

Oregon: A State of Hunger

Oregon continues to be one of the hungriest states in the nation, a distinction that Governor Ted Kulongoski has called “a shame that no Oregonian wants or would allow to continue.” In a state so abundant in agriculture and food production, 5% of Oregon households were classified as “food insecure with hunger” in 2000-2002.

What Is Hunger?

Hunger is defined as the uneasy or painful sensation caused by involuntary lack of food, which over time may result in malnutrition. Hunger exists in the U.S. without visible signs of malnutrition, such as swollen bellies and skinny arms and legs.

What is Food Insecurity?

Food insecurity occurs whenever the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food, or the ability to acquire food in socially acceptable ways, is limited or uncertain. In 2000-2002, 13.7% of Oregon households were classified as food insecure. These families reported that their children had to cut or skip meals. Food insecurity with and without hunger can result in reduced quality of dietary intake.

Why is Oregon’s Hunger Rate So High?

- The **cost of living** (such as for housing and health care) has increased significantly while wages for many workers have remained stagnant.
- The **gap between the rich and the poor** has increased faster in Oregon than nationally. During the 1980s and 1990s, average family incomes of the poorest fifth of Oregonians declined 6%, whereas incomes grew 34% in the richest fifth.
- The **changing nature of Oregon’s economy** has resulted in a significant decline in higher paying manufacturing jobs and an increase in lower paying service and retail jobs.
- **Seasonal employment** in agricultural, fishing, and timber industries means lower annual incomes for those wage earners.

Family Budgets

In Oregon, a basic family budget for essentials such as housing, food, health insurance and child care ranges from 205% to 249% of the Federal Poverty Line (FPL). Nearly one million Oregonians try to survive with incomes below 200% of the current FPL (\$36,800 for a family of four). Thirty-six percent of working families with one to three children under age 12 don’t earn enough to meet the basic family budget.

A “living wage” would allow families to meet their basic needs without resorting to public assistance. It also would help families deal with emergencies and plan ahead. The living wage is

now \$17.95 per hour for a single adult with two children. Only 37% of single parent families with two children earn a living wage.

Consequences of Hunger

Poor nutrition can reduce overall well-being and quality of life. Nearly 200,000 Oregon children live in families where there is often not enough food to eat. Recent research indicates that these children fail to thrive and don't learn as well as their classmates. In severe cases, there may be stunted growth and permanent mental deficiencies.

When faced with hunger and food insecurity, the growing elderly population is presented with unique challenges. Older adults, regardless of food sufficiency status, generally consume less than the recommended daily amounts of most nutrients. But, food-insufficient older adults consistently consume fewer calories (energy), B vitamins (B-6, B-12, niacin, riboflavin) and zinc.

Food insecurity in the elderly contributes to malnutrition. This increases the risk of disease that can potentially lead to increased disability. As a result, there are more care-giving demands that increase state and national health care expenditures.

Federal and State Nutrition Programs

Congress established federal food programs to help ensure that the dietary needs of low-income people are met. These include the Food Stamp Program, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), school meals (lunch, breakfast and milk programs), Summer Food Service Program (food when school is not in session), Child and Adult Care Program (nutrition program for day care), and food distribution (for Indian reservations, for older adults, and emergency food distribution).

Communities can support the availability of these programs at the local level. For example, funding can be sought for summer feeding programs for children who receive free or reduced-price lunches during the school year.

Working Together to End Hunger

Oregonians can take action to ensure that no one goes to bed with an empty stomach. Awareness and volunteerism are important for meeting short-term food needs and for bringing about community changes that can help end hunger. If you plant a vegetable garden, plant more than you need and donate the excess to a local food pantry. Volunteer in a soup kitchen, food pantry, food bank or homeless shelter. Support local food production (for example, by patronizing farmers' markets or initiating community gardens) to promote food availability at the local level. Assist with gleaning produce from harvested fields for the needy.

Long-term solutions to hunger/food insecurity will require changes in our communities that increase wages for low-wage employees and/or reduce their cost of living. Possible actions include working with community leaders on public policy changes, supporting local businesses that pay "living wages", and working with local groups that provide support such as affordable housing and child care.

Hunger Quiz

Answer true or false for the following statements by circling the correct answer.

1. Hunger is not a major problem in Oregon. True False
2. Being hungry affects how children develop physically and mentally. True False
3. Hungry = Homeless. True False
4. Hungry people are unemployed. True False
5. The living wage for a single adult with 2 children is \$17.95 per hour. True False

Circle the correct answer for statements below.

6. Oregon's emergency food recipients could populate:
A. Marion County (population: 288,452)
B. Lane County (population: 325,910)
C. Lane and Marion Counties combined.
7. In what percent of households seeking emergency food is someone earning a wage?
A. 15%
B. 42%
C. 70%
8. What percent of Oregon high school students skip meals because there isn't enough money for food?
A. 2%
B. 5%
C. 10%
9. How many Oregonians rely on Food Stamps to feed themselves and their families?
A. 50,000
B. 360,000
C. 600,000
10. How many low-income children who rely on free and low-cost school meals in Oregon miss out on summer meals?
A. 1 in 4
B. 2 in 4
C. 3 in 4

Emergency Food Box Activity

Bryan and Jessica are married with an 18-month-old daughter. Both work minimum-wage jobs and are frugal spenders, but their money doesn't seem to stretch very far. They're at a time in their lives when they're down on their luck. To help them from going hungry at the end of the month, they received a 3-day emergency food box from the local food pantry.

Situation

The box below contains food items received in the emergency food box. Neither Bryan nor Jessica knows just what to do with these. Give them some ideas on preparing meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks) with the following food items. ("oz" is ounce; "lb" is pound)

Vegetables 14.5 oz. can green beans 26 oz. can diced tomatoes 16 oz. frozen corn 4-6 potatoes, fresh	Soup 11 oz. tomato soup 2 oz. box onion soup	Meat/Fish 2 6-oz. cans of tuna 16 oz. package hot dogs 1 lb. frozen hamburger
Fruit 20 oz. can of peaches 16 oz. frozen berries 4-6 apples, fresh 32 oz. dried cherries	USDA Commodities: 25.6 oz. box nonfat dry milk	Canned/Prepared Meals 24 oz. can beef stew 28 oz. jar spaghetti sauce Skillet Meals/Box Meals 7.25 oz. box macaroni+cheese 6.2 oz. box "helper" mix
Grains 15 oz. package flour tortillas 40 oz. box baking mix	Peanut Butter 18 oz. jar Dried Beans 1 lb. Kidney beans	Eggs 6 eggs
Rice/Noodles/Pasta 2 16-oz. bags white rice	Cereal 18 oz. box corn flakes	Juice 46 oz. can orange juice

- How many meals were you able to prepare with the above food items?
- Did you use all emergency food items or did you find some items not useful?
- Are there foods that you or your family don't eat?
- Would you need any special equipment to prepare these foods?
- What would you do to improve the usage of emergency food box items (for example, giving recipe cards)?

Helpful Websites

Organizations:

- **Oregon Food Bank:** A statewide network of hunger relief agencies.
<http://www.oregonfoodbank.org/>
- **Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force:** A statewide advocate for Oregonians who are hungry or at risk of hunger.
<http://www.oregonhunger.org/>
- **Community Food Security Coalition.** A non-profit North American organization. Provides information to assure access to nutritious, affordable and culturally appropriate food for all people at all times.
<http://www.foodsecurity.org>
- **Oregon State University Extension Family & Community Development program:** Offers effective educational opportunities to help Oregon families meet the practical challenges of daily life; helps Oregonians become healthy, financially secure, and responsible members of society.
<http://oregonstate.edu/dept/ehe/hunger.htm>
- **Center on Hunger and Poverty (Brandeis University):** Promotes policies that improve the lives of low-income children and families.
<http://www.centeronhunger.org/>
- **Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), USDA:** Provides food security by helping people access enough nutritious food for an active, healthy life.
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsec/>
- **Food Research and Action Center:** Works to improve public policies in order to eradicate hunger and undernutrition in the United States.
<http://www.frac.org/>
- **America's Second Harvest:** Distributes food and grocery products through a nationwide network of certified affiliates; increases public awareness of domestic hunger and advocates for policies that benefit America's hungry.
www.secondharvest.org

Publications:

“Food Insecurity and Hunger in Oregon: A New Look” (November, 2003)
Dept. of Agricultural and Resource Economics, Oregon State University
<http://arec.oregonstate.edu/ruralstudies/publications.htm>

“Poverty and Food Assistance in Oregon”(EM 8842-E; November, 2003)
Oregon State University Extension Service
<http://eesc.orst.edu/agcomwebfile/edmat/html/em/EM8842-E/EM8842-E.html>

“Oregonians face dual challenges: obesity and hunger” (EM 8828; May, 2003)
Oregon State University Extension Service
<http://eesc.orst.edu/agcomwebfile/edmat/EM8828.pdf>

“The State of Hunger” (July 1, 2002 – June 30, 2003)
Oregon Food Bank
http://www.oregonfoodbank.org/research_and_action/pdfs/state_of_hunger_2003.pdf

“Profiles of Hunger in Oregon, 2002”
Oregon Food Bank
http://www.oregonfoodbank.org/research_and_action/pdfs/profiles_of_hunger.pdf

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