanks go out to members of the Technical Advisory Group, including Chair Dr. John Cook of the Boston Medical Center, Vice-Chair Dr. Beth Osborne Daponte of Yale University, and members Steven Carlson of the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, Kirk Johnson of the Heritage Foundation, Lynn Parker of the Food Research and Action Center, Jan Poppendieck of Hunter College, Martha Raske of Eastern Indiana University, Ken Rice of Leo J. Shapiro & Associates, Rob Santos of NuStats, Inc., and Tommy Wright of the U.S. Census Bureau.

Finally, we thank the 52,000 adults across the country who agreed to share their stories with us, often answering personal or sensitive questions, thereby allowing us to complete the study.

## CONTRIBUTING STAFF

Halley Torres Aldeen, Director of Research & Analysis  
Hannah Dallmann, Research Intern  
Maura Daly, Director of Communication  
Ross Fraser, Media Relations Manager  
Whitney Gretz, Research Intern  
Dan Michel, Senior Webmaster  
Douglas L. O'Brien, Vice President of Policy & Research  
Kathleen Ortiz, Research Assistant  
Millie Osorio, Public Policy Assistant  
Brent Puls, Graphic Designer  
Melinda B. Resser, Data Analysis Manager  
Elizabeth Rowan, Publications Specialist  
Elizabeth Tyson, Public Policy Intern  
Teff Uchima, Research Analyst  
Philip Zepeda, Vice President of Communication





Ending Hunger.

35 E. Wacker Drive

Suite 2000

Chicago, IL 60601

tel: 312.263.2303

web: [www.secondharvest.org](http://www.secondharvest.org)



Altria