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

2008 Report and Recommendations

Prepared for Governor Kathleen Sebelius
December 12, 2008

Kansas Food Security Task Force 2008 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.

In response to our 2006 and 2007 Reports, 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. Over the past year, significant changes have occurred through actions taken at the federal, state and local levels that relate to recommendations made in our previous reports. At the national level, passage of the 2008 Farm Bill has increased funding for the purchase and distribution of foods through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), and has increased the minimum monthly benefit under the Food Stamp program from \$10 to \$14. In Kansas, significant steps have been taken toward increasing participation rates in the food stamp program and toward further expansion of the capacity of farmers' markets to accept food stamp sales transactions. The private food banks that serve Kansas have significantly expanded the services they provide, including Backpack programs to provide weekend food for school-aged children. These changes and actions are described in more detail in the body of the full report.

Over the course of its third year (2008), 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. While significant efforts have been undertaken toward the goal of reducing the prevalence of food insecurity and hunger among Kansas families, worsening economic conditions over the past year have resulted in increasing numbers of Kansans seeking food assistance. The numbers of individuals participating in the Kansas Food Assistance program (now known nationally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)) and the Women, Infants and Children Supplemental Nutrition Program (WIC) have increased significantly over the past 12 months, and food pantries across Kansas report that they have seen a thirty percent increase in the number of clients coming through their doors. The majority of those seeking assistance are from working families, and many are asking for assistance for the first time in their lives.

The most recently available data¹ on levels of household food insecurity and hunger across the nation and in Kansas indicate that, while national levels of food insecurity and hunger in 2007 did not change significantly from previous years, rates of food insecurity continued to creep upward in Kansas, and the gap between Kansas and U.S. rates continued to widen. Rates of household food insecurity in Kansas during 2005-2007 were a full 2 percent higher than national rates, with 13% of households rated as food-insecure at some time during each year. It is important to note that these data reflect the experience of households during 2007, a period of expansion and economic growth. Without doubt, the current situation is even less positive.

At the same time that increasing numbers of Kansas families are food-insecure and seeking help, the State is facing severe budget shortfalls and the need to reduce expenditures. In upcoming months, State policy-makers will be challenged to make tough choices as they look for ways to balance the budget and still provide essential services.

The Kansas Food Security Task Force is appreciative of the ongoing support received from the Governor's office and participating state agencies. Through partnerships and collaborations among agencies and organizations participating in the Task Force, many opportunities to coordinate efforts and strengthen the emergency food assistance network in Kansas have been identified and acted upon. We believe that each of the steps that have been initiated will move us toward reducing levels of food insecurity and hunger among Kansas families. Our work is far from complete, however, and continued efforts will be even more important during the current period of economic hardship.

With that in mind, we respectfully submit an updated set of recommendations for actions that might be taken at the state level to reduce the prevalence of food insecurity and hunger among Kansas households. This year, we submit a shorter list of recommendations than in previous years, focused in four major areas that we feel are critical: 1) Maximizing scarce state dollars by using them to leverage federal and private funding sources, 2) Reducing childhood hunger and food insecurity, 3) Strengthening the emergency food assistance safety net, and, 4) Addressing the underlying causes of hunger and food insecurity. Many of our recommendations have minimal requirements for outlays of state dollars, yet have the potential to return large benefits in terms of improving the food security and health of Kansans, improving school performance, and boosting the Kansas economy.

In conclusion, the problems of food insecurity and hunger among Kansas families are serious, and growing. Although many actions have been initiated in the past two years that we believe will be helpful in the fight against hunger, much work remains to be done. Current economic conditions will likely mean many difficult budgetary challenges for Kansas families and for Kansas government. Yet, we also face opportunity. At the national level, we may be approaching a time when political will and public sentiment are converging toward solving the hunger problem. The incoming President and Vice-President have campaigned on a platform of poverty reduction and strengthening the

¹ Nord, Mark, Margaret Andrews and Steven Carlson. *Household Food Security in the United States, 2007*. ERR-66, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Econ. Res. Serv. November 2008.

middle class, and have pledged to end childhood hunger by the year 2015. National policy-makers are recognizing that expanded SNAP (food assistance) and unemployment benefits should be considered as part of an economic stimulus package. Recent polls indicate that Americans recognize that domestic hunger is an important problem, and support governmental steps toward solving the problem.² In a post-election poll conducted in November 2008, 73% of respondents favored spending additional tax dollars on federal hunger programs to end child hunger in the United States by 2015.³ Many of the solutions to the problems of hunger and food insecurity are also steps toward improving the economic security of families, and strengthening the overall economy. Small investments in improving food security will reap long-term benefits and much larger returns in improved health and productivity.

No Kansan should go hungry. We can solve this problem, and, at the same time make Kansas stronger and a 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.

² Food Research and Action Center (25 September 2008). Memorandum from Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., and McLaughlin & Associates to Jim Weill, Food Research and Action Center, RE: Review of Public Opinion Research on Nutrition and Hunger. Retrieved from http://www.frac.org/Press_Release/hungerpoll08.htm, accessed December 08, 2008.

³ The Alliance to End Hunger, *2008 National Post-Election Survey*. Results presented by McLaughlin & Associates – Freedman Consulting, November 5, 2008. Report available at <http://www.alliancetoendhunger.org/building-political-will/hunger-message-project/index.html>.

2008 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE KANSAS FOOD SECURITY TASK FORCE:

1. Maximize scarce state dollars by leveraging Federal and private funding

Recommendation: Continue to allocate attention and resources to support efforts to increase participation of eligible Kansas households in the Food Stamp program.

Recommendation: Restore state funding levels required to continue the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program.

Recommendation: Fund a Grants Specialist position within the State system to provide support to State agency staff in identifying and acquiring grant funding resources.

2. Focus on eliminating childhood hunger

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.

2. Strengthen the emergency food assistance safety net

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

4. Address the Underlying Causes of Hunger and Food Insecurity

Recommendation: Include poverty reduction and living wage as high-priority issues on the 2009 Kansas policy agenda.

Kansas Food Security Task Force 2008 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: UPDATE ON HUNGER AND FOOD INSECURITY IN KANSAS

Over the past year many changes have taken place at the national and state level that will impact Kansas families' food security and access to healthy foods.

The passage of the federal 2008 Farm Bill legislation included many significant changes and expansions to federally supported nutrition assistance programs. Among the changes are increases in mandatory funding levels for the purchase of commodity foods under The Emergency Food Assistance Program, from the previous level of \$140 million per year to \$190 million in federal fiscal year (FFY) 2008 and \$250 million in FFY 2009, with funding increases indexed for food-price inflation for FFY 2010 – 2012. The 2008 Farm Bill also increased the minimum monthly benefit amount under the Food Stamp program (re-named SNAP) from \$10 to \$14, with increases indexed to inflation.⁴

Another provision of the 2008 Farm Bill expanded the funding available for the school Fresh Fruits and Vegetable program by \$40 million in FFY 2008, with additional annual increases in funding to a level of \$150 million in FFY 2011. In addition to funding increases, the Fresh Fruits and Vegetables program was expanded to include all states, and is targeted to low-income elementary schools in each state. As a result of this change, Kansas was awarded \$748,995 for School Year 2008-2009, and 33 elementary schools in Kansas are participating in the program for the first time.⁵

⁴ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *2008 Farm Bill Side-By-Side*. Retrieved November 15, 2008, from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/FarmBill/2008/Titles/TitleIVNutrition.htm>.

⁵ Information provided by the Jodi Mackey, Director of Child Nutrition and Wellness, Kansas State Department of Education

As a result of recommendations put forth in a 2005 report by the Institute of Medicine, revisions have been made to the package of foods authorized under the federally-sponsored WIC program, and the Kansas WIC program is currently working on procedural and operational changes that will be required for implementation of the new food package. The new WIC food package, which will be implemented in October 2009, will align the food content with the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and infant feeding practice guidelines of the American Academy of Pediatrics. It will include authorization for the purchase of more fruits and vegetables than the previously-defined package allowed.⁶

Many low-income workers have received some increases in their earnings during the past year. As mandated under the federal Fair Labor Standards Act, the federal minimum wage level increased to \$6.55 per hour effective July 24, 2008.⁷ Although this hourly wage is still substantially less than what would be considered a living wage, it will bring low-income workers one step closer to being able to afford a modest standard of living.

While these programmatic revisions and legislative actions have brought changes that should help to alleviate the problems of hunger and food insecurity, other recent changes in the economic environment have likely offset any potential gains. Over the past year, fuel prices soared, and peaked at more than \$4.00 per gallon. Food prices have also increased sharply – USDA has forecast that the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for food will increase by 5 to 6 percent in 2008.⁸ Data released by the Bureau of Labor statistics show that national rates of unemployment have increased from 4.8 % in October 2007 to 6.5% in October 2008⁹; Kansas unemployment rates rose from 4.0% to 4.8% over the same time period¹⁰. More recently, national economic conditions brought on by the collapse of several prominent financial institutions have reached levels that have frequently been described as a “crisis,” resulting in investment losses, mortgage foreclosures, credit-tightening, job losses and decreases in consumer spending. At the time of this report, it is unclear how or when this downturn of the economy will end. What is clear is that these economic conditions are certain to create additional hardships for those families who have previously been just getting by, but are without any resources in reserve. Many of these families are likely to find themselves no longer able to stretch their incomes far enough to cover the necessities of food, housing, fuel, and health care. Even before the

⁶ For more detail on changes in the WIC Food Package, refer to USDA, Food and Nutrition Services, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/benefitsandservices/foodpkg.HTM>.

⁷ U.S. Department of Labor, Federal Minimum Wage rates, retrieved November 5, 2008, from <http://www.dol.gov/elaws/faq/esa/flsa/001.htm>.

⁸ USDA, Economic Research Service, Briefing Rooms, *Food CPI, Prices and Expenditures*. Retrieved November 6, 2008 from <http://www.dol.gov/elaws/faq/esa/flsa/001.htm>.

⁹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey*. Retrieved December 8, 2008, from <http://www.bls.gov/cps/>.

¹⁰ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Local Area Unemployment Statistics*. Retrieved December 8, 2008, from <http://www.bls.gov/lau/>.

economic problems reached crisis proportion on Wall Street, there were indications of increasing numbers of American families struggling to make ends meet.

One such indication is found in the increasing numbers of families and individuals that have been participating in food assistance programs. At the national level, the number of people receiving food stamp benefits in May 2008 (28,435,841) was the second highest monthly total on record, exceeded only by the month of November 2005 shortly after the devastation caused by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma. The May 2008 participation count represents an increase of more than 350,000 individuals over the previous month, and more than 2 million people since May 2007.¹¹ In Kansas, Food Stamp participation numbers have also been steadily increasing, with an additional 9,563 individuals added to the program between September 2007 and September 2008.¹² The number of individuals served through the Kansas WIC program also reached a record high of 75,605 in August of 2008, up five percent from August 2007 levels.¹³

Another indication is seen in the reports from food banks and food pantries. Food pantry operations across Kansas consistently reported in September that they have observed 30 percent increases over the past year in the numbers of clients coming through their doors seeking emergency food assistance. For many of these clients, this is the first time that they have ever had to ask for help, and the majority of clients are from working families.¹⁴ At the same time that the numbers of people seeking assistance has increased, supplies of food made available to food banks through TEFAP, and food donations from food industry sources have decreased significantly. Many local food pantries have struggled and continue to struggle to meet the needs of their clients. Fortunately, 2008 Farm Bill legislation increased TEFAP funding levels, and the amounts of food distributed through the TEFAP program should begin to increase again in upcoming months.

RECENT DATA ON HUNGER IN KANSAS

Although we sometimes tend to think of hunger as a problem that exists primarily in poor, urban parts of the country, available data tell us that the problems of hunger and food insecurity exist at about equal rates in urban and rural parts of the nation. In fact, in

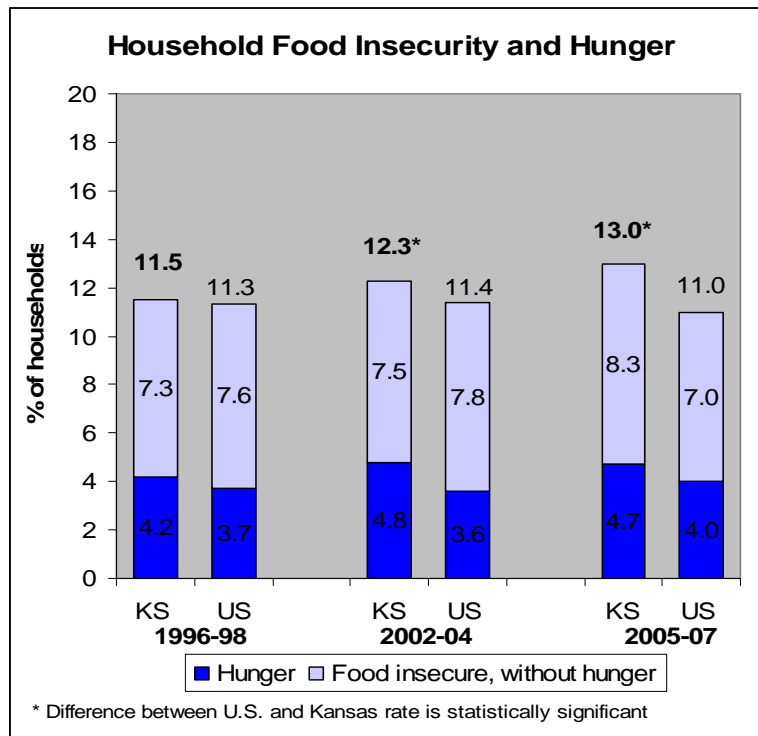
¹¹ Weinberg, Zy and Barbara Vauthier, Eds. *Foodlinks America*, August 29, 2008. For archived editions of *FoodLinks America*, go to www.tefapalliance.org.

¹² Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, Public Assistance Report SFY 2009. Retrieved December 8, 2008, from <http://www.srskansas.org/ISD/ees/reports/PAR.pdf>.

¹³ Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Nutrition and WIC Services Section; USDA Food and Nutrition Services, Women, Infants and Children Program Participation Data, retrieved December 8, 2008, from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/27wilatest.htm>.

¹⁴ Informal survey of Kansas Food Banks and subsidiary food distribution agencies, September 2008, by members of the Kansas Food Security Task Force.

recent years, Kansan families have experienced food insecurity and hunger more frequently than families across the nation. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey, Food Security Supplement reveal a troubling trend; while national rates of household food insecurity have remained fairly stable over the past decade, rates of food insecurity among Kansas households have crept consistently upward, and the gap between U.S. and Kansas rates has widened.¹⁵ Between the years 2005 and 2007, more than *one out of every eight Kansas households* (13.0%) reported that they had at some time been uncertain of being able to obtain enough food. This figure represents an average of approximately 141,000 Kansas households each year. The uncertain access to enough food because of a lack of resources is referred to as “food insecurity.” In more than 51,000 food-insecure Kansas households (4.7% of all Kansas households), someone went without food or modified their eating because of a lack of food (referred to as ‘hunger’ in this report.)



It should be noted that these data reflect the experience of households during 2007, a period of economic expansion and growth. Without a doubt, the current experience of Kansas families is even less positive.

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

¹⁵ Nord, Mark, Margaret Andrews, and Steven Carlson. *Household Food Security in the United States, 2007*. ERR-66, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. November 2008. Report can be accessed at: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR66/ERR66b.pdf>

intuitive. Households which include 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.¹⁶ Levels of hunger and food insecurity are about equal 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 larger cities. The face of hunger in Kansas today is a low-income working family with children, trying to earn their way but unable to keep up with the costs of housing, heat, medical bills, child care and food.

Food insecurity and hunger have serious and long-term consequences. Inadequate nutrition during periods of brain growth in early childhood can result in delays in cognitive development. Research findings tell us that children who grow up in food-insecure households perform less well in school, and are more likely to have health 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 paradoxical, 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.

Hunger in the United States is not a problem of not having enough food. Food production in the United States yields approximately twice the caloric value needed to supply the population. For the most part, food insecurity and hunger in the U.S. are the consequence of inadequate earning power for low-wage working families. Our approach to addressing food insecurity and hunger in the United States has relied heavily on government-sponsored programs that supplement the food purchasing power of low-income families, government purchase and distribution of surplus foods, and distributions of free food through private-sector food banks and food pantries. While all of these programs are laudable and have been important in preventing situations of food insecurity from advancing to full-blown malnutrition and starvation, they for the most part fail to address the underlying causes that got families into the food insecurity situation in the first place. These feeding and supplemental nutrition programs are critical interim measures that must be maintained as short-term solutions to carry families through periods of hardship. But, to achieve real and lasting change, we will also need to address the underlying causes and take steps toward re-establishing the ability of all working families to earn a wage that is sufficient to provide for a decent standard of living. While we must continue

¹⁶LaClair, Barbara and Mark Berry. *Hunger in the Heartland: Hunger and Food Insecurity Among Kansans, 1995-2000*. Kansas Health Institute, January 2004. Report can be accessed at: <http://www.khi.org/resources/Other/51-0401HungerHeartland.pdf>.

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 and eliminate food insecurity and hunger.

UPDATE ON THE STATUS OF 2006 AND 2007 RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of actions have been taken at both the Federal and State levels that relate to recommendations previously put forward by the Kansas Food Security Task Force. We appreciate the continued support by the Governor's office and participating state agencies and organizations, and we are once again optimistic that these changes will have a positive impact on levels of hunger and food insecurity in Kansas. Changes that have been initiated during the past year are summarized below.

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

A the result of a collaborative effort between SRS, the Kansas Department on Aging, K-State Research and Extension Services, and the Kansas Rural Center, two Kansas Farmers' markets participated during the 2007 Farmers' Market season in a successful pilot test of wireless EBT transactions to support farmers' market sales to Food Stamp beneficiaries. Both of these markets continued to offer EBT sales during the 2008 market season. This year, SRS has set aside a portion of Food Stamp Bonus funds received from USDA in July 2008 to expand EBT capability to an additional 4 to 5 markets for the 2009 summer season. Planning and implementation steps for this expansion are currently in progress.

2007 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.

In July of 2008, SRS was awarded \$1.5 million from USDA Food Stamp Bonus funds in recognition of their low error rates. The agency set aside a portion of this money to support efforts to increase participation in the Kansas Food Assistance program, and in September of 2008 SRS awarded \$150,000 in grants to seven Kansas organizations for Food Assistance Outreach projects. The grants were targeted toward increasing Food Assistance participation rates in areas of low participation, and among elderly and Hispanic populations. This is the second consecutive year that SRS has funded food stamp outreach projects by Kansas organizations.

During the 2006-2007 income tax season, SRS worked collaboratively with H&R Block in a 3-county pilot test of a program in which H&R Block tax preparers screened low-income tax clients for potential eligibility for food stamp assistance,

and then assisted interested clients in completing the Food Stamp application and submitting it to SRS. The collaboration was continued in the 2007-2008 tax season, and expanded to all parts of the state where H&R Block has tax preparation offices, and will continue again during the 2008-2009 income tax season.

SRS is also working with United Way of the Plains to use the BEN benefit calculator system to screen low-income clients for potential eligibility for the Food Assistance Program, and with Inter-Faith Ministries in Wichita to support the Benefit Bank program. The Benefit Bank service is available at community organizations and is used to help low-income individuals file their income taxes and to apply for food assistance, cash assistance, and medical assistance.

Representatives from the SRS Food Assistance program and K-State Research and Extension have collaborated in developing a joint Food Assistance outreach promotion project.

Harvesters is also working with SRS on Food Stamp Outreach as one of the organizations funded in the 2008 Outreach grants. In addition, Harvesters is working with United Way on the 211 program, which will connect individuals with assistance programs, including the Food Assistance Program, in their area.

2007 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.

The 2008 Farm Bill legislation included revisions that will increase the minimum monthly food stamp benefit from \$10 to \$14, and will index the benefit amount to inflation.

2007 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.

Although no action has been taken on this recommendation, Summer Feeding programs in Kansas have continued to expand, with an increase from 2003 to 2008 of 57 to 77 sponsors, and 191 to 251 meal sites. Expansion to reach more low-income children continues to be challenging due to a number of factors: requirements that participating sites have at least 50% of children qualifying for free or reduced price school meals; minimal reimbursement for administrative costs, and a lack of funding to support transportation of rural children to meal sites.

2007 Recommendation: Support SRS efforts to allocate state budget dollars toward supplementation of foods made available through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP).

The amount of foods distributed through TEFAP had decreased significantly over the past few years, resulting in many food banks and food pantries having difficulty maintaining sufficient food inventories to meet the needs of their clients. Legislation included in the 2008 Farm Bill increased funding for both the entitlement and bonus foods distributed through TEFAP, and indexes future funding for food-price inflation. Some changes will be phased in during 2008, and 2009 food distribution levels are expected to be substantially higher.

Other notable progress over the past year:

The Kansas Department of Education has been working collaboratively with SRS to use matched data from the Food Stamp program and school enrollment rosters to help districts find students from low-income households and to automatically qualify those students for free and reduced price school meals. This will eliminate the need for families to complete an application for the Free/ Reduced Price school meal program, and will result in more low-income students receiving their school meals free or at reduced price.

Backpack programs administered through Food Banks operating in Kansas are another notable effort toward reducing childhood hunger. For many school-aged children who rely on free or reduced price meals during the school week, weekends may represent days without enough food. In these programs, backpacks filled with a two-day supply of shelf-stable, kid-friendly foods are distributed to participating schools. Students in need are identified by school staff, and are given on Fridays a backpack of food to take home to be consumed during the weekend. Children return the empty backpack to school on Monday so that it can be re-supplied with food for the following week. The *Food for Kids* backpack program administered by the Kansas Food Bank in Wichita is currently in its 5th year, and serves schools in 86 counties in Kansas. The Food Bank is continuing to add schools to the program, and will be serving 300 schools by the end of the year. Deliveries are made to schools on a monthly basis, and one school staff person is needed to distribute each week. In some locations, faith-based organizations deliver fresh fruit to the participating schools each Friday, and the school's site coordinator adds those items to the backpacks. Last year, 3,800 children were served through the *Food For Kids* program; this year the number of children has increased to 5,500. Harvester's operates a similar program in the Kansas City area, which will be expanding this year from 650 backpacks per week to 8,000 per week by the end of this school year. Second Harvest of St. Joseph also operates a school backpack program in the counties that they serve and The Flinthills Breadbasket has just begun a program in Manhattan. Reports from staff at participating schools have indicated that these programs have resulted in increased communication between school principals and parents, improved teacher morale, and

fewer discipline problems and improved grades among participating students. Over the next year, Harvesters will be conducting a formal evaluation of their school backpack program, and will be collecting data to document program impact. These programs have been developed and operate entirely with private funding sources; no governmental food assistance funding sources are involved. Presently, the school-based programs operate only during the school year.

2008 RECOMMENDATIONS

Significant progress has been made during 2007, and the Task Force is optimistic that the changes that have been implemented will help to move us toward the goal of ensuring that all Kansans have access to enough food of good nutritional quality. However, recent data and anecdotal reports remind us that our work is far from finished. This report includes our updated recommendations for actions that should be taken at the state level to further reduce hunger and food insecurity among Kansas households. The recommendations are focused in four major areas that we feel are critical: 1) Maximizing scarce state dollars by using them to leverage federal and private funding sources, 2) Reducing childhood hunger and food insecurity, 3) Strengthening the emergency food assistance safety net, and 4) Addressing the underlying causes of hunger and food insecurity.

1. MAXIMIZE SCARCE STATE DOLLARS BY LEVERAGING FEDERAL AND PRIVATE FUNDING

During times of tight state budgets and revenue shortfalls, it is tempting to balance the budget by reducing or cutting “optional” programs and services, and avoiding any new outlays of money. Yet, at the same time that the state is facing budget difficulties, many Kansas families are also struggling to balance their budgets and may be forced to call upon the safety net provided through government programs. By all available indications, rates of food insecurity and hunger among Kansas families have increased over the past year, and will likely continue to rise in upcoming months. In some cases, modest outlays of state dollars could be used as matching funds to draw down much larger amounts of funding from federal or private sources that could be used to help alleviate food insecurity and hunger among Kansas families.

Increasing the numbers of eligible Kansans participating in the Food Assistance program is one example where modest outlays of state money and effort spent on outreach and promotion efforts could reap substantial benefits in the form of federal dollars. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (Food Assistance Program in Kansas), 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. Participation in the Food Assistance Program is one of the most immediate courses of action as an interim solution to food insecurity and hunger, as the supplemental purchasing power

provided by food stamp benefits helps low-income households to afford the purchase of more and higher-quality food. The Kansas Food Assistance Program is funded entirely with Federal dollars.

In addition to the increased food purchasing power provided to participating households, food assistance benefits can also make a substantial contribution to state and local economies. The most recently available estimates indicate that 65% of Kansans who qualify for the food stamp program actually participate and receive benefits. Increasing the Kansas food assistance participation rate to 80% of eligible individuals would result in an additional annual infusion of \$33,783,951 into the state's economy. Because food assistance benefits stimulate additional economic activity by increasing household spending, the total value of the economic activity triggered by these additional food stamp dollars would be estimated at more than \$62 million per year.¹⁷

2008 Recommendation: Continue to allocate attention and resources to support efforts to increase participation of eligible Kansas households in the Food Assistance Program.

The Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, administered by USDA is another example of state dollars leveraging substantially larger amounts of federal dollars to benefit both the nutrition of low-income Kansas seniors, and the incomes of Kansas farmers. This program, which provides about 8,400 low-income Kansas seniors with approximately \$30 in vouchers each market season to be applied toward the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables at farmers' markets or participating farm stands, has been very popular among seniors. Program evaluations have demonstrated that participating individuals increased their consumption of fruits and vegetables during the market season, and that those increases in consumption were sustained after the market season ended. With an annual investment of approximately \$25,000 from the State General Fund, of state funds, nearly \$175,000 in Federal dollars has been drawn down each year in support of this program. As a result of current and anticipated future shortfalls in the state budget, state funding support for this program has been eliminated.

The Food Security Task Force recognizes that the budget decisions facing the Kansas Department on Aging have been extremely difficult, and that budget reductions that result in the reduction or elimination of programs to seniors are not undertaken lightly. Nevertheless, the Task Force would like to respectfully express their concern with the elimination of this program and request that efforts be initiated to identify ways by which this important program could be restored and continued. The amount of state funding that would be saved through elimination of the SFMNP is very small; and the potential loss in terms of nutritional status and well-being of low-income Kansas seniors is substantial. Task Force members have expressed concern that once Kansas withdraws

¹⁷ Calculations utilizing methodology defined by U.S. Department of Agriculture, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, The Business Case for Increasing SNAP Participation. Retrieved from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/business-case.htm>, most recently accessed December 8, 2008.

participation from the SFMNP, it will be very difficult to re-enter the Federal program in the future. Given the small amount of state funding required to maintain this program, it may be possible to identify a private funding source that would be willing to contribute the amount necessary to continue state participation. The Task Force respectfully requests that the state reconsider the decision to eliminate the Kansas Senior Market Nutrition Program, and that additional effort be put into identification of alternative means by which this program could be continued.

2008 Recommendation: Restore state funding levels required to continue the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program.

Grants, from both public and private sources, are a potentially significant source of funding that could be used to supplement limited state dollars and support continued efforts to strengthen the food assistance safety net. Over the course of our first two years, the Food Security Task Force has been made aware of many grant funding opportunities that might have been used to support efforts to reduce hunger and food insecurity, but Kansas has rarely been successful in tapping those funding sources. State agency staff have expressed frustration at a lack of staff time and expertise to identify potential funding sources and to write successful proposals. A modest investment of state funds to create and support a Grants Specialist position that would support State agencies could be an investment that would return financial benefits to the state many times greater than the amount expended.

2008 Recommendation: Fund a Grants Specialist position within the State system to provide support to State agency staff in identifying and acquiring grant funding resources.

2. FOCUS ON REDUCING CHILDHOOD FOOD INSECURITY AND HUNGER

Children are our most precious resource, and our future depends upon their successful development into well-educated, productive adults. The Partnership for America's Economic Success recently released a review of scientific studies examining the effects of food insecurity and hunger on the health, development and learning ability of children.¹⁸ The findings are sobering, and are summarized in the following paragraphs.

Poor nutrition during periods of brain growth and development in early childhood can have devastating and life-long effects. Food insecure children age 0 to 3 have been found to be more than twice as likely as their food-secure peers to develop iron deficiency anemia, which can result in delays in cognitive development. Food insecurity weakens

¹⁸ Murphy, Carolyn, Stephanie Ettinger de Cuba, and John Cook, et al. Reading, Writing and Hungry. Partnership for America's Economic Success. November, 2008. Report can be accessed at: http://www.partnershipforsuccess.org/docs/researchproject_foodinsecurity_200811_report.pdf.

the immune system, making children more susceptible to infection. Food insecure young children (age 0 to 3) are twice as likely to be reported in fair or poor health, and one-third more likely to have a history of hospitalization.

Proper nutrition is crucial to childhood learning and school performance. Children who enter school without adequate nourishment and support start out at a disadvantage, and struggle to keep up with their peers. Kindergarteners from food insecure homes have been found to enter school with lower math scores, and to learn less over the course of the school year. By the third grade, children who were food insecure in kindergarten have been shown to have lower reading and math scores than their peers who had not been food insecure. Other studies have found that elementary students from food insecure homes have lower math scores and are more likely to have repeated a grade than peers from food secure homes. Food insecurity increases the likelihood that a child will require special education services.

Older children continue to exhibit the negative effects of food insecurity. Food-insecure elementary school children have an increased prevalence of negative behavioral outcomes, and are more than twice as likely as their food-secure peers to have seen a psychologist. Elementary children who are hungry are four times more likely than non-hungry children to have a history of mental health counseling, seven times more likely to be classified as clinically dysfunctional, and twelve times more likely to steal. Food-insecure teenagers are more than twice as likely as food-secure peers to have seen a psychologist, and twice as likely to have been suspended from school. Behavioral problems, such as aggression and stealing, frequently lead to contacts with the criminal justice system. Children who struggle in school with lower grades and difficult social interactions are at increased risk of dropping out in high school.

Children from food-insecure households are also at increased risk for obesity and related health problems. Families that are struggling to put food on the table are often forced to choose less expensive, and frequently less nutritious but calorie-dense food options.

Data from the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement show that households which include children, and especially those led by single female heads of household are at greatly increased risk for food insecurity and hunger. Households with 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.

Children from food-insecure households begin school at significant disadvantage, from which many never fully recover. The consequences and costs are long-lasting and substantial, in terms of increased medical costs, increased costs for special education, increased costs to the criminal justice system, and loss of productivity and earning power as the children reach adulthood. The life-long costs of childhood food insecurity and hunger far outweigh what it would have cost to assure that these children had access to adequate nutrition. It is not only a moral obligation, but also a prudent financial

investment, to see that our children have access to enough healthy food to support sound growth and development.

School meals provide one important source of nutrition for school-aged children, and for low-income families, free or reduced-price school meals can be a tremendous help in stretching limited household food budgets. For families whose children depend on access to free or reduced-price school meals during the school year, 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. While this requirement may work reasonably well in geographic regions with concentrated pockets of poverty, many low-income students in Kansas do not live in locations that meet this eligibility standard. Almost one-half (47.7%) of the 180,000 low-income Kansas students who qualified for free or reduced price school meals during the 2005-2006 school year were not in school districts where at least 50% of students qualified for free or discounted meals. For still more low-income children, the logistical challenges of getting rural children to a meal site during the summer months when school is not in session and there is no funding for transportation pose insurmountable barriers to operating Summer Meal programs in their areas.

The Child Nutrition staff at the Kansas State Department of Education have worked diligently to increase the number of available summer feeding sites, and to increase the numbers of participating low-income students in areas where summer feeding sites are available. The number of summer program sponsors, sites and meals served in Kansas has steadily risen, with increases from 57 to 77 sponsors, and 191 to 251 meal sites between the years 2003 and 2008. Although progress has been made, significant numbers of low-income Kansas children are still not being served through the Summer Food Service Program.

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.

2008 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.

3. STRENGTHEN THE EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE SAFETY NET

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 has risen significantly. At the

same time, the quality and quantity of food donations to food bank and food pantry operations has decreased. As a result of more efficient systems of inventory control, corporate food donations have declined significantly. The 2008 Farm Bill has increased funding for TEFAP and will help to restore levels of commodity foods distributed through this program, but encouragement of food and monetary donations from private sources is still needed.

One approach to increasing private donations 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 in 2007, providing a tax credit equal to one-half the value of the donation, not to exceed \$2,500 per taxpayer.¹⁹ One option for implementing a similar credit in Kansas without the requirement for new legislation may be to designate the three Food Banks that serve Kansas as eligible organizations under the Community Service Tax Credits program currently administered by the Kansas Department of Commerce.

2008 Recommendation: Implement a state income tax credit to encourage donations of food and monetary support to emergency food assistance organizations.

Limited infrastructure for transporting and storage of large quantities of foods continues to constrain the ability of food assistance agencies to accept donated food when it becomes available. This is particularly true for perishable food items. Refrigeration and freezer storage capacity, warehouse capacity, and access to 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. The Kansas Food Security Task Force will examine this issue in more depth during the upcoming year, and work to identify specific steps that might be taken to strengthen food storage and distribution infrastructure.

4. REDUCE FOOD INSECURITY BY ADDRESSING THE UNDERLYING CAUSES

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.

¹⁹ Missouri Revised Statutes, Chapter 135, Tax Relief. Section 135.647. August 28, 2008.

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. Recent increases in the costs of food, fuel, and health care have only exacerbated this problem.

No one who works full-time should live in poverty. Economic development that results in the creation of new jobs paying a living wage, workforce skills development programs, expansion of affordable housing, expansion of access to affordable health care, programs that encourage asset building among low-income families, and the elimination of predatory lending practices are all important steps that could help low-income working families achieve financial stability and avoid food insecurity and hunger. Enabling low-wage working families to earn a living wage will also result in increased household spending and taxable income that will contribute to strengthening the Kansas economy.

2008 Recommendation: Include poverty reduction and living wage as high-priority issues on the 2009 Kansas policy agenda.

CONCLUSION

The problems of food insecurity and hunger among Kansas families are serious, and growing. Although many actions have been initiated in the past two years that we believe will be helpful in the fight against hunger, much work remains to be done. Current economic conditions will likely mean many difficult budgetary challenges for Kansas families and for Kansas government. Yet, we also face opportunity. At the national level, we may be approaching a time when political will and public sentiment are converging toward solving the hunger problem. The incoming President and Vice-President have campaigned on a platform of poverty reduction and strengthening the middle class, and have pledged to end childhood hunger by the year 2015. National policy-makers are recognizing that expanded food stamp and unemployment benefits should be considered as part of an economic stimulus package. Recent polls show that the majority of Americans say hunger is a very important social issue, and that the U.S. government should place a higher priority on solving hunger. Many of the solutions to the problems of hunger and food insecurity are also steps toward improving the economic security of families, and strengthening the overall economy. Small investments in improving food security will reap long-term benefits and much larger returns in improved health and productivity.

No Kansan should go hungry. We can solve this problem, and, at the same time make Kansas stronger and a 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.

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