

Will Greene

Ms. Puckett

16 November 2010

Does the U.S. Government Provide Enough Funding to Families In Need of Food?

Everyday, millions of people skip meals to pay for electrical bills, heat, and many other things. Many people can go through the day, skipping a meal or two every now and then, but over time; skipping meals daily can have decaying effects on the body such as lowered concentration and raised aggression levels. Those who go hungry must rely on food programs provided by the government. However, many U.S. citizens are still lacking food. The U.S. government does not provide enough funding to food insecure families due to inadequate spending, publicity, and qualifications for food supplement programs.

Several definitions of poverty need to be examined in order properly examine evidence and shed light on this avoided subject. Also, terms like hunger can be very subjective when used in everyday language. When a child claims to be starving, he really is not; he is really just a little hungry. Terms like these can be warped in everyday language due to relativity, but intellectually, hunger is defined as the long-term uneasy or painful sensation caused by lack of food (Hunger 1). Also, another difficult term to quantify is a household. The U.S. has three hundred million people, and there are many variations of how people live. Some families are separated, complicating surveys and certain qualifications for food programs. A household is defined as a person or a group of people living together, but not necessarily related, who purchase and prepare food together (Eligibility 1). As for the more official unknown terms, there are four: high food security, marginal food security, low food security, and very low food security. They all deal with amounts of food are used in almost all studies dealing with hunger

in America. In order to have a basis for what these terms mean, a survey entitled Current Population Survey, or CPS, was carried out. Its objective was to measure food insufficiency by asking a variety of questions. According to "Hunger in the U.S.", "the questions asked are about anxiety that the household budget is inadequate to buy enough food; inadequacy of the quantity or quality of food eaten by adults and children in the household; and instances of reduced food intake or consequences of reduced food intake for adults and children" (Hunger 1). The highest response in the survey was high food security, were the households that did not answer yes to any of the food insecurity questions (Hunger 1). The questions were worded in a way that if someone said no, he or she had no problems with food in that subject matter. Marginal food security was determined by someone answering yes to only a few of the questions (Hunger 1). A person that had low food security would typically be cutting back on the quality or quantity of food that they purchased in order to carry on with other household upkeeps (Hunger 1). A person that was classified as having very low food security would typically be cutting back on meals on a frequent basis, including parents and children (Hunger 1).

The U.S. has a surprisingly high number of food insecure people. According to "Hunger in the U.S.", "In 2008, 49.1 million Americans lived in food insecure households, 32.4 million adults, and 16.7 million children" (Hunger 1). That was about one sixth of the U.S. population. Being the richest country in the world, this number seems a bit too high. Aside from stomach pain, hunger can affect many other aspects of life. Many people have to deal with this recurring problem daily. Going with minimal food, day after day leads to malnutrition, which is an imbalance in the body's nutrients. Even though it may not seem harmful after skipping a few meals, skipping or cutting back on meals daily leaves a devastating effect on the body, physically, mentally, and emotionally. The mental and physical changes that accompany

inadequate food intakes can have harmful effects on learning, development, productivity, physical and psychological health, and family life (Hunger 1). Hunger has a powerful effect on people, and is a very important issue. The U.S. government has made goals to work toward in order to increase food security, or, in other words, decrease the food insecurity rate. However, these goals have not been reached. According to one source, the goal was to increase food security from 88 percent of all U.S. households in 1995 to 94 percent (Hunger 1). In other words, decrease food insecurity from twelve to six percent. However, seventeen percent of population was still food insecure in 2008. Not only has there been no progress made toward this goal, but negative progress. This is a fact that the U.S. government should not ignore.

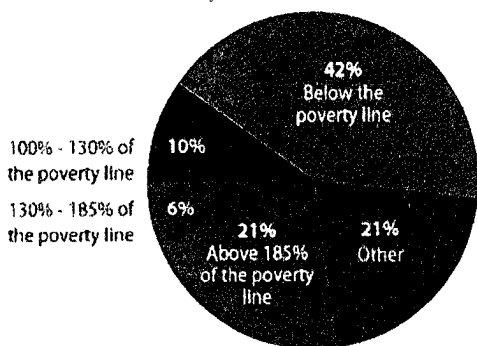
Of all hunger in the U.S., child hunger deserves the most attention. Childhood can hold some the fondest memories of one's life. Some children are faced with lasting memories full of worry about their family's ability to have food. Child hunger is at the source of our nation's hunger problem. If children are hungry, they have less concentration, behavior tends to be more aggressive, and many other setbacks. Nearly one in four kids, 17 million children, struggle against hunger in the United States (Children 1). School programs are a logical place to improve the situation. School lunch and breakfast is an economical and sufficiently nutritional meal value. Also, there are forms that can be filled out that enables kids to have the opportunity to get a reduced price or even free price of school lunch due to income amounts. This is a good way to keep children fed. However, there are 101,000 schools operating the National School Lunch Program, but only 87,000 operating the School Breakfast Programs (Children 1). This means that 14,000 schools with numerous children do not even have a chance to get school provided breakfast. In order to solve the problem of child hunger, lunch and breakfast should be provided by all schools, not just some. If changes would be made, all children who go to school would

have an opportunity to get an adequate amount of food for two of the three meals of the day. Also, summer meals are unheard of by many, but they do exist. However, 17 million of the 19.5 million school children receiving food assistance at lunch do not receive enough school breakfast programs, and also does not provide enough summer meals. This is a result of a lack of production of food and lack of advertisement of summer meals. If no funding improvements are made, child food insecurity will continue to rise. Without adequate funding, authorizing committees will be unable to make necessary improvements to these programs, leaving millions of children without access to needed food (Children 1). There should be more advertisements for summer meals and more schools that provide breakfast. Improving school food programs will not only improve child nutrition and performance, but the economical value of these meals will enable parents to spend more money on themselves for food, if they are in need of it as well. Also, the money saved could be used to pay off electric bills, heat, or virtually anything else. This will help feed stomachs as well as provide suitable living conditions for those who have hunger as one of numerous problems. As one can see, increasing advertisements for summer meals and increasing the number of schools that provide breakfast could lead be the most effective method of reducing the number of food insecure households.

In response to food insecurity, the U.S. government provides different programs to tackle the problems. SNAP, commonly called food stamps, is one of the most well known. SNAP stands for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Eligibility for SNAP is proven by going through an application process. The application process includes completing and filing an application form, being interviewed, and verifying facts crucial to determining eligibility (Eligibility 1). There are many different aspects of being eligible, such as having no more than \$2,000 in countable resources or having \$3,000 in countable resources with at least one

household member who is disabled or age 60 or older (Eligibility 1). Countable resources are anything that the home owner owns. From a statistical standpoint, all households must have incomes 100 percent below the poverty line (Eligibility 1). If a household qualifies for SNAP, they receive their stamps online or through the mail. The stamps are then used at the local grocery stores to purchase food. The stamps give a certain amount of money toward the food and only the food. Once the limit is reached, the buyer must pay for the rest from his or her own money. However, this seemingly good idea is not as effective as it should be. According to “SNAP/Food Stamp Historic Trends”, “one in three eligible people are not receiving SNAP or food stamps benefits” (SNAP 1). This is due to lack of awareness and qualifications that are too strict. SNAP is free food, and there is no way that a hungry person would turn down SNAP unless they did not know about it, or if they could not qualify. If food insecure households knew that there was a way to get free food, they would take advantage of it. The government does not advertise SNAP enough. Also, the qualifications are too strict. No matter what someone thinks about the qualifications, the food insecurity rate across in U.S. is 1 in 6 people. As seen in the graph below, there are many food insecure households above the poverty line. They do not qualify for SNAP, but they are still food insecure.

Families with children who were food insecure in 2007 by income



Source: USDA Economic Research Service.

Obviously, something is not working. More people should receive food stamps to decrease food insecurity rates. Whether the percent below the poverty line required is too low, or if possession amount is too high, at least one of these things needs to be revised to increase the number of eligible SNAP users. So even though SNAP issues may be part of America's hunger problem, it is not the only problem. There must be multiple different ways that a food-insecure person can access food other than SNAP.

The federal government not only funds federal programs, but also state programs. When food programs have to generalize across the United States, such as SNAP, they can be a bit vague. State programs funded by the federal government are a better way of reaching the needs of locals because the programs can be area specific. For instance, a city where expenses are higher could provide more food to the food insecure since it is harder to buy, and a city that had lower food expenses could provide less food, since the citizens could afford more. This way the programs could meet the needs of the people, while also saving money. For example, in Pennsylvania, there are six programs, or departments, that contain more specific programs that deal with meeting the needs of the hungry. The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture administers Farmer's Markets and emergency food programs. The Pennsylvania Department of education administers all school related food supplements and a child care program. The Pennsylvania Department of Health administers nutrition programs for women, children, and infants. These programs are very specific to certain needs, whereas SNAP is more generic. According to Dale Matthews of CAM, programs such as CAM (Clayton Area Ministries) are local programs funded by the state and federal government that are also effective in meeting citizens hunger needs (Matthews 1). These specifications help meet the needs of food insecure citizens at a core level to help solve the problems possible for good by slowly raising the families

out of poverty and escalating them to be a part of the community. In other words, the programs are more specific to people needs. Also, the programs not only provide food, but they work with the people to bring them out of poverty and give them financial advice that accommodate their food needs. However, these programs are not as well known, and are not funded as much, where as they are actually more effective. Since all state programs are different, it is hard to advertise them nationally. The U.S. government should spend less money on federal programs and more on state programs to lower the food insecurity rate. After doing this, they should publicize these programs on television or in newspapers. There is an analogy that can be used to compare federal and state programs. SNAP and other federal programs are like Wal-Mart. They are popular, and people can get what they need, but the quality might not be as good. State programs are a specialized store, like GameStop, that specialize in video games. They aren't as big as federal programs, but if you can narrow down what you need, you will get better quality results. This is why the U.S. government should give more funds to state programs.

As for management of the hunger issue, there are many problems within the federal government. Judy dePombriant from the Harvard School of Public Health commented on hunger in the U.S. "There is a priority problem, not a resource problem," stated dePombriant (Condello 1). This means that we have plenty of food; it just has not been distributed evenly, along with the money. The United States ranks first in the world in military expenditures and 17th in infant mortality (Condello 1). This inadequate spending should not be tolerated by the federal government. In order to fix the hunger problem, priorities should be established. Also, needy families often encounter difficulties meeting eligibility requirements for government aid, she said (Condello 1). According to dePombriant, "In more than half of the states, families with both parents at home are not eligible for financial aid" (Condello 1). This is because the families are

on the borderline for receiving benefits, but since there are two parents, it pushes them into the category of being food supplement ineligible. This restriction has caused fathers to leave their homes so their children can eat, dePombriant said (Condello 1). On the other hand, instead of families going to the extremes to get food, there are families who are too afraid or discouraged to go out and get their own food due to lack of advertisement or embarrassment because of peers. This means that there is not enough publicity for these programs in the public. Lastly, there is a stunning amount of wasted food each year. Supermarkets and companies waste close to 137 million tons of food each year (Condello 1). The wasted food could be used in emergency food kits before it spoils, or for distribution throughout the city's state and local programs. This is another problem that the federal government should address and research to tackle the hunger issue.

The government's priority, publicity, and qualification issues are why the government does not provide sufficient funds to families in need of food. Programs such as SNAP have qualifications that are too strict. Many people do not take advantage of food programs. Some schools lack breakfast programs. These are all problems that need to be fixed to improve the hunger situation of the U.S. Hunger is a central issue that can be revised. The U.S. government should spend more money on funding federal and state government programs, publicize these programs in advertisements and television to increase accessibility, and revise the standards for many programs such as SNAP so that food insecure households can have opportunities to fulfill their hunger needs.

Works Cited

- "Hunger in the U.S.". Frac. 16 Nov 2009. 13 Sept 2010. <http://www.frac.org/html/hunger_in_the_us/hunger_index.html>.
- "Hunger and Poverty Statistics". Feeding America. 2010. 28 Sept 2010. <<http://feedingamerica.org/faces-of-hunger/hunger-101/hunger-and-poverty-statistics.aspx>>.
- "Hunger and Food Insecurity in Pennsylvania". Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center. 2010. 29 Sept 2010. <http://www.pahunger.org/html/hunger/ana_hungempa.html>.
- Matthews, Dale. Personal Interview. 13 Oct 2010.
- Condello, Mary. "Speakers Blame Government for Hunger Problem". The Tech. 2010. 7 Oct 2010. <<http://tech.mit.edu/V105/N52/hunger.52n.html>>.
- "Children Nutrition Programs". Bread for the World. 2010. 7 Oct 2010. <<http://www.bread.org/hunger/us-poverty-solutions/federal-nutrition-programs.html>>.
- "Eligibility". FRAC. 2010. 9 Oct 2010. <<http://frac.org/federal-foodnutrition-programs/snap-food-stamps/eligibility/>>.
- SNAP/Food Stamp Historic Trends: 1998-2010". Frac. 2010. 9 Oct 2010. <<http://frac.org/federal-foodnutrition-programs/snapfood-stamps/historic-trends-1998-2008/>>.