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Federal Report Illustrates Low-income Texans Struggle to Afford Good Nutrition

(AUSTIN, Texas) — Today the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released its annual report that illustrates the struggle low-income Texans face in affording a consistent and nutritious diet. The USDA report, [*Household Food Security in the United States in 2010*](#), reveals that almost one in five Texas households (18.8 percent, or 1.7 million households) were food insecure between 2008 and 2010, compared to 14.6 percent of households nationwide. Over one-third of these households (6.9 percent) are classified as having very low food security—the more severe condition associated with food insecurity—compared to 5.6 percent of U.S. households. Texas ranks second in the nation for the highest percentage of food insecure households, and is tied for third in the share of households experiencing very low food security.

According to the USDA data, there was no significant change in the national rate of food insecurity between 2009 and 2010, though the share of food insecure households increased sharply from 2007 to 2008—to the highest levels since USDA began conducting food security surveys in 1995— and remained at that high level in 2009 and 2010.

U.S. households with children were more likely to experience food insecurity, at 20.2 percent. Rates of food insecurity were substantially higher than the national average among households with incomes below the Federal poverty line, households with children headed by single parents, and Black and Hispanic households. Though the report does not provide state data on the household characteristics associated with food insecurity, Feeding America (the nation's food bank network) estimated that more than one in five Texas children—1, 871, 660 kids or 28.2 percent—live in a family that struggles to afford food.

The report also includes data about participation in federal and charitable food assistance programs to illustrate the extent to which food insecure families use outside resources to bridge the gap. In 2010, 59 percent of food insecure families received assistance from one of the three largest Federal food and nutrition assistance programs.

“The number of Texas families who struggle to afford food is not a problem we can afford to ignore,” says Celia Cole, senior policy analyst at the Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPPP).

“Food insecurity not only hurts individuals and families, it costs all of us. When kids come to school hungry, they cannot learn. This affects academic achievement and the health of our future workforce and economic competitiveness.

continued



“Food insecurity is the result of extensive poverty, a lack of economic opportunity, and barriers to accessing the public and private resources available to prevent hunger and ensure good nutrition,” says Cole.

Texas can overcome these challenges by:

- Increasing state investments in public and higher education,
- Eliminating the barriers to accessing food resources and good nutrition, and
- Protecting federal investments in nutrition programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps), Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and school meals.

In a separate report released today, the Texas Food Bank Network (TFBN), in partnership with the Texas Hunger Initiative (THI) and First Choice Power, released [*Hunger by the Numbers: A Blueprint for Ending Hunger in Texas*](#) that shows the rate of food insecurity by county.

About the Data

The Household Food Security Report 2010 has been published annually since 1997 and uses data collected by the U.S. Census bureau to calculate the overall food security of U.S. households. Food security is defined as having access, at all times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members. Families are classified as food insecure if they express uncertainty about their ability to afford enough food for their household at any point in the previous 12 months. Households are classified as having “low” “very low” food insecurity if they report reducing food intake below usual or adequate levels due to a lack of resources.

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The Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPP) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit policy institute committed to improving public policies to better the economic and social conditions of low- and moderate-income Texans. You can learn more about CPPP at www.cppp.org.

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