

Oregon #3 in nation
for high percentage of hungry citizens
Report shows Oregon again at risk of becoming hungriest state

Report available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/FoodSecurity/>

Portland, OR – Nov. 18, 2008 – Oregon had 12.4 percent of its population (458,000 people) living in households that struggled with hunger or were “food insecure” during the 2005-2007 period, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) recently released annual report. Food insecurity is the USDA term given to describe households that struggle with affording enough food. Nationally, more than 36.2 million people lived in households that were food insecure in 2007 – up from 35.5 million in 2006 and 33.2 million in 2000.

“We were expecting to see an increase in food insecurity because wages have not kept up with the cost of basic items such as food, shelter and utilities,” said Patti Whitney-Wise, executive director of the Oregon Hunger Task Force. “We have seen a rapid rise in food stamp applications, more than 50,000 new people over the past year, bringing the total to nearly 500,000 Oregonians. And requests for food boxes are higher than ever. What worries us most is that this report covers information from a year ago. Everything we are seeing in Oregon tells us that a new survey taken today would undoubtedly show considerably higher numbers of food insecure people.”

Oregon worked hard to impact hunger over the past 8 years, when it was dubbed the “Hungriest State in the Nation” in 2000. The Task Force and other anti-hunger advocates joined forces and worked closely with the Governor to bring attention to the issue and created the *Act to End Hunger*, a 5-year plan to reduce hunger in Oregon. And it was successful: 26 of the 40 actions were accomplished. In 2005, Oregon dropped from #1 to #17, a statistically significant improvement. However, rising joblessness, falling wages, and rapidly rising food and fuel costs have meant that more and more families are stretched to the limit and beyond.

“Oregonians are going to need help. Oregon’s unemployment rate is 7.3 percent, and people are competing for scarcer jobs.” said Whitney-Wise. “To get us through this crisis we need to preserve safety net services, on both the state and federal level. With help, families can rebound more quickly and will be less vulnerable to the ravages of poverty. Without help, families become homeless, children go hungry, the elderly get sick, and our communities languish.”

The Task Force has asked the Governor to prioritize human services in his 2009-11 budget. The Task Force has also joined the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) in calling for Congress to pass an economic recovery package that first and foremost includes an extension to unemployment insurance and a boost in SNAP/Food Stamps benefits (SNAP is the acronym for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the new national name for the Food Stamp Program). During his campaign, President-elect Barack Obama committed to end childhood hunger in this country by 2015. The Task Force has joined FRAC in pledging to work with the new Administration, the 111th Congress, and state and local officials to put this plan into motion.

“People with the lowest incomes face the most serious threats. □ We must not fail to invest in rebuilding our economy while also preventing hunger and poverty,” said Whitney-Wise.

Each year, the Census Bureau measures food insecurity through a series of household survey questions about the ability to obtain enough food for an active, healthy life for all members. To report food insecurity in each state, USDA uses three-year averages to compensate for limited sample sizes and give a better estimate of the number of households experiencing hunger.

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