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Landmark Study Reveals Large Increase in People Seeking Emergency Food

Mid-Ohio Foodbank reports a 28 percent increase in food requests in Central and Eastern Ohio

Grove City, OH – February 2, 2010 – A landmark study released today by Mid-Ohio Foodbank and Feeding America – the nation's largest domestic hunger-relief organization – reports that more than 248,000 individuals – including 86,975 children and 17,395 seniors – receive emergency food each year through Mid-Ohio Foodbank. These findings represent a 28 percent increase from the results reported in *Hunger in America 2006*. In Mid-Ohio Foodbank's 20 county service territory, in any given week, more than 40,000 people receive emergency food assistance from a food pantry, soup kitchen, or other agency served by the Mid-Ohio Foodbank.

Below are key findings from the report:

CHILDREN

"We know how damaging hunger is for children. It has adverse effects on the physical, behavioral and mental health, and academic performance of children. It is morally reprehensible that any child should go hungry in America," said Matt Habash, president and CEO at Mid-Ohio Foodbank.

- Thirty-five percent of those served by Mid-Ohio Foodbank agencies are children younger than 18 years-old.
- Eight percent of those served are ages five and under.

"We must change this. Our challenge is to respond to these alarming numbers with food to meet the need now and public policies that will end childhood hunger," said Habash.

Across the country, *Hunger in America 2010* shows the significant connection between the recession and the increased need for emergency food assistance. In Mid-Ohio Foodbank's service area, many people report they are struggling with unemployment.

UNEMPLOYMENT

While 35 percent of client households have at least one working adult, 76 percent of adult clients younger than 65 are currently unemployed. Their hardship is evident through difficult choices between food and other basic necessities, and the pressure of healthcare costs.

- **Forty-three percent** of clients have had to decide between making rent or mortgage payments or buying food – 48 percent more than four years ago. **Twenty percent** reported they'd been late paying their rent or mortgage last month.

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- **Fifty-seven percent** of clients reported choosing between utilities and food – 30 percent more than four years ago.
- Forty-one percent of clients are forced to choose between paying for food and paying for medicine or medical care – 60 percent more than four years ago.
- In the same time period, there has been a 33 percent increase in the number of client households that include at least one person in ill health.
- More ominously, 39 percent of clients who are senior citizens—eligible for Medicare—report having to choose between paying for food and paying for medicine or medical care, just to handle expenses not covered by Medicare.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

In the 2009 data, the average household income for the previous year was \$14,500. In the 2005 study, average household income was \$9,510. This tells us that there are a lot of people seeking food assistance *now* who were earning good money just last year. “It’s about your neighbor, someone that’s been laid off in your company, a classmate in your child’s school. It’s people who once donated food, money and volunteer time to help those who needed food assistance,” said Habash.

The data tells us that:

- Eighteen percent of those seeking assistance have been in managerial or professional jobs compared to only nine percent in the 2005 study. That’s a 50 percent increase – telling us that hunger has spread across new demographic groups.
- Seventy-one percent of all clients have finished high school.
- Five percent of clients have completed college or beyond.

FOOD INSECURITY AND POVERTY

The local study finds that 85 percent of all client households are food insecure. In households that include children, 43 percent are experiencing the most severe level of food insecurity – hunger. That’s 39 percent more than four years ago.

Nearly 30 percent of households that include seniors, experience very low food security – hunger.

AMONG OTHER KEY FINDINGS IN THE MID-OHIO FOODBANK REPORT:

- One out of five clients is a homeowner and only five percent is homeless.
- Twenty percent of all adult clients have no private health insurance, nor do they have Medicaid or Medicare.
- Fifty-three percent of client households served by Mid-Ohio Foodbank are receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. In the 2005 report, 49 percent of client households received the benefit. SNAP is the first line of defense against hunger in America.
- Seventy-one percent of client households had incomes below the federal poverty level during the previous month. The average household income during the previous month was \$1,000, and the average client household size was 2.8. The 2009 poverty level for a family of three is \$1,526 per month. Families that use the emergency feeding system in central and eastern Ohio are trying to get by on less than two-thirds of what the federal government considers impoverished. In 2008, 1.5 million Ohioans lived below the Federal Poverty Level. Ohio’s poverty rate of 13.7 percent in 2008 is the highest since the 14.1 percent rate in 1994.

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- Seven percent of clients at our agencies are over 65 years of age.
- Sixty percent of adult clients are women.

GROWING NEED REPORTED AT AGENCIES

Both nationally and in the local report, *Hunger in America* illustrates the rapidly increasing need for food assistance. The dramatic increases are confirmed by Mid-Ohio Foodbank's network of partner agencies with 86 percent of food pantries, 75 percent of kitchens, and 71 percent of shelters indicating that they serve more clients now than they did in 2006. They express concerns about the future, with 61 percent of food pantries, 58 percent of soup kitchens and 84 percent of emergency shelters reporting that they are facing one or more problems that threaten their ability to continue operating. Most commonly cited were shortages of funds and food.

Results from agency surveys indicate that there is a dedicated, passionate group of people who are highly invested in hunger relief in Mid-Ohio Foodbank's service area. Volunteers are the backbone of the emergency feeding our system. Without them the system would collapse.

- As many as 97 percent of pantries, 93 percent of kitchens and 79 percent of shelters depend on volunteers. 73 percent of pantries and 60 percent of kitchens are operated entirely by volunteers.
- Sixty-four percent of agencies are run by faith-based agencies affiliated with churches, mosques, synagogues and other religious organizations.

METHODOLOGY

Nationally, MATHEMATICA Policy Research collected quantitative and qualitative feedback from 61,000 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. The methodology incorporated into the 2010 study includes data collected from February through June, 2009. Mid-Ohio Foodbank conducted face-to-face interviews with 602 people seeking emergency food at food pantries, soup kitchens and other emergency feeding programs. MATHEMATICA Policy Research collected data from 399 feeding agencies in Mid-Ohio Foodbank's service territory. The full national report is available on Feeding America's web site at <http://www.feedingamerica.org/hungerstudy>.

About Mid-Ohio Foodbank

Mid-Ohio Foodbank provides food to hundreds of thousands of hungry Ohioans each year by partnering with more than 500 emergency feeding sites across central and eastern Ohio, including food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, senior centers, and after-school programs. For 30 years, the Foodbank has been dedicated to feeding hungry people by collecting and distributing food and grocery products, advocating for hunger-relief programs, and collaborating with others who address basic human needs. In 2009, the Foodbank distributed 33.9 million pounds of food and grocery products to their partner charities. Mid-Ohio Foodbank is a member of Feeding America, the nation's largest domestic hunger-relief charity. For more information or to donate, visit www.midohiofoodbank.org. Find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/midohiofoodbank or follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/Mid_OHfoodbank.

About Feeding America

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/FeedingAmerica or follow our news on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/Feedingamerica>.

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