



Department of Social Development and World Peace
Office of Domestic Social Development

Background on Food and Nutrition Programs
February 2007

ISSUE

In 2005, the number of Americans suffering from hunger or living in homes on the edge of hunger was over 35 million Americans - 12.4 million of them children. Essential federal programs target hunger and food insecurity, generally through partnerships between the federal and state governments and cooperating organizations. They provide children and needy families with access to food, a healthier diet and nutrition education in a manner that also supports American agriculture. Unfortunately every day there continue to be millions of children and adults in our country who go to bed and wake up hungry.

BACKGROUND

Food Stamps: The food stamps program is the first line of defense against hunger. It enables low-income families to buy nutritious food. An average of 26.3 million people participated in the program each month in 2006, according to USDA estimates. The amount of food stamps given is based on an estimate of how much it costs to buy food to prepare nutritious, low-cost meals for a household. Food stamps are expected to be only a part of a family's food budget. Family resources and income determine eligibility. Both U.S. citizens and some non-citizens are eligible to get food stamps. Adult legal immigrants are eligible only after they have resided in the United States legally for at least five years; legal immigrants who are children or disabled are eligible. There are additional limits on eligibility for adults between 18 and 50 who do not have any dependent children.

Child and Adult Care Food Program: The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) provides support for children through nutritious school meals and nutrition assistance for day care, after school and summer programs, and homeless shelters. Charitable and non-profit community organizations feeding children in these programs can receive reimbursement for food and meal preparation, as well as training in the nutritional needs of children. The program is administered at the national level by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and at the state level through the State Department of Education or Child Nutrition. About 3 million children received nutritious meals and snacks through CACFP programs in 2006 at child care centers and family child care homes across the country.

WIC Program: The Special Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) improves the health of mothers and their children by providing supplemental foods, nutrition and breast-feeding education, nutrition screening and referrals to other social services. It serves low-income, nutritionally at risk pregnant women; breast-feeding women; mothers for up to 6 months after the birth of an infant; infants and children up to their 5th birthday. WIC is a Federal grant program for which Congress must authorize a specific amount of funds each year. Just over 8 million women and children participated in WIC in 2006.

Food Distribution Programs: Food distribution programs strengthen the nutrition safety net through commodity distribution and other nutrition assistance to low-income families, emergency feeding programs, Indian Reservations, and the elderly. For example, children can receive nutritious food through USDA distribution programs such as the National School Lunch Program, the CACFP and the Summer Food Service Program. Through the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), the USDA makes commodity foods available to food banks and soup kitchens through states and local agencies, allowing low-income needy people, including

3211 Fourth St., NE. Washington, DC 20017. Tel: (202)541-3160 Fax: (202)541-3339

elderly people, to receive emergency food and nutrition assistance at no cost.

USCCB POSITION

In *For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food*, the bishops reiterated that a primary goal of food and agricultural policy should be providing basic food and nutrition for all. In *Food Policy in a Hungry World*, the bishops called for strengthening the domestic food assistance programs to ensure that no one in America goes hungry or suffers malnutrition. "When the economy fails to provide the jobs and income necessary to prevent hunger and malnutrition, the various local, state, and national food assistance programs must be funded and expanded to provide food to all in need."

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Support Funding for Improvements to the Food Stamp Program: Congress must reauthorize the Food Stamps Program as part of the 2007 Farm Bill reauthorization. *Contact your Senators and Representatives on the Agriculture Committees and urge them to support the strongest possible Nutrition Title in the 2007 Farm Bill – including adjusting the benefit level to reflect increasing food costs and ending the five-year waiting period for adult legal immigrants' eligibility for food stamps.*

Support Full Funding for WIC: Each year, Congress determines in the Agriculture Appropriations bill how much to spend on the WIC program the following year. Work on appropriations bills usually begins early in the year. *Make sure your Senators and Representatives know that you want adequate money set aside in the 2008 Agriculture Appropriations bill so that all the women and children who will be eligible for WIC next year will be able to get assistance.*

Make Sure Low-Income Families Have Access to Food Stamps: Approximately 40 percent of those eligible to receive food stamps are not getting them. Many families leaving welfare do not realize they can get transitional food stamps for five months, and may still be eligible for food stamps after that. Other families are unable to meet the program's administrative requirements. It is important that agencies serving low-income people instruct them that regardless of the states' TANF rules, they may still be entitled to food stamps. And it is important to make sure that legal immigrants know that all children, as well as adults who have been here for five years, are now able to receive food stamps under new eligibility rules. *Work with your local agencies that serve low-income families to be sure that they inform these families of their potential eligibility for food stamps even if they have exhausted their TANF benefits. Continue to call for program simplification and outreach efforts to ensure that eligible families receive food stamps.*

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: Roxana Barillas, 202-541-3445, rbarillas@usccb.org, USCCB website: www.usccb.org