

---

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

---

**2007 Report and Recommendations**

**Prepared for Governor Kathleen Sebelius**  
**November 30, 2007**

# **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. 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 K-State research and Extension, 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 its second year (2007), the Task Force has continued to monitor information from a variety of sources regarding levels of hunger and food insecurity in Kansas, as well as issues related to the nutrition support safety-net. The most recent available data show that rates of household food insecurity have been gradually increasing since the year 1999, both nationally and in Kansas. Each year between 2004 and 2006, an average of approximately 136,000 Kansas households reported uncertainty about being able to obtain enough food. In nearly 49,000 Kansas homes, someone went without food because of a lack of resources. Rates of both food insecurity and hunger in Kansas have consistently been slightly above national rates, and current data suggest that the gap between Kansas and U.S. rates may be widening.

In response to our 2006 Report, a number of actions have been initiated. The Task Force applauds these efforts and is optimistic that they will have a positive impact toward the goal of reducing hunger and food insecurity in Kansas. Significant steps have been taken toward increasing participation rates in the food stamp program, expanding the capacity for vendors at farmers' markets to accept food stamp transactions, supplementing the decreasing volume of foods made available through The Emergency Food Assistance Program, reducing food waste, and collecting state-level data on food insecurity and hunger. These actions are described in more detail in the body of the full report.

In addition, our on-going research and discussions have led to the identification of an updated 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. Some of the recommendations are revised or carried forward from our 2006 report, while others are new. The Task Force believes that these recommendations represent an action plan that will allow us to move closer to the goal of eliminating food insecurity and hunger in Kansas.

In conclusion, household food insecurity and hunger continue to be a significant problem in Kansas. Although many actions have been initiated in the past year that we believe will be helpful in the fight against hunger, much work remains to be done. We must continue efforts to increase participation in the food stamp program as a first-line defense against hunger. We must also pay close attention and find ways to bring assistance to the struggling private-sector emergency food provider network. These agencies are currently straining to meet increased demands with decreasing resources, but cannot continue to function under these circumstances indefinitely. We need to establish an entity within the state governmental system that will assume responsibility for monitoring and promoting actions to solve the hunger problem in our state. And, finally, we must look beyond the symptoms of food insecurity and hunger and begin to delve more deeply into addressing the root causes of household financial security and poverty. Some of the steps that have been taken in the past year, although likely to have beneficial impact, were those that were the simplest to address. Now, we need to roll up our sleeves and begin to tackle some of the tougher issues, such as economic conditions.

There is no reason that Kansans should go hungry. If we have the will, we can solve this problem, and, at the same time make Kansas an even better place to live. The steps that must be taken to eliminate hunger will also result in improved health, increased workforce productivity, and economic prosperity. The Kansas Food Security Task Force looks forward to another year of progress toward the goal of eliminating hunger in Kansas.

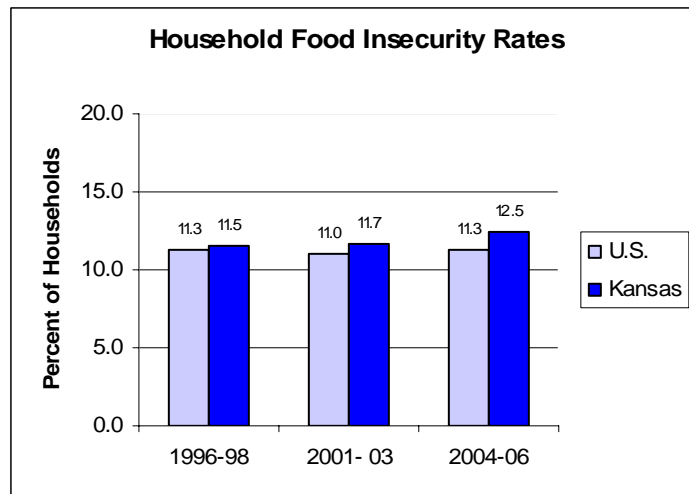
# Kansas Food Security Task Force 2006 Report to the Governor of Kansas

## INTRODUCTION

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. 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 K-State Research and Extension, the major Food Bank providers in the state, representatives of faith-based organizations with an expressed interest in reducing hunger, and other interested parties. This document represents our second annual report and recommendations to the Governor of Kansas.

## BACKGROUND: HUNGER AND FOOD INSECURITY IN KANSAS

Although food insecurity and hunger remain largely invisible issues in Kansas, the problems persist. In fact, the trend over recent years has shown a gradual increase in the numbers of families that struggle to obtain enough food to eat. Data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Current Population Survey, Food Security Supplement tell us that between the years 2004 and 2006, 12.5% of Kansas households reported that they had been uncertain about being able to obtain enough food at some time during the previous year. This figure represents an average of approximately 136,000 Kansas households each year. The uncertain access to enough food because of a lack of resources is referred to as "food insecurity." Nearly 49,000 households (4.5%) reported that someone went without food because of a lack of resources. Both nationally and in Kansas, levels of food insecurity and hunger have gradually increased since the year 1999. Rates of both food insecurity and hunger in Kansas have consistently been slightly above national rates, and current data suggest that the gap between Kansas and U.S. rates may be widening.



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 greatly increased risk. Households that include children experience food insecurity at a rate nearly twice as high as those without children, and nearly 40% of single-mother households in Kansas report experiencing food insecurity. The majority of food-insecure households are working families, with 60% having 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. Food insecurity and hunger in Kansas are not limited to the homeless, the unemployed, or those living in the inner cities. The face of hunger in Kansas today is a low-income family with children, working hard but unable to keep up with the costs of housing, heat, medical bills, child care and food.

Hunger in the United States is not a problem of not having enough food. Rather, it is largely a problem of equitable 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. Hunger is a complex problem that will not be solved by simply increasing the amount of free foods distributed through food banks and food pantries. Nor will it be solved solely by increasing assistance to low-income families through federally sponsored nutrition programs such as Food Stamps. To achieve real and lasting impact toward reducing hunger in Kansas, we will also need to study, understand and address the underlying causes - much tougher issues such as affordable housing and access to jobs that allow a full-time worker to earn a living wage. While we must continue to provide the supports that feed the food-insecure and the hungry, we must also think about longer-term solutions that will begin to address the underlying problems.

Household food insecurity and hunger have serious consequences. A recent report commissioned by the Sodexo Foundation estimated the annual economic burden associated with hunger to exceed \$90 billion nationally, and to be approximately \$900 million per year in Kansas. 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 and report poorer health status. 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 options 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.

## **UPDATE ON THE STATUS OF 2006 RECOMMENDATIONS**

A number of actions have been taken by the Governor's office and various state and private agencies as a result of the 2006 Kansas Food Security Task Force Report. The Task Force applauds these efforts and is optimistic that they will have a positive impact toward the goal of reducing hunger and food insecurity in Kansas. Actions that have been initiated during the past year are summarized below.

**2006 Recommendation:** Raise awareness of hunger and food insecurity as issues in Kansas.

During the past year, Task Force representatives have given presentations on the topic of hunger and food insecurity at several conferences, including the 2007 Healthy Food Policy Forum and the 2007 Kansas Conference on Aging. Informational materials were distributed at the Kansas Conference on Poverty. An Internet website providing information on the hunger in Kansas and Task Force activities has been implemented. In partnership with the Kansas Community Nutrition Services (KCNS), a one-day conference was conducted on October 29, 2007, focusing on building collaborations to increase organizational effectiveness in decreasing hunger and food insecurity in Kansas. More than 100 individuals attended this event, and many ideas were generated for steps that participants could take in their own communities to build effective anti-hunger collaborations.

Member organizations have also undertaken efforts to raise awareness of hunger in Kansas. In recognition of Hunger Awareness Day in June of 2007, Harvesters collaborated with local media to issue a food stamp challenge to the Kansas City community. Challenge participants were asked to try to feed their households for a week on a budget equal to the maximum food stamp benefit for a household of their size, and to share their experiences in an online community created by the Kansas City Star.

**2006 Recommendation:** Expand participation in the Food Stamp Program.

Of the recommendations put forth by the Task Force in 2006, increasing participation rates of eligible households in the food stamp program was identified as a top priority. We continue to believe that the Food Stamp program offers one of the most promising short-term interventions to reduce levels of hunger and food insecurity among low-income households. Evidence from the state of Oregon demonstrates that a focus on increasing food stamp participation rates can result in significant reductions in a state's rates of hunger and food insecurity. Toward this goal, the department of Social and Rehabilitative Services (SRS) has taken two substantial steps.

In 2006, a pilot project was conducted in three Kansas counties, in partnership with H&R Block. In this project, as tax preparers assisted low-income clients with tax returns, the financial information collected was also reviewed for potential client eligibility for Food Stamp benefits. Clients that met the screening criteria and indicated interest in applying for food stamp benefits were then assisted by H&R Block staff in completing an application. The pilot project was considered a success, with approximately 40 new families being enrolled to receive food stamp benefits, and the project will be expanded statewide during the upcoming tax season.

In addition to this successful public-private collaboration, SRS announced in August 2007 that \$150,000 had been designated to fund short-term pilot grants to non-profit agencies with innovative ideas for ways to assist low-income clients with Food Stamp outreach and application assistance. These grants were specifically targeted to geographic areas and population sub-groups that currently have low participation rates, and the funded projects will be required to periodically report to SRS the results of their efforts to increase food stamp participation. This strategy will allow SRS to very quickly identify successful strategies that might be appropriate for expansion to other areas of the state.

**2006 Recommendation:** Review and resolve the inconsistency between Kansas child care licensing categories and the federal eligibility criteria for participation in the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

KDHE staff have reviewed this issue and believe it to be fairly limited in scope, affecting approximately 10 child care centers in Kansas. Although no action has been taken to date, KDHE staff now have an enhanced understanding of the problem, and will consider options as licensing regulations are reviewed in the future.

**2006 Recommendation:** Expand Electronic Benefit Transaction (EBT) capability to additional farmers' markets throughout the state.

SRS has completed a study of the projected costs of expanding EBT capability to farmers' markets statewide, and have included funds in their SFY 2009 enhanced budget to support the expansion. This budget remains subject to approval by the 2008 Kansas Legislature, but if approved, expansion of EBT capability at farmers' markets will move forward next year.

**2006 Recommendation:** Supplement the foods made available through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) in Kansas with state dollars.

To help in off-setting the impact of a sixty percent decrease in the amount of foods made available through TEFAP over the past two years, SRS has proposed a \$300,000 budget enhancement for SFY2009. These funds would be used to

purchase additional foods to supplement the TEFAP distributions. This proposed budget enhancement remains subject to approval by the 2008 Kansas Legislature.

**2006 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.

Food safety inspection staff within the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) have worked to clarify the guidelines regarding 'best used by' and expiration dates, and will be including the clarification in their upcoming training sessions. A contact point within KDHE has been established for the reporting of problems or concerns about good food that is being discarded because of confusion surrounding this issue.

**2006 Recommendation:** Increase the Kansas minimum wage of \$2.65 per hour to exceed the current Federal level of \$5.15 per hour.

Although the 2006-2007 Kansas Legislature considered a measure to increase the Kansas minimum wage, the measure was not passed. However, the U.S. Congress did approve a phased-in increase in the Federal minimum wage, with minimum wages increasing to \$5.85 effective July 24, 2007; \$6.55 effective July 24, 2008; and \$7.25 effective July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2009. Since Kansas workers in jobs covered by the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) will be subject to the higher federal minimum wage rate, the increase in the federal minimum wage will have a positive impact on many low-wage Kansas workers. Nevertheless, approximately 27,000 Kansas workers are in job classes not subject to the FLSA, and are earning wages lower than the federal minimum wage.

**2006 Recommendation:** Continue to seek opportunities to extend health and dental insurance coverage and access to health care services to low-income adults in Kansas.

Governor Sebelius has made access to health care insurance a priority within her administration, and efforts are ongoing within the Governor's office, the Kansas Health Policy Authority, and the Kansas legislature to find an acceptable solution to the problem of uninsurance. Providing low-income families with affordable access to needed health care services will serve to reduce one significant source of household financial strain, and will free up dollars from the household budget that could be re-directed toward the purchase of nutritious foods.

**2006 Recommendation:** Add a brief Household Food Security Module to the Kansas Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey conducted annually by KDHE.

A six-question household food security screening panel has been approved by KDHE for inclusion in the 2008 Kansas Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance

Survey. The data collected through this process will provide important information on patterns of hunger and food insecurity within Kansas, and will be useful in more effectively targeting interventions within the state.

## **2007 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Significant progress has been made during 2007, and the Task Force is optimistic that the changes that have been implemented will move us toward the goal of ensuring that all Kansans have access to enough food of good nutritional quality. However, more remains to be done. The recommendations put forth in this report are a combination of some revised or carried forward from the 2006 report, and some that are new. The Task Force believes that these recommendations represent an action plan that will allow us to move closer to the goal of eliminating food insecurity and hunger in Kansas.

### **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. Including food insecurity and hunger in the Governor's agenda and publicly discussing the extent of the problem would help to stimulate public interest and action.

**Recommendation:** Include hunger reduction in the Governor's agenda and help to call attention to the issue as a priority. Support the efforts of the Kansas Food Security Task Force 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. Current estimates indicate that 65% of Kansans who qualify for the food stamp program actually participate and receive benefits.

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.

One often-cited barrier to participation in the food stamp program, particularly for seniors, is the minimum benefit amount of \$10 per month. This amount has not been increased since it was established in the 1970s, and is perceived by many potentially eligible persons to be such a small benefit that it is not worth the effort required to apply to the program. Many households that receive the minimum benefit contain elderly or disabled individuals. Some states have addressed this problem by supplementing the minimum monthly benefit amount with state dollars.

**Recommendation:** Continue to allocate attention and resources to support the efforts of SRS and collaborating partners in increasing rates of participation of eligible Kansas households in the Food Stamp program. Although significant initial steps toward this goal have been undertaken in 2007, these efforts will need to be continued and expanded in the upcoming year.

**Recommendation:** If the current Food Stamp minimum benefit level of \$10 per month is not increased in the upcoming federal Farm Bill legislation, consider supplementing the minimum benefit amount for Kansas recipients with state dollars.

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.

Despite the assistance that could be available to low-income children through the Summer Food Service program, participation rates remain low, with only 7% of low-income Kansas students participating during the summer of 2005. The reasons for this are numerous, and include the fact that many students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals during the school year do not live in areas that meet the 50% eligibility criteria. Transportation issues in rural areas also complicate the logistics of serving children when school is out.

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 to June 2006, the number of sponsors increased by 27 percent from 59 to 75, the number of sites increased by 30 percent from 195 to 253, and participation has increased by nearly 30% over the past ten years.

One area where the state could 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 extending to the lunch hour or beyond 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.

### **Supporting local efforts to provide emergency food**

Over the past year, members of the Kansas Food Security Task Force have continued to receive reports that the current resources of the emergency food assistance network are strained, and that the number of clients seeking assistance continues to rise. The quality and quantity of food donations to food bank and food pantry operations is decreasing. As a result of more efficient systems of inventory control, corporate food donations have declined significantly. At the same time, the volume of foods made available through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) has dropped by 60% over the last two years. At the time of this report, it is uncertain whether the U.S. Farm Bill will increase future funding support for the TEFAP program. Additionally, one of the major food bank operations in the state has experienced significant financial problems during the past year, resulting in reductions in staff and services offered. The emergency food provider network in Kansas is seriously strained, and in need of assistance.

The Task Force has also heard reports that the infrastructure for transporting and storage of large quantities of foods sometimes limits the ability of agencies to accept donated food when it becomes available. This is particularly true for perishable food items. Refrigeration and freezer storage capacity, as well as refrigerated trucks for transportation, are limiting factors. Expansion of cold storage capacity at agencies located throughout the state, and/ or a centralized warehouse and distribution facility located somewhere along the western I-70 corridor could help to alleviate this problem and make better use of foods that become available.

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.

Another approach to increasing resources available to food bank operations would be to provide an income tax credit for donations to food banks and food pantries. The Missouri

legislature passed such a bill last year, providing a tax credit equal to one-half the value of the donation, not to exceed \$2,500 per taxpayer.

**Recommendation:** Support SRS efforts to allocate state budget dollars toward supplementation of foods made available through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP).

**Recommendation:** Appoint a task force to identify ways in which the state might assist in strengthening the infrastructure for handling donated food items, particularly for perishables. Options that should be considered include state funding assistance, grant funding sources that might be used to purchase additional cold storage and distribution capacity, and opportunities to improve collaboration and efficiency among public and private entities currently involved in emergency food distribution.

**Recommendation:** Implement a state income tax credit to encourage donations of food and monetary support to emergency food assistance organizations.

### **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 of food insecurity and hunger, i.e., financial insecurity and poverty. For this reason, the Task Force is again 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 the rent, the heating bill, the medical bills, or buy food. Increasing costs of food, fuel, and health care have only exacerbated this problem. Frequently without any reserve funds for emergencies, many families are just one unexpected expense away from food insecurity and hunger. Economic indicators show that while the overall economy has improved in recent years, the wages of low- and middle-income earners have gained only modest increases and have failed to keep pace with inflation.

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. Raising the Kansas minimum wage to a rate consistent with the federal minimum wage would assist the 27,000 Kansas workers who currently earn less than the federal minimum wage. Raising the Kansas minimum wage to a level that exceeds the current federal rate of \$5.85/ hour would have even broader benefit, by bringing all low-wage earners closer to a living wage. Currently, thirty-three states have enacted minimum wage levels that exceed the federal rate. Promotion and expansion of existing workforce training and vocational training programs, combined with scholarships or tuition assistance for low-income individuals could also help to position low-income workers to qualify for better paying technical and trades 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 believe that there may be untapped funding sources available through federally-sponsored grant programs.

Through surveys conducted by America's Second Harvest and first-hand 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.

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. A similar type of savings plan might be implemented to encourage low-income families to build and maintain a modest contingency fund for emergencies and unexpected expenses. Caution must be exercised, however, in the design of any savings incentive program to ensure that any modest financial gains accumulated through savings are not offset by the loss of eligibility for other assistance programs such as food stamps and child care subsidies.

**Recommendation:** Increase the Kansas minimum wage to equal or exceed the current Federal level of \$5.85 per hour. Currently, an estimated 27,000 Kansas workers are employed in jobs not subject to the federal Fair Labor Standards Act and are earning less than the federal minimum wage rate.

**Recommendation:** Promote the workforce development services currently available through the Kansas Workforce Centers to all low-income adults in Kansas. Consider expansion if warranted.

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

**Recommendation:** Implement a savings incentive program to encourage low-income families to maintain a modest cash reserve.

**Recommendation:** Continue the Governor's efforts to expand affordable access to health insurance for low-income Kansans.

### **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, no state-level entity has been tasked specifically with the goal of reducing hunger. Efforts to monitor the extent of hunger and food insecurity within Kansas have been hampered by both a lack of adequate and timely state-level data, and a lack of assigned responsibility for ongoing monitoring of the problem. Over the past year, steps have been taken to address the lack of Kansas-specific data by adding a panel of food security questions to the next round of the Kansas Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey. A need still remains to assign responsibility for ongoing monitoring of food insecurity levels, and for coordination of intervention efforts.

A need also remains for a centralized clearinghouse for information related to hunger food insecurity in Kansas, as well as information about available nutrition assistance resources. Such a clearinghouse could serve to direct food-insecure individuals to food assistance resources in their communities, to 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 to promote and support community level hunger prevention efforts through the provision of information and examples.

**Recommendation:** Designate a state-level entity to be responsible for day-to-day coordination of efforts to reduce hunger and food insecurity in Kansas, including on-going monitoring of food security and hunger levels in Kansas. This office could also fulfill the need for a centralized and comprehensive clearinghouse for information related to hunger issues and emergency food assistance resources.

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 has 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. Grant requirements for matching funds sometimes serve as a barrier. State agency staff have also 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:** Establish a state-level fund to support anti-hunger efforts in Kansas. One possible source of funding could be a state income tax check-off program, similar to the “Chickadee Check-off”. The funds generated through this program might be utilized as matching funds to be applied toward leveraging other grant funding sources, to assist local food pantry operations with acquiring needed cold storage capacity, or to provide seed money for small-scale pilot projects testing the effectiveness of various anti-hunger interventions.

## **CONCLUSION**

Household food insecurity and hunger continue to be a significant problem in Kansas. Although many actions have been initiated in the past year that we believe will be helpful in the fight against hunger, much work remains to be done. We must continue efforts to increase participation in the food stamp program as a first-line defense against hunger. We must also pay close attention and find ways to bring assistance to the struggling private-sector emergency food provider network. These agencies are currently straining to meet increased demands with decreasing resources, but cannot continue to function under these circumstances indefinitely. We need to establish an entity within the state governmental system that will assume responsibility for monitoring and promoting actions to solve the hunger problem in our state. And, finally, we must look beyond the symptoms of food insecurity and hunger and begin to delve more deeply into addressing the root causes of household financial security and poverty. Some of the steps that have been taken in the past year, although likely to have beneficial impact, were those that were the simplest to address. Now, we need to roll up our sleeves and begin to tackle some of the tougher issues, such as economic conditions.

There is no reason that Kansans should go hungry. If we have the will, we can solve this problem, and, at the same time make Kansas an even better place to live. The steps that must be taken to eliminate hunger will also result in improved health, increased workforce productivity, and economic prosperity. The Kansas Food Security Task Force looks forward to another year of progress toward the goal of eliminating hunger in Kansas.

**KANSAS FOOD SECURITY TASK FORCE MEMBERSHIP**

**Director, Kansas Food Policy Council**

**Dan Nagengast**, Executive Director  
Kansas Rural Center

**Coordinator, Kansas Food Security Task Force**

**Barbara LaClair**  
Kansas Rural Center

**Karole Bradford**

Program Director  
Inter-Faith Ministries

**Susan Craig**

Nutrition Education Outreach and Program Marketing  
Kansas Department of Social Rehabilitation Services

**Karen Fitzgerald**

Coordinator  
Kansas Nutrition Network

**Paula Ford**

Doctoral Student, Kansas State University

**Ron Hamilton**

Manager, Food Distribution Program  
Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services

**Joe Hendrixson**

Director, Great Plains Office  
Church World Service

**Mary Meck Higgins**

Extension Specialist, Nutrition  
K-State Research & Extension

**John Holzhuter**

The Winter Center for Restorative Justice

**Karen Hudson**

Coordinator Family Nutrition Program  
K-State Research & Extension

**Pam Jacob**

Manager, Food Stamp Program  
Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services

**Jodi Mackey**

Director, Child Nutrition and Wellness  
Kansas State Department of Education

**Jane Metzger**

President/ CEO  
Meals on Wheels of Shawnee & Jefferson Counties

**Denis Medeiros**

Chair, Department of Human Nutrition  
Kansas State University

**Natascha Phillip**

Executive Director  
Flinthills Breadbasket

**Sandra Procter**

Coordinator, EFNEP  
K-State Research & Extension

**Karen Siebert**

Communications Manager  
Harvesters – The Community Food Network

**Tawny Stottlemire**

Executive Director  
Kansas Association of Community Action Agencies

**Dave Thomason**

Director, Nutrition and WIC Services  
Kansas Department of Health & Environment

**Tamara Tiemann**

Program Manager, Nutrition and Community Services  
Kansas Department on Aging

**Brian Walker**

Executive Director  
Kansas Food Bank