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MISSISSIPPI  
FOOD NETWORK

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## **Landmark New Study Reveals an Unprecedented Number of Mississippians Seeking Emergency Food Assistance**

*Largest, Most Comprehensive Report Ever Conducted On Emergency Food Distribution Reports Increase in Clients Served Annually*

**Jackson, MS --- February 2, 2010 ---** A landmark study released today by the Mississippi Food Network and Feeding America, the nation's largest domestic hunger-relief organization, reports that more than 347,000 people, including 93,690 children, receive emergency food each year in our State. An estimated 50,800 people receive emergency food assistance each week from a food pantry, soup kitchen, or other agency in Mississippi.

This is the first research study to capture the significant connection between the recent economic downturn and an increased need for emergency food assistance. The number of children and adults in need of food as a result of experiencing food insecurity has significantly increased. In Mississippi, more than 73 percent of client households are experiencing very low food security—or hunger. Among households with children, 71 percent are food insecure and 32 percent are food insecure with very low food security. Nationally, more than one in three client households are experiencing very low food security—or hunger—a 54 percent increase in the number of households compared to four years ago.

An estimated 5.7 million people receive emergency food assistance each week from a food pantry, soup kitchen, or other agency served by one of Feeding America's more than 200 food banks, including Mississippi Food Network. This is a 27 percent increase over numbers reported in [\*Hunger in America 2006\*](#), which reported that 4.5 million people were served each week.

"We learned through this study that 47 percent of the clients served in Mississippi report having to choose between paying for food and paying for utilities," stated Marilyn Blackledge, Director of Development. "We also had 42 percent report having to choose between paying for food and paying for medicine or medical care," stated Blackledge. "These figures validate what we already knew, that many Mississippians are struggling to feed their families."

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“It is morally reprehensible that we live in the wealthiest nation in the world where one in six people are struggling to make choices between food and other basic necessities,” said Vicki Escarra, president and CEO of Feeding America. “These are choices that no one should have to make, but particularly households with children. Insufficient nutrition has adverse effects on the physical, behavioral and mental health, and academic performance of children. It is critical that we ensure that no child goes to bed hungry in America as they truly are our engine of economic growth and future vitality.”

The [methodology](#) incorporated into the 2010 study includes data collected from February through June, 2009. During that time, 689 face-to-face interviews were conducted in Mississippi with people seeking emergency food at food pantries, soup kitchens and other emergency feeding programs.

Nationally, Feeding America collected quantitative and qualitative feedback from more than 62,000 face-to-face in-depth interviews with people seeking emergency food assistance and more than 37,000 agency surveys, making this study the largest, most-comprehensive ever conducted on domestic hunger.

USDA reported in November 2009 that an estimated 49 million people, including 17 million children, are at risk of hunger in this country. *Hunger In America 2010* reinforces the dramatically increasing need for food assistance in the United States.

Among the key findings in the Mississippi report:

- 79.8 percent of households reported that during the previous 12 months they had been in the situation where the food they bought just did not last and they did not have money to buy more.
- Food banks are by far the single most important source of food for agencies with emergency food providers, accounting for 79 percent of the food distributed by pantries, 44 percent of the food distributed by kitchens, and 32 percent of the food distributed by shelters.
- 21.2 percent of the client households interviewed have at least one adult working.
- Among the adult clients who come to program sites, 26.3 percent are 65 years of age and older.
- 63.8 percent of the client households had monthly household income of less than \$1,000.
- Among the client households with children younger than age 18, 39.7 percent had low food security and 31.6 percent had very low food security.
- Among the clients households with seniors age 65 years or older, 40.4 percent had low food security and 22.6 percent had very low food security.
- 87.6 percent of the clients who are receiving SNAP benefits, the benefits last for three weeks or less. For 59.8 percent, they last for two weeks or less.

“Our member agencies have reported a 30 percent increase in the number of people they serve each month over the same time last year,” stated Desiree Dillon, Director of Agency Relations. “The information in the *Hunger In America 2010* will be so valuable to us as we continue to work to better serve our member agencies and their clients,” stated Dillon

A summary of the findings is available at <http://www.msfoodnet.org/publications.htm>. The full national report is available on Feeding America's web site at [Hunger in America 2010](#).

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**Mississippi Food Network** provides donated food and household items to more than 320 member agencies across the state. With the current economy, the member agencies are serving more than 100,000 people each month. In 2009, MFN distributed more than 15 million pounds of food and grocery product to agencies across Mississippi. Member agencies consist of Emergency Food Pantries, Day Care Centers, Emergency Shelters, Group Homes, Soup Kitchens, Teen Centers, Alcohol and Drug Rehabs, Homeless Shelters and Senior Citizen Programs. To find out more about Mississippi Food Network visit our website at [www.msfoodnet.org](http://www.msfoodnet.org).

**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 37 million Americans each year, including 14 million children and 3 million seniors. Serving the entire United States, more than 200 member food banks support 61,068 agencies that address hunger in all of its forms. Feeding America is based in Chicago. For more information on how you can fight hunger in your community and across the country, visit <http://www.feedingamerica.org>. Find us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/Feeding America](http://www.facebook.com/FeedingAmerica) or follow our news on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/Feedingamerica>.