



Advocacy Alert

OREGON FOOD BANK
OREGON HUNGER RELIEF TASK FORCE

November 2001
Volume 8 Issue 1



take five

(actions that take five minutes or less)

Action: Call U.S. Senators Gordon Smith & Ron Wyden. Tell them you support the food stamp provisions of the Lugar Farm Bill (S.1571).

Message: I support Senator Lugar's Farm Bill because:

- \$10 billion over ten years is needed to improve the Food Stamp Program.
- Oregon is in a recession. A better Food Stamp Program helps low-income people AND local grocery stores.

See page 2 for more information about the Farm Bill and food stamp reauthorization.

Legislative Yellow Pages

State Legislative Information
(503) 986-1000
www.leg.state.or.us/findlegsltr/findset.htm

Governor Kitzhaber
(503) 378-3111

U.S. Capitol Switchboard
(202) 224-3121

President Bush/White House
(202) 456-1414

Federal Legislative Contacts
Rep. Wu (District 1)
(503) 326-2901
Rep. Walden (District 2)
(541) 776-4646
Rep. Blumenauer (District 3)
(503) 231-2300
Rep. DeFazio (District 4)
(541) 465-6732
Rep. Hooley (District 5)
(503) 588-9100
Senator Smith
(503) 326-3386
Senator Wyden
(503) 326-7525

As economy weakens, need for emergency food continues to rise

Oregon Food Bank (OFB) released its most recent service statistics (for July 1, 2000-June 30, 2001), showing a 10% increase from the previous year. Since 1996, the OFB statewide network of emergency food assistance programs has seen a steady yearly increase in requests for emergency food (a 27% increase since 1996).

While many low-income Oregonians have moved off public assistance due to restrictive welfare policies and a generally strong economy in the late 1990s, demand for emergency food has steadily risen. Oregon now ranks as one of the hungriest states in the nation, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In consultation with statisticians from federal and state offices, an independent research center, and Oregon universities, OFB revised the method by which it estimates the total number of people eating meals from emergency food boxes. The new figures indicate a higher number than previously assumed. An estimated 652,000 people, or **one in every six Oregonians**, ate from a food box at least once during the year. Surveys indicate that 40% of those receiving emergency food are children.

In addition to food boxes distributed, soup kitchens and meal sites served 3.7 million emergency meals, and more than 80,000 persons received OFB network food supplies at centers for low-income sen-

iors, child care sites, group homes, and after-school programs.

Effects of recession being felt already

OFB network leaders expect to see steeper increases in need in the coming months as Oregon faces impacts of the current recession and the events of September 11th.

"Low-wage workers will be the first to suffer from a recession," said Rachel Bristol, executive director of Oregon Food Bank. "Many already need food boxes to meet basic needs. When their jobs disappear or their hours are cut, they will need even more help to get by."

Bristol noted that local agencies are already reporting

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Food stamp outreach expanding, participation up

The Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force (OHRTF) is currently working with the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Oregon Food Bank Network to develop and implement a plan to increase food stamp outreach by placing five AmeriCorps*VISTA members in targeted areas around the state.

Funding for the project originated with the 2001 State Legislature, which appropriated \$100,000 for statewide food stamp outreach efforts. This state money is being matched by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, bringing a total of \$200,000 more to

outreach efforts during the 2001-03 biennium. Target areas include Yamhill, Polk, Washington, Tillamook, Hood River, and Malheur counties. VISTA members will be supervised by OHRTF staff and will use tested and effective outreach methods combined with local strategies.

OHRTF's ongoing Food Stamp Program outreach efforts have been successful in increasing participation statewide by an impressive 32% between September 2000 and September 2001. Yet, while OHRTF is pleased to see more eligible households re-

ceiving this nutritional support, one unintended result of increased participation has been a shortage of DHS caseworkers to process the growing caseload.

Not only did DHS offices administering food stamp cases suffer a significant reduction in staff after cuts made during Oregon's last legislative session, offices remain under a hiring freeze and are unable to add new staff. OHRTF recognizes that the lack of adequate staffing to cover increased caseloads has become a barrier to client access and a serious customer service issue.

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Emergency food need rises *continued from page 1*

a surge in requests for the first quarter of FY 01-02 as workers laid off earlier in the year exhaust unemployment benefits.

Public safety net facing cuts

Adding to the stress levels at OFB and its local member agencies is the fact that public services to the poor face cuts as city, county and state governments confront mounting budget deficits. As their designation implies, emergency food agencies were intended to be the final safety net, but increasingly they have become a main line of defense against hunger.

OFB cautions against more cuts in state safety net programs and also urges a federal economic stimulus package that includes services for the poor and tax relief for low-wage workers along with expanded food stamp distribution through

the new Farm Bill being crafted by Congress.

The heightened demand for food is not simply a product of the current economic downturn. When the state boasted a vigorous economy a few years ago, there was nonetheless a growing need for emergency food. Housing costs, tax policy, low-wage jobs, food stamp cuts and welfare shifts all contributed to the potential of hunger in good times as well as bad.

“Now is not the time to be making cuts to programs that serve vulnerable Oregonians,” said Bristol, “especially if we want to see our economy – and our workforce – rebound any time soon.”

For more information on OFB’s service statistics, contact Kim Thomas (see below for phone and email).

Food stamp reauthorization and WIC funding



Although Congress has been focused on legislation in response to September 11th, food stamp reauthorization is still on track and the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program is facing a crisis.

Farm Bill and Food Stamps

In early October the House passed a Farm Bill that provided \$3.6 billion over ten years for modest improvements to the Food Stamp Program. All eyes then turned to the Senate to raise the funding level and build upon the House food stamp provisions.

On October 18th, Senator Richard Lugar (R-Indiana), ranking minority member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, introduced his proposal for a comprehensive Farm Bill. His bill provides, among other things, \$10 billion over ten years for food stamp changes. This is an exciting development, made even more so by the fact that the Bush Administration has expressed support for the bill.

The Lugar Farm Bill (S.1571) expands food stamp

benefits, simplifies and increases access to the program, supports working families and seniors, and makes the program easier to administer at the state level. Highlights include partial restoration to legal immigrants, excluding the full value of all vehicles from calculating assets, and providing six months of transitional benefits to families moving off cash assistance.

For more details, go to www.wrahc.org. Also, see “Take Five” on page one for how to get involved.

More WIC funding needed

In July the House approved a \$4.137 billion appropriations for the WIC program based on a caseload projection in the Administration’s budget request from last winter. Caseloads are up, however, and will continue to grow as unemployment rises.

The Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee has approved \$4.247 billion to serve 7.35 million women, infants, and children – a \$110 million increase over the House funding level. But, WIC actually needs \$250 million above the House level to fund all those now needing assistance.

Please contact Senators Smith and Wyden, and urge them to increase WIC funding to the fullest extent possible.

Did you know?

- ☹ 1 in 4 children in Oregon lives in a food insecure household
- ☹ 1 in 3 working families with children under 12 do not earn enough to meet their monthly budget

Food stamp outreach *continued from page 1*

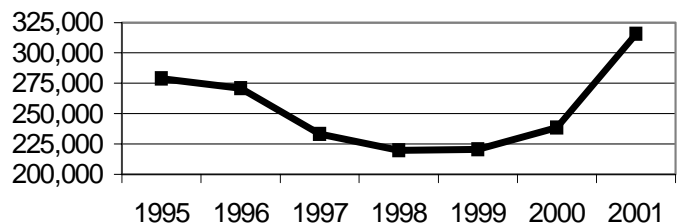
Other client barriers identified by OHRTF through focus group feedback include misinformation about eligibility, pride or stigma, excessive paperwork, transportation, and the fear of negative treatment in the food stamp office.

OHRTF welcomes the addition of five VISTA members to increase knowledge about food stamps and other food security resources within Oregon’s local communities.

For more information about outreach efforts or to **apply for the VISTA positions**, please contact Nancy Weed, Food Stamp Outreach Coordinator.

*Food Stamp Fact:
Last fiscal year, Oregon received \$227 million in federal food stamps.*

Food Stamp Participation in Oregon
Recipients in month of September (1995-2001)



The Advocacy Alert is published jointly by the Oregon Food Bank (OFB) and the Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force (OHRTF).

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