

**First Progress Report to Governor Jim Douglas
From the Governor's Task Force on Hunger
November 15, 2006**

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Introduction

The establishment of the Governor's Task Force on Hunger could not have come at a more critical time. The initial findings of the Task Force highlight a serious hunger problem in Vermont. Statistical information, insights of service providers, and the stories of our neighbors and community members who struggle to feed their families, all point to a growing problem and incomplete solutions. According to the 2003 census estimates, there are over 55,000 Vermonters living at or below the federal poverty level, including nearly 16,000 children. Since 1999, the number of Vermont families most severely affected by hunger has doubled - the largest percent increase of any state in the nation.

The true cost of hunger is revealed in the words of the Vermonters who struggle to put food on the table. One young mother of three at a food shelf in Essex described her efforts to feed her family: "It's never enough. Even with WIC, it's never enough. I've been hoarding this month so we can have something for Thanksgiving."

Here in Vermont, where we value our rich agricultural heritage and warm community connections, some children still go hungry on the weekends when the school cafeteria is closed, and some seniors are hungry and isolated with no means of accessing a warm meal. Hunger in our state and in our communities is unacceptable, and it is solvable. The Governor's Hunger Task Force is committed to creating a shared vision of a hunger free state, and developing the action plan that will allow everyone to work together to ensure that no Vermonter is hungry.

This report presents an overview of what we have accomplished in our first meetings, and where we would like to go in the coming year.

Section 1: Overview of the Work of the Task Force

Since first convening on June 26, 2006, the Task Force has met five times. Over the course of the first three meetings, the group reviewed current data on hunger, heard from anti-hunger advocates and service providers, and learned about some of the various public and privately funded programs to address hunger. We also worked towards a common definition of hunger that would express our shared understanding of the problem. Discussions demonstrated that hunger is complex and includes many facets. Dimensions of hunger include the need for adequate calories in addition to nutritional quality.

The task force is made up of a diverse group of representatives with a variety of experience working to address hunger in Vermont. Early meetings included in depth discussions of the problem including economics, access, education and stigma.

Perhaps one of the most significant insights that we've gained is that there is no single statewide source which provides a comprehensive overview of nutrition resources, services and programs. Even within one community, providers at one program may not be aware of other services. We believe that this fragmentation results in underutilization of existing resources, and lost opportunities.

The fourth and fifth meetings were spent summarizing what we have learned, and beginning to draft a description of what we wish to accomplish as a Task Force in order to reduce the impact of hunger in Vermont.

The membership of the Task Force and a more detailed overview of each meeting are included in Appendix 1.

Section 2: Areas Requiring Additional Exploration

As a result of our work, the Task Force is more clearly aware that hunger is a complex problem with no one solution. Creating a Vermont where no one goes hungry requires a comprehensive and coordinated set of resources, program and policies implemented by individuals, organizations and government. The preliminary work of the Task Force has identified aspects of the problem and solution deserving of further exploration.

1. Best and Promising Practices

- Identification of model projects, programs and initiatives to increase access to adequate food.
- Inventory and assessment of programs at the local, state and national level.

2. Partners and Potential Partners in Addressing Hunger

- Identification and assessment of the various organizations and agencies which participate in providing food and nutrition resources at the local, state, and federal levels.
- Identifying opportunities to create and strengthen community coalitions, and increase coordination of services.

2. Federal Nutrition Programs

- Identification of the various federal nutrition programs and the actual participation in Vermont compared to potential participation.
- Assessment of each aspect of the federal nutrition programs, including outreach, application process, and quality of food and services.
- Identifying opportunities to reduce barriers and improve access to federal nutrition programs, and the role that the state, communities, organizations and individuals can play in promoting use of these programs.

3. Charitable Food Distribution System

- Identification of the various facets of the charitable food distribution system, and of the different stakeholders and providers.
- Assessment of the quality, quantity, access and community involvement in the charitable food distribution system.
- Identifying opportunities to strengthen the charitable food distribution system through increased community involvement and other resources.

4. Nutrition Education and Practical Skills

- Assessment of the programs and services that provide nutrition education, obesity prevention, food preparation, purchasing and production skills to underserved Vermonters.
- Identifying opportunities to strengthen the nutritional education resources available to low-income Vermonters.

5. Local Food Production

- Assessment of programs including community gardening programs in underserved areas, farm to table initiatives and food stamp acceptance at farmers markets.
- Identifying opportunities to improve resources which connect local food producers and low-income Vermonters.
- Identify opportunities for regional or statewide distribution of local foods.

6. Reducing Stigma

- Assessment of the scope and affects of social stigma as it relates to accessing nutrition resources.
- Exploration of effective models for reducing stigma.

7. Underused Resources and Fragmentation

- Identification of opportunities for increasing coordination of the various nutrition assistance programs, including joint outreach and applications, a stronger referral system, and sharing of information and resources.
- Identification of resources that are not fully used in Vermont, including school breakfast, food stamps and child care nutrition, and of effective methods for increasing participation.

8. Root Causes of Hunger

- Identify contributing factors to the problem of hunger
- Evaluate opportunities to address contributing factors (note some contributing factors may be determined to be out of the prevue of the hunger task force i.e. livable wage)

9. Policy Priorities

- Identify potential policies at the federal state or local level that are related to reducing hunger.
- Develop priorities for policy change appropriate for Vermont.

Section 3: Looking Forward

The preliminary work of the Task Force confirms that hunger exists in Vermont, and that this problem takes its toll not only on individuals and families but on the whole community. To thrive in the 21st century, Vermont cannot afford the illness, academic failure and lost potential caused by inadequate access to nutrition. Although there are many admirable initiatives in place to address hunger, we have not yet managed to ensure that all Vermonters can consistently count on getting the nutrition they need.

As a Task Force, we propose to spend the coming year learning more about both the problem of hunger and effective solutions. We will look at existing anti-hunger efforts, explore how well these efforts fit together, what gaps remain, and what would be required to fill these gaps. We will seek out the most effective efforts in Vermont and elsewhere, in order to find practical models that can be replicated widely.

Although we have not yet created a detailed plan for this phase of our work, we are likely to include some of the following approaches:

- Public hearings in locations around Vermont, during which Vermonters directly affected by food insecurity, and Vermonters who provide services can share their experiences and their recommendations for addressing hunger.
- An inventory of best practices within the various public and private anti-hunger programs, with an analysis of what makes these programs effective, and how they might be duplicated.
- A review of findings and recommendations from organizations such as Second Harvest, the Community Food Security Network, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Food Research and Action Center, and Bread for the World to extract information that would be applicable in Vermont.

At the end of the year we will share our findings, and our recommendations. We will propose new programs and policies as appropriate, and emphasize how existing efforts can be supported and strengthened by policies and actions by the state, local communities, organizations and individuals. We will highlight which of these recommendations are most likely to be effective in moving us closer to a time when no Vermonter needs to worry about access to enough nutritious food.

Section 4: Additional Resources and Support Needed

The Hunger Task Force is comprised of a diverse group of representatives who are volunteering their time to participate on the task force. In order to move forward with activities outlined above there is a need for additional resources. We are requesting support for the following components:

- \$15,000 Public Hearings**
Conduct five public hearings in each of the regions of Vermont served by a Community Action Agency. This includes all costs to conduct the hearings including a consultant to facilitate the hearings, outreach materials, taping, transcripts, and report of findings.

- \$5,000 Facilitation and Administration**
To coordinate, facilitate and provide administrative support for ongoing task force meetings.

- \$5,000 Research best practice policies and practices**
Funding for a consultant to research evidence based policies and practices that have been implemented in other states that have the potential to be replicated in Vermont.

2006 Task Force

The membership of the Hunger Task Force was appointed by the Governor, and includes:

- Donald. Swartz, MD, Vermont Department of Health, Chair
- Jo Busha, Director of Child Nutrition Programs, Vermont Department of Education
- Renee Richardson, Director of the Food Stamp Program, Vermont Department for Children and Families Economic Services Division
- Steve Kerr, Secretary, Vermont Department of Agriculture
- Representative Patricia O' Donnell
- Sr. Irene Duchesneau, Fanny Allen Corporation
- Joseph Kiefer, Executive Director Food Works/Two Rivers Center for Sustainability
- Robert Dostis, Executive Director, Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger
- Sharon Russell, Rutland City Mission
- Deborah Flateman, CEO, Vermont Foodbank
- Hal Cohen, Executive Director, Central Vermont Community Action Council
- Senator Jane Kitchel

The 2006 Governor's Task Force has held five meetings to discuss its goals, develop objectives and an action plan. Meeting dates and agenda items are listed below:

- June 26, 2006, 10 – Noon
Vermont Department of Health, Division of Health Improvement-Burlington
 - Introductions of Task Force Members
 - Overview of Hunger:
 - Childhood Hunger, Robert Dostis
 - Behavioral Risk Factors Surveillance System Vermont Data, Susan Coburn
 - Emergency Food Resources, Renee Richardson
 - Discuss next steps
- August 28, 2006, 2 PM – 4PM
Agency of Agriculture-Montpelier
 - Updates on news and events
 - Presentation by Bob Canavan and John Magnarelli, USDA Child Nutrition Programs
 - Presentation by Deborah Flateman on America's Second Harvest Hunger Study, and Vermont findings
 - Presentation by Joseph Kiefer regarding the 1986 Vermont Task Force on Hunger
 - Setting short term, intermediate and long term goals

- September 20, 2006, 2PM – 4PM
Agency of Agriculture-Montpelier
 - Updates on news and events
 - Definition of “Hunger”? presentation by Deborah Flateman and Robert Dostis
 - Review of progress on 1986 Task Force recommendations
 - Discuss initial report to the Governor

- October 31, 2006, 1PM- 4PM
Vermont Foodbank-Barre
 - Updates on news and events
 - Discussion of Task Force vacancies
 - Report preparation

- November 8, 2006, 1-3PM
Agency of Agriculture-Montpelier
 - Updates on news and events
 - Presentation from Cerina Gagne
 - Report preparation

Overview of Hunger in Vermont

Food Insecurity

Food Insecurity is the lack of access to enough food required to fully meet basic nutritional needs at all times as a result of limited financial resources

- 9% of Vermont households are food insecure

Childhood Food Insecurity occurs when adults in food insecure households cannot buffer their children from food shortages in the households. Child food insecurity involves repeated reductions in children's dietary quality or quantity, putting children at risk for micronutrient deficiencies or growth failure.

- 14% (19,000) of Vermont children live in food insecure households

Food Insecurity with Hunger is defined as those households in which individuals have decreased the quality and quantity of food they consume due to lack of resources and are likely to be frequently hungry

- 3.6% of Vermont households are food insecure with hunger

Since 1999-2000, Vermont has experienced **the largest percentage increase of food insecurity with hunger in the nation.**

- 100% Increase in food insecurity with hunger

Effects of Food Insecurity on Children

Children in food-insecure households experience a variety of disruptions in their eating and nutrition. Even mild to moderate undernutrition can have long-term adverse consequences.

Health

- Poorer overall health status and compromised ability to resist illness
- Health problems such as stomachaches, headaches, colds, ear infections and fatigue
- Greater incidence of hospitalizations

Psychosocial and Behavioral

- Higher levels of aggression, hyperactivity, and anxiety as well as passivity
- Difficulty getting along with other children
- Increased need for mental health services

Learning and Academic

- Impaired cognitive functioning and diminished capacity to learn
- Lower test scores and poorer overall school achievement
- Repeating a grade in school

Sources:

Current Population Surveys of the U.S. Census Andrews, Margaret et al, 2002-2004, 3 Year Average of the Current Population Survey of the U.S. Census, "Household Food Security in the United States, 2004," Food and Rural Economics Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Report No. 11., <http://www.ers.usda.gov>

"The Safety Net in Action: Protecting the Health and Nutrition of Young American Children", Children's Sentinel Nutrition Assessment Program, 2004

"Consequences of Hunger and Food Insecurity for Children: Evidence from Recent Scientific Studies", Center on Hunger and Poverty, Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University, 6/2002.

Charitable Food Distribution System

Charitable food resources play a critical role in ensuring that families can access nutritious food during times when other resources are unavailable.

The Vermont Foodbank serves approximately 256 agencies. 122 of these agencies include at least one food pantry, soup kitchen, or shelter and served 88,000 different individuals in 2005.

- 21,190 different people receive assistance from the food shelves and soup kitchens in any given week.
- 31% of the members of households served by the Vermont Foodbank are children under 18 years of age.
- 8% of the members of households served by the Vermont Foodbank are children under 5 years of age.
- Among all clients of the Vermont Foodbank, 72% are food insecure and 34% are food insecure with hunger.
- Among the households with children served by the Vermont Foodbank, 82% are food insecure and 37% are experiencing hunger.

According to a Vermont Department for Children and Families survey in 2005:

- At least 134 food shelves exist in Vermont
- These food shelves serve 10,379 households monthly
- These households include 11,437 children
- 2,148 of these households include someone over 65

Sources:

"Hunger in Vermont: Report on the 2005 Survey of Vermont Food Shelves and Community Kitchens", Vermont Department for Children and Families, April 2005

"Hunger in America 2005: America's Second Harvest, Local Report – Vermont", 2005

Federal Nutrition Programs

Food Stamps:

- In state fiscal year 2006, average monthly food stamp participation in Vermont was 46,628 individuals.
- The average monthly food stamp benefit was \$86.53.
- Current estimates are that only 60% of income eligible Vermonters are participating in the Food Stamp Program; another 30,000 individuals may be eligible.

School Meals

- Of approximately 100,000 elementary, middle and secondary students in Vermont, 29,000 are currently enrolled to receive free or reduced price meals.

School Breakfast Program:

- 309 of 323 Vermont public schools currently offer the federally funded breakfast program.
- An average of 12,148 free or reduced eligible students participate in the breakfast program each day.

School Lunch Program:

- 293 of 323 Vermont public schools currently offer the federally funded school lunch program.
- An average of 22,826 free/reduced price eligible students participate in the lunch program each day.

Summer Meals:

- 5,227 Vermont students participate in the summer lunch program at sometime during the month of July 2004.

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP):

- Approximately 50% of Vermont child care homes offer nutritious meals using CACFP funding.
- Approximately 20% of Vermont child care centers offer nutritious meals using CACFP funding. This appears to be among the lowest rate of participation in this program in the nation.

Commodity Supplemental Food Program:

- In September 2006, this program served 3,592 individuals. The current allocation for Vermont is 4,270 individuals.
- At its peak in 2003, the program served 5,500 individuals per month.

WIC, the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children:

- 16,306 individuals participate in the WIC program each month. (3,388 women, 3,289 infants, and 9,629 children between age 1 and 5.)

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

- \$198,673 in federal entitlement funding in 2005
- \$563,761 in bonus commodity funding
- \$92,132 in administrative dollars

Sources:

Documents prepared by the Office of Policy, Planning and Regulation, Economic Services Division, Planning and Evaluation Team at the Department of Children and Families, August 28th, 2006
State of the States 2006: Food Research and Action Center
Department of Education

Glossary

Nutritional Terms

Food Insecurity - The limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods, including involuntarily cutting back on meals, food portions, or not knowing the source of the next meal.

Malnutrition – A serious health impairment that results from substandard nutrient intake. Malnutrition may result from a lack of food, a chronic shortage of key nutrients, or impaired absorption or metabolism associated with chronic conditions or disease.

Obesity – An abnormal accumulation of body fat that may result in health impairments. Obesity is generally defined by the National Institutes of Health as having body weight that is more than 20% above the high range for ideal body weight.

Undernutrition – The consequence of consuming food that is inadequate in quantity and-or nutritional quality.

Food Program Synopses

Child and Adult Care Food Program - The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is a federal program that provides healthy meals and snacks to children and adults (elderly people unable to care for themselves) in day care settings.

Commodity Supplemental Food Program – The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) works to improve the health of low-income children, mothers and other people at least 60 years old by supplementing their diets with U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) commodity foods. USDA administers CSFP at the federal level, providing food and administrative funds to states, though not all states participate.

Elderly food programs – Federal nutrition programs that specifically target at-risk elderly people and include home delivered meals and congregate meals programs, which provide meals at central facilities in group settings.

Emergency food program – Emergency food programs distribute donated food items to hungry people through avenues such as shelters, soup kitchens and food pantries, which usually are supplied by food banks. Such programs typically are run by private, nonprofit community organizations.

Food bank – A charitable organization that solicits, receives, inventories, stores and donates food and grocery products pursuant to grocery industry and appropriate regulatory standards. These products are distributed to charitable human service agencies, which provide the products directly to clients.

Food pantry – Nonprofit organizations (typically small in size), such as religious institutions or social service agencies, that receive donated food items and distribute them to hungry people.

Food Stamp Program – The federal Food Stamp Program serves as the first line of defense against hunger. It enables low-income families to buy nutritious food with Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards. Food stamp recipients are able to buy eligible food items in authorized retail food stores. The program is the cornerstone of the federal food assistance programs and provides crucial support to low-income households and those making the transition from welfare to work.

School Lunch and Breakfast Programs – The National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs are federally assisted meal programs operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions. They provide nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free meals to children each school day.

Soup Kitchen – An organization whose primary purpose is to provide prepared meals served in a local agency kitchen for hungry people.

Summer Food Service Program – The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) provides reimbursements to schools, local government agencies and community-based organizations for meals and snacks served to children during the summer months. Geared toward low-income children, the SFSP is the single largest federal resource available for local sponsors who want to combine a feeding program with a summer activity program.

Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) – WIC provides supplemental nutritious foods, as well as nutrition counseling, to low-income, nutritionally at-risk pregnant women, infants and children up to age 5.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) – Under TEFAP, commodity foods are made available by the USDA to states. States provide the food to local agencies that are selected, usually food banks, which distribute the food to soup kitchens