

Many Families Still Go Hungry in United States

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Most households (89.1%) in the United States are “food secure.” They have consistent, dependable access to enough safe food for healthy living. Unfortunately there are many hungry families in this country every day of the year.

The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) recently announced that the hunger and food insecurity rates in the United States generally remained unchanged in 2006. Their announcement was based on the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) annual report that details the rates of food security, insecurity and hunger in the U.S. released November 14, 2007. It revealed that more than 35.5 million people lived in households struggling against hunger in 2006 and it did **not** include homeless families. According to the USDA report:

- The 35.5 million people included 22.9 million adults and 12.6 million children (17.2% of all children)
- Black (21.8%) and Hispanic (19.5%) households experienced food insecurity at far higher rates than the national average.
- 13% of Florida households are food insecure and Leon County has approximately 14.5% food insecure households.

What are the definitions of hunger? Food insecurity?

According to Oregon State University Extension’s website **hunger** is “the uneasy or painful sensation caused by involuntary lack of food which over time may result in malnutrition.” In hunger, adults and/or children cannot access food consistently and have to reduce food intake, eat poor diets and often go with out any food.

Food insecurity is “whenever the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food or the ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways is limited or uncertain.” People experiencing food insecurity require emergency food assistance and adults trying to have enough food to feed the children may skip meals. The mental and physical changes that accompany inadequate food intakes can have harmful effects on learning, productivity, physical and psychological health, and family life.

Under-nutrition often takes its heaviest toll on the elderly, pregnant women and of course, children. Smaller babies are borne to women that are poorly nourished. Small babies have difficulty thriving and are usually slower to develop. These babies are also more prone to illness than normal weight babies.

A hungry child is an educational risk. A child that is poorly fed may lose learning potential, suffer from poor growth or hyperactivity, and have a greater susceptibility to infection and increased absenteeism from school. All these can result in poorer performances in school and limited future opportunities.

Agencies assisting with the battle against hunger see a sharp rise in donations during the holiday season. That’s great news! However, in light of the recent USDA report, consider making food collections year round projects.

When you donate food try to consider the most appropriate food items needed. Connie Evers, MS, RD, author of **Nutrition for Kids**, suggests that you “only donate foods that you would like to eat. In other words, don’t scrounge around in the cupboards and pantry in search of foods that you want to get rid of. Instead, pick the foods you like the most and donate those to the food drives.”

- * Avoid the temptation to donate old, dented, bent or rusty cans of food, food in damaged packages or out of date foods.
- * Avoid donating seasonal or holiday foods such as pumpkin and cranberry sauce. Agencies also receive large quantities of green beans and corn but go lacking for many other foods. This means the agencies are limited in their ability to provide the variety of foods necessary for a healthy diet.
- * Foods that require minimum preparation or do not have to be cooked are excellent contributions. Many people who receive food donations do not have adequate cooking equipment and/or space for storage. It is best to select items that can be served right from the container or prepared by simply adding water. Examples include canned fruit, juices, vegetables, hearty soups, spaghetti sauce, peanut butter, tuna, chicken ‘n dumplings, other meats and meat dishes.
- * Items packaged in small containers for only one or two people are most desirable. It is true larger cans and packages are generally more economical. However, the people receiving the foods may not have a large family, and frequently there is no refrigeration. This makes smaller containers less wasteful, and allows food to be consumed in one sitting rather than having leftovers that need to be refrigerated. Medium-size to individual-serving cans are also helpful for the agencies that must manage food-pantry storage. Pop top cans are most convenient.
- * In addition to canned goods, there are a variety of very useful individually packaged foods, i.e., powdered milk, dried noodles, soup, oatmeal and granola bars. Packages of foods needing minimum preparation, such as boxes of macaroni and cheese, potato and rice mixes, and ready-to-eat cereals are also good choices. Please inspect dry food packages to insure that there is no contamination by insects. One contaminated item can lead to the destruction of much food.
- * Fresh foods can be a welcome donation. Best examples are fruits that do not require refrigeration, such as oranges and apples. Fresh vegetables that are in season, especially potatoes, onions, tomatoes and carrots, are good choices that can add nutrition and variety to donation bags.
- * Stick to common foods that are popular locally. People receiving donations are often not accustomed to a vast array of foods and have not acquired a taste for the non-conventional.

Sources: <http://www.frac.org/>; <http://www.flimpact.org/>;
<http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR49/>
<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/fcd/hunger/hdefined.php>
<http://www.nutritionforkids.com/emlnews/FK-December04.htm>