

Hunger at Home:

The Growing Epidemic

By Michelle McMullen

The beginning of another school year, the changing colors of fall leaves, and the harvesting of bountiful crops mark the fast approach of the Thanksgiving feast.

Thanksgiving brings family, friends and communities together to celebrate everything that we are thankful for, over a home cooked meal traditionally featuring turkey and all the traditional fixings.

Millions of people across the United States share a delicious meal with the individuals they care most about - but many individuals celebrate Thanksgiving without all the fixings for dinner.

This is a real issue plaguing many families in both urban and rural areas of the United States.

As FFA members, there are a number of things that we can do in our own communities to help individuals in need.

Together, our contributions can make a positive difference - - big or small. Hunger and poverty issues are usually identified at the international level - - the underprivileged children in developing countries.

However, food security in the United States is a real issue - - with over 32,000 million people living in

poverty and the number of children living in poverty have increased by 50 percent in the last 25 years.

It's hard to believe that the impact that hunger has on the United States - one in 10 Americans is affected by hunger, which is unique among the World's wealthy democratic countries.

Other wealthy countries fall into the category, but the United States is the only wealthy country where a high proportion of its citizens suffer from nutritional deprivation due to inadequate income.

One in five children live below the federal poverty line of \$14,150 annually for a family of three.

A lack of food in the United States, especially in rural farming areas seems mismatched with the stereotypical image of American agriculture: fertile lands,

bountiful crops and grazing livestock, producing food for people around the world.

Myths and misconceptions about hunger and poverty the United States has kept the issue hidden and unsolved.

Hunger in the United States, commonly identified with poor nutrition, negatively affects personal performance and well-being.

Economic hardships often result in many families being unable to buy enough food to feed everyone.

America has the ability to end hunger - - we have the resources, effective programs that really make a difference when used, and enough food to end this serious problem.

Dedicated and motivated Americans can work together to end hunger. Are you ready to make a Xtreme Impact to eliminate hunger in your local community?



Hunger Facts

World harvest of wheat, corn, rice, and other grains produce enough to meet the minimum nutritional requirements for every child, woman and man in the world. Despite this, hunger continues to plague an estimated 841 million people around the world, including 30 million in the United States.

- World Watch Institute

Around the world the most vulnerable to hunger are: children, pregnant and nursing women, single mothers, the elderly, the homeless, the unemployed, ethnic and racial minorities, and the working poor.

- United Nations

Many hunger experts believe that ultimately the best way to reduce hunger is through education. Educated people are best able to break out of the cycle of poverty that causes hunger.

- UNICEF

100 million people are homeless and 2.5 billion people have no access to proper sanitation.

- UNICEF

Often it takes just a few simple resources for impoverished people to be able to become self-sufficient. These resources include quality seeds, appropriate tools, and access to water. Small improvements in farming techniques and food storage are also helpful.

-OXFAM

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Hunger in the United States

A 1995 study by Tufts University estimates that 20 to 30 million Americans are too poor to meet their monthly expenses and buy enough food to live healthy, productive lives.

In 1994 the Urban Institute in Washington DC estimated that one out of 6 elderly people in the U.S. has an inadequate diet.

Poverty is becoming more prevalent among young people. Between 1979 and 1995, the number of children under three living in poverty in the United States grew from 1.7 million to 2.8 million, from 18 percent to 24 percent—a 33 percent increase.

Young children in the United States have about a 50-50 chance of escaping the risks of poverty or near poverty.

The rate of poverty for children under age three living in suburban areas grew by 61 percent between the late 1970s and early 1990s, whereas the rates of poverty for children in the same age group in urban and rural areas rose by 37 and 47 percent respectively.

Children make up almost half of the population living below the Federal Poverty Line. More than 21 Percent of U.S. children under age 18, and 25 percent of children under age 6, are poor. Sixty-four percent of children under 6, who live in female-headed, single parent families are poor.

Approximately four million low-income children under the age of 12 experience hunger each year and an additional 9.6 million children are at risk of hunger.

Every day, 25% of our food supply is wasted."

Changing the Politics of Hunger

The challenge, then is to change U.S. culture and politics enough to get the U.S. government to provide the necessary leadership to end hunger in our country and worldwide.

Will it happen? That depends mainly on whether individuals—people like you and me—decide to dedicate more of our time, resources and citizen action to the cause of justice for hungry people.

Every major victory for justice in this country—from women's suffrage to civil rights legislation—was spearheaded by ordinary people who organized for action.

It is possible to transform the politics of hunger. Hunger-related charities are roughly 1,000 times the size of the groups that lobby Congress on behalf of hungry people.

If just a slightly larger fraction of the effort we now devote to charity is directed to changing the politics of hunger, we can win the changes needed to reduce hunger by half in the United States and worldwide.

Organizations across the nation have learned from repeated experience that a small, scattered network of committed people can get the U.S. government to take action to reduce hunger.

The activities listed in the side bare are programs dedicated to providing you with steps toward ending hunger.

We hope this article provides you enough information to motivate you and your chapter to make an impact and take action against hunger in your community.

Make an Impact... Take Action against Hunger

Plant a Row Program
www.gwaa.org/Par/Campaign.html

This program shares bountiful produce with others in need. Harvest sharing can happen on many levels - individuals, community groups, churches and businesses.

Service Learning Program
http://www.kleinfoundation.org/brigade_main.htm

The program strives to empower students in a classroom setting to increase their community involvement and commitment to ending hunger in the United States.

Eat Healthy, Eat Breakfast
www.mnn.fcs.msue.msu.edu/EHEB.html

Campaign launched by MSU Extension to promote kids ages 11 through 15 to eat breakfast. Get involved through community, school or media intervention programs.

Oxfam Hunger Banquet
www.oxfamamerica.org/publications/art1104.html

This program is an excellent opportunity to educate students, raise money to fight world hunger and poverty and recruit volunteers.

Local Food Banks
www.secondharvest.org/site_content.asp?e=101

Plan a food drive in your local community - collect non-perishable or shelf-stable foods. Organizing a food drive is a fun and easy way to support your local food bank. Food drives are responsible for 1/3 of the food distributed by food banks.