

FULL PLATES

Helping Nebraskans Live Full &
Healthy Lives by Addressing Hunger



LOW INCOME SELF SUFFICIENCY PROGRAM

Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law in the Public Interest

September 2008

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HELPING NEBRASKANS LIVE FULL & HEALTHY
LIVES BY ADDRESSING HUNGER



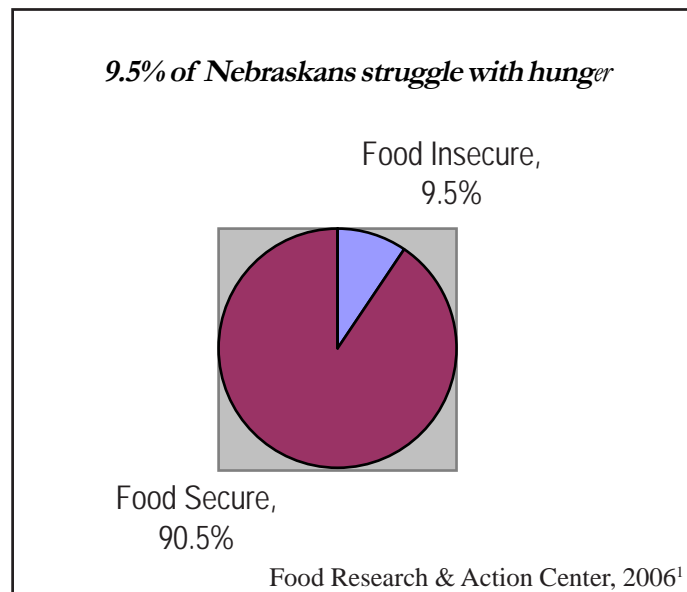
INTRODUCTION

Hunger is a difficult issue. The causes of hunger involve complicated factors such as availability of job opportunities and the rising costs of basic necessities. The impacts of hunger can range from inability to concentrate at school to long-term ill health. In Nebraska today it is important not only to recognize that hunger is a problem, but also to understand how hunger impacts families, communities, and our state as a whole. This report outlines basic information about hunger – and provides clear steps for actions to fill plates and help more Nebraskans live full and healthy lives.

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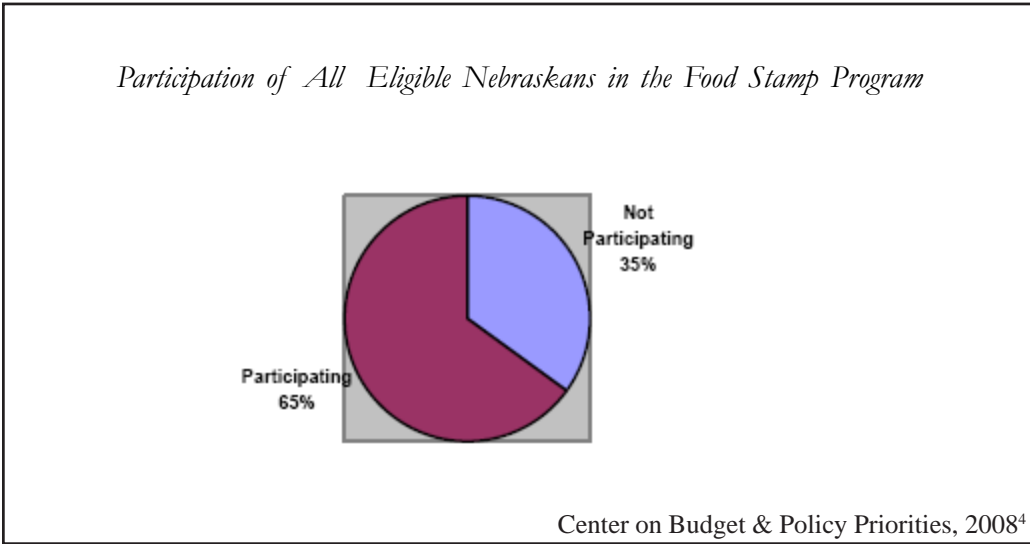
ADDRESSING HUNGER

Many of us balance “full plates” - managing work, family, and other responsibilities on any given day. Yet, one in ten Nebraskans go without the food they need to fuel their lives¹ and an increasing number of working people in our state are struggling with hunger because wages are not keeping up with increasing food and fuel costs. Others, such as children and the elderly, may not be able to have healthy diets without the benefits that assistance programs provide. While significant efforts are being made to address hunger in Nebraska, it is clear that we can do more to assure that plates remain full in our state. As a state, we can make choices to invest in efforts that address hunger, improve health, and contribute to quality of life in Nebraska.

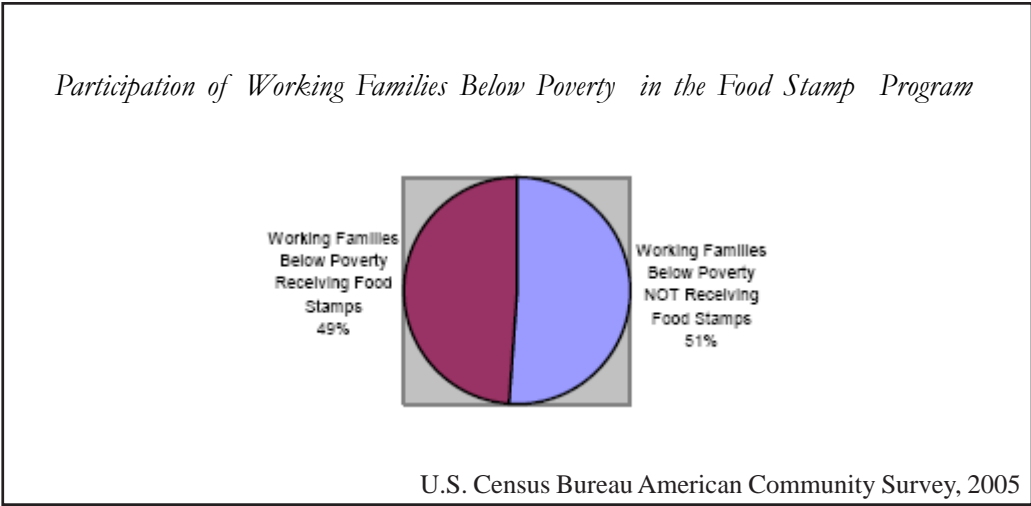


Recent increases in food costs have made it more difficult for some families to afford food. The cost of food rose 6.1% from June 2007 to June 2008². In 2008, the average price of a gallon of milk in Lincoln was \$3.88 a gallon. In 2007, it was \$2.93³.

While there are many initiatives to address hunger, including faith-based programs, non-profit initiatives, and government efforts, the Food Stamp Program is the nation’s largest anti-hunger program. Food stamp benefits are fully federally funded and provide people with additional money to purchase food. In Nebraska, approximately 120,000 people receive benefits. Yet, 35% of eligible Nebraskans do not participate in the Food Stamp Program.⁴



Eligible Nebraskans who don't participate include a significant number of people below poverty who are most in need of assistance. 51% of working families in Nebraska below poverty don't receive food stamps even though their low incomes make them eligible.⁵



➤ In Nebraska, we can do more to address hunger, strengthen efforts to provide food assistance, and take action to expand initiatives that ease food and family budgets.

IMPROVING HEALTH

Adequate food and nutrition is an extraordinary tool in preventative medicine. A healthy diet and access to enough food to eat play an enormous role in child development, the management of chronic

disease, and the overall health and well-being of every person. However, to benefit from the preventative power of food, people must first have access to it – reinforcing the need for anti-hunger initiatives in Nebraska.

Hunger isn't just an uncomfortable feeling. The health and development of children – especially infants and toddlers in critical growth periods – is dependent on quality nutrition. Early lack of food endangers future academic achievement, health, and workforce participation. Research shows that children in food insecure homes are approximately twice as likely to suffer poor health and one-third more likely to be hospitalized, because poor nutrition can increase the risk of illness and compromise immune systems⁶. Anti-hunger programs can help protect children from the adverse effects of hunger and even decrease the amount of tax dollars spent on children who become sick in families without private health insurance.

Adequate nutrition is also vital for the well-being of people with chronic illness. For example, in Nebraska, nearly 80,000 people suffer from diabetes⁷. A lack of money for food often causes people to choose less nutritious items, exacerbating chronic illnesses like diabetes and often contributing to obesity. However, research indicates that significant improvements in health can be made by receiving adequate nutrition that addresses medical needs⁸.

Ensuring that every Nebraskan is able to meet their basic food needs is cost-effective and results in healthier people. Simply put, full plates are vital for overall health and well-being.

Kelly Bauer Registered Nurse and Certified Diabetes Educator at the People's Health Clinic in Lincoln, which serves low-income clients, articulates the intersections between health and nutrition this way: "I educate people on weight loss, cholesterol and blood pressure control, and mostly diabetes. Patients often do not know how their nutritional status affects their health. But everyday I have many success stories: from controlling diabetes, to lowering cholesterol levels, to healing wounds, to losing weight..."



In Nebraska, we can contribute to improved health for children, families, and people with health concerns by developing targeted Food Stamp outreach to these groups

BUILDING FULLER LIVES

Nebraskans work hard, but low wages mean that some working people need food assistance to help them be productive at work and at home.

When budgets are stretched thin, families are often forced to cut back on spending. Because gas, water, and electric bills cannot be decreased, family budget cuts are often made in the grocery bill. This means buying less food, or buying more products that are inexpensive but lower in nutritional value. Too

many families also are forced to make difficult choices between food and other necessities – a problem made worse by increasing food and fuel costs. In a 2008 statewide survey of clients using Community Action Agency Services, 57% worried about how to make ends meet and 15.7% skipped meals in order to save money.

Dona Lawsen of Central Nebraska Community Services in Broken Bow puts it this way: “We especially feel the pinch of increased costs for basic purchases like food and gasoline in our rural area where everyone drives to work. Family incomes just can’t keep up – and it’s leading to a downward spiral. I see it everyday.”

Initiatives to address hunger do more than fill plates – they also ease pressure on families and allow workers to have the energy they need to do their jobs. Food assistance programs even contribute to the economy. The Food Stamp Program provides valuable assistance for low-income Nebraskans, but it also helps the state as a whole. The United States Department of Agriculture estimates that for every five dollars brought into Nebraska from federal food stamp funding, twice that in local economic impact is gained. In other words, funds brought in by federal food stamp funding help consumers make purchases in grocery stores, which in turn provide earnings for the store owners, truck drivers, and others involved in the food chain. Other programs, such as child care assistance and tax credits for working families also contribute to food security and community well being by helping parents participate in work, providing quality care for children, and keeping families stable on their road to self-sufficiency.

\$\$\$\$\$ of Federal Food Stamps = \$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$ of Local Impact

➤ Targeted assistance programs, such as child care assistance and tax credits aimed at working families are powerful tools in developing food security and family stability

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDRESSING HUNGER, IMPROVING HEALTH, AND BUILDING FULLER LIVES IN NEBRASKA:

❖ MAKE BETTER USE OF THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

- Improve Outreach and Eligibility:
 - What can be done: Provide training and capacity building for organizations implementing the on-line food stamp application process, build special outreach programs for working families and people with health concerns, and promote a positive

image of the food stamp program through a media campaign, and expand eligibility for special populations.

- Why it matters: Many people are aware of the Food Stamp program, but they do not apply because they are not aware of their eligibility – a problem outreach can solve⁹. Additionally, many low income folks -- especially families and people with health problems could particularly benefit from food stamps, but earn too much to be eligible.

❖ MAKE TARGETED INVESTMENTS TO EASE FAMILY AND FOOD BUDGETS

➤ The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)

- What can be done: Double the state EITC to put more money in the hands of low-income workers – an approach that would build on a successful system already in place to improve the ability of low-income working people to meet their basic needs.
- Why it matters: The federal EITC is an extremely effective and efficient anti-poverty program that incentivizes work by providing a refundable tax credit for low-income workers. The state of Nebraska provides a 10% state match to the federal EITC.

➤ Child Care

- What can be done: Increase income eligibility for child care assistance - helping families pay basic bills, allowing parents to continue to work, and easing family food budgets.
- Why it matters: All too often, families face difficult choices between paying for food and other basic needs. Currently, a family of four loses their “sliding scale” child care assistance when they earn just \$24,780¹⁰.

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Take Action!

- Cut out this card and send it in to show your support! You can also get more on our website at www.neappleseed.org to share with your church, civic organization, or just your friends and neighbors
- Join the Center for People in Need electronic action center to receive updates about anti-hunger legislation www.centerforpeopleinneed.org
- Invite Nebraska Appleseed to speak at your church or community organization, call (402) 438-8853
- Share food stamp information at your place of business, church, community organization, or local community center. Get a free toolkit at www.neappleseed.org

YES! I want the Nebraska State Legislature to support a Full Plate of policies that help assure that people in Nebraska are food secure - including improving outreach and making targeted investments in child care and tax credits to ease family food budgets!

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