



## HUNGER IN THE INLAND REGION

Inland families struggle with food insecurity

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California has the highest poverty rate in the nation as evidenced by the U. S. Census Bureau's most recent Supplemental Poverty Measure which showed nearly one in five of the state's residents live in poverty. The nation's Supplemental Poverty Measure weighs a number of factors including the cost of housing, utilities, food and clothing. It also counts any noncash government assistance as a form of income.

California is currently home to 12 percent of the nation's population and boasts a Gross Domestic Product, that economists report, increased at a rate double the national average during the five-year period which ended in 2016; yet, the state is home to nearly one in three of America's welfare recipients.

Despite the level of welfare enrollment and improving employment numbers, food insecurity defined as the lack of access to enough healthy

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**“...tonight, thousands of your neighbors will go to bed hungry. It may be your child’s schoolmate who is undernourished and has difficulty learning on an empty stomach. Or it could be a co-worker, a working mother whose low-wage job doesn’t make ends meet. Perhaps it’s an elderly neighbor who has to make a decision whether to delay filling a prescription or buying groceries. The faces of hunger are as broad as the faces of America.”**

**- David Nasby, General Mills**

food for all members of a household, has continued to persist. A new report by the domestic hunger relief organization Feeding America, provided information on food insecurity based on the most recent data available.

According to the report, in 2016, more than 227,000 Riverside County residents or 9.8 percent of the population were food insecure. The impact in San Bernardino County was even greater, nearly 10.4 percent of the population or nearly 219,000 residents experienced food insecurity.

As a point of clarity, it is important to note food insecure households are not necessarily food insecure all the time. In a number of instances, these households find themselves making trade-offs and those trade-offs can vary. In some case, families forego paying bills or filling prescriptions or are forced to choose meals with little or no nutritional value. The choices are difficult and impacting. For example, a former Riverside County resident named Dell who was also a senior and is now deceased, at times, would choose between food and her medication. This hard choice is not uncommon for a number of seniors.

One of the ways food insecurity can be mitigated for many low-income individuals and families is through the nation’s food stamp program, called CalFresh here in California. Unfortunately, only about 70 percent of those eligible in the state are actually enrolled compared to the national enrollment average of 83 percent. As a result, California has one of the lowest levels of food stamp program participation in the nation.

The encouraging news is although the level of statewide participation in CalFresh sits at 70 percent this number reflects a four percent improvement from the 66 percent participation previously reported.

Kim McCoy Wade, Chief, CalFresh Branch of the California Department

of Social Services recently told Kaiser Health News, the low level of participation in California’s food stamp program may be partly attributed to what she described as a less-than-optimal quality of customer service and a bulky bureaucracy.

San Bernardino County has taken an innovative approach to addressing this issue. It has placed self-service kiosks at the entrances to its county offices. It is staffed with county employees who help people enroll in CalFresh if they qualify and are interested.

California is also looking to its successful enrollment of low income residents in the Affordable Care Act to serve as a model for reducing food insecurity through CalFresh enrollment. “We are taking the successes from the Affordable Care Act and are turning to our next-biggest program and trying to apply those lessons,” McCoy Wade told Kaiser Health News. “The Medi-Cal-CalFresh connection is something where we think there is a lot of room to grow.”

Those who rely on these programs have expanded beyond the jobless, children and the elderly to encompass more and more of the nation’s working class. Consider that at least sixty percent of non-elderly individuals who rely on food stamps actually belong to households where at least one adult is working in contrast to the age-old-myth of the so-called “welfare queen.”

Many families and individuals are trapped in the food insecurity syndrome experienced by the working poor due to the suppression in wages that has spanned decades. In 2016, when the California legislature passed

an increase to the minimum wage from \$10 to \$15 an hour by 2022, it was a long overdue adjustment. Also, as experts have noted, had wages kept pace with the level of increased productivity experienced in recent decades, minimum-wage-workers would already be making over more

than \$18 an hour.

Another factor to be considered in this scenario is the role played by corporations like WalMart for example, who give generously to local nonprofits through contributions that can include food, cash and/or volunteer hours, yet purportedly because they pay their workers such low wages, some of their very own employees are served by the nonprofit agencies such corporations support.

Stalled wages have produced a class of working poor who are living at the margins in the inland region and left many of them dependent on social support programs like CalFresh. However, much of the heavy lifting locally in this regard is facilitated by the region’s nonprofits including the area’s local food bank, Feeding America of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties (FARSB).

In an interview with The Voice/Black Voice News, Stuart Haniff, Chief Philanthropy Officer at FARSB reported, “Over 400,000 people in the I.E. rely on the food bank’s food supply each month to help supplement their food shortage.” Despite this need, the organization’s ability to meet demand has been negatively impacted during the previous year.

According to Haniff, FARSB has experienced an overall decline in local donations, grants and corporate support which could mean less food going into the community to those who need it the most. He noted, “With political turmoil, devastating hurricanes, disastrous mudslides, and heart-breaking shootings, our entire Nation seemed to be in need and frankly, people didn’t know who to help or where to donate.”

In addition to this turmoil and despite the improving economy, too many people in the inland region still do not have enough food to eat. As Haniff explained, “One in eight Inland Empire residents are food insecure, including one in four children.” He further stressed how these numbers grew as a result of the Great Recession which produced increased disparities and high unemployment.

Also, according to Haniff, this region has also been among the slowest to recover. He further noted that due to size of the region, it is just not possible to reach all of the 800k residents in need. “We can provide food for half that number. Through that network, we provide food to 400k per month.”

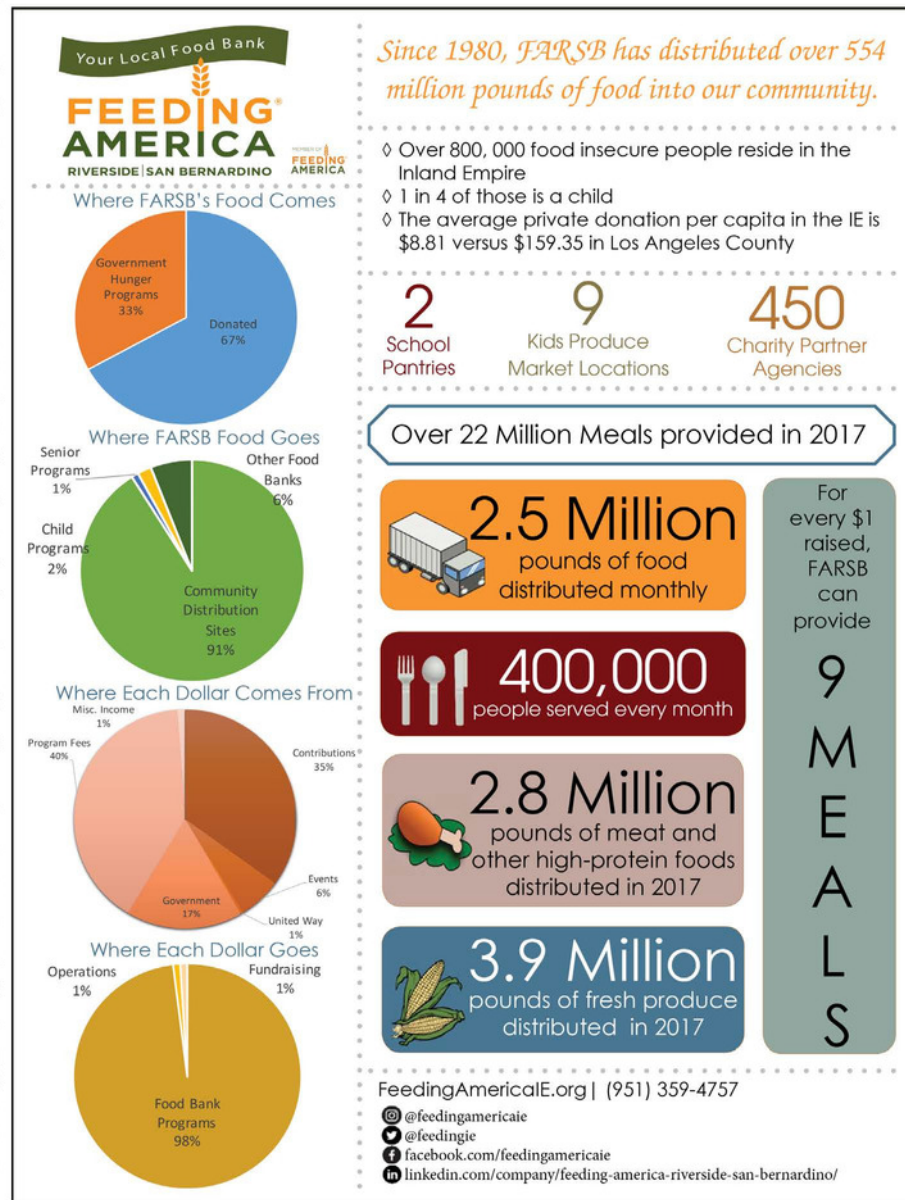
Haniff offered a compelling description of the changing face of hunger in the inland region. “We are finding a great shift in the population of those in need,” he stressed as he noted how it is no longer just the face of the homeless. “A lot of people in need are students, seniors and the working poor—many who are working two, three or even four jobs.”

Haniff and his team are spreading awareness within the community that although FARSB has a large and highly recognizable brand in its name, it does not receive its funding from the well-known national organization, Feeding America. “We are solely funded and operated through the donations and support of donors, corporations, and funders who live in the Inland Empire.”

In an effort to increase the organization’s visibility in the region and brand itself as unique from the national organization, FARSB has embraced a theme of “Give Where You Live.” It is the agency’s hope this will encourage increased local donations.

Haniff concluded, “The food bank is being resourceful and has confidence that once the community realizes the impact local nonprofit organizations like FARSB have experienced this past year, the community will join together to Give Where They Live.” This will help FARSB continue its efforts to build a better tomorrow for those most in need throughout the Inland Empire.

To contribute to the hunger-relief efforts of FARSB and/or to volunteer, visit their website at [www.FeedingIE.org](http://www.FeedingIE.org) or call (951) 359-4757 and ask for extension 109.



[FeedingAmericaIE.org](http://FeedingAmericaIE.org) | 951-359-4757

**WHO IS AT RISK FOR HUNGER?**

- An average of 18.75% (over 800,000) of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties live below poverty level.
- 1 in 4 children (over 300,000) in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties is at risk.

**WHOM DOES THE FOOD BANK SERVE?**

- Over 425,000 individuals, including children, families, seniors and veterans are assisted each month in the Inland Empire.
- 2.5 million pounds of food is distributed each month.

**HOW YOUR DONATION IS SPENT:**

- 98¢ of every \$1 raised goes directly to food and programs.
- For every \$1 donated, the food bank can distribute 9 meals.

Our Mission is to Alleviate Hunger in the Inland Empire.

