

For Immediate Release
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**NEW NATIONAL SURVEY BY FEEDING AMERICA:
Regional food banks struggle as economic woes and record unemployment send many
Americans in search of food**

***Tarrant Area Food Bank distributes record amount of food;
increasing demand driven by first-time users of emergency food aid***

FORT WORTH (September 14, 2009) – Tarrant Area Food Bank reports today that the need for emergency food in its 13-county service region has risen by 20 percent in the past year.

According to a new survey released today by Feeding America, the nation's largest domestic hunger relief charity, food banks across the nation report that the current recession and the continuing rise in unemployment are having a profound effect on their ability to feed millions of Americans living at risk of hunger .

The increase is nearly universal – 99 percent of all participating food banks reported a significant surge in demand for emergency food assistance over the past year.

TARRANT AREA FOOD BANK reports, as do most member food banks of Feeding America, that the increase is particularly driven by first-time users of the emergency food assistance system, including a greater number of people who have lost their jobs.

IN THE GREATER FORT WORTH METROPOLITAN AREA, AN ADDITIONAL FACTOR is the current delay in processing of re-certification and first-time applications for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP/Food Stamps). The delay is due to the overwhelming, record-breaking number of people applying for the program. The State is in the process of hiring additional staff to address the problem.

“This new survey shows that we are continuing to struggle to meet the needs of hungry people in our community,” said Bo Soderbergh, executive director, Tarrant Area Food Bank

“It’s becoming increasingly difficult for many of our partner pantries and soup kitchens to meet the needs of their clients, especially when new clients arrive all the time,” said Soderbergh. “This is especially sobering when you consider that this past year, between July 2008 and June 2009, we distributed a record-breaking 17.5 million pounds of food and groceries to our 13-county network of hunger-relief charities. That’s an increase of 24 percent over the previous year.”

“The most critical change we’ve seen over the past year,” Soderbergh said, “is the shift in the challenges facing middle- and low-income families from increasing food and fuel costs to unemployment and underemployment. We frequently hear stories from around our 13-county service region that people who once donated to their local food-aid charity are now waiting in lines as clients,” Soderbergh said.

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Food banks also reported in the Feeding America survey that increased support through federal nutrition programs, including through the recent American Reinvestment and Recovery Act, have provided vital support to their local efforts. Among food banks, including Tarrant Area Food Bank, that distribute commodities through The Emergency Food Assistance Program, (USDA's commodity program intended to help feed low-income Americans), 92 percent said the increase in food from the federal government has been very important to their capacity to meet the growing need. Additionally, almost half of food banks cited recent increases in benefits from the SNAP (formerly the Food Stamp Program) as being very important to clients in their service area.

“This survey underscores the importance of Congress providing more funding for Child Nutrition programs this fall and supporting President Obama's pledge to end child hunger by 2015,” said Escarra. “It is both tragic and unacceptable for anyone in this nation to go hungry, but we are especially concerned for the 12 million children living in food insecure households and suffering long term consequences as a result. Recent research has shown that children in food insecure households have difficulty learning and are less likely to become healthy, productive members of our society.”

IN TEXAS and in Tarrant Area Food Bank's 13-county service region, ONE IN FIVE CHILDREN live in households that don't always have the resources to provide sufficient nutritious food for healthy, active living.

Child nutrition programs are currently set to expire on Sept. 30, 2009, and the Congress will be considering whether to extend current levels of funding or increase funding in the coming weeks.

“As Congress and the Administration balance a very daunting list of priorities to jumpstart our economy, I hope that they will continue to remember the poor and near poor who suffer the most,” said Escarra. “We are deeply grateful for the support our food banks and clients have seen from the federal government this year, but it is important to acknowledge that millions of people are still continuing to face extraordinarily difficult times.”

For complete details on Feeding America's “Economic Impact Survey” including anecdotes from across the nation, please visit <http://feedingamerica.org/newsroom/local-impact-study.aspx> .

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TARRANT AREA FOODBANK, founded in 1982 to collect and distribute donated food, provides food in 13 counties to emergency pantries, Kids Cafes and other after-school programs, emergency shelters, senior centers, children's homes and other social service centers. Each month, this network of hunger-relief charities distributes emergency groceries to 35,000 families and serves more than 500,000 meals and snacks on charities' sites.

FEEDING AMERICA provides low-income individuals and families with the fuel to survive and even thrive. As the nation's leading domestic hunger-relief charity, our network members supply food to more than 25 million Americans each year, including 9 million children and 3 million seniors. Serving the entire United States, more than 200 member food banks operate 63,000 agencies that address hunger in all of its forms. For more information on how you can fight hunger in your community and across the country, visit www.feedingamerica.org.