OREGON: A State of Hunger
Teacher Guide

Objectives
Participants will
1. Become familiar with definitions of hunger/food insecurity
2. Identify factors that contribute to food insecurity and hunger in Oregon.
3. Identify health consequences associated with hunger.
4. Gain awareness of community hunger outreach.

Materials Needed
For Teachers:
• Teacher’s Guide – FCD04-004 including:

For Participants:
• Participant’s Guide – FCD04-005
• Evaluation and Consent Letter – FCD04-005

Before the lesson:
Read Teacher Guide and Participant materials.
Determine whether all parts of the lesson will fit into the time frame available.

10 minutes – Introduction and quiz
20 minutes – Background Information
10 minutes – Activity
5 minutes – Quiz answers
5 to 10 minutes – Evaluation and Closing
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 report that their children have to cut or skip meals. Being food insecure with or without hunger can result in a poorer diet.

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Distribute participant handout and ask members to complete the Hunger Quiz. (Wait until the end of the lesson to review answers.).
Why is Oregon’s Hunger Rate So High?

- The cost of living (such as the cost of housing and health care) has increased significantly for workers while wages have remained stagnant for many. Property values in Oregon have risen 129% within the last decade. The price of purchasing a home is out of reach for many Oregonians working in low-wage jobs. Meanwhile, median rent in Oregon has grown by 52% in the past decade. One out of three Oregon renters spends more than one-third of their income on rent.

- The gap between rich and poor has increased due to stagnant wages of many workers. This gap has increased four times faster in Oregon than nationally. During the late 1980s to 1990s, average family incomes of the poorest fifth declined by 6%, whereas the richest fifth grew by 34%.

- The changing nature of Oregon’s economy has led to a significant decline in higher paying manufacturing jobs and an increase in lower paying service and retail jobs. This has contributed to the growth in income inequality.

- Rural Oregon fares poorly due to more seasonal employment that results in lower annual incomes.

Basic Family Budget

Over one-third of working families with one to three children under the age of 12 don’t earn enough to meet their basic family needs.

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 (about one-third of the population) try to survive with incomes below 200% of the current FPL ($36,800 for a family of four).

When there isn’t enough to eat, some households have to rely on emergency food boxes (a 3-day supply of groceries provided by 338 pantries run by churches and other non-profit groups in the Oregon Food Bank network). Most families request emergency food help three or fewer times in a year. In 2002-2003, 780,000 Oregonians ate meals from emergency food boxes at least once. Of these, 40% were children under 18.
Working for a Living Wage

A living wage allows families to meet their basic needs without relying on public assistance and helps them plan ahead and deal with emergencies. Living wages are calculated on the basis of family budgets which include basic necessities, state, local and federal taxes, and minimal savings.

- In 2000, the living wage for a single adult in Oregon was $11.05/hour
- The wage was $17.95/hour for a single adult with 2 children.
- Only 37% of single adults with 2 children earn a living wage for their household type.

Health Consequences of Hunger

Poor nutrition can reduce overall well-being and quality of life. Currently in Oregon, nearly 200,000 children live in families where there is often not enough food to eat. Recent research indicates these hungry 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 for 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 older adults contributes to malnutrition. This increases the risk of disease that can potentially lead to increased disability. Older adults may go to nursing homes prematurely. Increased care-giving demands and extended hospital stays increase health care expenditures.
Federal and State Nutrition Programs

Congress established federal nutrition programs to help ensure that the dietary needs of low-income children, families and the elderly are met. These include:

- Food Stamp Program
- 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)
- Food distribution (for Indian reservations, for older adults, and emergency food distribution).

The Nutrition Education Program of the OSU Extension Service provides nutrition education classes, materials and community displays for those with low incomes, including youth from low income families. The relevant, practical and hands-on learning helps program participants:

- better manage their food resources
- improve their food security (families are less likely to run out of food before the end of the month)
- improve their food choices
- handle food safely

A recent study found that for every dollar invested in this nutrition education program, a savings of $3.63 in future health care costs can be expected. This is a great return on this investment.

Working Together to End Hunger

Hunger is not about the food supply; it’s about distribution and equality. Oregon’s citizens need to take action if they don’t want anyone in their communities to go 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.

Federal food programs help to ensure that the dietary needs of low-income children, families and the elderly are met.

The Nutrition Education Program (NEP) of the OSU Extension Service helps low-income Oregonians manage their resources, improve their food security, improve their food choices, and handle food safely.

The NEP investment saves future health care costs.

Oregon’s citizens need to take action if they don’t want anyone in their communities to go to bed with an empty stomach.

Volunteerism and awareness can help to meet short-term food needs and to bring about community changes that can help to end hunger.
There are many opportunities to take action:

- If you have a vegetable garden, plant more than you need for your family and donate the excess to a local food bank or church.
- 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 left in harvested fields to distribute to needy families.

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.

By working together, Oregonians can make a difference to lessen hunger in our state.

Review answers to Hunger Quiz in teacher guide.

Read the informed consent letter aloud and ask participants to complete the Participant Evaluation. Please return these to the county Extension office.
References:


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Hunger Quiz
Answers

1. False
Oregon continues to have a higher rate of hunger than most states. Last year, more than 652,000 people received emergency food boxes from the Oregon food Bank Network, an increase of 30% since 1996. That’s the equivalent of one in seven people in Oregon (Oregon Food Bank, 2002).

2. True
Children who do not eat enough nutritious food may suffer both stunted growth and permanent mental deficiencies (Oregon Food Bank, 2002).

3. False
81% of the people served by the Oregon Food Bank Network own or rent their own homes (Oregon Food Bank, 2002).

4. False
Of households receiving food boxes, 43% have at least one working adult; 25% of households have at least one adult working full time (Oregon Food Bank, 2002).

5. True
A living wage allows families to meet their basic needs without relying on public assistance and helps them plan ahead and deal with emergencies.

6. C. From July 2001 to June 2002, 626,000 Oregonians received emergency food at least once, more than the population of Lane and Marion counties combined (Oregon Food Bank, Oregon Blue Book 2003).

7. B. At least one family member is working in 42% of Oregon’s households receiving food assistance. The remaining 58% of households either had members who were disabled, retired, looking for work, or caring for a disabled member at home (Oregon Food Bank, 2003).

8. C. 10% of high school students reported not having enough money for food and skipping meals (Oregon Healthy Teens Survey, 2001).

9. B. More than 360,000 people receive Food Stamps, which is more than 1 in 10 Oregonians. This represents 65% of households that are eligible to receive Food Stamps. (Department of Human Services, 2003).

10. C. More than three in four low-income Oregon children miss out on summer meals, primarily because there is no summer food sponsor in their area (Food Research and Action Center, 2003).