

Transforming Hunger in New Orleans

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New Orleans was founded in 1718, in a part of the city now called the French Quarter. The Mississippi River and the Gulf brought indigenous and imported foodstuffs and goods from throughout the world to its markets and homes. It seems that from that founding moment on, this city was famous for its art, music, culture and cuisine. New Orleans was the birthplace of jazz and a unique cuisine which evolved from our Native American, African, Spanish, French and Caribbean roots. This diversity created the basis for our unique gastronomic traditions. Home cooks and chefs alike continue to nurture our flavors and dishes, thereby preserving our cultural foodways.



But the historic natural bounty of our area, the importance of the Mississippi for trade and our significant emphasis on food are components of our complex food system. The essence of community food security and the creation of a local sustainable food system must consider the supply side of the equation. Our state and the gulf coast has been impacted, in some cases horrifically, with disasters, hurricanes, floods, drought, extreme temperatures all creating immediate and on-going impacts on our farmers and fishers. Louisiana agriculture has struggled to compete in an increasingly global marketplace. “With...the potential for high-volume, low marginal cost enterprises...global integration has subjected Louisiana farmers to volatile commodity markets where small and medium sized farms cannot compete.”¹ “Despite their environmental, cultural, and economic assets, many Louisiana farmers struggle to make ends meet. This is especially true for small farmers—45% of all Louisiana farms in 2008—who cannot rely on large industrial buyers and government subsidies.”² These circumstances make it difficult for Louisiana

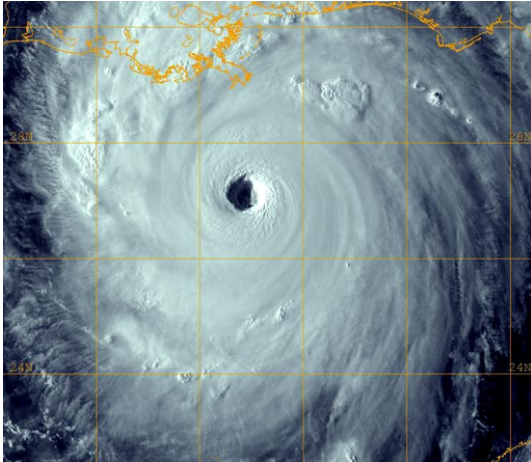
¹ GNOA, 2010:137

² GNOA, 2010:139

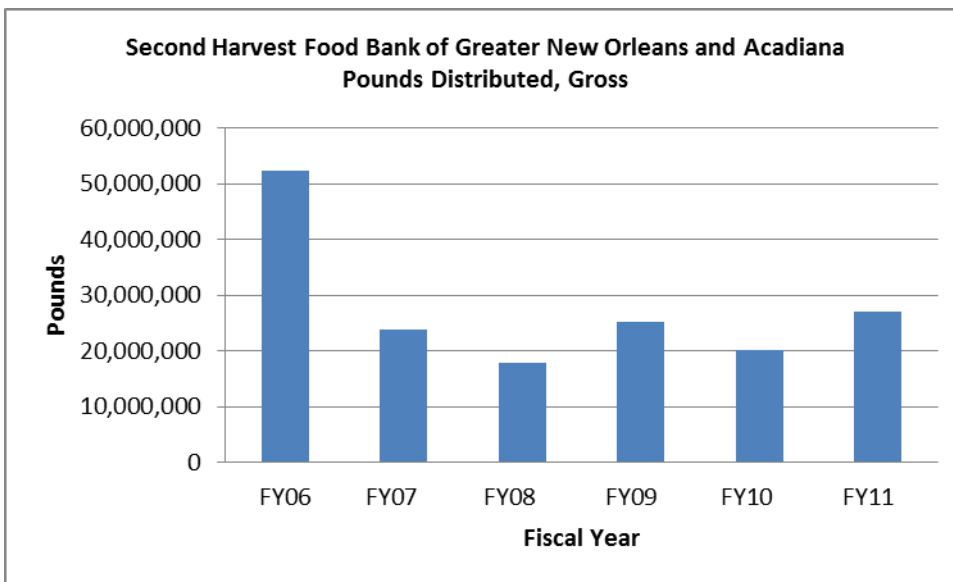
farmers to grow the type of market garden crops that would allow Louisiana to build a more sustainable local food economy. A comprehensive community food security strategy for the state of Louisiana, therefore, must include incentives to Louisiana farmers and fishers that will enable them to thrive while producing food that would be consumed in-state.



Summer feeding, afterschool feeding programs, greater access to supermarkets and farmers markets, more support for urban gardens and local agriculture, greater utilization of SNAP and other federal benefits – all these collaborative initiatives will help blunt the impact of these frightening times for the most vulnerable amongst us. And in that way, it is hoped that what is happening in New Orleans today further enriches the rich food traditions that are part of the City's heart and soul.



On August 29th, 2005 Hurricane Katrina made landfall, followed closely by Hurricane Rita on September 24th. More than a million people evacuated from their homes and the infrastructure of the region was devastated, forcing many people into emergency food assistance for the first time. Second Harvest Food Bank, supported by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Feeding America, became the largest food bank in history, distributing 8 million pounds of food from an abandoned Walmart warehouse in September, 2005 alone. In 2004, Second Harvest distributed 15 million pounds of food to 23 parishes of South Louisiana, stretching from the Mississippi to Texas borders.



The challenges and opportunities that face the anti-hunger movement parallel the challenges faced by all sectors in post-Katrina New Orleans. Where do you start rebuilding and can we rebuild our community stronger, better and safer than it was before the storms? Innovation and collaborations have been key to the successes so far. In the case of Second Harvest, this requires a determination of both how to make the greatest impact to meet the immediate crises while re-imagining its role in advocating for a sustainable food system in the future. With the help of universities throughout the

southern part of the state, Second Harvest embarked on a comprehensive farm to fork food system analysis of South Louisiana³.

A Healthy Eating Alliance was convened in partnership with Louisiana Southern University and Tulane University, the urban farming movement, the City of New Orleans, neighborhood associations, school reform advocates and the Louisiana Public Health Institute. Consequently, with the additional leadership of the Emeril Lagasse Foundation and the City of New Orleans, a Food Policy Advisory Committee (FPAC) was formed. The impact of this committee, which has issued reports on creating incentives for retail stores to open in underserved areas and improving school food service, has been felt state-wide. A state initiative to open retail stores carrying healthy foods in underserved areas has begun. The Louisiana Sustainable Local Food Policy Council has been established and is charged with finding ways to assist the local food economy and increasing food access for all Louisianans. Our city food systems were once more robust; full of farmers markets and stands, mobile food stands and small, neighborhood grocery stores, some of which still exist.



In New Orleans, we have an on-going situation of limited food access, which has been severely exacerbated by the storm impacts. Whereas the national average is 8,600 individuals per grocery store, in New Orleans over 15,700 people are served by each grocery store. In New Orleans East, 75,000 residents are served by just one grocery store. In response to the FPAC 2008 report and recommendations, “Building Healthy

³ Second Harvest Food Bank of Greater New Orleans and Acadiana (GNOA), From the Bayou to the Boucherie, 2010

Communities: Expanding Access to Fresh Food Retail”, the City of New Orleans launched a \$14 million dollar “Fresh Food Retail Initiative in March, 2011.⁴ Recent press indicates that several new grocery stores are set to open in underserved areas, supported in part by this initiative. New Orleans based MarketUmbrella.org has worked tirelessly to support local farmers and fishers and make their bounty available in various parts of the city. Other Pre-Katrina neighborhood stores, such as the Circle Store, have yet to re-open.



Our challenges and the opportunities to transform hunger in New Orleans and Louisiana can best be understood in the context of the history and evolution of feeding programs and legislative initiatives. There are many definitions for hunger, one is uneasy or painful sensation caused by want of food, craving and appetite (OED 1971). Malnutrition is the lack of some or all nutritional elements necessary for human health. More commonly, “undernutrition”, food insecure, or food secure have taken the place of these terms. Food insecurity is a result of limited access to adequate food due to lack of financial and other resources. Food insecurity is more common in urban areas and as of 2009 it is estimated that 50.2 million (16.6%) Americans lived in food insecure households. In Louisiana, 644,540 people (14.6%) are food insecure and in the Greater New Orleans MS, those statistics are 158,450 people or 13.7%. 246,720 or 22.1% of all children in Louisiana are food insecure⁵. Currently, one in eight residents of Louisiana are hungry and in New Orleans, it is one in five. There is general agreement that poverty is the principal cause of hunger, and that unemployment is the single largest indicator of how hunger is increasing, though natural and manmade disasters have made Louisiana somewhat of an anomaly. Recent statistics now indicated that Louisiana has the second highest rate of poverty in the nation.

Social justice is a term used to refer to a fair, honest and equal society. Food justice is a movement that attempts to address hunger by addressing the underlying issues of racial and class inequity and the inequities in the food system that correlate to inequities in economic and political power. It has been estimated that there are 925 million people in the world today who are hungry, which would be over 13% of the total population, close

⁴ FPAC, 2008, Building Healthy Communities: Expanding Access to Fresh Food Retail, http://nolafoodpolicy.org/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/FPAC_1_Report_Final.20874151.pdf

⁵ Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap, 2009

to one person in seven. The FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) estimates that 1.02 billion people are undernourished. This number is increasing for several reasons; including increasing population, worldwide economic crisis, significant increases in food prices and the loss of agricultural capability.

Hunger and poverty seem to be ageless. Archaeological evidence indicates that many individuals from throughout the world survived deprivation, serious injury and disease across the millennia because members of their community fed and cared for them when they were unable to, or incapacitated. In the past, various strategies attempted to combat hunger; such as redistribution of food by the wealthy, by religious organizations and/or communities. Gleaning, foraging, fishing and hunting meant that the poor were allowed to salvage food from the fields after harvest, nearby woods and streams. In England, in 1601, the Poor Law of Elizabeth, “An Act for the Relief of the Poor” was an early attempt to legislate aid.⁶ This was, in part, a response to the fencing and enclosing of land that had been commonly accessible and a resource for gleaning, grazing and hunting. In the 18th century, soup kitchens appear, borrowing from the findings in Europe that the most inexpensive and nutritious way to feed the military was with soup. Soon, “soup houses” were being used in many countries to feed the poor.



Here in America, in 1802, the Humane Society of New York City opened its first permanent “soup house” and provided soup for four cents a quart to the needy. During a harsh winter in 1804-05, a second “soup house” opened and distributed 8,400 gallons of soup. Supporters gave the needy “soup tickets” to use instead of money.⁷ Later in the 19th century, soup houses, now called “soup kitchens”, became less common with the exception of the Salvation Army which has continuously operated feeding programs in a wide range of locations. Today’s Salvation Army collects donations during the holidays in a black kettle, a practice which supposedly originated in 1894. A San Francisco Salvation Army soup kitchen was feeding the survivors of a shipwreck and ran out of soup, but a volunteer took the soup kettle into the street with a sign that read “Keep the Kettle Boiling” and collected donations in the kettle to buy more food.⁸

⁶ Ellison, 2004:7

⁷ Burrows and Wallace, 2000: 382

⁸ Katz and Weaver, 2003: V 3:303



By 1935, the Food Surplus Commodities Corporation was created in the United States to distribute “commodities”, meaning surplus agricultural products. From its beginnings in 1939, with the country in the “Great Depression” an experimental food stamp program had expanded by 1942 to every state (but West Virginia) with 4 million participants. Individuals would buy orange stamps, redeem them for food and receive 50% of the purchase price back in blue stamps. The blue stamps could then be traded for agricultural commodities, or designated surplus food. In 1941, the National Council for Defense recommended extending the program and called it a “vital cog” in the National Defense Plan.⁹ By 1943, the program was abandoned for a variety of reasons, including the fact that Congress had actually never authorized it.



In 1946, the National School Lunch Act was created and defined its purpose in Section 2 of Public Law 396 (PL) “a measure of national security to safeguard the health and well being of the Nation’s children”. This Act followed years of projects in various cities to feed children at school, dating back to an 1853 program by the Children’s Aid Society in New York. Robert Hunter, author in 1904 of the widely read and influential book, Poverty: Social Conscience in the Progressive Era, stated “..learning is difficult because hungry stomachs and languid bodies and thin blood are not able to feed the brain. The

⁹ <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Legislation/timeline.pdf> :1

lack of learning among so many poor children is certainly due, to an important extent, to this cause.”¹⁰ Hunter’s book was extremely powerful and anti-hunger efforts spread notably in New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Milwaukee, in addition to other cities and rural areas.¹¹ When the Works Progress Administration was created in 1935, school lunch was part of the employment program and by 1941 was operating in all states serving nearly 2 million lunches daily.¹²

HAM SHORTCAKE C-11

100 Portions	Ingredients	Portions	Cost
2½ pounds	Table fat		
1 pound 2 ounces	Flour		
1 to 2 tablespoons	Salt		
2½ gallons	Milk, hot		
1 pint	Parsley, chopped coarse		
10 pounds	Ham, cooked, sliced		
18	Eggs, hard-cooked, sliced (used No. C-7)		
Portion: ½ cup.		Total cost.....	
		Cost per portion.....	

U. S. BUREAU OF HUMAN NUTRITION AND HOME ECONOMICS
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1. Melt the fat, add flour and salt, and blend. Cook 3 minutes.

2. Add to milk. Cook, stirring constantly, until thickened.

3. Add parsley, ham, and eggs. Mix and heat thoroughly.

4. Serve on split corn bread, either fresh or toasted.

One day after his inauguration in 1961, John F. Kennedy signed an Executive Order which provided food coupons whose purchase power was greater than their cost. By 1964, Lyndon Johnson was calling the food stamp program (Food Stamp Act of 1964, PL 88-525) part of his “War on Poverty”.¹³ On May 21st, 1968, CBS broadcast “Hunger in America”, an hour long documentary narrated by Charles Kuralt and directed by Edward R. Murrow. This documentary, which later won an Emmy award, provided a close up view of hunger that was a revelation to many Americans and led to special Congressional hearings. Congress eventually authorized an additional \$200 million to fight hunger. Charles Kuralt said of the 30 million Americans who were poor and 10 million who were hungry, “Dessert and meat were like a star, able to be seen, unable to be reached.” The food stamp program of the time required the poor to buy their food stamps. Kuralt continued “Prayer is not what a man wants when he is hungry...a hard time earning means a hard time eating” and the show ended with these words “In this country the most basic need must become the most basic human right.”¹⁴

¹⁰ Hunter, 1965: 217

¹¹ Gunderson, 1971: 5-10

¹² Gunderson, 1971: 16-17

¹³ <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Legislation/timeline.pdf> :2

¹⁴ Berg, 2008



Many Americans were trying to combat hunger in their communities. During the 1960's, a variety of church and mission kitchens throughout the country provided food using the soup kitchen concept. A volunteer at a soup kitchen in Phoenix, Arizona, John Van Hengel, began aggressively gleaning fruits and vegetables from stores and found that due to his success, he had to create storage for the food before it could be used in the kitchen. He then created St. Mary's Warehouse often considered the country's first "food bank".¹⁵

St. Mary's Warehouse concept was inspiring and they received a grant to help set up food banks in other cities, creating a national network, that became Second Harvest and in 1979, formally incorporated as a separate 501c3 organization. The Tax Reform Act of 1976 provided a much needed financial incentive to corporations to donate products to charity. By 1982, Second Harvest was a national organization distributing 15 million pounds of food through a network of 44 food banks and providing training, health and safety inspections and quality control.¹⁶ Food was obtained primarily through relationships with national manufacturers. The local member food banks supplemented these food resources with donations from local manufacturers, wholesalers, retailers, the hospitality industry and with food drives conducted by the public. In 2001, Second Harvest merged with Foodchain, the nation's largest food rescue organization, which focused on recovering prepared and perishable food. In 2008, America's Second Harvest became Feeding America. Feeding America distributes more than 3 billion pounds of food annually to 37 million Americans, including 14 million children and 3 million seniors through its network of 202 member food banks. Today, every single parish and county in the United States is served by a Feeding America food bank.



¹⁵ Poppendieck, 1998: 30

¹⁶ Poppendieck, 1998: 32

The food bank model succeeds not only because it is able to bring national food resources to individuals in need, but also because it has ancillary benefits for government and business. Americans waste between 27%¹⁷ and 40%¹⁸ of all the food that is grown, processed and prepared in this country. Corporations and individuals spend more than \$1 billion disposing of this waste. Increasingly, government and nonprofits have joined forces to end hunger. Since World War II, government has worked with agriculture to protect farmers from food costs that plummet because of overabundance.



In 1977, President Jimmy Carter made a significant change in the food stamp program. For the first time, recipients did not need to purchase their stamps. (PL 95-113, Food and Agriculture Act of 1977). In 1981, President Ronald Reagan won significant cuts in food stamp benefits. However, in the same year, he also authorized the release of surplus dairy products for distribution to needy households with the purpose of reducing federal inventories and storage costs. This initiative became The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) which in 2010 provided 851.6 million pounds of food, or approximately 25% of the food commodities distributed by Feeding America food banks, including Second Harvest Food Bank of Greater New Orleans and Acadiana,.



Here in Louisiana, Second Harvest Food Bank of Greater New Orleans and Acadiana was founded in 1982 by Bishop Morin, Vicar of Community Affairs for the Archdiocese of New Orleans, and Gregory Ben Johnson, Director of the Social Apostolate of the Archdiocese. By 1985, when it joined the Feeding America network, it was distributing more than 1.2 million pounds of food a year. In 1989, it merged with The Food Bank for Emergencies of Greater New Orleans, reemphasizing its commitment to a community-wide approach to fighting hunger. By 2004, Second Harvest was distributing 15 million pounds of food annually to 23 parishes of south Louisiana stretching from the Mississippi

¹⁷ <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/FoodReview/Jan1997/Jan97a.pdf>:3

¹⁸ Bloom, 2010:10

to Texas borders. All Feeding America food banks, including Second Harvest, distribute food through faith-based and nonprofit agency partners, including many neighborhood-based organizations.

Today, some food banks are changing structurally to combine different functions in new ways. This allows them to reach especially vulnerable populations and includes the preparation of meals which are then distributed to specific programs. Types of feeding programs operated by Second Harvest, its partner agencies and other hunger fighting organizations include; the rescue of food from stores and restaurants and then distributing it, the storage of surplus or donated food which is then redistributed, emergency or soup kitchens which prepare food that is eaten on site and food pantries that specialize in distributing unprepared food.

One of every five Louisiana children under 18 is at risk of hunger today and Louisiana has the nation's highest rate of childhood hunger amongst children aged 0-5. The state has the third highest child poverty rate, affecting 28% of all children. In 2010, over 84% of children in New Orleans public schools qualified for school food under the free and reduced meal program.¹⁹ In the summer months, only 13% of these children have access to a feeding program. Many foundations, donors and organizations are working tirelessly to address these issues. There are innovative approaches and thousands of volunteers from around the country to lend a hand. There is also a spirit of collaboration among many non-profits, faith-based groups and charitable foundations to pool their expertise and resources in order to create a greater impact.

In an effort to address the stark realities of hunger in the summertime, the Emeril Lagasse Foundation joined with the City of New Orleans, United Way, Share Our Strength and Second Harvest Food Bank with the shared goal of transforming this picture of summer hunger. Second Harvest pushed the completion of their 8,500 square foot community kitchen to June, 2011, just in time to produce more than 100,000 meals and deliver them to children participating in summer programs at 35 different locations. This new kitchen has the capacity to produce 2,000,000 meals per year and flash freeze perishable foods to enhance the nutritional quality of its prepared meals. Second Harvest provides backpacks of kid-friendly nutritious food to 15 schools and 1,121 school children identified by their principals, teachers and guidance counselors as those most at risk for hunger.

¹⁹ FPAC, 2010, Stepping Up to the Plate: Transforming School Food, http://nolafoodpolicy.org/Transforming_School_Food_Web.pdf



Other exciting new programs supported by the Emeril Lagasse Foundation include the pairing of New Orleans College Prep with Liberty's Kitchen to serve fresh, nutritious school food and Café Reconcile in Central City which trains at-risk youth for jobs in the restaurant industry. The Edible Schoolyard at Samuel J.Green uses a special kitchen classroom and their large garden to provide experiential education, nutrition and cooking programs for students and their families. New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts has just launched a new four year high school culinary arts program. A new social and job skills training project at Café Hope in Marrero operated by Catholic Charities also provides housing for 60 homeless in an atmosphere that allows each family to stay together and eat together at Café Hope.

Second Harvest has become an organization promoting good health, while simultaneously ensuring that all people have access to nutritious food. Second Harvest is working more closely with government to ensure that all eligible people are signed up for SNAP benefits. Programs for adults teach how to stretch food dollars and cook more nutritiously. Fresh fruits and vegetables along with nutrition education are provided to children in Head Start programs. Seniors are supplied with food boxes to help them through the weekend and working with more than 250 partner agencies, mobile pantries of food drive into rural communities. In addition to the summer feeding program, Second Harvest hopes to make available afterschool suppers for students. In all, Second Harvest provides access to more than 20 million meals each year, serving more than 263,000 people, two thirds of them in the Greater New Orleans area.

Beyond all this, Second Harvest now has, through its own research and "Map the Meal Gap" food insecurity data provided by Feeding America, the detailed information required to design strategies to end hunger and to leverage its relationships with the food security community to enable these model programs to be not only delivered, but sustained. The leadership of the New Orleans community and the unique solutions being implemented here post- Katrina, were acknowledged in 2010, when the Community Food Security Coalition chose to have its annual national meeting in New Orleans.

However, we face continued threats to food security in south Louisiana. In 2008, Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, while missing New Orleans, created widespread crop loss and human suffering in south Louisiana. Response to these two storms demonstrated the

weakness of the Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, passed in 1988 as an amendment to the Disaster Relief Act of 1974.²⁰ The “red tape” restrictions in this law, meant to prevent fraud, also prevent the quick dispatch of food assistance and prohibit the use of federal food commodities and disaster SNAP at the same time.



No federal assistance was available after the Deep Horizon oil spill incident of 2010 because that disaster was covered by the Oil Pollution Act of 1990. Tens of thousands of fishers and their families lost their livelihoods overnight and with the long-term environmental impact of the storm yet to be determined, it is not clear how long these families will need assistance, or if they will ever be able to completely recover their former lives. The sustained moratorium on drilling threw even more people out of work, and while that business is slowly coming back online, it will be years before these families can recover what they have lost.



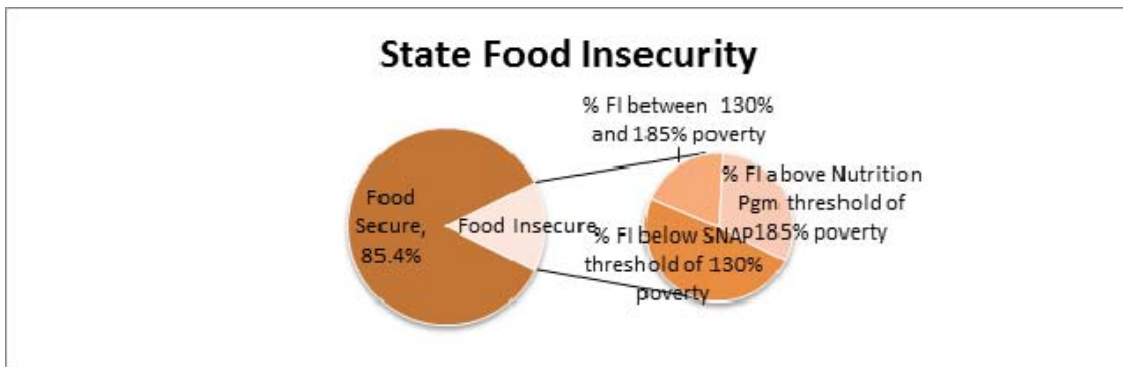
We are looking at a changing and escalating face of hunger in America and Louisiana. Food insecurity is rising in Louisiana, as it is throughout the country, because of the weak economy and high unemployment. Louisiana currently has the second highest poverty rate in the nation. The entire federal food safety net is at risk as the country discusses how to balance its budget and reduce its deficit. In the House version of the federal budget for the year 2012, deep cuts are slated for SNAP, TEFAP, CSFP (Commodity Food Supplemental Program) and other nutrition programs.

Simultaneously, Feeding America food banks have experienced a 46% increase in demand for their services over the last five years, mainly from middle class working families who are seeing their prosperity and their future erode. This “perfect storm” of circumstances is creating a “new face of hunger” as hundreds of thousands of people

²⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stafford_Disaster_Relief_and_Emergency_Assistance_Act

around the country seek emergency food assistance for the first time. In 2009, Feeding America published groundbreaking research which extrapolated the data from the Community Food Security Survey conducted annually by the USDA and combined it with Neilson data about the cost of food. This resulted in an accurate picture of hunger, as it currently exists, at the parish/county level,

The Map the Meal Gap Study shows that 32% of food insecure people in the state of Louisiana have enough income to disqualify them from any federal food assistance programs (\$40,793 for a family of four). This situation exists in households where a wage earner has just lost a job, or seen their hours cut back. They may still have mortgage notes and car payments to make and are trying to find ways to continue to pay for rising costs of food and utilities on their reduced incomes. In fact, in many ways this “new face of hunger” with its erosion of the middle class and increasing inequity in the distribution of wealth, is actually reminiscent of the circumstances present during the Great Depression of the 1930s.



We both feel strongly that the determination, innovation and spirit of collaboration shown by the partner organizations working to end hunger in Louisiana will prevail. There is much that you can do personally to make a difference in food insecurity from volunteering at Second Harvest, preparing food for distribution, donating food at one of the many drop points or food drives, engaging in educational efforts to promote healthy and productive lifestyles, particularly among our youth, and by making your voice heard in regard to legislation and funding at the federal level. In the words of Charles Kuralt, from the CBS Hunger in America program, “In this country, the most basic need must become the most basic human right.”²¹

²¹ CBS News, Hunger in America Report, 5/21/68, narrated by Charles Kuralt, produced by Edward R. Murrow

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Resources for more information:

www.no-hunger.org: The Second Harvest Food Bank of Greater New Orleans and Acadiana Website offers information about Second Harvest Programs, tools for hunger education, and resources for volunteers, donors and member agencies.

www.emeril.org: The Emeril Lagasse Foundation supports non-profit organizations that provide education programs, life skills development, culinary training, and cultural enrichment, creating opportunities in the communities where Emeril's restaurants operate.

www.feedingamerica.org : Feeding America is a national network of local food banks working to connect communities with government, corporate and non-profit partners. The Feeding America Website provides information about hunger and nutrition nationwide, public policy, food bank programs and partners, as well as a variety of educational resources.

www.foodsecurity.org : The Community Food Security Coalition is a group of organizations and individuals working to promote food security on the local, national and international level. Their website contains information about how to do a food system assessment, how to form a food policy council, federal nutrition programs and various institutional buying programs. This is an important resource for anyone trying to support sustainable food systems in their area.

www.whyhunger.org : World Hunger Year is a non-profit dedicated to finding community-based solutions to hunger and poverty. Their website offers information about planning fund-raisers, grass-roots advocacy, food security education, and a variety of resources for groups trying to meet the needs of their communities.

www.thefoodtrust.org : The Food Trust is a Philadelphia-based non-profit working with neighborhoods, school, farmers, grocers and policy-makers to make healthy food available to all. Their website provides support for new food security initiatives, research and policy resources and programmatic information about the innovative solutions that the Food Trust has developed.

www.esynola.org: Edible Schoolyard NOLA changes the way kids eat, learn, and live at FirstLine Schools in New Orleans.

www.foodcorps.org: Food Corps places motivated young leaders in limited-resource communities for a year of public service to give all youth an enduring relationship with healthy food.

www.marketumbrella.org: marketumbrella.org cultivates community markets that utilize local resources to bolster authentic local traditions. We believe that ambitious social, health, environmental and financial goals are achieved if trust and respect are present. We envision communities of market umbrellas, like flowers in the field, opening all over the world for the public good.

www.strength.org: Share Our Strength's goal is to end childhood hunger in America.

www.bread.org: Bread for the World is a collective Christian voice urging our nation's decision makers to end hunger at home and abroad.