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## THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM IN CALIFORNIA

The Food Stamp Program has made severe hunger rare in America. In the late 1960s, medical research exposed the fact that American children suffered and died from diseases related to severe malnutrition that usually are thought of as occurring only in third-world countries. In 1979, after the Food Stamp Program became available nation-wide, physicians discovered that this severe malnutrition had become rare, a result they attributed to the Food Stamp Program. The Food Stamp Program is the largest anti-hunger program in California.

### FOOD STAMPS HELP VULNERABLE CALIFORNIA RESIDENTS AND THE ECONOMY

- 2,048,185 Californians use food stamps to buy food every month.<sup>1</sup> That amounts to six percent of the people in California.
- California food stamp households receive, on average, \$1.16 per person per meal in food stamp benefits. This modest amount is crucial to financially pressed families.
- The Food Stamp Program pumped \$2,569,814,590 into the California economy last year, benefiting farmers, grocers, and small businesses throughout the state.<sup>2</sup>
- About 86 percent of California food stamp benefits go to households with children, many of them in working families.<sup>3</sup>

### FOOD STAMPS HELP PEOPLE THROUGH HARD TIMES

- During the recent rough economy, Food Stamp Program participation in California increased. In 2000, an average of 1,831,697 Californians received food stamps each month. That number rose steadily to 2,048,185 in 2007, an increase of 12 percent.<sup>4</sup>
- Using the flexibility provided in the Food Stamp Act, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is able to quickly issue disaster food stamps to people that survive hurricanes, tornadoes, or other natural disasters.

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<sup>1</sup> FY2007 average monthly participation, the most recent full year for which data is available. In February 2008, the most recent month for which USDA has published data, there were 2,176,434 participants in the state, but this data is preliminary and monthly data can fluctuate significantly. For the most recent month see: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/29fslatest.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Program Data, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture.  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/fspmain.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Analysis, Nutrition and Evaluation, *Characteristics of Food Stamp Households: Fiscal Year 2006*, FSP-07-CHAR, by Kari Wolkwitz. Project Office, Jenny Genser. Alexandria, VA: 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Program Data, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture.  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/fspmain.htm>.

## UNMET NEED REMAINS

- Still, about 35.5 million Americans have difficulty affording food. An estimated 1,396,000 households in California live with hunger or the threat of hunger, according to USDA.<sup>5</sup> That includes low-income working families and senior citizens living on fixed incomes.
- One in six children (17 percent) lives in families that have difficulty affording adequate food, according to USDA.<sup>6</sup> A household with a child under six is about twice as likely to suffer from food insecurity as a household with no children.
- Nationally, only 65 percent of those eligible for food stamps receive them. In California, the participation rate is estimated to be 50 percent.<sup>7</sup>
- Increasing the share of eligible households that participate in the Food Stamp Program by just five percentage points, California would provide food stamps to an additional 197,000 low-income Californians, bring \$105.7 million into California's local economy, and result in \$194.5 million in new economic activity.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Nord, Mark, Margaret Andrews, and Steven Carlson. *Household Food Security in the United States, 2006*. ERR-49, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Econ. Res. Serv. November 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Cunnyngham, Karen E., Laura Al. Castner, and Allen L. Schirm. "Reaching Those in Need: State Food Stamp Participation Rates in 2005." Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, October 2006.

<sup>8</sup> "The Business Case for Increasing Food Stamp Program Participation", Food and Nutrition Services, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/business-case.htm>.

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