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NEW HUNGER STUDY: One in eight residents in Tarrant region sought privately-sponsored food assistance in early 2009

Comprehensive study of private, nonprofit Emergency Food Aid reports on hunger nationwide and in local 13-county area served by Tarrant Area Food Bank

Fort Worth (February 2, 2010)— **One in 8 Tarrant area residents—including more than 120,000 children and 14,000 seniors—received emergency food assistance** during the first third of 2009 through **Tarrant Area Food Bank**, according to a report released today by nonprofit Feeding America, the nation's network of regional food banks.

In 2009 Tarrant Area Food Bank and its network of nonprofit hunger-relief agencies served an estimated 280,000 people compared to 158,000 four years ago in 2005 when the last hunger study was done by Feeding America.

The figures for Tarrant Area Food Bank and its 13-county network of emergency food providers are **part of the national study, *Hunger in America 2010***. The national study reports that **37 million people—one in eight Americans—sought emergency food assistance last year** from Feeding America's member food banks and their networks of food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters. In 2005 that number was 25 million.

"Tarrant Area Food Bank has seen the number of families depending on food pantries increase over the past year from 32,000 to 44,000 per month," said Bo Soderbergh, executive director of the Food Bank. "When people hit hard times including illness, loss of a job, or disruption in health insurance, they are forced to turn for help to the Feeding America network of members like Tarrant Area Food Bank and its partner charities," he said.

The regional report from *Hunger in America 2010* for Tarrant Area Food Bank's 13-county service area captures the connection between increased need for emergency food assistance and the beginning of the recession in Texas. As food and fuel costs rose and the effects of lay-offs began to ripple through the local economy, low-income families were pushed deeper into poverty.

Some **41 percent of households** seeking food aid in the Tarrant County region reported not only having less money for food, but also **having to reduce their food intake**. Among all households, **more than three-quarters (78) percent were living below the federal poverty line**. The **average ANNUAL income was \$13,000**.

Another indicator of the growing economic stress on families may have been the increase in the **percentage of school-aged children participating in the national school lunch and breakfast programs**. In early 2009, 73 percent ate in the school lunch

program, up from 65 percent in 2005, and 66 percent ate in the breakfast program compared to 58 percent in 2005.

Among the families served by the Food Bank's network, **43 percent had at least one adult who was working, up from 36 percent in 2005. This increase may have indicated** that people who in the past did not need food assistance had experienced reductions in pay, either because of reduced work hours or having to take lower paying jobs after being laid off.

Another indicator of economic hard times may have been the increase in the percentage of adults receiving food aid who had NOT completed high school from 37 percent in 2005 to 45 percent in 2009. It may be that the recession was making it more difficult for those without a high school diploma to earn enough to afford basic necessities including food.

Many of the clients who participated in face-to-face interviews for *Hunger in America 2010* reported **having to make choices between food and everyday necessities. LOCALLY, nearly one-half** (49 percent) of the households served reported having to choose between paying for food and paying to fill the gas tank of a vehicle; **more than one-half** (52 percent) had to choose between paying for food and their rent or mortgage.

On a positive note, volunteers and faith-based organizations are the lifeline of the greater Tarrant County area's and America's emergency food distribution system. **Among Tarrant Area Food Bank's network**, more than 51 percent of food pantries and 18 percent of soup kitchens are completely run by volunteers. Some 67 percent of TAFB pantries, 47 percent of soup kitchens and 33 percent of emergency shelters are run by faith-based organizations.

Tarrant Area Food Bank is by far the single most important source of food for its partner agencies, accounting for 79 percent of the food distributed by food pantries, 64 percent of the food served by kitchens and 52 percent of the food served by shelters.

In the past year, **Tarrant Area Food Bank distributed 17.6 million pounds of food to 300 local charitable agencies** that included not only food pantries, soup kitchens and emergency shelters but also senior centers, low-income day care centers, Kids Cafes, after-school programs, children's homes, residential treatment centers and disaster relief agencies. This network of emergency food providers served by the Food Bank operates **in the counties of** Tarrant, Cooke, Denton, Wise, Parker, Johnson, Hood, Somervell, Palo Pinto, Erath, Bosque, Hamilton and Hill. A large majority of the agencies serve Tarrant County.

AFTER 8 A.M. FEB 2:

For more LOCAL information from *Hunger in America 2010*, please visit www.tafb.org.

For more national information from *Hunger in America 2010*, please visit www.hungerinamerica.org.

Based on 62,000 face-to-face interviews of people seeking emergency food assistance and surveys of 37,000 pantries, soup kitchens and shelters, *Hunger in America 2010* is **the largest, most comprehensive study ever conducted on domestic hunger.**

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