



Feeding Opportunity

Ending Child Hunger Furthers the Goal of Cutting U.S. Poverty
in Half over the Next Decade

Joel Berg May 2010

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Contents

1 Introduction and summary

4 Child hunger in America today

- 4 Child hunger by the numbers
- 6 Characteristics of food insecure households

9 Hunger impairs children's ability to escape poverty

- 9 Prenatal and infancy
- 10 Childhood and adolescence
- 12 Parenting

14 Three reasons all Americans should care about ending child hunger

- 14 Reason one: Hunger hurts the economy
- 15 Reason two: Hunger could affect any of us at some point
- 15 Reason three: Hunger contributes to obesity

17 How the federal nutrition safety net ended starvation-like conditions

19 Strategies to end U.S. child hunger

- 20 Put an adequate down payment on ending childhood hunger
- 20 Reduce the school meals bureaucracy
- 24 Expand access to school breakfasts
- 27 Improve and expand access to other food programs
- 28 Encourage state innovations
- 28 Reduce poverty

30 Conclusion: We *can* solve child hunger

32 Endnotes

34 About the author and acknowledgments

Introduction and summary

Even before the worst of the current economic downturn, child hunger was a serious problem in the United States. In 2008, 16.6 million American children—more than one in five—lived in homes that couldn't afford enough food for their families.¹ The Great Recession has only made matters worse.

Child hunger in the world's wealthiest nation is not only morally unacceptable, but it costs the U.S. economy at least \$28 billion per year because poorly nourished children perform less well in school and require far more long-term health care spending.² Further, food insufficiency severely hampers children's emotional, intellectual, and physical development, and it strongly hinders the upward mobility of their parents.

President Barack Obama and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, or USDA, have set a national goal of ending childhood hunger by 2015. Reaching this goal is critical to cutting poverty in half in 10 years, which is the primary aim of the Half In Ten Campaign, a partnership among the Center for American Progress Action Fund, the Coalition on Human Needs, and the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. Poverty and hunger are interrelated problems, and the steps we take to eradicate child hunger will ultimately lay a solid foundation for realizing the ambitious but achievable poverty reduction target. Likewise, limiting poverty will reduce hunger and make it far less expensive for the nation to end hunger entirely.

CAP's recent paper, "Doing What Works to End U.S. Hunger: Federal Programs Are Effective, but Can Work Even Better," pointed out that due to \$21 billion in additional antihunger spending that was included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009—the federal stimulus—there is significantly less hunger and food insecurity in America today than there otherwise would have been. Most of this spending went to the SNAP-Food Stamps Program. Since nearly half of all SNAP-Food Stamp recipients are children, one step necessary in reaching the 2015 goal would be to preserve nutrition policies that proved so successful in the Recovery Act.

But we can also build on the success of these provisions. All major federal child nutrition programs are set to be reauthorized by Congress this year by a bill usually referred to as the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act—the Senate version of which is now named, somewhat optimistically, the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010. This bill provides one of the most effective vehicles to reach the 2015 hunger elimination goal and help the nation achieve First Lady Michelle Obama’s goal of dramatically reducing obesity in America.

This paper will discuss child hunger in America, how it functions as both a cause and effect of poverty, and the significant policy reforms Congress can take this year in the child nutrition programs to make a significant down payment on ending child hunger and fighting poverty. The paper argues that to end child hunger federal child nutrition programs will need at least an additional \$4 billion each year, and the nation will also have to strengthen other income and work support programs to tackle the root cause of hunger: not having enough income to purchase nutritious food for your family.

President Obama’s fiscal year 2011 budget proposal includes \$1 billion extra per year for 10 years for the child nutrition bill as a serious down payment on ending child hunger. Congress must invest at least as much as the president’s request in the child nutrition bill to make significant progress, and it will need to undertake other efforts to create jobs and enhance work supports for low-income families.

The paper further argues that to end child hunger by 2015 the government must not only spend more money but make child nutrition programs even smarter through:

- **Reducing paperwork and bureaucracy.** An estimated \$1 billion in tax dollars at the federal, state, and school district levels is spent each year solely on collecting and submitting required forms and daily meal counts for the school meals program (free, reduced-price, and full-price lunch and breakfast). Cutting this paperwork and simplifying applications could save a vast amount of money. And if the money saved were to be pumped back into feeding more children and making meals healthier that would help achieve both the hunger and obesity reduction goals.
- **Expanding access to school breakfasts.** I have previously argued that universal meals should be provided to all students. But policymakers’ concerns about the federal budget may delay such a goal. During this current reauthorization process, therefore, Congress should at a minimum make it a national priority to

provide free, universal, nutritious breakfast to every student in a Title I school, which are those schools with the highest concentrations of poverty in the country. This would eliminate the costs and stigma associated with unnecessary paperwork for these programs and provide each child the opportunity to begin each school day with the fuel needed for effective learning.

- **Improve and expand access to other meal programs.** Children are in school 180 class days out of a 365-day year, and if every student received a nutritious school breakfast and lunch every day that would still equal only about 360 meals out of the 1,095 a child needs to eat each year. We must ensure that more children participate in summer meals, after-school meals, and supper programs so that they get the food they need.
- **Rewarding states for improved performance in reducing child hunger,** USDA should be authorized and funded to provide cash grants to governors to support innovative and effective state efforts such as reducing paperwork in the SNAP-Food Stamp program, serving breakfasts in first period classrooms, or reducing the poverty that causes hunger.

These steps will also have the added benefit of reducing child obesity if they are implemented appropriately with an eye toward making available meals healthier. Ultimately, this would improve children's quality of life throughout their lifetime while also decreasing the amount of money the nation spends on health care and other costs. Taking simple and cost-effective measures could end child hunger in America, and they would be an important down payment toward the Half in Ten Campaign's goal of cutting U.S. poverty in half within a decade.

Child hunger in America today

The USDA didn't start publishing statistics on the extent of hunger and "food insecurity" in America until 1995. It used data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau to assemble the report. The report has since been issued every year, and though the timing of its annual release and some of its terminology have changed somewhat over time due to political and other considerations the study's basic methodology has stayed mostly the same, which allows the United States to have its first true annual indication of falling or rising hunger.

Some of the report's terminology is admittedly bureaucratic, academic, and just plain awkward. "Food insecure" households are "at times, uncertain of having, or unable to acquire, enough food for all household members because they had insufficient money and other resources for food."³ The most extreme cases of food insecurity are labeled as having "very low food security" or hunger. These families have "the uneasy or painful sensation caused by a recurrent or involuntary lack of food." Families that are food insecure but not experiencing the extreme of hunger may occasionally skip meals, reduce portion sizes, buy more filling but less nutritious foods, or worry about where they will get their next meal even if they are currently not going long periods of time with no food at all. Yet even those children experiencing this less severe form of food insecurity suffer from very significant physical and emotional impacts.

Child hunger by the numbers

In 2008, 16.6 million children lived in food insecure households—the equivalent of one in six American households. This is truly a startling statistic, and as Figure 1 shows there have been some jumps during different periods over the last decade.⁴ The U.S. government has only measured child hunger annually since 1998, but even since then we can see some changes. As the Great Recession began, for example, it is evident that poverty soared while food prices remained high, and

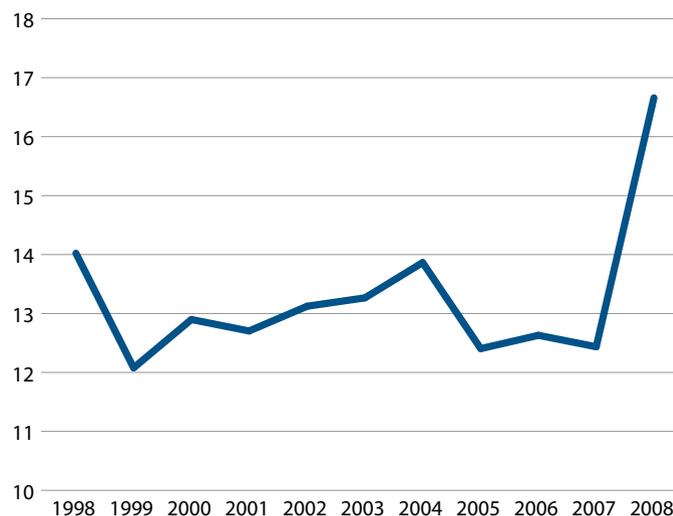
the number of children in food insecure households accordingly increased by 4 million in 2008 (see Figures 1 and 2).

It is important, however, to move beyond the statistics to understand what life is actually like for these families. When a household experiences food insecurity some time during the year it does not mean that the household was on the brink of hunger daily throughout the year. Families usually suffer from hunger only sporadically during the year or at certain points in each month such as near the end of the month when their benefits run out. Typically, households classified as having very low food security experience that condition in seven or eight months of the year for a few days in each of those months.

Further, just because families are designated as food insecure does not mean that everyone in each of those households goes hungry. Often parents go hungry themselves but make sure to feed their children or elderly parents. Additionally, most children have access to government-subsidized school lunches on school days, and an increasing number obtain school breakfasts and after-school snacks.

FIGURE 1
More children go hungry in the Great Recession

Number of U.S. children in households with any type of food insecurity, 1998-2008



Source: USDA Economic Research Service.

FIGURE 2
The Great Recession and increases in food insecurity

Food insecurity among U.S. households with children, 2007 and 2008

Food insecurity among U.S. households with children	2007	2008
Number of households with children with any level of food insecurity	6.2 million	8.3 million
Percentage of households with children with any level of food insecurity	15.8%	21.0%
Number of households with children with very low food security	323,000	506,000
Percentage of households with children with very low food security	.8 %	1.3%
Number of children living in households with children with any level of food insecurity	12.4 million	16.6 million
Percentage of children living in households with children with any level of food insecurity	16.9%	22.5%
Number of children living in households with children with very low food security	691,000	1.1 million
Percentage of children living in households with children with very low food security	.9%	1.5%

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service

That is why a far smaller number of children than adults suffer from hunger. There were 506,000 households in 2008—57 percent more than in 2007—in which children suffered from very low food security or hunger at some point during the year.⁵ This is an unconscionably high number, but some pundits—few of whom have ever experienced hunger themselves or even see it in their daily lives—claim it is small and point out that this figure is less than 1 percent of all U.S. children.

Characteristics of food insecure households

Food insecure families do not fit common stereotypes of people in need of assistance. They represent varied income levels, employment statuses, and geographic regions.

Varied incomes

Many children suffering from hunger and food insecurity are poor, but an increasing share lives in families with incomes above the meager federal poverty line. The USDA recently published the most comprehensive examination of American children who directly suffer from food insecurity and very low food security-hunger, based on 2007 data. The report's results tell us a great deal even though the data reflect the year before the broader economic downturn.

For instance, 42 percent of families with children who were food insecure earned incomes below the poverty line (up to \$17,170 for a family of three), 10 percent were between 100 to 130 percent of the poverty line (up to \$22,321 for a family of three), and 6 percent had incomes of 130 to 185 percent of the federal poverty line (up to \$31,764 for a family of three). A startling 21 percent earned incomes above 185 percent of the poverty line (above \$31,764 for a family of three). Eleven percent did not report their incomes.⁶

The current federal poverty line is based on an outdated formula calculated solely by food prices and does not take into account costs for housing, health care, child care, fuel, and transportation, among other things. As a result, many Americans who live somewhat above the official poverty line have so much trouble affording basic expenses that they live in seriously impoverished conditions, which explains how even people not formally “in poverty” can still have trouble affording food. This is especially the case in parts of the nation with particularly high living expenses.

Unfortunately, our current public benefits system fails to serve families at these varying income levels. If a family earned merely \$22,321 or more—as did 47 percent of all households in 2007 with children suffering from food insecurity—they would earn too much in most states to receive either SNAP-Food Stamp benefits or free school meals. If they earned \$31,764—as did 21 percent of all families with food insecure children—they would be “too rich” to receive either reduced-price school meals or WIC benefits, which provide food packages specifically tailored to nutritionally at-risk pregnant woman and small children.

Simply put, nearly one-quarter of all American children who don’t have enough food live in households supposedly too wealthy to receive any government nutrition assistance at all.

But even those families who do receive federal nutrition assistance are not always protected from hunger. Thirty-two percent of all households receiving both subsidized school meals and SNAP-Food Stamp benefits had children who were food insecure because school meals don’t cover nights, weekends, and summer and because SNAP-Food Stamp allotments are too meager to meet the full food needs of most families.

Work status and family structure

A significant percentage of food insecure households represent the working poor and two-parent families. Consider the following 2007 data in Figure 3:

FIGURE 3
Food insecure households don’t fit work and family stereotypes

Percentage of households with food insecurity by work status and family structure, 2007

Percent of households with food insecurity	
Work status	
At least one working adult	85%
At least one full-time working adult	68%
Unemployed, looking for work	5%
Disabled, out of the labor force	8%
Able bodied, neither working or looking for work	7%
Family structure	
Two-parent families	42%
One to two children	72%

Source: Mark Nord, “Food Insecurity in Households with Children: Prevalence, Severity, and Household Characteristics” (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service: Economic Information Bulletin Number 65, 2009).

The belief that many children are going hungry due to the alleged irresponsibility of parents is thus proven false. The working poor population's size and the barriers they face are the reasons why Half in Ten, the National Anti-Hunger Organizations, and the Food Research and Action Center all call for the creation of good jobs, work supports, and a bump in the minimum wage as complementary measures to achieve the goals of ending child hunger and halving poverty over 10 years.

Varied geographic locations

Child hunger defies geographical stereotyping as well. Hunger is highest per capita in cities and in rural areas as we would expect. But 35 percent of households in which children directly suffer from food insecurity are in suburbs or exurbs, which were not too long ago bastions of middle- and upper-class comfort.⁷ And even though the Southeast has the greatest share of the hungry population, the Midwest, West, and Northeast are also affected.

Texas had the highest average rates of hunger in households with children from 2001 to 2007 with 21.5 percent suffering from food insecurity and 12.6 percent of those households having at least one child who directly suffered from food insecurity or hunger. New Hampshire had the lowest average rates of child hunger in 2007 with 10.1 percent of households with children having at least one person suffering from food insecurity and 4.8 percent of those households having at least one child experiencing hunger or food insecurity. Yet even in New Hampshire, 1 out of 10 households with children were food insecure and 1 out of 20 experienced child hunger—rates that likely far exceed those of most other developed nations.

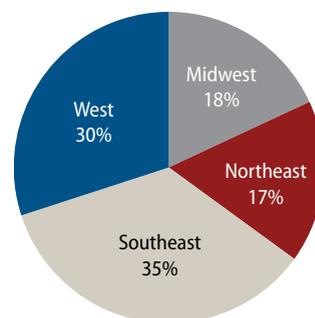
A joint U.S.-Canadian study helps give those numbers some perspective. When comparing the United States as a whole—including states with relatively low food insecurity—to Canada, among households with children the rate of adult food insecurity in the United States was nearly twice that in Canada.⁸

Differential impact according to race

Food insecurity is especially prevalent among African-American and Latino households, and female-headed households. Food insecurity affected 14.6 percent of households overall in 2008, but that portion was 25.7 percent for blacks, 26.9 percent for Latinos, and 37.2 percent for single mother-headed households. The situation almost certainly worsened this year.

FIGURE 4
Every region sees child hunger

U.S. households with very low food security among children, 2007



Source: Mark Nord, "Food Insecurity in Households with Children: Prevalence, Severity, and Household Characteristics" (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service: Economic Information Bulletin Number 65, 2009).

Hunger impairs children’s ability to escape poverty

The main cause of hunger is poverty. Yet hunger makes it difficult for children to escape poverty, creating a cruel trap. What’s more, researchers have produced vast amounts of data in recent decades proving that hunger and food insecurity directly harm children at each stage of their development while also erecting barriers to effective parenting. Hunger impairs physical growth and health, saps energy, and makes it impossible to concentrate, thereby compromising performance at school and home. Even children in families that struggle to put food on the table but manage to usually escape outright hunger suffer serious physical and emotional damage. All those factors then fuel feelings of despair and inadequacy among both children and parents

Prenatal and infancy

The Nutrition-Cognition National Advisory Committee—a panel comprised of doctors, nutritionists, and other experts on the effects of hunger—concluded in 1998 that problems with poor nutrition start even before birth, and pregnant women who are undernourished are more likely to have low birth weight babies. These infants are also more likely to suffer developmental delays and birth defects along with other health risks common to low birth weight babies. Permanent cognitive deficiencies associated with smaller head circumference in very low birth weight infants may reflect diminished brain growth. Finally, malnourished mothers are more prone to develop micronutrient deficiencies—the lack of specific vitamins and minerals—even if they have adequate maternal weight gain in pregnancy. These can have devastating consequences including an increased risk of neural tube defects such as spina bifida, which can result in a lifetime of spinal chord problems, in children.”⁹

Childhood and adolescence

Food insecure children experience a broad range of problems that affect their health, development, well-being, and ultimately their school performance.

Thirteen studies on child health and development outcomes associated with food insecurity and food insufficiency find the following conditions to be more likely for children in food insecure or food insufficient households than for children in otherwise similar food secure households:¹⁰

- Poorer health of children, as reported by parents
- More stomach aches, frequent headaches, and colds among children
- Higher hospitalization rates of young children
- Iron deficiency anemia in young children
- Behavioral problems in 3-year-olds
- Lower physical function in children ages 3 to 8
- Poorer psychosocial function and psychosocial development in school-age children
- Higher rates of depressive disorder and suicidal symptoms in adolescents
- More anxiety and depression in school-age children
- Higher numbers of chronic health conditions in children
- More “internalizing” problems in children, which makes it more difficult for them to develop the beliefs, attitudes, and values necessary for acceptable behavior
- Lower math achievement and other achievement gains in kindergarteners
- Lower math and reading gains from kindergarten to third grade
- Lower arithmetic scores

One pediatrician puts it this way:

Child hunger is a health issue, a very serious one. My kids [at the clinic] don't have AIDS but they function as if they did. The difference is that their immune system was fine until they become malnourished. Now they just continue to decline and decline.¹¹

A study at urban medical centers in five states and the District of Columbia finds that food insecure children have odds of “fair or poor health” nearly twice as great than food secure children and odds of being hospitalized since birth almost a third larger.⁸

Physical and mental health

Moving beyond physical health concerns, one study finds that food insecurity is associated with increased mental illness and behavioral problems among children:

Hungry children were three times more likely than at-risk for hunger children and seven times more likely than not hungry children to receive scores indicative of clinical dysfunction... The same pattern of at least doubling of risk was found for other indicators of psychosocial dysfunction like special education and repeating a grade... Hungry children were seven to 12 times more likely to exhibit symptoms of conduct disorder than not hungry children.¹²

Children experience a direct physical and psychological impact due to nutrient deprivation, but simply knowing that your family faces hunger—even if your parents take great pains to feed you before they feed themselves, as is often the case—can take its toll. One study finds:

Children as young as 11 could describe behaviors associated with food insecurity if they had experienced it directly or indirectly... Psychological aspects included worry/anxiety/sadness about the family food supply, feelings of having no choice in the foods eaten, shame/fear of being labeled as poor, and attempts to shield children. Social aspects of food insecurity centered on using social networks to acquire food or money and social exclusion.¹³

As children move into adolescence, a lack of food continues to be devastating. One study finds that simply being poor doesn't make teenagers more suicidal than those who are not poor, but being hungry or food insecure is associated with a greater likelihood for thoughts about death, a desire to die, and suicide attempts.¹⁴

Academic performance

Hunger and food insecurity also affects educational performance. Comedian and activist Dick Gregory explains what it's like for a child to be hungry in school:

The teacher thought I was stupid. Couldn't spell, couldn't read, couldn't do arithmetic, just stupid... Teachers were never interested in finding out that you couldn't concentrate because you were so hungry. All you could ever think about was noontime, would it ever come? Maybe you could sneak into the cloakroom

*and steal a bite of some kid's lunch out of a coat pocket to bite on something. Paste. You couldn't really make a meal of paste, or put it on bread for a sandwich, but sometimes I'd scoop a few spoonfuls out of the paste jar in the back of the room... Paste doesn't taste too bad when you're hungry.*¹⁵

The Nutrition-Cognition National Advisory Committee described the challenges this way:

*Undernutrition impacts the behavior of children, their school performance, and their overall cognitive development... Undernourished children decrease their activity levels and become more apathetic. This in turn affects their social interactions, inquisitiveness, and overall cognitive functioning. Even nutritional deficiencies of a relatively short-term nature influence children's behavior, ability to concentrate, and to perform complex tasks...[Child hunger] is capable of producing progressive handicaps—impairments which can remain throughout life.... By robbing children of their natural human potential, undernutrition results in lost knowledge, brainpower and productivity for the nation. The longer and more severe the malnutrition, the greater the likely loss and the greater the cost to our country.*¹⁶

Hunger's harm to educational performance is so well known among educators that schools that don't regularly provide breakfasts to their students are sure to do so on test days because they understand that good nutrition boosts scores.

Parenting

Hunger also makes it more difficult to be a good parent. Food insecure parents have higher rates of depression and more significant stress, and this obviously affects their parenting.¹⁷ One study finds that the percentage of mothers with either major depressive episodes or generalized anxiety disorder increases with increasing food insecurity.¹⁸ And an Oregon study finds that “adults in food insecure households were more than twice as likely to suffer depression as adults in households with adequate food.”¹⁹ One study in large cities also reveals a vicious cycle: Food insecurity makes women more depressed, but because they are more depressed they are less able to take the steps necessary to end their food insecurity.²⁰

For parents, food insecurity and hunger are also closely tied to poor health. Only 11 percent of the 37 million Americans who used food pantries, soup kitchens, and

homeless shelters in 2009 reported that their health was “excellent” compared to 16 percent who said their health was “poor” and 30 percent who said their health was only “fair.” Worse, even though this population is low income and should often be eligible for Medicaid or Child Health Plus—a special health insurance program for children in families at the edge of poverty—fully 21 percent of all the adults who obtain food from these emergency programs nationwide report that they have no health insurance. Forty-one percent of the food recipients further report unpaid hospital and medical bills, and nearly 1 in 10 clients report that they have been refused medical care because they could not pay or because they had a Medicaid or Medical Assistance card during the previous 12 months.²¹

All of hunger’s ill effects inhibit parents’ ability to make a living. Finding and keeping a job is hard enough—it is even harder on an empty stomach. It’s no wonder that hunger is so harmful to worker productivity. Nobel Prize-winning economist Robert Fogel estimates that 20 percent of the population in England and France was effectively excluded from the labor force around 1790 because they were too weak and hungry to work. He calculates that improved nutrition accounted for about half of Britain and France’s economic growth between 1790 and 1880. As a result, he points out that hungry people cannot work their way out of poverty.²² A study on women in large cities finds that “food secure women tended to have better employment and income outcomes than food insecure women, and they also tended to be less socially isolated.”²³

There’s no question that physically and emotionally unhealthy parents struggle to provide children with the care and attention they need. And since these issues make it difficult to obtain and maintain employment parents are also unable to adequately provide for their children economically. These factors limit children’s ability to immediately escape poverty, but they also affect the parent’s poverty.

In sum, hunger makes it harder for children to learn and for parents to parent. It causes frustration and hopelessness. It makes it nearly impossible for sick people to get well. And it drives a cycle of poverty that traps more and more people in this country every year.

The good news is ending hunger is an achievable goal that can help to break that cycle, offering families the fighting chance we all deserve and moving us toward ending poverty in America. What’s more, every American should care about this issue because its effects reach beyond the families it immediately harms, as the next section explains.

Three reasons all Americans should care about ending child hunger

The United States has almost 49 million food insecure residents, but its overall population is almost 309 million people. This means that 260 million Americans or about 84 percent of the population have enough food. So why should that 84 percent of Americans care? Having compassion for their fellow Americans and a desire to end poverty are good enough reasons. But there are three other significant reasons they should.

Reason one: Hunger hurts the economy

America's high prevalence of food insecurity damages our economy and international competitiveness by increasing our nation's spending on health care and reducing our productivity and educational performance. Hungry children can't learn as well, hungry workers can't work as effectively, and malnourished adults have many diet-related diseases. All these problems add up to vast economic costs to our society. A 2007 study written by Dr. J. Larry Brown and others from the Harvard School of Public Health that included all these factors concludes:

The cost burden of hunger in the United States is a minimum of \$90 billion annually [mainly due to physical and mental health costs, but this figure also accounts for impacts on education services and worker productivity as well as the costs of delivering foods through charitable avenues]. This means that on average each person living in the US pays \$300 annually for the hunger bill. On a household basis this cost is \$800 a year. And calculated on a lifetime basis, each of us pays a \$22,000 tax for the existence of hunger. And because the \$90 billion cost figure is based on a cautious methodology, we anticipate that the actual cost of hunger and food insecurity to the nation is higher.²⁴

Since there's been a massive increase in food insecurity since then I have used that data to estimate that domestic hunger's cost to our economy now likely exceeds \$126 billion annually. Dr. Brown has written that "extrapolations from (the

report's data) data suggest that **our nation pays at least \$28-\$34 billion a year for the negative impact of hunger among children alone.**²⁵

Again, this figure is likely much higher today.

Like a skyscraper, the national economy is only as strong as its foundation. Therefore, ensuring a brighter future for America includes empowering and enabling all its citizens to succeed and contribute. Even Henry Ford—who was not a progressive—understood that workers needed to be paid well enough at least to buy his cars. The entire economy is significantly weighed down when large numbers of people are too poor and too hungry to purchase goods and services or to be as innovative or productive as they can and should be.

Reason two: Hunger could affect any of us at some point

Many people who face hunger are poor or near poor their entire lives, but many Americans who are now middle class may still face hunger themselves someday. Job losses, divorces, bad mortgages, illnesses, and plain bad luck often contribute to a sudden drop in financial well-being, particularly if significant debt and limited assets accompany the new problems (as is the case with many middle-class Americans today). In fact, half of all U.S. children will receive SNAP-Food Stamp benefits sometime before their 18th birthday.²⁶

So another reason to worry about the nation's hunger problem is that the crisis might someday be your own.

Reason three: Hunger contributes to obesity

Obesity is a growing problem in America. Fully 34 percent of U.S. adults and 17 percent of adolescents are overweight.²⁷ Yet not only does hunger exist in America despite obesity, and people are frequently both obese and food insecure at the same time, but hunger is actually a key contributor to the growing obesity problem among low-income Americans.

Hunger and obesity are flip sides of the same malnutrition coin. It's true that some of the hungriest and poorest Americans eat so little that they lose weight. But many others who have a marginally better ability to get food—either through

limited food purchases, meager food stamps allotments, or pantry donations—eat food of such poor nutritional quality that they gain weight.¹⁸ When people are on a limited budget the easiest way to fill their bellies is to purchase high-carbohydrate, high-fat, high-sodium foods that are cheaper to buy but more likely to cause obesity. Add to that the fact that most nutritious types of food aren't even available in many low-income neighborhoods and you have a recipe for dietary failure.

Obesity has a detrimental impact on human health whether the person is poor, middle class, or ultra rich. It increases the risk for heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and many other serious ailments. The link between obesity and diabetes is particularly strong: It's no coincidence that the neighborhoods with the highest rates of diabetes are also the neighborhoods with the highest rates of obesity and the highest rates of poverty and food insecurity. Low-income people are most affected by this trend, as with much else.

Nutrition-related diabetes has reached epidemic proportions in the United States. Deaths from diabetes in New York City skyrocketed by 71 percent between 1990 and 2003, and people of color were the hardest hit.²⁸ African-American diabetics died at three times the rate of white New Yorkers with the disease, and Hispanic New Yorkers shouldered a 169 percent rise in deaths from diabetes since 1990—the greatest increase of any ethnic group.²⁹ Residents of neighborhoods where diabetes was most prevalent—among them East Harlem, the South Bronx, and Brooklyn's Williamsburg and Bushwick, all of which are very low-income neighborhoods—died of diabetes at seven times the rate of those in the least affected parts of the city.³⁰ They also were hospitalized 10 times more than those on the Upper East Side, a wealthy neighborhood.³¹

Dr. Shadi Chamany, the head of diabetes prevention and control for the New York City government, says that, “It can be a risk factor if people are more likely to be overweight or obese and less physically active because they live in a particular neighborhood where they don't have access to resources such as parks and nutritious food.”³²

Nationwide, obesity increases health care costs by 36 percent and medication costs by 77 percent because it plays a role in so many serious diseases. It now costs the country more in health care expenses than smoking.³³

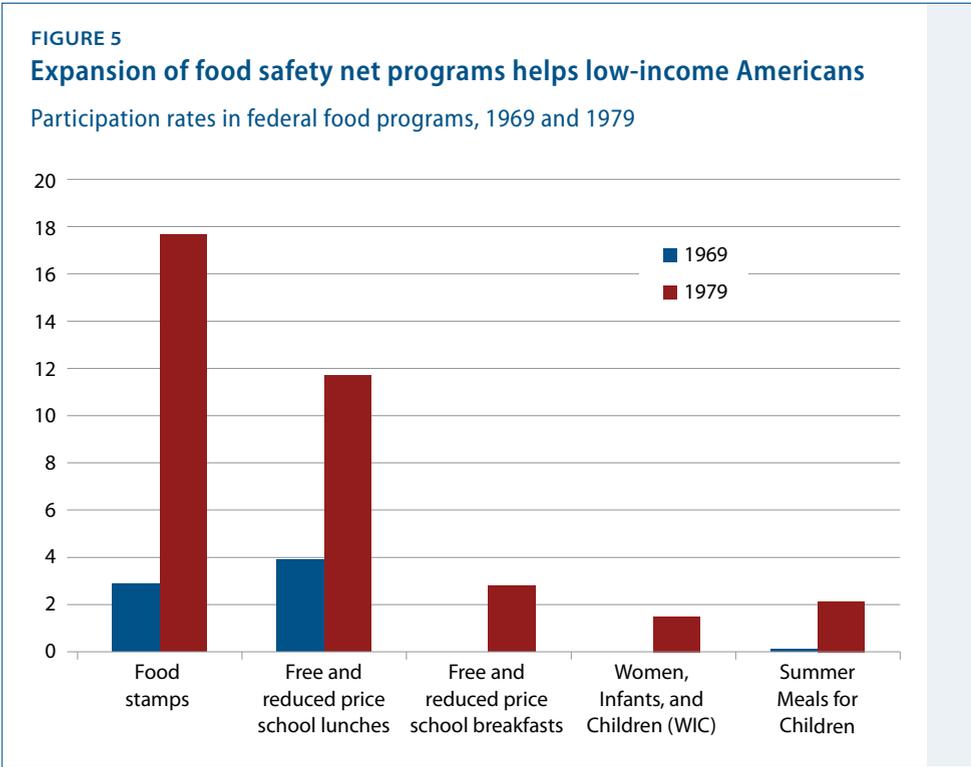
Fortunately, many of the steps necessary to reduce hunger—increasing the affordability and physical availability of nutritious foods in low-income neighborhoods, for example—are the same steps necessary to reduce obesity. Moreover, the federal government has a history of success tackling hunger.

How the federal nutrition safety net ended starvation-like conditions

A short history of the federal nutrition safety net demonstrates why it is so important that each federal dollar spent fighting hunger and food insecurity be put to good use. When this funding actually reaches the low-income Americans it is intended to serve—rather than being squandered on paperwork or bureaucracy—it has the power to eradicate hunger and improve people’s lives.

It’s worth noting that the expansion of existing food safety net programs and the start of new ones between 1969 and 1979 resulted in a dramatic increase in the percentage of low-income Americans who received federal help obtaining food. Congress passed legislation in 1971 that limited the purchase requirement for food stamps, and in 1972 it authorized the Women, Infants and Children, or WIC program. Congress then passed a law in 1973 requiring states to expand the Food Stamp Program to every jurisdiction (see Figure 5).

The biggest advance was the passage of the Food Stamp Act of 1977, which created the program as we know it today. The act completely eliminated the original purchase requirement for food stamps, making them free on a large scale for the very first time. It also established national income eligibility guidelines at the poverty line and required



Source: USDA Food and Nutrition Service.

outreach to enroll more people into the program. Congress also permanently authorized the Child and Adult Care Food Program in 1978, which provides food to low-income children in child care and to low-income seniors in certain institutional settings.

The food programs succeeded spectacularly in achieving their main goal: ending starvation conditions in America. In 1979, the Field Foundation, a nonprofit philanthropy, sent a team of investigators to parts of the United States that were found to have high rates of hunger in the late 1960s. They found dramatic reductions in hunger and malnutrition, and concluded:

This change does not appear to be due to an overall improvement in living standards or to a decrease in joblessness in these areas.... The Food Stamp Program, the nutritional components of Head Start, school lunch and breakfast programs, and... WIC have made the difference.³⁴

These initiatives showcased government programs that worked. Had the nation built on this progress by further expanding and strengthening these programs, it could have easily ended hunger entirely.

CAP's recent paper, "Doing What Works to End U.S. Hunger: Federal Programs Are Effective, but Can Work Even Better," pointed out that due to \$21 billion in additional antihunger spending that was included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009—the federal stimulus—there is significantly less hunger and food insecurity in America today than there otherwise would have been. Most of this spending went to the SNAP-Food Stamps Program. Since nearly half of all SNAP-Food Stamp recipients are children, one step necessary in reaching the 2015 goal would be to preserve nutrition policies that proved so successful in the Recovery Act.

Beyond that, we still have the opportunity to end hunger—and child hunger in particular—if we take the right steps.

Strategies to end U.S. child hunger

Several ideas for improving the Child Nutrition Act—the major federal legislation that determines child food policy and resources—have been discussed and considered over the last several months. Well-respected experts with the Food Research and Action Center, or FRAC, and the National Anti-Hunger Organizations, or NAHO, produced documents outlining their recommendations (see <http://www.frac.org> and <http://www.alliancetoendhunger.org>), which included methods for improving access and participation in the various meals programs that serve children. Many of these recommendations were included in the Senate’s Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, S. 3307, which was introduced by Sen. Blanche Lincoln (D-AR) and passed the Senate Agriculture Committee, which she chairs, in March. The bill would provide \$4.5 billion in new child nutrition program funding over 10 years.

This bill, however, isn’t exactly picking up the president’s pledge to end child hunger by 2015 and running with it. The version the committee passed includes too little money and too few reforms. While the bill is significantly larger than the last funding increase, it still provides less than half the money the president requested.

Moreover, only \$1.2 billion of the bill’s additional funding goes directly to ending child hunger over the next 10 years. That means that the bill would invest only eight additional antihunger dollars annually for each U.S. child living in a household that experiences hunger and food insecurity. Such limited investments do not place the United States on a track toward ending child hunger within five years, and the money is so meager that if the bill is enacted as proposed child hunger and food insecurity might actually increase.

This report has made clear that hunger continues to severely affect the country, and the recession is taking a lasting toll. Therefore, it is worth stressing some of the strong points of the Senate’s version of the current reauthorization bill while urging for the bolder action necessary to reach the goal of ending childhood hunger by 2015.

Put an adequate down payment on ending childhood hunger

The Child Nutrition Reauthorization Bill would need to spend an additional \$4 billion per year or \$40 billion over 10 years to even come close to ending child hunger. Sen. Kristen Gillibrand (D-NY), who is on the Senate Agriculture Committee, has pledged to reach that \$40 billion goal. If such funding were allocated, it would cost an estimated \$3.6 billion each year (\$36 billion over 10 years) to make free and healthy breakfast available to every child in a Title I school—a goal worthy of prioritization. The remaining \$400 million could be used for other worthy goals such as improving the quality of school meals, rewarding states for innovative efforts to reduce child hunger, further enabling schools to buy food from local and regional farmers, expanding the WIC program, expanding access and reducing paperwork in programs that provide meals to children after school and during the summer, and boosting school gardens.

President Obama’s 2011 budget proposal includes—and proposes concrete ways to pay for—a \$1 billion per year (\$10 billion over 10 years) increase in child nutrition funding. This sum would definitely advance the administration’s laudable child nutrition priorities and would be an important down payment on the president’s goal to end U.S. child hunger by 2015. Congress should provide no less funding than the president’s request, and it should use the current reauthorization and upcoming appropriations processes as opportunities to work toward the full \$40 billion needed.

Reduce the school meals bureaucracy

Over the past 60 years, the school breakfast and lunch programs have dramatically succeeded in slashing the previous Third-World-like levels of child hunger in America. But they are currently hampered from achieving further progress because the bureaucracy associated with student participation levels based on family income is terribly inefficient and actually discourages students from taking advantage of school meals.

Wasted time and money

Current program requirements dictate that children from poor families receive free meals, children from near-poor families receive reduced-price meals, and

children from families slightly better off than near-poor pay “full price” for meals, which is really a misnomer since these meals are also subsidized by the federal government. Tremendous paperwork is used to make sure that schools are reimbursed only at the levels for which each child is eligible.

In most American schools, many teachers spend at least some time collecting children’s eligibility forms and administrative staff must be assigned to gather those forms and submit them to the district. Every school district in turn must assign additional staff to collect those forms from the schools, analyze them, and submit them to the state. Then every state must assign extra staff to collect the forms from the districts, analyze them, and submit them finally to USDA. Further, each school day school cafeteria staff have to collect and then submit breakdowns of meals by student family income.

Shuffling around all this paper adds up, of course. Long-time school food advocates Kathy Goldman and Agnes Molinar have been working on a project to calculate how much New York City schools actually spend on meals paperwork collection and submission. They collected data from 23 local schools in 2006 (14 elementary, 5 middle, and 10 high schools). They then calculated that the schools spent the following average time per year on the following meals paperwork-related tasks:

Task	Hours per year
Distributing applications	5.7
Collecting applications	48.6
Reviewing applications	66.1
Contacting families	110.9
Average outside school hours	7.0
Follow up on nonreturns	111.1
Assigning categories	46.7
Tracking categories daily	121.9
Lost tickets	7.8
Collecting money	1.4
Lunch accountability	363.6
Breakfast accountability	121.8
Total	1,012.6 hours per year per school

They further calculated that school aides provided 780 of those hours, principals provided 10, and other staff provided 223. Factoring in the average wages for those categories of employees they calculated that each school spent \$19,190 per year just on staff salaries for the school meals paperwork system—not including employee benefits. At the time, New York City had 1,500 schools. Therefore, the system spent an astounding \$28.8 million annually on collecting and submitting the school meals data.

Since there are 101,000 schools nationwide that participate in federal school meals programs, if each school spends \$19,190 on such data collection and submissions the astonishing total equals \$1.9 billion at the school level alone. But this doesn't even include spending at the district, state, and federal levels.

There is a lack of national data collection on this issue, but I will use New York City to extrapolate a rough estimate of national costs. Since New York City costs are likely higher than much of the rest of the country, I will make the very conservative assumption that the nation spends at least \$10,000 a year on this data collection and submission for each school district, which equals \$1.01 billion per year in tax dollars at the federal, state, and school district levels spent solely on collecting and submitting required forms and daily meal counts.

Thus, reducing paperwork and simplifying applications could save a vast amount of money that could be pumped back into feeding more children and making meals more nutritious and tasty. What's more, there are numerous cheaper and easier ways to determine reimbursement rates for schools—such as using census income data—that would both reduce school district burdens and still ensure taxpayer dollars are used wisely.

Stigmatizing students

Unfortunately, school meals participation is also hampered by a great stigma for free and reduced-price meals. A low-income high school dropout in Denver described how he felt when forced to use a different colored card to obtain a reduced-price lunch: “You feel low. It should not be like that. We should not have certain colors to separate us; like one rich, one poor.”³⁵

Kids who get free lunches sometimes have to stand in different lines than those who pay for lunch. But even more shocking is that in a few schools they have to go

to an entirely different room. San Francisco advocates point out that in one local school higher-income students, who tend to be white, did not participate in the USDA programs and ate lunch on an entirely different floor of their school than their primarily Hispanic and low-income counterparts.

Sociologist Janet Poppendieck quotes students describing their school meals experience in her recent book on school meals, *Free for All*:

Those who were provided with lunch, they were the only ones who actually ate the school food... There was also a separate door for them to receive their lunch, and they had to eat in the cafeteria because the school dishes were not allowed outside. The system for free lunches made the students who received them stand out, it divided their school... The area where standard school lunch was served, where almost only free lunch students ate, was pretty far away from where most everyone else ate and bought food... I ate mostly candy, pizza, and cinnamon rolls, I was eligible for free lunch but was embarrassed, and annoyed my mom for pizza money.³⁶

Many children in these situations choose to go hungry rather than admit they're poor. "Lunchtime is the best time to impress your peers," says Lewis Geist, a senior and class president at Balboa High School in San Francisco. He adds that being seen with a subsidized meal "lowers your status."³⁷

School lunch programs have very high participation rates in elementary schools since kids generally can't leave the school buildings. When students grow older, however, their participation decreases, which is likely due to the stigma. As explained below, one proven way to reduce this stigma is by making meals universal regardless of family income and serving breakfast in first-period classrooms.

A better way

A number of national polls show that Americans are indeed willing to spend more of their tax dollars to end child hunger.³⁸ But they are only willing to do so if increased spending is combined with serious reform and bureaucracy reduction.

The best way to enact such serious reform is for the Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill now being considered by Congress to make universal school meals a reality in all Title I schools nationwide. This legislation should also enact alternative count-

ing mechanisms using census data to calculate how much school districts will be reimbursed for lunches and breakfasts, thereby eliminating the need for parents to submit eligibility forms and for all levels of government to collect and process them.

Expand access to school breakfasts

Research proves that children who eat breakfast at school have higher test scores, fewer school nurse visits, act up less in class, and may even suffer less frequently from obesity. Yet daily school breakfast participation nationwide is only 36 percent of school lunch participation. Many suburban and rural schools don't even serve breakfast. Even when it is served it is often too early or too late, making it impractical for students to eat.

Stigma is an even bigger problem with school breakfast than with lunch because while most kids eat lunch everyone knows that only the really poor kids go to the cafeteria to eat breakfast. A 2009 FRAC report showed that out of 25 big U.S. cities 22 had rates of free and reduced-price breakfast participation below 60 percent. The rate was below 50 percent in 14 of those cities.³⁹ Many suburban and rural districts have even lower rates.

Universal and in-classroom breakfast benefits

Universal and in-classroom breakfasts have already proven their success in select school districts nationwide. For instance, in Newark, New Jersey—which has both universal and in-classroom breakfasts—the district has a 94 percent breakfast participation rate. When I visited Newark to check out the effort for myself, I was thrilled to find elementary school student breakfast monitors cheerfully delivering breakfasts to all their peers. I also learned of a local high school in which the number of breakfasts served increased tenfold after the meals were provided in classrooms.

I heard that before universal, in-classroom breakfasts were implemented in Newark, principals often served extra breakfast on standardized testing days. I had a hard time believing that until I heard similar stories in New York City and heard school officials nationwide admit that such a practice was common. Of course, that begs the question: If schools know that good breakfasts enhance educational performance, shouldn't they serve good breakfasts every day?

New York City schools launched a pilot project in 2008 to try out in-classroom breakfasts in a number of schools at the urging of the New York City Coalition Against Hunger (my organization) and others. The program worked so well the city expanded it, and more than 100 schools now provide in-classrooms breakfast in at least some of their grades. Not shockingly, St. John's University professor Dr. Shamima Khan conducted a preliminary analysis on behalf of the coalition and found that schools that provided breakfast in even some of their classrooms had a statistically significant higher rate of participation than schools that served no in-classroom breakfasts.

At P.S. 68 in the Bronx—one New York City in-classroom pilot site I visited—all students ate breakfast together during their first-period class. The pilot is working better than anyone could have anticipated. The school's principal told me that before the pilot an average of 50 kids came to school late every day—so many that she had to assign extra staff to write out late slips. When they started serving breakfast in their classrooms children came in early just for the meals, and now only about five kids a day are late—a 90 percent decrease in tardiness. The principal also told me that absenteeism and visits to school nurses dropped, and kids fell asleep in the classrooms less frequently in the afternoon.

This is obviously not only good nutrition policy but also good education policy. Public school districts typically lend textbooks out free of charge to all students because they are widely understood to be a critical educational tool. The time is ripe for the nation to view school meals in the same way. Free breakfast and lunch should be universal in far more classrooms around the country.

The benefits of breakfast programs can be seen in other states as well. Michigan State Superintendent of Schools Mike Flanagan learned that the federally funded free and reduced-price breakfast program was being underused in his state. While more than 140 million free and reduced-price lunches were being served in Michigan, only 39 million breakfasts were being served. So Flanagan decided to kick off a *Michigan School Breakfast Challenge* in 2008 in partnership with the United Dairy Industry of Michigan, or UDIM, calling on all schools statewide to increase breakfast participation by 50 percent. UDIM provided extensive marketing and support materials, equipment for the schools, and monetary awards for the highest-achieving schools in both the first and second years of the challenge.

In a podcast during the challenge kick-off aimed at schools statewide Flanagan said:

How many of you would encourage a good breakfast on the day that (standardized tests) are given? Probably all of you. Because we know this connection with brain power and kids' ability to do well... Research shows that academic achievement improves and that the attentiveness of kids, particular young children, is better. It improves behavior in school and (improves) school attendance. This is really the way to go because it builds happy and healthy students. So why doesn't every school promote and serve a healthy breakfast every day? It just doesn't fit. If we are doing it for the (test) day, shouldn't we do it for a regular day when we want all kids to learn?... Why are we feeding all the kids who are entitled to this program at lunch but so few of them at breakfast?... Breakfast is really brain food and it is necessary for our kids to do well.⁴⁰

Flanagan encouraged schools to implement breakfast in their first period classrooms or so-called “grab-and-go” meals in which students get a breakfast bag in the hallway on their way to class and bring it into classrooms themselves. He made it clear that time spent serving breakfast would count toward official instructional time. Eighteen months later, Flanagan announced that in the challenge's first year nearly 5 million more school breakfasts were served to Michigan school children—a 12.4 percent increase. In the first year alone, 81 school districts indeed met the challenge, with several schools far exceeding that aim.

Flanagan also announced monetary awards to the schools with the largest increase in participation. These awards can be used toward wellness activities for students, future breakfast promotion efforts, physical education programming, and/or school meal improvement. Flanagan encouraged every district to continue pursuing the challenge and “help school kids develop healthy lifestyles with a nutritious morning meal.”⁴¹

New York and Michigan's experiences illustrate that federal government resources are vital, but local leadership and partnerships clearly matter.

Moving forward

Providing free breakfasts to every student in America who now receives school lunches would eliminate the stigma and paperwork associated with the three eligibility categories. It would cost an additional \$7.0 billion per year, which is far less than the \$28 billion per year our nation loses as a result of child hunger. The nation faces budget constraints, however, and many Americans would like most

government resources to focus on families and neighborhoods with the greatest need. A sensible compromise would be to provide a free, universal, nutritious breakfast to every student in Title I schools—the lowest-income schools where at least 40 percent of students are eligible for free and reduced-price meals. Doing so would cost about \$3.6 billion and improve the nutrition of 17 million of the nation’s poorest students.

If paperwork was simultaneously eliminated for school lunches and eligibility was instead determined using U.S. Census data—which taxpayers already pay to collect—the nation would roughly save about \$1 billion annually. This would make the estimated net price to the nation for fighting child hunger \$2.6 billion annually—a mere sliver of the at least \$28 billion that child hunger costs America in health care, lost productivity, education system impacts, and charity system outlays each year.

True, much of the estimated \$1 billion bureaucracy-reduction savings would not benefit the federal government, and the federal government would need to pay the full costs of the breakfast program expansion. But since the rest of the savings would be state and local such savings would indeed benefit all taxpayers. This will allow many schools and districts to reallocate time and resources to other needs that are more important than paperwork such as making meals healthier or actual instruction.

Clearly, ending child hunger as one of the first steps toward cutting poverty in half in 10 years is a smart economic investment.

Improve and expand access to other food programs

Providing universal school breakfasts to children in Title I schools would be a huge boost toward reaching the 2015 goal, but schools average 180 class days out of a 365-day year and breakfast is only one of three daily meals. Even if every student received a nutritious school breakfast that would equal only about 180 meals out of 1,095 meals a child needs to eat each year.

Further, in July 2007, only 18 percent of low-income children who received school lunches received summer meals.⁴² That means that 82 percent of kids who receive government food support during the school year fail to get it in the summer when their caloric needs are likely even higher. After-school snack and supper programs also have similarly low participation rates.

Therefore, children's participation in both summer and after-school feeding programs needs to be increased. The president and Congress need to ease eligibility rules, increase the reimbursement rates for program sponsors, and reduce the paperwork necessary to be a sponsor. All of these improvements as well as improvements in food nutritional quality could be accomplished through this year's Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill.

Encourage state innovations

States must be rewarded for improved performance in reducing child hunger. Encouragingly, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack has announced support for grants to states to bolster antihunger innovation, and the Senate Agriculture Committee included provisions to do so in its Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill. This program could, *for example*, reward Michigan State Superintendent of Schools Mike Flanagan for his *Michigan School Breakfast Challenge* and help other states replicate its success.

Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley announced a partnership on November 24, 2008, aimed at making Maryland the first state in the nation to end child hunger. O'Malley was cajoled to do so by the national hunger organization Share Our Strength. If Maryland's efforts show early success they should be rewarded by USDA grants, which would encourage other states to follow suit.

Reduce poverty

It's relatively easy to end child hunger in America. If the nation increased and modernized the already existing safety net and took all the other basic steps this paper proposes, we'd finally wipe out this egregious problem. But if poverty continued to increase in America, children would continue to suffer and taxpayers would need to continually pump more money into the safety net to prevent hunger from returning. The country must therefore make the eradication of hunger the first step in a broader effort to slash domestic poverty to truly make the American dream attainable for all those willing to work for it.

Nearly 40 million Americans live below the official poverty line (\$21,834 a year for a family of four), and more than 14 million children are poor. Inequality has reached record highs and is greater than at any time since 1929. Moreover, growing portions

of the nation's wealth have been concentrated in a small fraction of households while more than 30 percent of us are trying to get by on incomes less than 200 percent of the federal poverty line or about \$44,000 for a family of four. Well before the current crisis, 6 million low-income households were spending more than half their income on rent and utilities or lived in severely substandard housing.⁴³

But U.S. poverty is indeed fixable, and the Center for American Progress has released a blueprint for cutting poverty in half in 10 years. It includes policy solutions such as creating decent-wage jobs, increasing the minimum wage, expanding refundable tax credits, enhancing work supports such as child care, connecting youth to work, increasing the availability of affordable housing, and helping families build assets.

Similarly, the National Anti-Hunger Organizations and the Food Research and Action Center have released sophisticated plans to achieve the president's target of ending child hunger by 2015. Their recommendations include improving nutrition assistance programs and a broader strategy to tackle poverty head-on and create decent-wage jobs.

To further these goals, CAP joined a partnership with the Coalition on Human Needs and the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights to form Half in Ten, a campaign that aims to cut poverty in half in 10 years. As the Half in Ten Campaign puts it:

Given the persistence of poverty over recent decades, it is understandable that many Americans consider cutting poverty an impossible task. This is not true. Throughout our history, there have been periods when economic gains were more equitably shared, and we significantly reduced poverty—periods when a strong near-full-employment economy was combined with governmental and private initiatives to lift all Americans up. Between 1964 and 1973, for example, poverty fell by more than 40 percent. Between 1993 and 2000, it fell by 25 percent.

Our experience has taught us a lot about effective strategies for poverty reduction. Now is the time to capitalize on these lessons, add new thinking to respond to changing times, and aggressively tackle the problem in order to eliminate poverty in the United States. The Half in Ten campaign believes that a clear goal and tested strategies to achieve it are crucial for success. Accordingly, setting a 50 percent reduction goal is our first step toward eliminating poverty. We can accomplish that goal if we deepen and expand the public will to move forward, and if we channel that will toward proven policy solutions.⁴⁴

Conclusion: *We can solve child hunger*

A Bronx school official told me he saw a small child rummaging through a trash bin outside his school for extra food. This is unacceptable in America.

What seemed inevitable in one age is unthinkable in another. Take slavery or child labor, for example. When we look back in our country's history, we can hardly believe how bad things were. We ask ourselves if America used to be so barbaric that it was acceptable to buy and sell human beings.

And can we imagine that the United States was so heartless that “breaker boys” as young as 6 years old often worked in anthracite coal mines separating slate rock from the coal for 14 to 16 hours a day six days a week, frequently losing fingers or dying from black lung—all for just a few dollars per month?

Of course we can't imagine it.

It is my hope that the same process will happen with child hunger after it's eliminated in this country, which will hopefully be a few years from now. We have the tools to accomplish that goal. All we need now is the political leadership and money to back that up. The first step forward is through a strong Child Nutrition bill that includes:

- An adequate down payment on ending childhood hunger
- Reductions in the bureaucracy associated with school meals
- Expanded access to school breakfasts
- Targeted improvements to other meals programs such as summer meals, after-school snacks, and supper programs
- Incentives for state innovations aimed at ending childhood hunger

The Senate has thus far produced a bill that is commendable in its efforts to advance such goals. But larger authorized funding amounts and still further increases in program access are needed to fully serve the needs of the nation's children.

Importantly, this legislation alone cannot solve all the problems associated with child hunger and poverty. It must be accompanied by strong policies aimed at increasing work opportunities and incomes, which would eliminate poverty and the inability of families to provide for all of their food needs.

Someday we'll ask ourselves whether we can imagine a time when America was so stonyhearted it forced working families to seek food from charities just so their kids could survive. A time when the nation was so divided it had hundreds of billionaires but tens of millions of students falling behind in school because they faced hunger. Or a time when the country was so blind it couldn't see school children scavenging through garbage bins to eat.

I hope that by 2015 our answers to all those questions will be that we can't.

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About the author

Joel Berg is a nationally recognized leader in the fields of hunger and food security, national and community service, and technical assistance provision to faith-based and community organizations. He is also author of the book, *All You Can Eat: How Hungry is America?* The book challenges the president and Congress to make hunger eradication a top priority—and offers them a simple and affordable plan to end it for good.

Berg has led the New York City Coalition Against Hunger since 2001, which represents the more than 1,200 nonprofit soup kitchens and food pantries in New York City and the more than 1.4 million low-income New Yorkers who are forced to use them. The coalition works to meet the immediate food needs of low-income New Yorkers and to enact innovative solutions to help them move “beyond the soup kitchen” to self-sufficiency.

Prior to his work with the coalition, Berg served for eight years in the Clinton administration in senior executive service positions at USDA. For two years, he worked as USDA coordinator of community food security, a new position in which he created and implemented the first-ever federal initiative to better enable faith-based and other nonprofit groups to fight hunger, bolster food security, and help low-income Americans move out of poverty.

He worked as USDA coordinator of food recovery and gleaning the previous two years, working with community groups to increase the amount of food recovered, gleaned, and distributed to hungry Americans. Also while at the USDA, he served as director of national service, director of public liaison, and as acting director of public affairs and press secretary.

From 1989 to 1993, he served as a policy analyst for the Progressive Policy Institute and a domestic policy staff member for then President-elect Bill Clinton’s transition team. Berg has published widely on the topics of hunger, national and community service, and grassroots community partnerships, including a recent white paper on food jobs for the Progressive Policy Institute.

A native of Rockland County, New York, and a 1986 graduate of Columbia University, Berg now resides in Brooklyn. He is the past winner of the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture’s Honor Award for Superior Service and the Congressional Hunger Center’s Mickey Leland National Hunger Fighter Award.

Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge the generous contributions made by The Walmart Foundation and the Irving Harris Foundation.

Some of the ideas in this paper originally appeared in a May 2006 Democratic Leadership Council report, “Ending U.S. Child Hunger by 2012: How America Can Break the Political Logjam,” by Joel Berg and Tom Freedman and in Joel Berg’s book *All You Can Eat: How Hungry is America?*, published in November of 2008 by Seven Stories Press.

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