



May 2004
Volume 2, Issue 1

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Background Brief on...

Hunger

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Food Insecurity

The Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS) collects food insecurity and hunger data. The latest three-year average covers 2000-2002. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) analysis of the data, 13.7 percent of households in Oregon were found to be food insecure and 5 percent of households were food insecure with hunger. Nationally, these figures are 10.8 percent and 3.3 percent, respectively. Oregon has one of the highest number of people in the nation for food insecurity with hunger and food insecurity.

The USDA considers a household food insecure if it is "uncertain of having, or being able to acquire, enough food to meet basic needs of all household members because they had insufficient money or other resources for food." A household is food insecure with hunger if one or more household members were hungry, at least some time during the year, because they could not afford enough food.

A recent USDA-funded study by Oregon State University found that hunger is more prevalent in Oregon in unexpected populations: 5.5 percent of Oregonians with someone in the household working full time, compared to 2 percent nationwide; 7.3 percent of Oregonians with two parents and children, again compared to 2 percent nationwide. Researchers at ECONorthwest, an Oregon economic consulting firm, confirmed the accuracy of hunger rates in the state, citing high unemployment, Oregonian's tendency to move more often within the state, and unusually high housing costs as contributing factors to these rates. The Department of Human Services (DHS) also notes that food insecurity "is caused by a number of factors including high housing costs and low-wage jobs that often force low-income Oregonians to choose between paying their rent or feeding themselves."

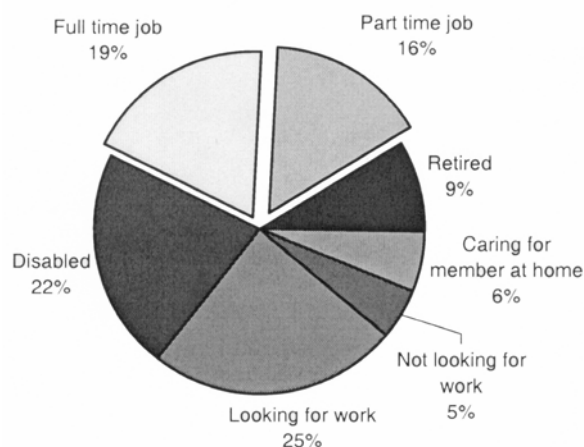
Oregon Food Bank Survey

The Oregon Food Bank (OFB) serves a state-wide network of hunger-relief agencies in Oregon and Clark County Washington. OFB recovers food from farms, stores, manufacturers and others to distribute food to local food banks. A 2002 survey by OFB

identified people seeking assistance from local food banks and why they needed assistance. In surveying 2,856 families, the study found that:

- 40 percent of household members receiving emergency food boxes were under age 18
- 53 percent of households had children
- 31 percent of households were headed by two parents
- 17 percent of households were headed by a single parent

The OFB survey found that a large number of those responding were working poor, retired, or disabled. Below is a chart representing about 75 percent of adult recipients of assistance:



From Profiles of Poverty and Hunger in Oregon (2002). Oregon Food Bank

The pie chart shows that 42 percent of households surveyed had one or more members working. More recently, emergency food use in Oregon has been on the rise with more than 625,000 people eating from food boxes from OFB in FY 2003, which is an 80 percent increase since 1996.

Food Stamps

The federal Food Stamp Program, administered by DHS, assists low-income families, single adults and childless couples in buying food. The federal government pays 100 percent of the benefit cost

and 50 percent of administrative costs. In January 2004 over 410,000, people in Oregon received food stamp benefits, an increase of 70 percent from January of 2000.

The Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force and the Oregon Food Bank, in conjunction with DHS, began several initiatives in 2000 to increase access to food stamps. These included holding statewide community forums, conducting workshops for nonprofit agencies on how to improve their knowledge of the food stamp program and focus on increasing outreach to individuals who are eligible for food stamps but are unaware of their eligibility or how to apply.

The 2001 Legislative Assembly allocated \$100,000 to DHS to conduct food stamp outreach. The federal government matched this money. DHS made several policy changes to food stamp eligibility including allowing clients who qualify for other welfare programs to also qualify for food stamps without consideration of their gross income and resources. The agency also applied for food stamp waivers that allowed more low-income workers to qualify for food stamps by disregarding vehicle value and simplifying medical expense reporting when considering a person's food stamp eligibility.

Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force and the Interagency Coordinating Council on Hunger (ICCH)

The task force was created by the 1989 Legislature as a resource on hunger for government and as a statewide advocate on hunger issues. The ICCH was created by the 1995 Legislature and charged with implementing the recommendations of the task force and together making recommendations to the Governor and the legislature. A recently released five-year plan to help eliminate hunger, titled "Act to End Hunger: 40 Ways in 5 Years to Make a Difference" makes the following first-year recommendations:

Family Economic Stability

Goal: Develop living wage opportunities for Oregonians.

- ◆ Increase tuition assistance for low-income students seeking higher education and implement the Parents as Scholars Program to allow parents on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) to pursue the education necessary to secure higher paying jobs.

Goal: Strengthen family stability with programs that offset living expenses.

- ◆ Create a tax credit for low-income families who are renting.

Goal: Revamp the tax and lending systems to protect low-wage workers.

- ◆ Make the Oregon Earned Income Tax Credit refundable and increase the value to eliminate state income taxes for people living below the federal poverty level.

Goal: Create an adequate safety net for those unable to work.

- ◆ Reinstate the General Assistance program to provide adequate support for disabled, extremely low-income individuals.

Community Food Security

Goal: Develop and support a sustainable regional food system through community-based solutions, with statewide coordination.

- ◆ Establish a statewide Food Policy Council to assess statewide needs, propose solutions, and provide coordination among local food policy councils.

Goal: Support local farmers and improve the nutrition of Oregonians.

- ◆ Support Farmers' Markets and small farmers in their efforts to accept food stamps through the addition of Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) technology to their markets.

Federal Food Programs

Goal: Increase participation in underutilized federal food programs.

- ◆ Fund outreach, education, and technical assistance in Oregon communities where there is low participation in federal food programs, especially the Food Stamp Program, the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), and the After School Snack and Meal Program.

Goal: Reduce barriers to participation in federal food programs.

- ◆ Fund start-up costs and provide supplemental meal reimbursement to boost participation in the SFSP and the After School Snack and Meal Program.

Goal: Improve and invest in programs at the federal level.

- ◆ Increase participation in the SFSP by lowering area eligibility rates from school areas where 50 percent or more of the children are eligible for free and reduced price meals to 40 percent, and expand the Lugar pilot nationwide to simplify program operations.

Emergency Food Services

Goal: Increase the capacity of Oregon Food Bank's Statewide Network.

- ◆ Maintain a contribution from the state General Fund each biennium to the Oregon Food Bank statewide network.
- ◆ Increase private efforts to build community capacity of regional food banks and local agencies to generate more food and funds for their local communities.

For more information or for a copy of the full five-year strategic plan, contact:

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