



*Getting to the
Root of the
Problem*

Hunger Action Network OF NEW YORK STATE

Hunger Soars to New Heights in New York State:

*A survey of Emergency Food Programs and
hunger trends in New York State.*



**“Over half of food programs provided food to more
children and seniors in the last year.”**

**Conducted by:
Hunger Action Network of New York State, November 2003.**

94 Central Avenue, Suite 2
Albany, NY 12206
(518) 434-7371 • Fax (518) 434-7390
smccarthy@hungeractionnys.org

325 West 38th Street, Suite 1008
New York, NY 10018
(212) 741-8192 • Fax (212) 741-7236
spasquantonio@hungeractionnys.org

www.hungeractionnys.org

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The Hunger Action Network study team was spearheaded by Susannah Pasquantonio (Downstate Community Food Coordinator) and Sheila McCarthy (Upstate Community Food Coordinator), and also comprised of Vivian Horn (Downstate Policy Coordinator), Mark Dunlea (Associate Director), Bich Ha Pham (Executive Director), Casey Burwell (Downstate Intern), Elizabeth Yackel (Upstate Intern), and Liz Wagner (Community Food Assistant).

1. INTRODUCTION

The Hunger Action Network of New York State is a statewide membership organization of Emergency Food Programs (EFP), advocates, low-income people, and concerned citizens whose goal is to end hunger and its root causes, including poverty, in New York State.

Hunger Action Network has represented EFPs for twenty-one years. Like the EFPs it represents, Hunger Action Network was started in response to the growing level of hunger in communities throughout New York State, following the federal budget cuts and economic decline of 1981. When many of the EFPs were initially started in the early 1980's, organizers thought such programs would be a temporary Band-Aid response that would soon fade away once Congress realized the detrimental impact of the budget cuts and once the economy improved. However, 22 years later, political leaders are increasingly calling upon food pantries and soup kitchens to be the first line of defense against the growing problem of hunger.

Since the early 1980's, demand for emergency food has steadily increased every year. A report in 2001 by America's Second Harvest found that each week, more than 904,884 different hungry New Yorkers turn to food pantries and soup kitchens for emergency assistance. There are approximately 3,000 emergency food programs throughout New York State.

Last year, the Hunger Action Network of New York State conducted a survey of Emergency Food Programs throughout the state to examine hunger trends and programmatic changes from September of 2001 to September of 2002. 73 per cent of programs responding to the survey reported an increase in demand for food. Comparing data from the months of September 2001 and September 2002, there was a 27 per cent increase in demand for food in that month alone. Programs attributed the increase to: (1) the poor economy; (2) low wages; (3) job loss and business closures; (4) reduction in the number of hours or days people work; and (5) the ripple effects caused by the World Trade Center attack, among other things.

2. METHODOLOGY

The New York City Coalition Against Hunger (NYCCAH) distributes an annual survey to EFPs in New York City. Hunger Action Network provided feedback on NYCCAH's survey questions

and selected nine questions from their survey to distribute to EFPs in the rest of the state. NYCCAH has provided Hunger Action with the responses to the nine questions from New York City EFPs. NYCCAH will release its own comprehensive report separately.

In the rest of the state, including Long Island, Hunger Action worked with the regional Food Banks to distribute the surveys to their EFP members. Hunger Action also mailed out the survey to 200 additional programs that participated in the survey last year. The survey was also faxed to over 400 programs.

There were 630 respondents statewide to the survey: 69 operated soup kitchens; 468 operated food pantries; 79 operated both soup kitchens and food pantries; and 25 operated other forms of emergency food programs (e.g., shelters). 379 of the respondents were from outside of NYC. 251 were from NYC.

3. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The Hunger Action Network of New York State conducted a survey of Emergency Food Programs throughout the state to examine hunger trends in New York State in the last year.

The report found a large increase in the demand for food, combined with a reduction in emergency food resources.

The report found a 20.4% increase in the number of individuals fed statewide by EFPs comparing September 2002 to September 2003. For soup kitchens only, there was a 10.4% increase in the number of meals served by soup kitchens comparing September of 2002 to September of 2003.

79.4% of the programs reported an increase in the number of guests they were serving, with 40.3% reporting that the number of people that they fed greatly increased. An equal percentage (80%) expects to see similar increases next year.

Many of the EFP guests are children, senior citizens, and the working poor. More than half saw an increase in seniors (53%) and children (54%). 37.1% of the programs reported an increase in the number of employed people who used their program.

A fifth of the EFPs (20.3%) reported that they lacked enough food to meet demand. The increased demand for emergency food has forced many programs (35.4%) to reduce the amount of food assistance they provide to households by “thinning” the food packages, increasing eligibility restrictions, reducing their program hours, and/or turning people away.

The programs have fewer resources than in the past to deal with the increased demand. Almost half of the programs reported a decrease in resources in 2003. 48.3% reported a decrease in the amount of government food and money they received, while more than 40% (41.6%) reported a decrease in private food and money.

4. FINDINGS

(Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100%)

New York State Findings

Hunger Action received over 630 responses from surveys distributed throughout New York State (251 from NYC, 379 from outside NYC). The surveys included responses from 468 food pantries, 69 soup kitchens, 79 programs that operate both a food pantry and a soup kitchen, and 25 other programs that provide food, such as shelters, etc. The Hunger Impact Survey yielded the following results for New York State:

I. The report found a 20.4% increase in the number of individuals fed statewide by EFPs comparing September of 2002 to September of 2003.

- Hunger Action asked all programs who completed the survey (food pantries, soup kitchens, etc) to provide data on the number of people they provided with food in September 2002 and September of 2003. 329 programs provided data for both of those months.

II. For soup kitchens only, there was a 10.4% increase in the number of meals served by soup kitchens comparing September of 2002 to September of 2003.

- Hunger Action asked soup kitchens only to provide data on the number of meals they served in September 2002 and September of 2003. 70 programs provided data for both of those months.

III. 20.3% of programs do not distribute enough food to meet their current demand. 605 programs responded to this question.

- 76.2% do distribute enough to meet their current demand.
- 3.5% are unsure if they distribute enough food to meet the current demand.

Of the programs that do not distribute enough to meet their current demand, 71% have enough capacity (storage space, refrigeration, staff and/or volunteers) to safely increase the amount of food they distribute. 159 programs responded to this question.

- 26.7% do not have enough capacity to safely increase the amount of food they distribute.
- 1.3% didn't know if they had enough capacity to safely increase the amount of food they distribute.

IV. 48.3% of programs reported that their food and money resources from the government decreased in the last year. 602 programs responded to this question.

- 17.0% of programs reported that their government resources decreased greatly.
- 31.4% of programs reported that their government resources decreased somewhat.
- 29.4% of programs reported that their government resources stayed about the same.
- 12.3% of programs reported that their government resources somewhat increased.
- 4.0% of programs reported that their government resources greatly increased
- 6.0% of programs were unsure.

- V. **41.6% of programs reported that their food and money resources from the private sector decreased in the last year.** 575 programs responded to this question.
- 13.2% of programs reported that their private decreased greatly.
 - 28.4% of programs reported that their private resources decreased somewhat.
 - 35.3% of programs reported that their private resources stayed about the same.
 - 12.0% of programs reported that their private resources somewhat increased.
 - 1.2% of programs reported that their private resources greatly increased
 - 9.9% of programs were unsure.
- VI. **46% of programs reported that their total food and money resources decreased in the last year.** 591 programs responded to this question.
- 13.4% of programs reported that their total resources decreased greatly.
 - 32.5% of programs reported that their total resources decreased somewhat.
 - 31.3% of programs reported that their total resources stayed about the same.
 - 12.4% of programs reported that their total resources somewhat increased.
 - 3.0% of programs reported that their total resources greatly increased
 - 7.4% of programs were unsure.
- VII. **79.4% of programs reported that the overall number of customers needing food increased in the last year.** 603 programs responded to this question.
- 40.3% reported that the overall number of customers greatly increased
 - 39.1% reported that the overall number of customers somewhat increased.
 - 14.3% reported that the overall number of customers stayed about the same.
 - 3.5% reported that the overall number of customers decreased somewhat.
 - 1.5% reported that the overall number of customers decreased greatly.
 - 1.3% were unsure.
- VIII. **37.1% of programs reported that the people with paid employment using their program increased in the last year.** 584 programs responded to this question.
- 11.0% reported that this category of customers greatly increased
 - 26.2% reported that this category of customers somewhat increased.
 - 26.2% reported that this category of customers stayed about the same.
 - 8.4% reported that this category of customers decreased somewhat.
 - 2.7% reported that this category of customers decreased greatly.
 - 25.5% were unsure.
- IX. **52.8% of programs reported that the number of senior citizens using their program increased in the last year.** 592 programs responded to this question.
- 14.7% reported that this category of customers greatly increased
 - 38.2% reported that this category of customers somewhat increased.
 - 38.3% reported that this category of customers stayed about the same.
 - 3.5% reported that this category of customers decreased somewhat.
 - 1.5% reported that this category of customers decreased greatly.
 - 3.7% were unsure.

- X. 56.3% of programs reported that the people who receive inadequate pay using their program increased in the last year.** 590 programs responded to this question.
- 25.8% reported that this category of customers greatly increased
 - 30.5% reported that this category of customers somewhat increased.
 - 18.0% reported that this category of customers stayed about the same.
 - 1.0% reported that this category of customers decreased somewhat.
 - 0.8% reported that this category of customers decreased greatly.
 - 23.9% were unsure.
- XI. 54.3% of programs reported that number of children (under age 18) using their program increased in the last year.** 586 programs responded to this question.
- 19.8% reported that this category of customers greatly increased
 - 34.5% reported that this category of customers somewhat increased.
 - 31.9% reported that this category of customers stayed about the same.
 - 3.1% reported that this category of customers decreased somewhat.
 - 0.7% reported that this category of customers decreased greatly.
 - 10.1% were unsure.
- XII. 35.4% of programs reported that they had to turn people away, reduce the amount of food distributed to each person, or limit their hours of operation in 2003 because they lacked enough resources.** 588 programs responded to this question.
- 61.1 of programs reported that they did not have to turn people away, etc.
 - 3.6 were unsure.
- XIII. 79.8% of programs think that the demand for food will continue to increase over the next six months.**
- 33.4% think it will greatly increase.
 - 46.4% think it will increase somewhat.
 - 14.1% think it will stay about the same.
 - 0.3% think it will decrease somewhat.
 - 1.3% think it will greatly decrease.
 - 4.4% are unsure.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Increase HPNAP Funding to \$30 Million

Hunger Action urges the State Legislature to raise funding for the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) by nearly \$8 million to reflect the growing demand for emergency food. Last year the Governor and State Legislature cut funding for the HPNAP program by \$1.6 million. HPNAP provides funding for New York's State's food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, and other food programs to obtain nutritious food.

B. Job Creation

Many EFP guests do not have a job or the number of days or hours they work has been reduced. We need to create more living wage jobs in New York State. Hunger Action Network is developing a comprehensive jobs proposal. As a short-term step, we recommend adoption of the Empire State Jobs Program (A.8276) to assist welfare participants and unemployed individuals with transitional jobs that include educating and training.

C. Ensure Living Wages

More than a third of the EFPs responding to the survey reported an increase in the number of working poor people utilizing food pantries and soup kitchens in the last year. This indicates that an increasing number of New Yorkers are working, but are not earning enough to cover the cost of basic needs, including food. To address this problem, Hunger Action strongly recommends that the New York State legislature make the minimum wage a living wage of \$8.40/hour. Currently, an employee earns \$5.15 an hour in a minimum wage job; this amount is insufficient to meet a household's basic expenses.

Hunger Action also recommends that all levels of governments ensure that companies receiving economic development subsidies and contracts from the government provide living wages to their employees.

D. Increase Access to Education and Training

People leaving welfare for work do not find employment that provides a sustainable income. Thousands of individuals have entered low-wage, low-skill jobs under welfare reform. It is important that policy makers collaborate with New York State Congressional representatives to ensure increased access to adequate education and training so that welfare recipients can obtain sustainable employment.

We urge Governor Pataki to end his opposition to education for welfare participants. Two years ago, the Governor vetoed legislation that would have made it easier for welfare participants to participate in adult literacy, GED and English-as-Second language programs, including allowing up to 16 hours a week of education to count as work. While the legislation has strong support in the Assembly (A6503), the Senate Republicans have not wanted to move on the legislation (S4626) until the Governor indicates support and until the federal government completes work on Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) reauthorization.

We also support legislation (A7894 & S2856) that will ensure that participation in higher education will count towards the welfare work requirements. While only a small percentage of welfare participants are presently prepared for college, the state and local governments should not hinder college-ready participants from attending college. A recent national study by the Children's Defense Fund found that the only welfare participants who routinely escaped poverty when they find work are those with a college education. While the Governor has improperly diverted more than \$700 million of TANF funds to the Tuition Assistance Program on the grounds that college prevents pregnancies, he has refused to allow welfare participants to attend college.

E. Increase Participation in the Food Stamp Program

New York State has made progress in this area, though more remains to be done. Last year, the state did increase funding for the Nutrition Outreach and Education Program to assist in community outreach efforts for food stamps. The Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance has also required local counties to use the new federal simplified form for food stamps.

Hunger Action Network recommends that Governor Pataki implement the rule that existed when he took office, which allowed households to receive expedited food stamps the day after they submit an application; the present rule is five days. Households eligible for food stamps can receive expedited food stamps if their income and cash on hand is less than their monthly rent and utility bills. While almost all food stamp qualifying households are eligible for expedited food stamps, only a small percentage receives them. The state needs to dramatically improve their monitoring of expedited food stamps.

New York should also consider providing a state-funded supplement to food stamp benefits. The federal benefits are so unrealistically low that such households have to rely on emergency food programs each month to feed their families. Food stamp monthly income eligibility guidelines exclude New Yorkers who earn over 130% of the poverty level. Yet many New Yorkers who earn above this level are not able to cover the cost of living based on their income. Therefore, Hunger Action recommends that New York State provide food stamps to households at 200% of the poverty level. Funding for such a program could come from the Federal TANF surplus program, which is improperly used to balance the state's general budget.

Due to changes made to the Food Stamp Program as part of the Farm Bill on the federal level, more legal immigrants were able to receive for food stamps starting April 1, 2003. However, there are still many legal immigrants, namely those who have not been in the US for five years, who will remain ineligible for food stamps due to their citizenship status. This leaves thousands of New Yorkers without access to enough food. Legal immigrants pay taxes and contribute to society and therefore should be able to receive food stamps. Hunger Action recommends that the New York State Legislature introduce legislation that expands the Food Assistance Program so that all legal immigrants can receive food stamps in New York State.

F. Improve Child Nutrition Programs

It is estimated that half of those relying on Emergency Food Programs are children. More than half of the EFPs responding to the survey reported an increase in the number of children utilizing their programs in the past year. To address this problem, Hunger Action recommends that the NYS Legislature provide increased outreach funds for the federal Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). This program is grossly underutilized compared to the School Lunch Program; only 300,000 income-eligible children participate in SFSP while 1.6 million participate in School Lunch.

Although Child Nutrition Programs have the potential to help eradicate childhood hunger, such programs need many improvements. Hunger Action urges New York State legislators to show

support for provisions that broaden eligibility guidelines, increase sponsor reimbursement levels, expand universal breakfast programs and reduce paperwork requirements as part of federal Child Nutrition Program Reauthorization.