



Center for Public Policy Priorities

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**O P - E D**

Plenty of Food for Thought

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More than 68,000 people in Travis County rely on Food Stamps to put a decent meal on the table. Statewide, 2.3 million Texans (more than the entire population of Houston) use Food Stamps.

The Food Stamp Program helps low-income working families, seniors, and persons with disabilities make ends meet during periods of unemployment or economic downturns. At any given time, 8% of Travis County residents rely on the Food Stamp Program.

Statewide, 25% of Texas children receive food stamps. Nationally, roughly *half* of all Americans between the ages of 20 and 65 will use Food Stamps at some point in their lives when they fall on hard times. Food Stamps is such a successful program that the *National Journal* recently described it as “a government reform that worked.”

Unfortunately, due to cuts in 1996, the purchasing power of Food Stamps has eroded. Food Stamp recipients now get just \$1 per meal per day, which increases families’ risk of running out of food before the end of the month or forces them to buy cheaper, less healthy food.

But don’t just take our word for it.

For the week of May 15- May 21, Congressman Lloyd Doggett, the Capital Area Food Bank, and the Center for Public Policy Priorities challenge Central Texans to eat and drink only what \$1 a meal—or \$21 a week—can buy.

Nationally, U.S. Representatives James McGovern and Jo Ann Emerson have posed this Food Stamp Challenge to all members of the U.S. House and all citizens across the country. The Challenge is part of a push to increase the value of Food Stamps as part of the 2007 Farm Bill, which Congress will begin debating at the end of this month.

Locally, the week-long Challenge is an attempt to shine a light on the meager amount of federal support families receive to supplement their monthly food budgets. It is also an opportunity to mark a week in solidarity with our neighbors at the larger community table.

To sign up for the challenge, visit [www.austinfoodbank.org](http://www.austinfoodbank.org). At the site, you will find tips and advice from the Food Bank’s Registered Dietitian on how to stretch your food budget and eat healthfully during the Challenge. Also available is information about emergency food pantries and soup kitchens, should you need supplemental food during the Challenge. We’ll also use the site to share the daily experiences of both Challenge participants and people who regularly use Food Stamps to supplement their monthly budgets.

In addition to participating in the Challenge, we encourage you to urge your U.S. representatives to strengthen the 2007 Farm Bill by restoring the purchasing power of Food Stamp benefits, increasing Food Stamp eligibility to cover more needy families, and helping states enroll more eligible families in the program.

Currently, less than half of eligible families in the state (35% in Travis County) participate in the program. More than 1.3 million individuals, or 16% of households, in Texas are food insecure—the third-highest rate of food insecurity in the country.

Helping Texans avoid hunger is a priority we should all embrace. You can bet the farm on it.

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