

Kansas Food Security Task Force
A Sub-Committee of the Kansas Food Policy Council

2006 Report and Recommendations

Prepared for Governor Kathleen Sebelius
December 22, 2006

Kansas Food Security Task Force 2006 Report to the Governor of Kansas

Executive Summary

The Kansas Food Security Task Force was formed in 2006 as a sub-committee of the Kansas Food Policy Council. Its task is to study the issues of food insecurity and hunger among Kansas households, and to recommend to the Governor steps that might be taken toward reducing hunger and food insecurity levels. Its members include representatives from each of the state agencies responsible for administering federally-funded nutrition assistance programs (Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Kansas Department on Aging, Kansas Department of Education), Kansas State University and KSU Extension Services, the major Food Bank providers in the state, representatives of faith-based organizations with an expressed interest in reducing hunger, and other interested parties.

Over the course of 2006, the Task Force reviewed data from a variety of sources to study the issues of food insecurity and hunger in Kansas. Information reviewed included the most recent available data from the Current Population Survey's Food Security Supplement, the Kansas-specific data from the America's Second Harvest Study, *Hunger in America, 2006*, and the shared experiences of Task Force members and invited guests who administer federally sponsored nutrition programs and other emergency food assistance programs. Many of these representatives work directly with food-insecure clients and were able to share their experiences and stories. Our research and discussions have led to the identification of a set of recommendations for actions that could be taken at the state level to reduce the prevalence of food insecurity and hunger among Kansas households. This document, summarizing those recommendations, represents the first annual report of the Task Force. The complete set of recommendations, as well as additional background and discussion for each, are contained in the body of the full report.

Recommendations:

Although we believe that each of the twenty-two recommendations included in this report is important and worthy of consideration, we also recognize that the list is long and that prioritization may be helpful in focusing efforts to those areas of highest need or most likely to have a more immediate impact. Task Force members have identified the following five recommendations as highest priority to be addressed in the upcoming year:

- Support efforts of SRS and collaborating partners in efforts to increase participation of eligible Kansas households in the Food Stamp program.

- Supplement the foods made available through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) with state dollars.
- Expand Electronic Benefit Transaction (EBT) capability to additional farmers' markets throughout the state so that Food Stamp benefits can be used to make purchases of fresh produce at the markets.
- Require that in all schools where 50% or more of students qualify for free or reduced price meals and educational programming is offered during the summer months, summer meal programs are also offered.
- Include hunger reduction in the Governor's agenda and help to call attention to the issue as a priority.

2006 Report to the Governor of Kansas

Introduction

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Background: Hunger and Food Insecurity in Kansas

In a strong agricultural state like Kansas, it may come as a surprise to many that families struggle to obtain enough food to eat. Yet, that is the case. Data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Current Population Survey, Food Security Supplement tell us that between the years 2002 and 2004, 12% of Kansas households reported that they had been uncertain about having enough food at some time during the previous year. This uncertain access to enough food because of a lack of resources is referred to as "food insecurity." Nearly 5% reported that one or more household members had gone without food and experienced hunger because of a lack of resources. Both nationally and in Kansas, levels of food insecurity and hunger have increased steadily since the year 2000. Rates of hunger have increased more rapidly in Kansas, however. In 2004, Kansas was ranked 7th highest among the states for the percent of households experiencing hunger.

While it comes as no surprise that households with lower incomes are at highest risk for food insecurity and hunger, other characteristics of food insecure households may be

less obvious. Households containing children, and especially those led by single female heads of household are at increased risk. Nearly 40% of single-mother households in Kansas report experiencing food insecurity. The majority of food-insecure households are working families; 60% have at least one household member who is employed full-time. Levels of hunger and food insecurity are about the same in rural and metropolitan portions of the state.

Hunger in the United States is not a problem of not having enough food. It is largely a problem of distribution. Food production in the United States yields approximately twice the caloric value needed to supply the population. Issues of insufficient income, inadequate or unreliable transportation, and the trend toward locating supermarkets in the more affluent portions of communities are all factors that can influence the ability of a family to obtain enough nutritious food. In addition to these factors, there is significant waste in our food distribution system; depending upon the source consulted, estimates indicate that between 25% and 40% of all food produced is lost to waste. This includes products that remain in the fields after harvest, loss due to spoilage and outdating, processing waste, and waste of surplus prepared foods.

While the nature of hunger and food insecurity in the United States is different than the stories we hear from third-world nations – thankfully, we do not see malnourished children with spindly limbs and extended bellies – the problems still have serious consequences. Research findings tell us that children who grow up in food-insecure households perform less well in school, and are more likely to have behavioral problems. Adults in food-insecure households are more likely to suffer from anxiety disorders. Furthermore, while it may seem somewhat counter-intuitive, food insecurity and obesity often go hand in hand. When food choices must be made on the basis of getting enough affordable foods to fill stomachs and stave off hunger rather than optimal nutritional value, the available choices often include calorie-dense foods that contribute to the problems of overweight and obesity. The prices of fresh fruits and vegetables, essential for healthy nutrition and known to be of benefit in preventing many chronic health conditions, are frequently beyond the reach of food-insecure families.

Raising Awareness of Hunger and Food Insecurity as issues in Kansas

Although national survey data show that Kansas fares no better than the rest of the nation on hunger and food insecurity issues, the issues remain largely invisible. Raising awareness of the problems, and focusing attention on the need to find solutions are critical first steps in reducing the numbers of food-insecure and hungry Kansans.

Recommendation: Include hunger reduction in the Governor's agenda and help to call attention to the issue as a priority. Continue to support the efforts of the Kansas Food Security Task Force through signatures of endorsement on educational materials developed to increase public awareness of hunger and food insecurity, and through appearances at selected public events targeted to reducing hunger and food insecurity.

Expanding federally-sponsored nutrition programs

The Food Stamp program, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is the largest and most well-known of the Federal nutrition assistance programs, and helps low-income families avoid hunger by providing supplemental benefits that can be used to purchase groceries. The program is funded entirely with Federal dollars.

The most impressive example of a state successfully reducing rates of hunger and food insecurity among its population has come from Oregon. While national rates of hunger and food security were on the increase from 1999 to 2004, Oregon reduced its rates of household food insecurity from 13.7% to 11.9%, and dropped household hunger rates from 5.8% to 3.8%. This was accomplished primarily through dramatic increases in food stamp participation rates.

In addition to the benefit of reducing numbers of food-insecure households, increasing participation in the food stamp program brings additional federal money into the state's economy. An analysis produced by the USDA in 2006 has estimated that increasing food stamp participation rates in Kansas by only 5% would bring in an additional \$15,100,000 annually in economic activity. Current estimates indicate that 65% of Kansans who qualify for the food stamp program actually participate and receive benefits.

Recommendation: Support efforts of SRS and collaborating partners in efforts to increase participation of eligible Kansas households in the Food Stamp program. It should be noted that adequate levels of SRS caseworker staff will be essential for timely processing of new applications and maintaining an increased caseload, and are vital to the success of this effort.

For families whose children depend on access to free or reduced-price school meals to help stretch their food budgets, summer months when school is out of session can be very difficult times. To assist these families, USDA sponsors the Summer Food Service Program. Through sponsored meal sites in low-income areas, this program provides free meals and snacks during summer months to children through age 18. To qualify as a sponsored site, federal guidelines require that at least one-half of children in the program's service area be eligible for free or reduced price school meals. Sponsors, who may be schools or private entities, frequently combine the Summer Food Service meals with other activity or educational programs.

In Kansas during the 2005-06 school year, 464,561 students were enrolled in public schools. Of this total, 180,826 students attended a school where 50 percent or more of the students (i.e. 97,547) were eligible for free or reduced price school meals. The Kansas Department of Education, which administers the Summer Food Service Program in Kansas, has worked diligently to reach more children. The number of summer program sponsors, sites and meals served in Kansas has steadily increased.

Comparing June 2005 with June 2006, sponsors increased by 27 percent from 59 to 75, sites increased by 30 percent from 195 to 253, and total meals (breakfasts, lunches, suppers and snacks) served increased by almost 22 percent from 363,215 to 441,882.

Nevertheless, many low-income children are not currently being served through this program. More than 83,000 students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals during the school year did not live in areas that met the 50% eligibility criteria. Even when summer meal programs are available to students in low-income areas, participation rates vary. Transportation issues in rural areas complicate the logistics of serving children when school is out. One area where the state might assist with promoting children's access to the Summer Food Service Program would be in assuring that all qualifying schools which offer summer educational programs that extend to the lunch hour or beyond in the summer also offer a meal program. A waiver option, similar to the one currently in place with the School Breakfast Program, could be included to allow schools providing adequate justification to opt out of the lunch program.

Recommendation: Require that in all schools where 50% or more of students qualify for free or reduced price meals and educational programming is offered during the summer months, summer meal programs are also offered.

The Child and Adult Care Food Program, another USDA-sponsored nutrition program, provides reimbursement to licensed providers for the costs of meals and snacks provided to children and elderly individuals in day care settings. USDA regulations require that to participate in this program, a child care provider must be licensed by the state as either a "family day care home provider" or a "child care center." Under the current KDHE licensing procedures for child care facilities, there are many small child care operations that are licensed as "group day care homes." Because of their licensing classification, such facilities are not allowed to participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program, and therefore, lose much needed financial support. Program participation can make the difference in whether or not a child care operation is financially viable.

Recommendation: In collaboration with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and the Kansas Department of Education, review the current process for licensing child care agencies in Kansas to determine whether there are opportunities to redefine Kansas licensure categories in a way that would allow group day care homes to meet federal eligibility criteria for participation in the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

Access to fruits and vegetables is an important component of good nutrition. For families struggling to feed their members on limited budgets, the price of fresh fruits and vegetables is often out of reach. Lack of reliable transportation, and the trend toward relocation of grocery stores and supermarkets to more affluent communities and neighborhoods, may also limit access to fresh foods for low-income families.

Farmers' markets are a good way to bring fresh fruits and vegetables to community residents, often at prices below those found in supermarkets. With the conversion of the Food Stamp program to computer-based Electronic Benefit Transaction systems (EBT), most open-air markets have lacked the capability to accept and process Food Stamp benefits. Wireless technology now offers a solution, which has been successfully pilot-tested at two Kansas farmers' market locations during the 2006 season. Because the wireless terminal devices cost approximately \$1500 each, additional funding sources will have to be identified before expansion to additional locations can occur. It is estimated that there are about fifteen additional Kansas farmers' markets located in geographic areas with existing wireless service capacity. In more remote areas of the state lacking wireless service coverage, the EBT transactions could be handled through a standard wired point of sale device (provided at no cost to the market), where phone line and electrical service could be made available.

Recommendation: Expand Electronic Benefit Transaction (EBT) capability to additional farmers' markets throughout the state. Identify and allocate state funds to assist with purchase of additional wireless point of sale devices.

Supporting local efforts to provide emergency food

Over the past year, members of the Kansas Food Security Task Force have repeatedly heard reports that the current resources of the emergency food assistance network are strained, and that the numbers of clients seeking assistance continues to rise. Newspapers across the state have carried reports of food pantries with bare shelves and making difficult choices to limit the amounts of food disbursed. The amounts of foods made available through the federally sponsored food assistance programs have decreased as national food surpluses have declined. Since 2002, the amount of supplemental food entering the state through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) has dropped by more than 50 percent. In 2005, Kansas received 2.1 million pounds of food, compared with 5.5 million pounds in 2002. Many states supplement the foods made available through TEFAP with state dollars. For example, the state of New Jersey was able to provide funds for local refrigeration equipment and other infrastructure support, as well as for the purchase of supplemental foods from local farmers through \$1 million in state funds. Comparing the New Jersey and Kansas TEFAP programs, the equivalent amount in Kansas would be about \$376,000.

In addition to the concerns of limited food resources and increasing client demands, the majority of emergency food assistance providers rely heavily upon a rapidly-aging cohort of volunteers and express concern about finding new workers as the current volunteers age out of the system.

Recommendation: Supplement the foods made available through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) in Kansas with state dollars.

Recommendation: Implement state tax incentives to encourage corporate donations of food and monetary support to emergency food assistance organizations.

Recommendation: Promote volunteerism, and Kansans helping Kansans. Issue a policy directive to state agencies that would allow state employees to take a limited amount of paid time away from the worksite for community volunteer activities. Encourage private businesses to do the same.

An estimated 25-40% of food produced in the United States is lost to waste. Much of this is food that is nutritious and safe for human consumption, but perhaps rejected for market because of minor imperfections, or discarded as a result of over-supply of prepared foods. Many of these foods could be safely recovered and re-directed to those in need.

Fears about liability and food safety issues are frequently cited as barriers to food recovery. Although there are Good Samaritan Laws in place at both the State and Federal level that protect food donors from liability, concerns continue to limit food donations. Additionally, inconsistent interpretation of food safety regulations by local health departments further complicates the recovery of surplus foods.

Recommendation: KDHE and the Kansas Association of Local Health Departments should conduct a state-wide training program for local health departments, to include the applicable Good Samaritan and food safety laws, and to standardize the interpretation of food safety regulations in the context of food recovery.

Many local emergency food providers have limited capacity to accept donations of perishable or prepared foods due to a lack of refrigeration and freezer storage. This lack of capacity also limits their ability to store and distribute meat products.

Recommendation: Identify ways in which the state might assist local emergency food assistance organizations in acquiring refrigeration and freezer equipment.

Reducing poverty and increasing family self-sufficiency to provide greater food security

Nutrition assistance and emergency food programs provide a critical safety net for food insecure families. These programs are designed and intended to function as short-term solutions, filling in during temporary periods of hardship. They are not designed to be long-term solutions, nor can they effectively address the underlying issues that lead to food insecurity and hunger. Solving the problems of hunger and food security on a longer-term basis will require looking beyond the nutrition assistance programs to the root causes - financial insecurity and poverty. For this reason, the Task Force is including recommendations to reduce poverty and improve the financial security of Kansas families.

Although the majority of Kansas households that experience food insecurity have at least one full-time wage earner, many struggle to earn sufficient wages to make ends meet.

All too often, they face the difficult choice of whether to pay their rent, their heating bill, their medical bills, or buy food. Frequently without any reserve funds for emergencies, many are just one unexpected expense away from food insecurity and hunger.

Increasing earning power is one way to help struggling families. In 2004, The Economic Policy Institute calculated that a household of one parent and one child living in Topeka would need to earn a minimum of \$25,692 per year, or \$12.35 per hour to meet a basic family needs budget. A family of two parents and a child would need \$33,268 in earnings. An estimated 22.5% of Kansas families fell below these income levels. There are a number of approaches that might be considered. The Federal Minimum wage is currently \$5.15 per hour, and has not been increased since 1997. As of the November 2006 elections, twenty-nine states and the District of Columbia have adopted state minimum wage laws that exceed the federal level. Although there have been longstanding fears that increasing minimum wages will have a negative effect on business, leading economists have more recently concluded that those fears are unfounded. Raising the minimum wage could assist the lowest wage earners, if it does not result in their losing eligibility for other critical benefits such as subsidized housing, child care assistance and food stamps. Another approach to increasing earning power would be to provide low-income wage earners with technical skills training that would qualify them for higher wage technical and trade jobs.

Recommendation: Increase the Kansas minimum wage to exceed the current Federal level of \$5.15 per hour.

Recommendation: Implement a state-sponsored scholarship or subsidy program to assist low-income workers in acquiring technical or professional trade skills that would qualify them for higher-wage jobs.

Finding affordable housing is a concern for many low-income families. The task force has been told by a number of sources that the supply of affordable housing in Kansas is problematic, and money that must be paid for rent often takes away from money for food. This is one area in which Task Force members felt that there may be untapped funding sources available through federally-sponsored grant programs.

Recommendation: Expand the current supply of safe and affordable housing for low-income families.

Many of the Kansas families who experience food insecurity do so because they have had unexpected expenses, and lack any cash reserve or contingency funds for emergencies. Building and maintaining a modest financial reserve would allow many of these families to cope more effectively with unexpected demands on their budget, while still maintaining an adequate diet. Across the nation, the concept of Individual Development Accounts (IDAs), where savings set aside by an individual are matched

with additional funds to help the savings grow more rapidly, has been successful in helping low-income families save for higher education or purchases of homes.

Recommendation: Implement a savings option similar to Individual Development Accounts, with matching contributions from state or private sources that would encourage low-income families to set aside money for emergency funds, and for saving toward larger investments such as higher education or home purchases.

Through surveys conducted by America's Second Harvest and anecdotal accounts from agencies which serve clients directly, we know that many of the individuals seeking emergency food assistance have chronic health conditions and unpaid medical bills. The costs of medical care are just one more demand competing for limited household budget dollars. Poor oral health and a lack of access to dental care are also concerns, as they may limit an individual's ability to eat nutritious and healthy foods.

Recommendation: Continue to seek opportunities to extend health and dental insurance coverage and access to health care services to low-income adults in Kansas.

Through agencies that work directly with clients seeking food assistance, the Task Force has been told that many of the clients needing help are single mothers who either receive no child support or receive it on an irregular and sporadic basis. An analysis by the Annie E. Casey Foundation's *Kids Count* project shows that the percentage of female-headed families in Kansas that receive child support has decreased steadily from 54% in the year 2000 to 38% in 2004. While Kansas mothers were still slightly better off than the national average of 35% in 2004, this downward trend is disconcerting.

Recommendation: Examine the current system of Child Support enforcement in Kansas to determine if there are opportunities to improve collection efforts and channel child support monies to single mothers on a more regular and consistent basis.

Developing ongoing systems to coordinate and support hunger reduction efforts

Although there are currently a number of Kansas state agencies and private-sector organizations that play a role in hunger reduction efforts, there has been no state-level entity tasked specifically with the goal of reducing hunger. Efforts to monitor the extent of hunger and food insecurity within Kansas are hampered by both a lack of adequate data to support timely analysis for geographic areas and population subgroups within the state, and by a lack of consistent funding to support consistent, ongoing analysis of the data that are available.

Recommendation: Designate a state-level entity to be responsible for day-to-day coordination of efforts to reduce hunger and food insecurity in Kansas.

Recommendation: To provide a more timely and statistically robust data source that will allow for monitoring of hunger and food insecurity for geographic areas within Kansas and among population sub-groups, add a brief Household Food Security Module to the Kansas Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey conducted annually by KDHE.

Recommendation: Earmark funds to support regular, periodic analysis of hunger and food insecurity data for Kansas.

Kansas lacks a centralized and comprehensive clearinghouse for information related to hunger issues and emergency food assistance resources. Such a resource could serve to direct food-insecure individuals to food assistance resources in their communities, support hunger advocacy and relief efforts by providing state and community level data that could be used for monitoring progress and development of funding proposals, and promote and support community level hunger prevention efforts through the provision of information and examples.

Recommendation: Fund staff support for a centralized hunger information clearinghouse.

Building and sustaining the focused efforts that are needed to reduce levels of food insecurity and hunger in Kansas will require financial resources to support staffing and infrastructure. While some support from state budget dollars may be necessary, other funding sources may also be available to support these efforts. Grant funding, from both public and private sources, is a potentially significant source. During the course of our discussions, the Task Force repeatedly heard of grant funding sources that have been available to support the types of activities and infrastructure we identified as needed, but Kansas has rarely been successful in tapping those funding sources. State agency staff expressed frustration at lack of staff time and expertise to identify potential funding sources and to write successful proposals.

Recommendation: Fund one or more Grants Specialists positions within the State system to provide support to agency staff in seeking and acquiring grant funding sources.

Recommendation: Implement a state tax check-off program, similar to the “Chickadee Check-off”, to support anti-hunger programs and initiatives.

Conclusion

No Kansan should go to bed hungry. Food insecurity and hunger keep children from learning to their full potential, and contribute to life-long health problems. Through the recommendations outlined in this report, we believe that the Governor and State policy-makers can have a significant impact on reducing the levels of food insecurity and hunger in Kansas.

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