



Hunger in Vermont

An Action Plan for Change

*Presented by the
Governor's Hunger Task Force*

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Preface

By Dr. Donald Swartz, Chair of the Governor's Hunger Task Force

November in Vermont. Leaves are down. Crops are in. Fields wear stubble or lie in wait of the rejuvenating blanket of snow. Warm house lights dot the late afternoon landscape. Roads are marked by the white and red of car lights, some streaming past and some turning into shopping centers and supermarkets. In the midst of this routine and regularity, within this annual waiting-for-winter ritual, how can there be hunger? But, in fact, hunger is riding in many of those cars, and hiding in many of those warmly lit homes, reducing Vermont's social and economic resources and impairing her ability to provide the best future for her people.

It doesn't have to be this way. Working together, we have the capacity to end hunger in Vermont. And because we have the capacity to end hunger in Vermont, we have a moral obligation to do so.

This report, presenting the work of the Governor's Hunger Task Force, picks up the threads spun by the report of Governor Madeleine Kunin's Task Force on Hunger in 1986, and follows strands to the present, identifying advances that resulted from that report, and also important recommendations that were never pursued. It adds strands drawn from the lives of Vermonters for whom the existing food safety net has worked and from those who fell, hungry, through its gaps, or were turned aside by well-intended but obstructive policies and procedures.

In this report, the Hunger Task Force offers recommendations that weave these strands together to identify actions that will address our food needs, and which Vermont communities, organizations and governmental agencies have the capacity to undertake.

This report is offered as a call to action, an invitation to enlist, and the next pages contain a roadmap to a future in which waiting for winter does not include worry about hunger.

November, 2008

Executive Summary

Governor Douglas convened a Hunger Task Force in 2006 to study the extent of hunger in Vermont, analyze factors contributing to its causes, and recommend actions to respond to the problem. The Hunger Task Force was also charged with examining the impact of public and private sector programs and services attempting to prevent or mitigate hunger in Vermont. This report represents findings reached over the first two years of the Task Force's work.

*“There have definitely been days when I have not eaten so that my kids can have the milk or the bread. As sad as it sounds, it's true.”
-Washington County Resident*

An Introduction to Hunger in Vermont:

Not all Vermonters realize that hunger is a serious problem in our state. However, evidence shows that not only is hunger a major challenge for Vermont, it is a challenge out of proportion to our high ranking in other indicators measuring a state's quality of life:

- In 2007, 10.9 percent of Vermont households were food insecure and 4.6 percent were very insecure (also called food insecure with hunger), a statistically significant increase from 10 years ago¹. Vermont has the 14th highest rates of food insecurity with hunger in the U.S.
- Ten percent of Vermonters visit a food shelf at some time during each year. The majority of food shelves in Vermont reported significant increased demand entering the winter of 2008, reflecting national trends of 20-40 percent increased demand².
- Over half of households visiting a food shelf in 2008 had children.
- While poverty is a major risk factor for hunger, an end to poverty does not mean an end to hunger. Vermont recognized this fact in fall, 2008, by expanding food stamp eligibility to 185 percent of the federal poverty level. Nationwide, over 1.6 million households *above* the poverty line turned to food pantries for help in 2007³.

The impact of this food insecurity reaches far beyond the individuals who have difficulty accessing food. It is a measure of our ability to build strong communities and it affects our state's overall health, education and economy.

- The Center on Hunger and Poverty at Brandeis University reports that children who grow up in a food insecure household are more likely to suffer elevated sickness, including more hospitalizations, impaired ability to learn, and behavioral difficulties.
- The Food Research and Action Center reports that lack of adequate nutrition in the elderly both exacerbates existing conditions and speeds the onset of degenerative diseases.

¹ Statistics taken from the USDA – ERS report “Household Food Security in the United States, 2007”

² As reported in the New York Times “When the Cupboard is Bare”, 11/10/2008

³ From USDA-ERS “Household Food Security” report.

- Households with food insecurity may enter into a cycle of decreased health due to poor nutrition coupled with an inability to afford adequate healthcare. The Vermont Foodbank reports that 28 percent of food shelf clients have to choose between paying for food and paying for medicine or medical care.
- In 2007, the Sodexo Foundation, Public Welfare Foundation, and Spunk Fund, Inc. commissioned a report on the economic cost of domestic hunger. Vermont's portion of the national burden was estimated at \$200,000,000 each year.
- Approximately 20 percent of Vermonters eligible for food stamps didn't claim those benefits in 2006 (the most recent data year). This gap left a potential of \$12.5 million unclaimed. Using the USDA estimated multiplier of \$1.74 in economic activity returned for \$1 in food stamps, which leaves \$21.8 million in foregone economic returns each year.

Causes & Solutions:

Feeding America, previously known as America's Second Harvest, gathers statistics from across America outlining our struggle to eliminate hunger in this country. Nationally, certain groups are more likely to experience food insecurity, including single-parent households, households without an employed head of household, and individuals belonging to an ethnic or racial minority. At the same time, there isn't a single profile to hunger in America. For example:

- The fastest growing segment of Vermonters accessing the charitable food system is the working poor. Thirty five percent of surveyed households accessing food assistance have one or more adults currently employed (2006).
- Nationally, 62.8 percent of emergency food recipients have attained high school diplomas or above (2001).
- Among VT Foodbank partner clients who have their own housing, 23.4 percent are homeowners (2001).

Many factors lead these disparate groups to a situation where they cannot reliably access adequate food. Long term trends that create the context for food insecurity include the strength of our state's economy, cost of living, availability of affordable housing, cost of health care, and whether job wages cover basic expenses. Major changes in costs of basic necessities can also have a dramatic impact on ability to pay for food. When faced with choices between heat, electricity and rent, households often find that food is the easiest cost to forgo. Emergencies can precipitate a period of hunger as well, whether a community wide emergency such as a natural disaster or a household emergency such as a job loss.

Vermonters do not need to look far to see how a combination of factors lead to hunger. In 2008, the rising costs of fuel both contributed to

One night in February, Bussino (Ex. Dir. Of Brattleboro drop in center) conducted an informal survey of people staying in the shelter. Of the 12 people she spoke with, six were working full time and three had college degrees.
 -"Downturn Hits VT Nonprofits" Times Argus May 2008

“People are coming in looking for gas money. They say they can’t fill up their tanks to go to work. We must have four or five people coming in every day looking for gas money.” -Melinda Bussino, Brattleboro Area Drop in Center Times Argus May 2008

increased costs for food and also forced more households into choosing between heat and food. The Governor’s Fuel and Food Partnership directly addressed this combined challenge as Vermont entered the 2008 – 2009 heating season. Rising costs of fuel also impacted an ongoing rural challenge - transportation to food sources. The cost of private transportation for Vermonters without easy access to public transit, or food assistance within walking distance, is an ongoing threat and one that mirrors national trends in rural hunger. Finally, dramatic volatility in the nation’s financial markets and a weakening business climate spilled over into Vermont’s economy. Increased unemployment, concerns over job security, losses in savings meant for retirement all impacted Vermonters on the edge of food insecurity. Those working in food assistance reported to the Task Force many stories of families seeking services for the first time.

For Vermonters who do face food insecurity, the Hunger Task Force found strong networks of food assistance, both in the number of organizations working in some way on hunger and in the caliber of work performed by many of these organizations. Nonetheless, shortcomings still remain. Some of these shortcomings have trickled down from federal level policies. For example, failure to peg assistance levels to the real cost of food, confusion in application procedures, inadequate provisions for the working poor, and need for greater attention to the specific challenges of unique vulnerable populations, such as refugees and children. Vermont’s move to expand food stamp eligibility and eliminate asset tests in September 2008 demonstrated that states do have power within federal programs, but full reform requires stronger federal advocacy.

Vermont has reached a stage where we possess most, if not all, of the tools necessary to end hunger. However, these tools will not come together without additional effort. The Hunger Task Force recommendations outline how the Governor’s office can support a solution to hunger in Vermont. To achieve this goal, it is recommended that the Governor’s office:

- Set the stage for the recommendations included in this report by building awareness among all Vermonters that hunger is a serious problem in our state, and one we can overcome.
- Assign a point person dedicated to coordinating efforts and developing new initiatives across all sectors of government and between partners at community, state, and federal levels to eliminate hunger and the factors that lead to hunger.
- Build from the momentum started as a response to the fuel and food crisis in 2008-2009 to craft long-term solutions to communities’ food insecurity.

Summary of Recommendations:

Working towards a hunger-free state is everyone's responsibility – from the individual citizen to the highest offices of the state. Hunger creates a fundamental weakness in the fabric of our communities. Furthermore, current efforts alone will not fully position Vermont to eliminate food insecurity. The following recommendations suggest avenues that Vermont's Governor can pursue to place us substantially closer to a goal of ensuring that all Vermonters have access to adequate, nourishing food.

The following are the primary areas for action recommended by the Governors Hunger Task Force. More detailed descriptions of each area, along with specific examples of steps the Governor's office can take, appear in the main report.

- Use the leadership of the Governor's office to pull together existing tools to end hunger into an effective, sustained strategy.
- Create an easily understood, streamlined process for Vermonters seeking food assistance.
- Help Vermonters reach outlets where they can access nutritious, affordable food, including a range of sites such as supermarkets, food pantries, meal sites, farmers' markets.
- Ensure that nutritious meals are built into daily programs for children, elders, refugees, and people with disabilities.
- Make certain that the charitable food system provides a full safety net for Vermonters who cannot access adequate food without assistance.
- Increase Vermont's food security through increased local food production
- Teach Vermonters the skills they need to prepare whole foods, produce their own food, and preserve food during seasonal abundance.
- Encourage community-based efforts to end hunger through helping communities plan effectively.
- Advocate for changes to federal policy.

Hunger in Vermont

Purpose of this Report:

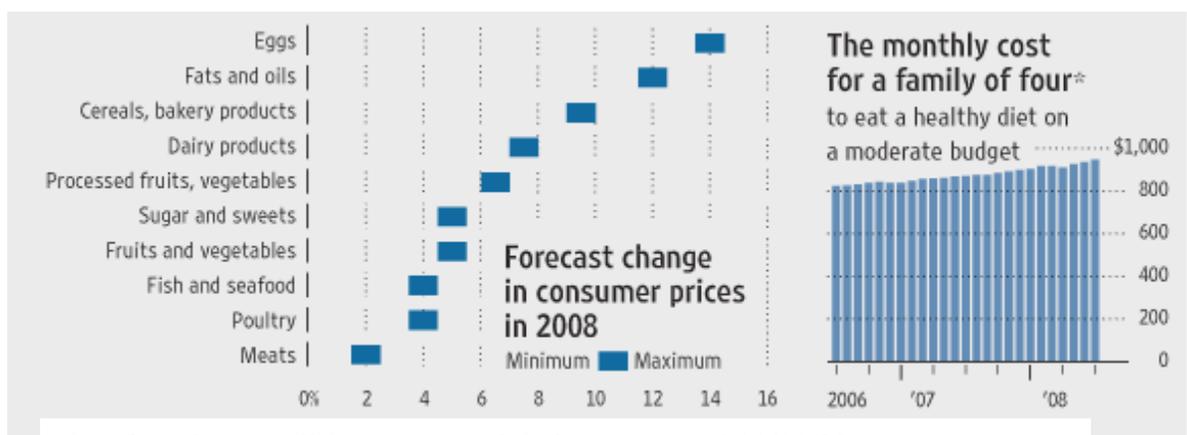
Governor Douglas convened a Hunger Task Force in 2006 to study the extent of hunger in Vermont, analyze factors contributing to its causes, and recommend actions to respond to the problem. The Hunger Task Force was also charged with examining the impact of public and private sector programs and services attempting to prevent or mitigate hunger in Vermont. This report represents findings reached over the first two years of the Task Force's work and recommendations for next steps that the Governor's office can take to institute long-term solutions to hunger, and its immediate causes, in Vermont. Members of the task force are listed in Appendix A.

An Introduction to Hunger:

Hunger exists throughout the United States. In 2006, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported that 35.5 million Americans were living with food insecurity. This number equates to 10.9 percent of households being food insecure with 4 percent experiencing very low food security⁴. These statistics remained essentially unmoved from the year before. Since the 2006 report, the Consumer Price Index for food rose 6 percent between 2007 and 2008, with the USDA predicting similar increases for 2008-2009. Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Energy predicted heating cost increases between 10 - 30 percent in the 2008 winter and a housing crisis, precipitated largely by subprime mortgages, required federal action throughout the summer of 2008. These events mean that the Hunger Task Force is presenting its findings in a national context of food budgets tightening while, at the same time, pressures surrounding other basic needs have intensified.

HUNGER:

The Governor's Task Force on Hunger recognizes "hunger" as more than a physical sensation. The experience of hunger reflects an involuntary, recurring difficulty accessing sufficient food. Hunger needs to be placed in a larger social and economic context and not remain focused on an individual's physical condition.



Graphics from Wall Street Journal Online (accessed 11/11/08)

⁴ "Food Insecure" households have to make changes to quantity or quality of food to match budget constraints; "Very Food Insecure" households were previously classified as food insecure *with hunger*. See Appendix B for more information.

10 percent of Vermonters visit a food shelf during an average year.

Vermont's own experience reflects many of the problems we face nationally. Even though our state has some of the lowest poverty rates in the nation, we have the 29th highest rate of food insecurity in the nation and the 14th highest rate of food insecurity with hunger – the most severe form of food insecurity⁵. Ten percent of Vermonters visit a food shelf at some time during each year (VT Foodbank). The Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger reports that 19,000 Vermont children live in households at risk of hunger and over half of households visiting a food shelf have children (2008 data). Even more households report trouble accessing *nutritious* food. Sixty-two percent of Vermonters report some barrier to providing nutritious food for themselves and their families; one third of those experiencing a barrier cite cost as the primary reason⁶. Hunger needs to be recognized as a serious problem in Vermont.

Unfortunately, just as national trends suggest an increase in hunger, Vermont has already seen evidence of this rise in our state. The 2007 USDA report on food insecurity shows that Vermont's rates of very insecure households increased from an average of 2.7 percent a decade ago to 4.6 percent today – one of the highest increases in the nation (behind Mississippi). Governor James Douglas recognized the immediate threat of increased hunger in Vermont by launching the Fuel and Food Partnership in 2008 “. . . to help Vermonters address increasing home heating, gasoline and food costs by marshalling every available resource in our state.”

Vermont's well developed charitable food system could fall behind in the demands being placed on it. Food shelves have experienced a 20 - 40 percent increase in demand nationally over the last year.

The safety nets that Vermont has in place to supplement inadequate food budgets could start to fall behind in the face of these rising demands. The rate of increase in the requests for food in the Vermont Foodbank's two largest distribution areas rose by more than 25 percent in 2007 and trends continued upwards in 2008 when, nationally, food banks reported 20 to 40 percent increases in demand⁷. Schools provide a safety net for many children, but not necessarily during the summer, weekends, or vacations. During focus groups performed by the Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger, mothers shared their stories of struggling to keep food in the house. “My kids eat 24/7. I need to padlock the cupboards. The grocery bill goes up an extra \$200 when the kids are home on vacation.” Vermont has one of the highest rates of children in child care settings, yet we rank 49th in the nation in participation in the federal Child and Adult Care Food Program⁸.

⁵ Hunger statistics taken from the USDA – ERS report “Household Food Security in the United States, 2007”.

⁶ Data collected in the 2007 Vermonter Poll by the Center for Rural Studies at UVM.

⁷ *When the Cupboard is Bare* by David Cay Johnston, New York Times, 11/11/08

⁸ Testimony provided by Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger

The Governor's Hunger Task Force found that Vermonters in general do not understand, and often underestimate, the problem of hunger in our state. Hunger is in reality a significant problem that deserves greater attention. The Recommendations section outlines ways in which the Governor's office can educate Vermonters both about the scope of this issue and ways to contribute to its solution.

Hunger's Impact on Vermont

"Hunger is a moral issue. It is simply wrong that people should go hungry. That's it." -Sister Irene Duchesneau

Food is a basic necessity; all Vermonters should have access to an adequate food supply. The Governor's Hunger Task Force recognizes a primary moral imperative to ensure that our citizens remain well nourished. Securing fundamental needs, such as sufficient food to eat, is a primary responsibility of government that is vital to the overall strength of our state. However, in addition to this core belief that sustaining food is a right of all Vermonters, we also know that hunger has quantifiable, negative societal effects.

Impact on Health:

Chronic under nutrition undermines individuals' health, particularly in children. The Center on Hunger and Poverty at Brandeis University reports that children who grow up in a food insecure household are more likely to suffer:

- A reduced ability to fight illness
- Elevated numbers of sicknesses, including more hospitalizations
- Impaired ability to learn
- Behavioral difficulties, including increased aggression, hyperactivity, anxiety and passivity
- Lower academic achievement

Poor nutrition in pregnant women can affect the health of their babies as well. The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) reports that the elderly are also highly vulnerable to health impacts of consuming too few nutrients; lack of adequate nutrition exacerbates their existing conditions, limits activities of daily living, and speeds the onset of degenerative diseases. Plus, households with food insecurity may not be able to afford adequate healthcare. The Vermont Foodbank reports that 39 percent of clients seen by their food shelf partners have unpaid medical bills and 13 percent had been refused medical care because they could not pay⁹.

A recently recognized health effect of hunger is its link to the obesity epidemic. The Food Research and Action Center has published several reports summarizing research on this link¹⁰. When households are trying

⁹ Information gathered with America's Second Harvest (now Feeding America) in the 2006 Hunger in America report. Available online: www.vtfoodbank.org.

¹⁰ <http://www.frac.org>

to make their food budget cover the greatest quantity of food possible, they may find it difficult to fit healthier items into their spending. USDA research shows a pervasive view of fruits and vegetables as “too expensive” even when the costs are in reality low. On average, 19 percent of low income households buy *no* produce in a given week¹¹. The problem of affording a balanced diet is exacerbated by difficulty reaching preferred stores; if a family is forced to shop at convenience stores due to lack of transportation their healthy options are seriously constrained. The stress caused by fragile food chains can lead to disordered eating, including overeating when food *is* available. This tendency can be most seen in the refugee population that will eat an entire week’s worth of food in a matter of days due to their constant struggle with food security. Finally, physical exercise becomes difficult in situations of high stress and lowered nutrition.

Impact on the Economy:

Hunger weakens Vermont’s economy. This impact appears in both costs to Vermont, for example through stresses on the healthcare system or reduced childhood learning, and lost opportunities to bring more dollars into our economy through food purchases. In 2007, the Sodexho Foundation, Public Welfare Foundation, and Spunk Fund, Inc. commissioned a report on the economic cost of domestic hunger. That report tallied a conservative estimate of the national burden at \$90 billion each year, or \$800 per household, based on: the cost of charitable donations, societal economic costs related to reduced mental and physical health, lower quality of education, and lower work productivity. Vermont’s portion of the burden was estimated at \$200,000,000 each year.

A 2007 report found that Vermont loses \$200 million each year due to hunger. Economic stimulus lost through unclaimed food stamps alone was over \$50 million.

One of the most alarming facts of hunger prevention is that federal dollars are left *unspent* by states which are entitled to this money. In 2006, 23,696 Vermont households participated in the food stamp program or SNAP, with an average monthly benefit of \$176.16. Over \$50 million was received in that year by first families and then Vermont businesses. The USDA estimates that those dollars result in \$1.74 worth of economic stimulus, or \$87 million in 2006. But the USDA also estimates that 20 percent of eligible Vermont households did not participate – leaving a potential of \$12.5 million unclaimed and \$21.8 million in foregone economic returns. Vermont’s own track record of improving participation by 10 percent in just two years, from 2004 – 2006, and the fact that other states have reached close to 100 percent participation, show that it is possible to recover this \$21.8 million. More examples of these costs are outlined in Appendix F: Economic Cost of Hunger in VT.

¹¹ In 2004, the USDA’s Economic Research Service released a series of research briefs on Americans’ consumption behavior around fruits and vegetables. These are available online at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/aib792/>.

“When I can buy from a farmer I know my food costs are a lot lower. Then I’m shocked when I have to go back to the grocery store for a vegetable and see how much they cost there.”

-Focus Group participant from the VT Campaign to End Childhood Hunger

The positive economic impact of funding food assistance may reach new areas through a growing interest in local agriculture as a tool in reducing hunger. The 2008 Farm Bill provided \$53 million annually to farmers’ markets as part of its food assistance programs, including coupons for low income households and the elderly to use for farmer’s market food purchases along with funding to expand EBT machines at farmer’s markets. Programs connecting local growers with those in need of food assistance can channel private funding and grants (sometimes matched with public funding) back into food sales. Examples of these programs include subsidized Community Supported Agriculture (CSA’s) shares through the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA), food purchases under contract to local growers by the Vermont Foodbank, efforts to expand schools’ purchase of local foods through VT-FEED and Green Mountain Farm-to-School, and several food education and distribution programs through Food Works at Two Rivers Center.

Conclusion:

Hunger impedes our ability to reach many of the goals that we have for Vermont. In addition to the unacceptable burden of food insecurity on individual lives, this societal problem also harms:

- Vermont’s statewide health
- Efforts to control obesity
- Childhood education
- Healthy aging
- Vermont’s economy

Achieving food security will benefit many facets of life in Vermont.

Why Do Vermonters Experience Hunger?

Feeding America, previously known as America’s Second Harvest, commissioned a Hunger Study in 2001 to gather statistics from across America outlining our struggle to eliminate hunger in this country.

Poverty clearly leads to hunger. Nationally, certain groups are more likely to experience food insecurity, including single-parent households, households without an employed head of household, and individuals belonging to an ethnic or racial minority. At the same time, there isn’t a single profile to hunger in America. For example:

- 38.9 percent of surveyed households accessing food assistance have one or more adults currently employed.
- 62.8 percent of emergency food recipients have attained high school diplomas or above.
- Among clients of VT Foodbank partners who have their own housing, 23.4 percent are homeowners.

There are many reasons why Vermont’s households experience the threat of hunger. One way to think about the range of general causes is:

- Room for food in everyday budgets

- Resilience to sudden budget shocks & emergencies
- Ability to reach affordable, nutritious food (here called “food access”)
- Vulnerable populations

Everyday Budgets

Vermonters decide how much money they can allocate to food within a context of competing costs and, often, limited resources. Food is the part of basic household budgets that many people find easiest to cut back on. Statistics from the Vermont Foodbank (gathered as part of Feeding America’s 2006 Hunger in America report) clearly reflect this story:

- 38 percent of food shelf and soup kitchen clients reported having to choose between paying for food and paying for utilities or heating fuel.
- 33 percent had to choose between paying for food and paying their rent or mortgage.
- 28 percent had to choose between paying for food and paying for medicine or medical care.

These types of trade offs illustrate how hunger is closely linked to all costs of living. On the other side of the equation, factors such as job availability and the average wages of those jobs can expand a household’s income and leave more or less money available for food.

The Hunger Task Force chose only to recommend changes that directly impact households’ ability to pay for food. Changes to the state’s health care system or economic development strategy, for example, were beyond this group’s scope of work. However, the Task Force did recognize a need for hunger issues to be represented in making policy decisions in these interrelated fields. Sometimes policy efforts meant to alleviate pressure in one of these areas can actually make food access more difficult. For example, subsidized housing units reduce costs of living, but locating this housing away from affordable grocery stores or without well-linked public transportation to these stores can increase a family’s cost of purchasing food, especially nutritious food.

Another element in budgeting for food is individuals’ food knowledge. Food assistance organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of food literacy in achieving an affordable, healthy meal plan. As Vermonters lose knowledge of how to work with raw ingredients, raise food, preserve food during seasonal abundances and find the most densely nutritious foods for each dollar spent, they lose potential strategies for building a healthy diet under a constrained budget. It is important to reverse the loss of food knowledge between generations, as reflected in the Hunger Task Force’s recommendations on food literacy.

“It’s hard to pay the bills living off of one income alone in Vermont; in good times, I do well, but when times are tough because of the poor economy, it’s hard. That’s why the Food Shelf is so helpful.”
-Former farmer who donates his garden surplus to the food shelf when times are plentiful

Budget Shocks and Emergencies:

Personal or community emergencies have a profound impact on food security. Personal emergencies, such as a sudden illness, job loss, or home fire, can be the difference between food security and true risk of going hungry. In community-scale emergencies, lower income residents are particularly vulnerable. For example, the windstorms in Rutland in 2007 and flooding throughout the state in 2008 demonstrated how natural disasters can interrupt normal economic life.

Vermont had a clear example of the fragility of household budgets in 2008, as sharp economic downturns combined with rising fuel costs created what many advocates referred to as the “perfect storm” for a hunger crisis. As mentioned in the introduction, Governor James Douglas responded to this situation by launching the Fuel and Food Partnership in 2008 with the goal of ensuring that Vermonters had access to adequate heat and food in the upcoming winter.

“Solving these problems [rapidly rising fuel & food costs] requires an effort that goes beyond government alone and we're fortunate to have a strong network of community-based organizations and programs to help Vermonters when times get tough.” -Governor Douglas, Food & Fuel Partnership 2008

The Fuel and Food Partnership, headed by Lt. Governor Brian Dubie and Administration Secretary Neale Lunderville, recognizes that the success of their initiative relies in large part on Vermonters’ collective dedication to building their communities’ capacity to respond to crisis. Community volunteers had already stepped forward with increased food donations to local food shelves and the VT Foodbank, fundraising efforts, ad hoc neighborhood assistance organizations, and more formal regional food councils. The recommendations of the Hunger Task Force include ways in which the Governor’s office can continue to support this type of grassroots activity to end hunger.

Access to Food

The problem of food access is a major obstacle in efforts to fight hunger throughout rural America, where residents generally do not live within walking distance of major areas of activity (such as work, education and shopping) or public transportation hubs.

The Vermont Foodbank found that 42 percent of clients at food shelves and soup kitchens have no access to a working car (2006 Hunger Almanac). This limitation reduces their ability both to reach food assistance locations and to reach mainstream grocery outlets. Households may replace supermarket shopping with closer secondary locations, such as convenience stores, that carry few food staples and a disproportionate number of high-cost, low nutrition snacks.

Vermont’s chapter of the Good News Garage illustrates the specific impact of car ownership, or lack of ownership, in rural America. This organization, which provides vehicles to families in need, reports that:

- 60 percent of car recipients contributed obtaining employment to an automobile
- 83 percent of recipients contributed the ability to keep a job to the car
- 37 percent of recipients have reported a decrease in food stamps due to an automobile
- 72 percent of recipients contributed an ability to save money when shopping for food to the car

Car ownership can directly improve food access and it can indirectly improve a household’s ability to afford food, through long-term employment benefits that outweigh the costs of maintaining a personal vehicle. For some households, improved public transportation systems, job creation in rural areas, and changes in how education and job training are delivered might achieve similar results as private car ownership.

“Last week we had a 2 hour delay and you would not believe how many kids came to school at 10 am and still had not had breakfast. . . it worries me that that happens on a 2 hour delay day. What about weekends, vacations, summer break?” -VTCECH Focus Group Member, 2008

Fewer than 1 in 5 eligible children have access to summer food (VT Dept of Education, 2007)

The public school system offers another example of weaknesses in food access alongside tools to improve this access. Our schools already have a transportation infrastructure that ensures all children can reach school regardless of their family’s economic situation. At school, children can access free or reduced price lunches, breakfast, and increasingly healthy food paired with food education. However, during summers and vacations children lose this easy food access. Focus groups conducted by the Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger (VTCECH) found that most schools do not consistently provide food during vacations, holidays, and weekends. Only 17 percent of our child and adult care centers participate in federal food programs. While schools and childcare centers began with core missions that may not have included fighting hunger, they have become an essential part of bringing nutritious food into children’s lives.

The recommendations section considers multiple approaches of bringing more food to hungry Vermonters, making it easier for low income and elderly Vermonters to reach food outlets and food assistance, and integrating more food into existing daily routines.

Vulnerable Populations

Vermonters living in poverty are those most threatened by hunger. However, other demographic groups are both vulnerable to hunger and face particular challenges in accessing nutritious food.

- Seniors and Disabled Vermonters experience greater difficulty reconciling food needs with transportation challenges, costs of medical care, and problems of rural isolation. At the same time, caregivers, senior centers and existing networks of drivers delivering meals all offer avenues for reaching this population.
- Children are at high risk for health problems due to poor nutrition and inexperience in constructing a healthy diet. They rarely have

Middle and High School children are often the food choosers and preparers in their family -VTCECH, 2008 Findings

*“In general, refugees ate better in their home countries when they had access to their native fruits and vegetables. . .they are often lost with their arrival in the US”
-Report by Diane Orr, Nutrition Programs & Policy Intern*

independent means to reach food assistance. Work to end hunger includes both ensuring that all children have adequate food and that they receive the tools they need to help their families and ensure their own food security once they reach adulthood.

- The Working Poor are the fastest growing demographic of Vermonters seeking food assistance. Assisting this group requires additional attention to removing the shame of food insecurity and ensuring that food assistance policies recognize their unique needs, such as Vermont’s 2008 removal of the asset test for food stamp eligibility which makes food stamps available to individuals who may have retirement plans through their employers.
- Refugees face not only all the food pressures outlined throughout this report, but also a unique set of cultural barriers as they learn to navigate an entirely new food environment and, in many cases, require additional help in translating instructions. Effectively helping this population requires additional attention and understanding from food assistance providers.

The Recommendations section included in this report sets a foundation for addressing the needs of all Vermonters facing hunger. However, additional work in the Task Force’s final year will shape and refine those fundamental recommendations to include specific applications to these particularly vulnerable groups.

Where Are We Going?

All Vermonters are impacted by the presence of food insecurity in our communities. Many Vermonters, from the grassroots up through the highest levels of state government, are actively mobilizing to address this problem. Their efforts range from emergency hunger relief to food and cooking education to empowering Vermonters to raise their own food.

Achievements in creating a statewide system to alleviate hunger include:

- Creation of the Vermont Foodbank in 1986. The Foodbank now supplies needed food to over 270 partner organizations across the state.
- Formation of Food Works at Two Rivers Center in 1987. Food Works focuses on long-term hunger prevention, including through education and local food production.
- Creation of the Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger (VTCECH) in 1991, an organization dedicated to increasing awareness about hunger and to solving hunger through programs that feed children and families with dignity.

- Expansion of food access through the education system, largely through the efforts of VTCECH, the Department of Education and the Vermont Foodbank. For example:
 - Today 96 percent of schools are covered by a school food authority (which administers the national school lunch program) – only 11 schools offer neither school lunch nor school breakfast.
 - Vermont schools offering breakfast have increased from 10 percent in 1986 to 89 percent today (Bob Canavan, 8.28.08)
 - In 2008 the Vermont Foodbank launched a backpack program to send food home with children for the weekend.
- Improved Food Stamp participation. VTCECH reports a 28 percent increase in participation in the years from 2003-2008, supported by efforts such as statewide work groups, a central website, and trainings for service providers. In 2008, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and Governor Douglas announced expanded eligibility and DCF staffing to handle the transition.
- Movement towards self sufficiency through connections with local farms and provision of plots in community gardens. This work includes both contributions by non-profit organizations, such as the Intervale, Food Works at Two Rivers Center, Salvation Farms, Vermont Community Garden Network and the Vermont Foodbank, and also federal programs, such as the Farm-to-Family coupons and EBT at Farmers' Markets.
- Improved coordination with Community Action centers through the addition of a Food Stamp outreach position at the Agency of Human Services.
- Recognition of the importance of food literacy, as shown by programs such as Farm to School, Cooking for Life, VT FEED, Food Works' Gardens for Learning, and Healthy City.
- Greater capacity to assist Vermont's refugee population in achieving food independence.

Federal assistance program options have also changed, particularly compared to their status in 1986 when Governor Kunin released her Task Force's report on hunger in Vermont. This task force reported that “. . . changes in federal policy over the past five years have reduced the capacity of states to meet this [adequate nutrition] and other basic needs.” Federal activity since 1985 has:

- Increased Food Stamp Program participation after eligibility cutbacks in the early 1980's.
- Made the Electronic Benefits Transfer (which works like a debit card) available nationwide.
- Created programs to help purchase food from farmers' markets
- Introduced Community Food Projects grants for efforts to support the local food system.

- More than tripled funding allocated for the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) supplemental nutrition program¹².

Alongside these positive changes, there have also been negative shifts in federal assistance since 1986. For example, Food Stamp benefits have not kept pace with the increasing cost of food and the current calculation for benefits creates a 15-month lag in inflationary adjustments. Changes in federal reimbursement for administration of Food Stamps (now SNAP) have reduced Vermont's benefit from a 50:50 match to federal payments covering only 46.2 percent of those costs. Vermont has intervened to remedy some federal shortfalls, for example by increasing the gross income limit for food stamp eligibility and providing money to help more schools provide free breakfast. Nonetheless, gaps remain.

It is time to envision a hunger free state. Vermont can achieve a statewide culture in which everyone understands hunger to be an entire community's problem and everyone is educated with hands on skills and knowledge to maintain a nutritious, affordable diet. The Governor's Hunger Task Force found all the basic tools in place to eliminate hunger in this state. The Governor's office can take a lead in moving us within reach of that goal. America's agriculture produces enough food for everyone. Vermont's own advantages include low poverty rates, high capacity for local food production and preservation, a network of non-profit and government programs dedicated to addressing hunger, and communities more committed now than ever before to providing for all of their members. Hunger is unacceptable in the face of this underlying abundance.

The following section reflects the Hunger Task Force's collective opinion on the state's best options for making meaningful progress towards eliminating hunger in Vermont. The specific recommendations focus on actions that can, and should, originate from the Governor's Office.

¹² For a summary of national food assistance programs see the Food and Nutrition Service at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/>

A Roadmap to End Hunger

Working towards a hunger-free Vermont is everyone's responsibility – from the individual citizen to the highest offices of the state. Hunger creates a fundamental weakness in the fabric of our communities. Furthermore, as the introduction to this report has outlined, current efforts alone will not fully position Vermont to eliminate food insecurity. The following recommendations suggest avenues that state government and related institutions can pursue to place us substantially closer to a goal of ensuring that all Vermonters have access to adequate, nourishing food.

The work areas that follow represent a compilation of the multiple ideas that the Governor's Hunger Task Force discussed over its first two years. In prioritizing and presenting these recommendations, several parameters have shaped the scope of final topics covered:

- Ending hunger will require a combination of local, non-profit, state, and federal policies. The recommendations intend to strengthen these various spheres, but focus on actions immediately within reach of the Governor's office. Federal policy changes, for example, are listed as a separate platform for advocacy. Similarly, the recommendations focus on strategies to support community initiatives but don't prescribe how these should be undertaken.
- Hunger results from many factors that compete for or limit the resources households have available to purchase food. These concerns include jobs with a livable wage, affordable housing, and paying for both heating and medical bills. The Hunger Task Force recognizes the high importance of addressing these issues. However, the solutions lay beyond the scope of expertise on the Task Force and so do not receive specific recommendations except when they directly overlap with hunger actions.
- All members of the Hunger Task Force and those who provided testimony to the Task Force believe that ending the stigma of food assistance is a necessary goal. Efforts outlined in the recommendations, from educating all Vermonters about hunger to building meals into community events, will result in reducing stigma although this goal does not appear as a single, separate recommendation.
- Moving from recommendation to true action requires leadership, coordination of efforts, and regular addition of new champions. The Task Force recommendations focus on primary goals and provide examples of the types of activities that would advance those goals. Following the Governor's initial review of options presented here, the Task Force will use its final year to concentrate on priority projects, bringing

"Many of the clients we see from local towns are too embarrassed to go to their own local food shelf because of the stigma of being poor, so they come here."

-Pat Allen, Middlesex Food Shelf

together the partners who can accomplish the recommendation and implementing both immediate next steps and longer term strategies.

Today is a time of great potential to eliminate hunger in Vermont. Many tools are now in place that did not exist at the time of the last Hunger Task Force in 1986. Changes in federal policy, emergence of a strong non-profit advocacy and assistance sector, and involvement of leaders from a variety of professional fields have set a foundation for true progress. Sophisticated communication tools allow Vermonters around the state to stay connected and learn from each other. Reports become living documents that provide constantly updated tools and information. Community groups emerging in response to recent emergencies, such as home heating needs in the winter of 2008, have established pools of engaged citizen volunteers responding to their neighbors' needs. Vermont has attracted national attention for its innovative programs in food access and, in particular, local foods. Grassroots interest in how Vermont can increase food self-sufficiency has brought in another group of volunteers and brought us another step closer to seeing food security as a community-wide issue, not a stigmatizing personal concern.

A true end to hunger is possible. The following recommendations can bring that goal much closer to reality.

Recommendations

Provide State Government Leadership in Eliminating

Hunger: The Task Force heard repeatedly Vermont's need to understand food security as a fundamental concern for state government, build partnerships across agencies and organizations, coordinate existing efforts, and spread the word throughout our communities that hunger is *everyone's* problem. As outlined in the body of this report, many of the tools exist to significantly reduce hunger in our state, but the state needs a strong champion to bring them together into an effective, sustained strategy. The Hunger Task Force believes that lack of a strong leader for implementation significantly decreased the impact of the 1986 Hunger in Vermont report. The Governor's office can provide this leadership.



RECOMMENDATION #1: Appoint a standing Commission on Hunger in Vermont. This commission would last beyond the 3 year term of the Hunger Task Force and advise the Governor's office, receive feedback from those experiencing food insecurity, provide input into policymaking, and monitor progress on the Task Force's recommendations. It would be composed of state, non-profit, business, and community member representatives.



RECOMMENDATION #2: Appoint a full-time Director of the Commission on Hunger to coordinate, support and move forward

our state's anti-hunger efforts, and facilitate the work of the Hunger Commission.

Working in tandem, a dedicated staff person and the commission on hunger will provide many key services, such as:

- Acting as a neutral convener for the multiple local, non-profit, and government organizations working on hunger to come together to promote coordinated efforts.
- Introducing a perspective on hunger into work in related fields, including energy costs, affordable housing, children's issues, job creation, refugee resettlement, and seniors' issues.
- Collecting data gathered statewide on hunger issues and monitoring progress; making information available for research, informed policymaking, and public education.
- Generating an ongoing public conversation on hunger that reduces its stigma.

Make the Food Assistance System Easy to Understand and

Use: Vermonters in need of assistance to make ends meet should not face an onerous process to access that assistance. Unclear information and information lost between programs can lead to underpayment of benefits and discourage qualified people from seeking benefits to begin with. The Governor should address this problem through both simplifying information and providing adequate outreach in all corners of the state.



RECOMMENDATION #3: Ensure that the Agency of Human Services has the funds needed to fully complete its proposed updated, centralized system for learning about all options available for Vermonters in need of food assistance. This information center should provide guidance covering everything from explaining federal programs to mapping the nearest food shelves. It should also appear in multiple formats, including online, printed brochures, and multiple languages. The process of creating a streamlined information center should also address streamlining entrance into programs, particularly by combining applications where possible.



RECOMMENDATION #4: Invest in expanded direct outreach around food assistance. The state of Vermont can both improve the quality of existing services and the reach of these services. Examples of needs include:

- Establishing assistance offices in more remote regions of the state.
- More aggressive efforts to remove language barriers with refugee families.
- Information campaigns designed to reach the working poor.



RECOMMENDATION #5: Develop an outreach program targeted at service providers. While individuals seeking assistance need clear

information, the many intermediaries who connect them with food also need to be clear on all program options, how enrollment in one program may prequalify a participant for another, and any changes in federal, state and charitable opportunities.

Help Vermonters Reach Food Outlets: Vermont’s relatively dispersed population presents a particular challenge in connecting food with people who need it. This challenge isn’t only in distributing charitable or supplemental food, but also in simply connecting Vermonters with basic, affordable food when no grocery store is nearby.



RECOMMENDATION #6: Integrate food access into planning at the Agency of Transportation. This work would include:

- Building grocery store stops into public transit routes that currently lack them.
- Adding farmers’ market stops on the days of market operations.
- Ensuring that affordable housing and senior centers have reliable public transportation connecting them to food shopping, food shelves, and meal sites.
- Advertising all options for reaching food



RECOMMENDATION #7: Seniors face particular challenges in finding transportation to food. The Governor’s office should build on existing transportation options for this group, for example by matching state funds to Medicaid -funded travel to include trips to grocery stores and meal sites or providing better reimbursement for drivers bringing food to seniors (see also Nutritious Meals in Daily Programs below).

Ensure that Nutritious Meals are Built Into Daily Programs for Children, Elders, Refugees, and People with Disabilities:

It is important to use all points of contact with vulnerable populations to ensure that they can connect with nutritious foods. Integrating food into their daily routines both increases the ease of finding food and reduces stigma associated with seeking out help for food. The Governor’s office, with the assistance of the Hunger Commission’s director, can ensure that Vermont maximizes its opportunities to provide food to citizens in need through expanding the places where supplemental food is offered.



RECOMMENDATION #8: Convene regular meetings of government departments and non-profit organizations that review federal funding opportunities to identify 1.) programs that do not made full use of federal funds (e.g. childcare and adult care centers, alternative high schools, schools without free breakfast, etc.) and 2.) strategies to increase their usage, in conjunction with the outreach described in Recommendation #5.



RECOMMENDATION #9: Provide start up grants that help schools, senior centers, community centers, municipal governments and

other organizations build the programs needed to introduce food into daily gathering places for vulnerable populations and make use of federal or private funding in the future.

Close Gaps in the Charitable Food System: Charitable food assistance is increasingly becoming a mainstay in the diets of Vermonters in need. The recommendations made by the Governor’s Hunger Task Force should diminish this trend. At the same time, it is important to make sure that Vermonters are not falling through gaps in the existing safety net and that the charitable food system is fully supported in its efforts. The Governor’s office can strengthen the charitable food system through both funding and public work to raise its profile.



RECOMMENDATION #10: Help the charitable food system meet budgets for serving a sharply increasing number of Vermont households by providing direct funding, directing the Hunger Council’s director to assist in teaching volunteers about fundraising and in developing grant proposals, and raising the profile of the need (see Recommendation #11).



RECOMMENDATION #11: Contribute to publicity and education campaigns that mobilize Vermont citizens to get involved in food and fund drives, volunteerism at local food shelves and meal sites and other projects to end hunger.

Increase Vermont’s Food Security through Increased Local Food Production: Although Vermont doesn’t currently produce enough food to meet all of the state’s food demand, local sources can provide staples from dairy to produce to meat. Increasing our local food capacity decreases reliance on an ability to transport food cheaply over long distances. It also supports the goals of increasing Vermonters’ food literacy and communities’ planning for food security. The Governor should encourage the increasing interest in using local food sources to combat local hunger.



RECOMMENDATION #12: Expand local production of basic foods. Investment in bringing local foods into the supplemental food system not only connects people with local foods, but also provides a starting point for farmers who want to expand commercial production of these basic goods. The state should actively build this type of development. Examples of programs to provide a starting point include:

- A subsidized basket to food shelves
- Reduced price CSA shares
- Resource to build up the Farm-to-Family coupon & EBT at Farmers’ Markets programs.
- Increased use of local products at congregate meal sites, including the Farm-to-Table distribution model.

- Farm-to-School meal & education programs
- Local products in WIC baskets



RECOMMENDATION #13: Support the Vermont Agency of Agriculture’s pledge to make local food accessible to all Vermonters within 5 years. Projects like the Farm-to-School lunch program, gleaning for the charitable food system, building the wholesale market demand, and innovative distribution experiments, have started to address this challenge.

See also the Food Literacy recommendations.

Increase Vermonters’ Food Literacy: Food knowledge is needed for following an affordable, nutritionally complete diet. It is time to reverse our loss of knowledge about how to prepare whole foods, produce our own food, and preserve food during seasonal abundance. Food literacy is a key step towards food self sufficiency and returning to a seasonal diet with higher nutritional value. Further work on food literacy should be encouraged.



RECOMMENDATION #14: Build an interagency effort to enhance and / or create programs that address food literacy in Vermont. The Agency of Human Services, Department of Education and Agency of Agriculture all have current efforts in this area that range from classroom curriculum to community and school gardens. These efforts should be coordinated with each other and non-profit programs, as well as linked with available federal funds, such as through Food and Nutrition Services at USDA.



RECOMMENDATION #15: Develop, through the Commission on Hunger in Vermont its director, models of nutrition, food preparation and food system education for at- risk populations (e.g. seniors, disabled Vermonters, children, refugees); partner with groups already providing food education to expand the reach of those programs.

Assist Communities in Planning for Food Security:

Communities around Vermont are moving forward to implement policies that can build their food security. Efforts include everything from land use planning to support for the charitable food system. These highly local efforts help ensure that neighbors reach neighbors and everyone has an opportunity to contribute to a food secure state. While this effort is fundamentally grassroots, the Governor’s office should create a supporting system for effective strategic planning to eliminate hunger.



RECOMMENDATION #16: Encourage all towns, or regional groupings of towns, to develop a food plan that addresses every aspect of food security, from charitable food systems to transportation to agricultural land use to emergency planning.



RECOMMENDATION #17: Use the Commission on Hunger and its Director to provide technical assistance to communities and

regions as they develop food councils and hunger action plans. Services should include:

- Sharing best practices for how to conduct a community needs assessment, including providing relevant background data and studies on hunger, food access, and risk factors for hunger.
- Sharing models of best practices, both in Vermont and in other areas of the country, for drafting and implementing an effective food plan.
- Including access to food for at-risk or marginally at-risk citizens when planning for emergencies – and providing sample materials for how this emergency planning can be done.
- Adding a food security component to state-level planning that can be a reference point for individual communities, for example in emergency planning, public transit planning, use of prime agricultural soils in developing regions, etc.
- Building and administering a pool of state, federal, and charitable funds that communities can access to support effective planning. Examples of expenses include professional facilitators, community forums, accurate survey work and attending trainings / educational opportunities.

Work Towards a Better Match of Federal Programs and Vermont’s Needs:

Vermont relies on assistance from the federal government to help overcome hunger. The Hunger Task Force recommends that the Governor’s office advocate for improvements to these federal systems and consider how work at the state level can best bridge gaps for priority areas in the absence of federal reforms.



RECOMMENDATION #18: Review the proposed platform for federal change included in Appendix C and present priority actions to the Congressional delegation.



RECOMMENDATION #19: Assign the Hunger Commission as a body to hear recommendations from all Vermonters and state staff on federal program changes that could improve efforts to end hunger. Report these findings to Congressional staff.



RECOMMENDATION #20: Assess where current federal programs have gaps and seek alternate funds to bridge those gaps. Although it is necessary to advocate for federal policies that meet the needs of our rural nutrition programs, Vermont also cannot let critical needs go unmet. Examples of areas where the state could fill gaps include matching reimbursement rates for meal programs and assessing and eliminating “benefit cliffs” (see Appendix C).

APPENDIX A: GOVERNOR’S HUNGER TASK FORCE MEMBERS

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

- Donald Swartz, MD, Medical Director, 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
- Anson Tebbetts, Deputy Secretary, Vermont Agency of Agriculture
- Representative Patricia O’Donnell
- Sr. Irene Duchesneau, Fanny Allen Corporation
- Joseph Kiefer, Co-Executive Director Food Works at Two Rivers Center for Sustainability
- Robert Dostis, Executive Director, Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger (2007)
- Dorigen Keeney, Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger (Replaced Robert Dostis, 2008)
- Sharon Russell, Rutland City Mission
- Doug O’Brien, CEO, Vermont Foodbank (2007)
- Chris Meehan, Vermont Foodbank (Replaced Doug O’Brien, 2008)
- Hal Cohen, Executive Director, Central Vermont Community Action Council
- Senator Jane Kitchel
- Cerina Gagne, Public Member, Low income representative
- Linda Berlin, Nutrition Specialist, University of Vermont Extension

The following individuals participated on the Task Force at the invitation of the Chair:

- Amy Nickerson, Program Coordinator, Master of Science Program in Dietetics, University of Vermont
- Susan Coburn, State Nutritionist, Vermont Department of Health
- Mary Woodruff, Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living

Additional staffing was provided by:

- Paul Markowitz, Facilitator
- Koi Boynton and Helen Labun Jordan, Assistance in Drafting Report Text

APPENDIX B: GLOSSARY & DEFINITION OF TERMS

Defining Hunger

The definition of “hunger” has evolved in recent years to move beyond describing a particular physical sensation to including the context in which individuals eat; food may be available today but not necessarily available tomorrow. The Governor’s Task Force on Hunger recognizes “hunger” as more than a physical sensation. The experience of hunger reflects an involuntary, recurring difficulty accessing sufficient food. Hunger needs to be placed in a larger social and economic context and not remain focused on an individual’s physical condition.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture refined its definition of hunger in 2006. The USDA now tracks what is commonly referred to as “hunger” through an 18 question survey that is part of the yearly Current Population Survey of the US Census. This measure of “food security” quantifies the difficulty a household experiences in finding food on a regular basis. Detailed information on best practices in tracking hunger-related issues is available online from USDA’s Economic Research Service¹³. The USDA’s definitions of food security are as follows:

- **Food Security:** Access by all people in the household to enough food for a healthy life, including ready availability of nutritionally adequate safe foods and the assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (e.g., not from emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies).
- **Low Food Security:** Generally, people that fall into this category have had to make changes in the quality or the quantity of their food in order to deal with a limited budget.
- **Very Low Food Security:** People that fall into this category have struggled with having enough food for the household, including cutting back or skipping meals on a frequent basis for both adults and children. This category was earlier referred to as “food insecure with hunger”¹⁴.

Other Common Terms

The following definitions of key terms are taken from the 2008 Blueprint to End Hunger¹⁵.

Child and Adult Care Food Program: The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) provides healthy meals and snacks in day care settings. The program primarily serves children but is also available in nonresidential adult day care centers for adults 60 years and older or those 18 years and older who are chronically impaired.

Commodity Supplemental Food Program: The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) provides monthly packages of USDA commodity foods to supply nutrients typically lacking in the diets of the target population. Low income children up to age six, pregnant and new mothers and seniors are eligible for the program. USDA provides food and administrative funds to states; local agencies distribute food to participants.

¹³ <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/FoodSecurity/measurement.htm>

¹⁴ “Household Food Security in the United States, 2006,” www.ers.usda.gov

¹⁵ The Blueprint to End Hunger is produced by a coalition of national anti-hunger organizations (NAHO) and was accessed at: <http://www.bread.org/learn/us-hunger-issues/blueprint10-16-08.pdf>

Farmer’s Market Nutrition Programs: USDA operates two nutrition programs aimed at getting fresh produce to target populations. The WIC Farmer’s Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) provides WIC participants with coupons for the purchase of fresh, nutritious, locally grown fruit and vegetables at authorized farmer’s markets and roadside stands. Similarly, the Senior Farmer’s Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) provides low-income seniors with coupons for the purchase of fresh produce. (Vermont also provides a senior farmshare program that provides CSA shares for low income seniors).

Federal Poverty Level: Poverty thresholds change by number of people in a household and number of dependent children. The U.S. Census Bureau reports these measurements online at <http://www.census.gov>. An excerpt from the 2007 poverty levels table:

One person (unrelated individual)	10,590						
Under 65 years	10,787	10,787					
65 years and over	9,944	9,944					
Two people	13,540						
Householder under 65 years	13,954	13,884	14,291				
Householder 65 years and over	12,550	12,533	14,237				
Three people	16,530	16,218	16,689	16,705			
Four people	21,203	21,386	21,736	21,027	21,100		
Five people	25,080	25,791	26,166	25,364	24,744	24,366	
Six people	28,323	29,664	29,782	29,168	28,579	27,705	27,187

Food Bank: Food banks are regional, charitable organizations that oversee the collection, storage and distribution of food and grocery products for delivery to agencies directly serving hungry people (for example food shelves and soup kitchens). Food banks inventory, store, and transport food in line with grocery industry and appropriate regulatory standards. In addition to individual and corporate donations, food banks may also receive federal administrative funding and commodity donations through The Emergency Food Assistance Program. (Vermont has one, statewide, food bank).

Food Stamp Program / Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): SNAP serves as the first line of defense against hunger. 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. SNAP provides low-income families with Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards that enable them to buy food items in authorized retail food stores.

Hunger: The uneasy or painful sensation caused by a recurrent or involuntary lack of access to food. Many scientists consider hunger to be chronically inadequate nutritional intake due to low incomes (ie: people do not have to experience pain to be hungry from a nutritional perspective).

School Lunch and Breakfast Programs: The National School Lunch (SLP) and Breakfast Programs (SBP) 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.

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): WIC provides nutritious foods, as well as nutrition counseling and health care referrals, to low-income, nutritionally at-risk pregnant and nursing women, infants, and children up to age five. WIC participants receive monthly vouchers for the purchase of specific foods that are designed to supplement their diets with the nutrients important for healthy development. Vermont is unique in the country in providing food delivery to participant homes.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP): Under TEFAP, administrative funding and commodity foods are made available by the USDA to states. States provide the food to local agencies, usually food banks, which in turn distribute the food to soup kitchens and food shelves that directly serve the public.

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

APPENDIX C: CHANGES TO FEDERAL POLICY

State and community work to end hunger relies on complementary federal assistance programs. While Vermont cannot directly rewrite federal policy, the following recommendations advocate for changes to help federal programs better match Vermonters' needs. As noted in the recommendations of the full report, the Hunger Task Force recommends assigning one point staff person to work with Vermont's congressional delegation on federal level changes and furthermore assessing where the state government has capacity to fill in gaps left in federal support.

Changes to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):

The Hunger Task Force found that the federal systems behind SNAP did not adequately reflect the real needs of today's Vermonters at risk of hunger. The gaps occurred both in the amount of food benefits and in the groups eligible to participate. The Task Force further found that, as other programs to assist low-income families have developed, the multiple programs do not always fit seamlessly together. The following recommendations provide examples of changes that could close assistance gaps and simplify federal programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recognize that many working people still need food assistance and revise SNAP in line with this need.

Specific Action Steps:

- Allow working SNAP enrollees to deduct from gross income a standard transportation allowance based on distance traveled to and from their workplace.
- Raise the earned income deduction from 20 percent to 25 percent of gross earnings.

Link SNAP benefits to the real cost of food

Specific Action Steps:

- Raise the minimum monthly allotment to \$25 for categorically eligible households and provide this to all of those households, not only those of one or two members.
- Replace the USDA Thrifty Food Plan with USDA's Low Cost Food Plan as the basis for calculating SNAP allotments.
- Adjust for lag times in data on inflation in food costs. There is currently a 15 month lag in adjustments. In 2008, for example, the baseline benefit calculation that relied on June food costs from the previous year, left families at \$56 below the Thrifty Food Plan cost (for a family of four) when they received their benefits in July.

Expand groups eligible for enrollment in SNAP

Specific Action Steps:

- Expand base gross income up to 185 percent of FPL (the state of Vermont has already made this change to our state policies).
- Extend SNAP categorical eligibility to all recipients of federal Earned Income Tax Credits, WIC Program, and Commodity Supplemental Food Program.
- Eliminate the maximum shelter deduction for all families.

- Retain SNAP categorical eligibility for households that receive a benefit or service that is funded by TANF or TANF/Maintenance of Effort.
- Eliminate eligibility time-limits for able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs).
- Exclude special needs adoption subsidy income; or allow states to align treatment of adoption subsidy income with TANF and Medicaid program rules
- Allow participating immigrant children under the age of 18 to retain eligibility for SNAP benefits when they reach age 18 – even if they have not lived in the U.S. for the requisite five years.
- Allow married or parenting children who are under the age of 22, to apply as a separate SNAP household if they purchase and prepare food separately from their parents living under the same roof

Reduce the burden of applying for SNAP

Specific Action Steps:

- Restore the federal 50:50 match for SNAP administration. Returning to this equal match would provide Vermont with almost \$400,000 to reinvest in helping Vermonters access the food assistance system. The diminution in funds occurred when the administrative match became included in a TANF base grant that placed new restrictions on how funds could be used, effectively bringing the federal contribution down to 46.2 percent from the previous 50 percent.
- Amend SNAP law to allow states to test a variety of innovative methods and alternative application strategies that can remove more barriers and further streamline the eligibility and benefit determination process.
- Incorporate the Combined Application Projects into SNAP law as a state option rather than a demonstration project, and provide the funds necessary for the Social Security Administration to participate in the projects by collecting and providing information to allow automated approval of the standardized SNAP benefit.
- Provide a state option patterned on the Minnesota Family Investment Plan to allow states to provide a standardized SNAP benefit to TANF cash assistance recipients. Nationwide, cash assistance cases make up only 13 percent of all SNAP households; simplifying the benefit determination for these households would allow caseworkers to devote more time to the important tasks of supporting work activities and/or handling the more complex earned income cases that now make up nearly 30 percent of all SNAP cases
- Require USDA to study and recommend alternative, simplified methods of determining the allotment using gross income with no deductions, and then authorize several demonstrations to test the effectiveness of these methods. In the Information Age, it should be possible to create a formula or formulas that take into account certain household characteristics and variances in the cost of food that would adequately target benefits without the need to collect and verify numerous household expenses.

Make it easier for SNAP families to meet their ongoing food and nutrition needs without diminution

Specific Action Steps:

- Remove the requirement that households repay benefits that were overpaid due to an agency error. Families at risk of low-food security should not have to suffer a further loss of benefits beyond the necessary downward adjustment to correct the monthly benefit for a no-fault overpayment.
- Adjust the FNS cost-effectiveness threshold for pursuit of inadvertent household error claims to \$500 and index the threshold each year for inflation. Many states have implemented this higher cost-effectiveness threshold and it makes sense to adjust the amount each year as costs go up.

Changes to Assistance to Children:

The Hunger Task Force found that many holes exist in the safety net currently provided to Vermont's children. As outlined in the recommendations section, Vermont as a state can fix some of these holes by steps such as increasing participation in the Child and Adult Care Program meal plans or improving food literacy. Some of the SNAP changes recommended above could also improve childhood nutrition, for example by making it easier for their parents to receive the SNAP benefits. The changes in the federal school lunch program and WIC services described below would further these efforts to eliminate hunger among Vermont's children.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Improve federal school lunch program

Specific Action Steps:

- Pilot a program to allow Vermont schools to accept cash in lieu of commodities.
- Develop a system for regional preferences in ordering commodity foods.
- Allow school-based programs to offer school meals during vacations, not just summer
- Allow non-residential teen programs to participate in school meals programs

Improve services offered through WIC

Specific Action Steps:

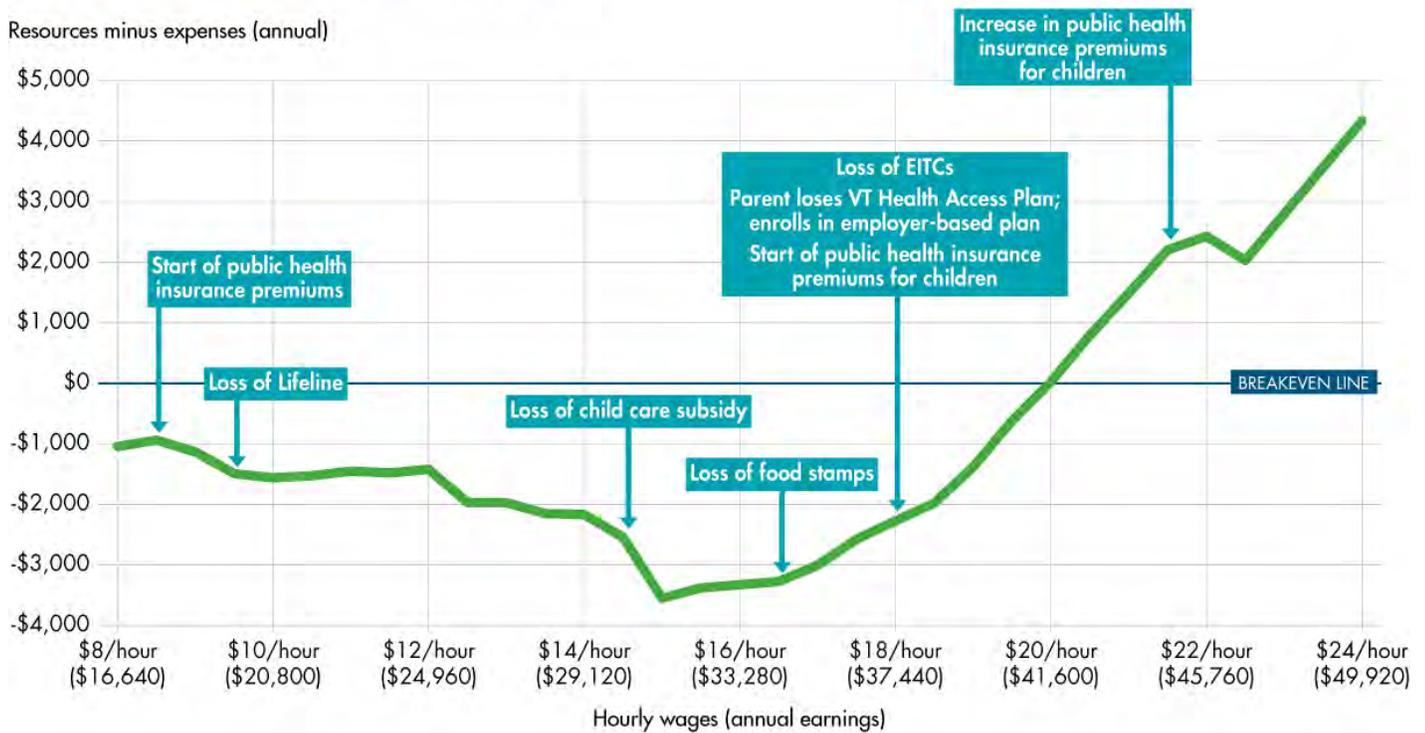
- Increase the number of WIC offices with breastfeeding counselors
- Provide WIC benefits via an electronic card, provide WIC & SNAPs on the same card.
- Create a WIC package for 5-12 year olds that contains protein, fruits and vegetables, and milk.

Ensure that the System of State and Federal Benefits Does Not Penalize Increased Income

Federal, state, and local governments provide public benefits and work supports to help low income working families move toward self-sufficiency. Benefit and support programs, however, are plagued by changing and differing federal, state and local rules, income eligibility levels and benefit cut-off points. The current system can result in the problem of increasing income paired with *decreasing* overall resources as government benefits are removed, as illustrated below:

Net Family Resources: Lamoille County, VT

Single parent with two children, ages 3 and 6



Source: National Center for Children in Poverty's Family Resource Simulator, Vermont 2008 <www.nccp.org/tools/frs>. When eligible, the family receives the following work supports: federal and state tax credits, food stamps, LIHEAP, Lifeline Telephone Service Credit, public health insurance, and a child care subsidy.

Programs such as food stamps, Medicaid, Dr. Dynasaur, Low Income Energy Assistance Program, Head Start, Child Care Assistance and Reach Up are vital to low-income working families. But there is little understanding of how means-tested public benefits and work support benefits can facilitate or hinder a family's progress toward self-sufficiency.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Ensure that federal and state assistance programs work together to support Vermonters' efforts to reach self sufficiency.

Specific Action Steps:

- Review and reform the full federal system of work supports (tax credits, insurance credits, food stamps, etc.) to ensure that families can meet basic needs at every level and that increased earnings do not decrease overall welfare.
- Recognize SNAP reforms (as described previously) as a key part of this reassessment of how federal programs reward or penalize return to work.
- Provide assistance to state governments to comprehensively evaluate how their own support policies match up with federal programs and provide an adequate bridge towards self sufficiency for their citizens.

APPENDIX D: REFERENCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

The Governor's Hunger Task Force relied on the information provided by its members, local organizations, and public testimony. The data provided by several national resources also proved extremely useful in developing this report. For more background information on hunger in the U.S. and where Vermont fits into the national context, consider the following sources.

Blueprint to End Hunger – A collaborative effort between National Anti-Hunger Organizations (NAHO) this report is available from www.bread.org

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities – A fiscal policy research center with food assistance as one focus area <http://www.cbpp.org/>

Community Food Security Coalition – National organization whose food security efforts include a strong component of local food production. <http://www.foodsecurity.org/>

Current Population Survey (U.S. Census Bureau & Bureau of Labor Statistics) – Tracks trends including poverty in America. <http://www.census.gov/cps/>

Feeding America (Formerly America's Second Harvest) – National studies of hunger, which include state-specific profiles. www.feedingamerica.org

See in particular:

- 2007 Hunger Almanac
- Hunger in America 2006

Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) – National research network with particular information on children's hunger issues and food stamps. <http://www.frac.org/>

See in particular:

- State of the States Report

National Center for Children in Poverty – National public policy center dedicated to the well-being of low income families and children. <http://www.nccp.org>

USDA Food and Nutrition Information Center – See in particular the Nutrition Assistance Programs page linked at <http://fnic.nal.usda.gov/>

USDA Economic Research Service Briefing Room: Food Security in the United States <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/FoodSecurity/>

APPENDIX E: VT ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED IN ENDING HUNGER

Vermont has a robust network of state, federal, non-profit and community organizations working to end hunger. The following references provide an introduction to that network. It is not a comprehensive list, but provides a starting point for learning more.

Organizations that provide food and nutrition assistance

For immediate information on public and private nutrition assistance programs, dial 2-1-1, the United Ways of Vermont's toll-free helpline.

For information about nutrition assistance services provided by the state of Vermont, use <http://screendoor.vermont.gov/>

The site for Vermont Food Stamps information is:
<http://www.vermontfoodhelp.org>

Statewide organizations that focus on hunger and access to food:

Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger
802-865-0255
www.vtnohunger.org

The Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger works statewide to increase access to nutritious food through increased use of school meals, summer meals, child care meals and the Food Stamp program, and through Cooking for Life, a hands-on series to offer cooking skills and nutrition education to low-income households. The Campaign also operates a food stamp website www.vermontfoodhelp.com which provides current information on how to apply for this program.

The Vermont Foodbank
802-476-3341
800-585-2265 Toll free
www.vtfoodbank.org

The Vermont Foodbank—the state's largest hunger relief organization—annually distributes more than 6.5 million pounds of donated, purchased, and harvested food to 270 hunger relief organizations statewide including food shelves, senior meals sites, child care facilities, and other human service agencies. Additionally, the Foodbank manages federal food commodity programs, facilitates in-school and other youth-targeted feeding programs, organizes a statewide hunger conference, runs a food preparation and job training program, tracks hunger and poverty rates in Vermont communities, and educates the public and policy makers on effective anti-hunger measures.

Regional and community organizations that focus on poverty alleviation and services to low-income individuals

Vermont is served by a network of 5 community action agencies

- Bennington-Rutland Opportunity Council (BROC) (800) 717-2762
- Central Vermont Community Action Council (CVCAC) (800) 639-1053
- Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO) (800) 287-7971
- North East Kingdom Community Action (NECKA) (800) 639-4065
- Southeast Vermont Community Action (SEVCA) (800) 464-9951

The Vermont Foodbank has almost 300 partner organizations statewide that access food bank food for redistribution through their communities. A listing of these partners is available online:

<http://www.vtfoodbank.org>

Regional organizations that focus on resources for people 60 and over, including meals-on-wheels and community meals.

The following organizations can be reached by dialing the Senior HelpLine at (800) 642-5119

- Champlain Valley Area Agency on Aging
- Central Vermont Council on Aging
- Southeast Vermont Council on Aging
- Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging
- Area Agency on Aging of Northeastern Vermont

To find out about community anti-hunger and nutrition coalitions in your area, contact

- Agency of Human Services - Field Directors
<http://humanservices.vermont.gov/>
- Vermont Department of Health District Health Directors
http://healthvermont.gov/local/district/district_office.aspx

Organizations that focus on rebuilding regional food systems and food education to address hunger:

Vermont FEED (Food Education Every Day)

<http://www.vtfeed.org>

(802) 434-4122

Works with schools and communities to raise awareness about healthy food, the role of Vermont farms and farmers, and good nutrition. We act as a catalyst for rebuilding healthy food systems, and to cultivate links between the classrooms, cafeterias, local farms, and communities. VT FEED is a collaboration of NOFA-VT, Shelburne Farms and Food Works at Two Rivers Center.

Food Works at Two Rivers Center

<http://www.tworiverscenter.org>

(802) 223-1515

Food Works at Two Rivers Center was founded in 1987 to work on long-term hunger prevention. This program is central Vermont's hands-on food and agricultural education center working to strengthen local food systems and empower children, families, and seniors to grow, prepare, eat and preserve their own foods

Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA-VT)

www.nofavt.org

(802) 434-4122

Although NOFA-VT focuses on assistance to organic farmers, its programs also include subsidized CSA shares, expanding EBT at farmers' markets and VT FEED.

Organizations assisting refugees and immigrants in Vermont:

Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program

(802) 655-1963

<http://www.vrrp.org>

The Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program (VRRP) is a field office of the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI). Established in 1980 as a local response to the global refugee crisis, VRRP has helped thousands of refugees resettle into Vermont. VRRP is the only refugee resettlement agency in Vermont. VRRP helps refugees and immigrants gain personal independence and economic self-sufficiency, become contributing members of their new communities, and able participants in all aspects of American life.

Association of Africans Living in Vermont

(802) 985-3106

<http://www.africansinvermont.org/>

AALV is an association run by Africans for Africans living in Vermont. This organization advocates for Africans and can provide resources for those in need of assistance and for service providers who wish to improve the services they provide to the African-born community.

APPENDIX F: HUNGER'S ECONOMIC COST TO VERMONT

At times of economic difficulty, the need for efforts to fight hunger increases while the burden of finding resources to pay for that work also increases. Fortunately, hunger prevention is one area where modest investments will produce not only important social gains, but economic returns as well. Today, Vermont is leaving potential money untapped that could go both towards meeting basic needs of Vermonters and, through their food purchases, back into the Vermont economy.

- **Over \$12 million in federal money could go into Vermont's economy if we achieved full participation in Food Stamps (now named SNAP)¹⁶.**

In 2006, 23,696 Vermont households participated in the food stamp program, with an average monthly benefit of \$176.16. Over \$50 million was received in that year – and with a USDA-estimated economic multiplier effect of \$1.74 for each dollar spent the total economic stimulus was \$87 million. But the USDA also estimates that 20% of eligible households did not participate – leaving a potential of \$12.5 million unclaimed and \$21.8 million in foregone economic returns.

- Note on Rates: Vermont improved its SNAP participation rate by 10% between 2004 and 2006, proving that the numbers *can* be improved. In fact, other states have approached 100% participation. Unfortunately, since 2006, the number of working poor eligible, traditionally the most difficult category to reach, has risen rapidly, suggesting that rates may have fallen since the most recent USDA report.

- **Changes to federal reimbursement for Food Stamp / SNAP administration have resulted in a federal repayment reduction that costs Vermont nearly \$400,000 each year.**

In the late 1990's, states began to adjust how they charged the federal government for the 50% match to SNAP (the Food Stamp) administration. Although states were originally responding to the government's recommendation for which programs to charge, subsequent changes in accounting systems for these programs meant that the match Vermont receives was ultimately reduced by an amount of \$398,000 each year. Working with the federal government to return the match to the 50% level would reinvest almost \$400,000 in state programs and personnel.

- **Vermont ranked 49th in the nation for using Child and Adult Care Food Program funds¹⁷. Reaching the national average would bring Vermont an addition \$3.3 million each year¹⁸.**

The Child and Adult Care Food Program, a federal entitlement program, provides cash reimbursements to eligible child care centers, afterschool programs for at-risk youth, shelters, and adult day care facilities for meals they provide, as well as administrative payments to states. Vermont is currently ranked 49th in the U.S. for use of the program. If we reached just the national average for percent of centers accessing these federal funds,

¹⁶ USDA Food and Nutrition Service and VT Department for Children & Families provide SNAP information.

¹⁷ The Food Research and Action Center, VT Campaign to End Childhood Hunger and VT Department of Education provide CACFP information.

¹⁸ Estimate of funds lost provided by VT Campaign to End Childhood Hunger based on Food Research and Action Center unpublished report.

our payment would increase from \$3.9 million each year to \$7.2 million.

- **Over \$30 million moves through Vermont school lunch programs each year– more of this money should be going towards local purchasing, and federal programs can help¹⁹.**

The National School Lunch program provides an important baseline of nutrition for children during the school year through free and reduced price lunches, and through entitlements to commodity products. These programs are beginning to be used more effectively to complement local economic development, for example:

- Adjusting state commodity food ordering practices to concentrate the entitlement on products *not* available locally, so schools can use these subsidized commodities to open more room in their budgets for purchasing local items.
- Using special funding, such as USDA’s recent funding for a fresh fruit and vegetable snack program, to not only buy local foods but also integrate them into educating students about nutrition and agriculture.

The amount of money that moves through school lunch programs is significant. Federal funds paid \$10 million to the Vermont school lunch program last year, each year schools spend a state average of \$31 million on food programs, and about 10% - 20% of the food used comes from the commodity system.

- **The charitable food system should be an emergency supplement, but today it is a core part of many families’ monthly food budget and represents millions of pounds of food that Vermonters are unable to purchase on the open market²⁰.**

Vermont is fortunate to have one of the best charitable food distribution systems in the country. Each year the Vermont Foodbank moves over 6 million pounds of food through Vermont and those pounds are matched by local donations to food shelves and soup kitchens. Unfortunately, this food also represents products that families would have preferred to be able to purchase through normal market channels.

The long-term economic costs of hunger are even greater than short term opportunities lost. These costs include lowered worker productivity, greater stress on the healthcare system, lowered academic performance for our children, displacement of charitable monies that could be spent elsewhere, and lasting unhealthy approach to food as families seek simply the least-cost (often low-nutrition) options. **A 2007 report, *The Economic Cost of Domestic Hunger*²¹, tallied all of these costs and found that hunger’s total cost to Vermont is \$200 million.**

Creative efforts around the country have demonstrated ways that mitigating these long-term impacts can also mean an immediate stimulus to a state’s economy. For example:

- Madison-area health insurance companies offer cash rebates for members to subscribe to Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs). This system increases fresh produce in members’ diets (improving long-term health) while also injecting money today into the local economy.

¹⁹ The VT Department of Education and VT FEED provide school lunch program information.

²⁰ The Vermont Foodbank and Feeding America provide information on the charitable food system.

²¹ Prepared for the Sodexo Foundation, Public Welfare Foundation and Spunk Fund, Inc. Lead author: Dr. J. Larry Brown, Harvard School of Public Health.

- Similarly the federal government provides Farm-to-Family coupons and support for EBT machines at Farmers' Markets, instilling long-term healthy eating habits while increasing the business for local food producers.
- The Campus Kitchens project initiated by the Sodexo Foundation combines preparing meals for the hungry with culinary skills training for participants. Campus Kitchens uses the support of the Sodexo foundation to deliver not only food but also a chance for those in need of assistance to improve their job options. This program is representative of funding opportunities through private foundations to fight hunger while strengthening the workforces.

Figures such as those represented here demonstrate that not only is investment in comprehensive strategies to end hunger the right thing to do, we can't afford not to.