



A JEWISH RESPONSE TO HUNGER

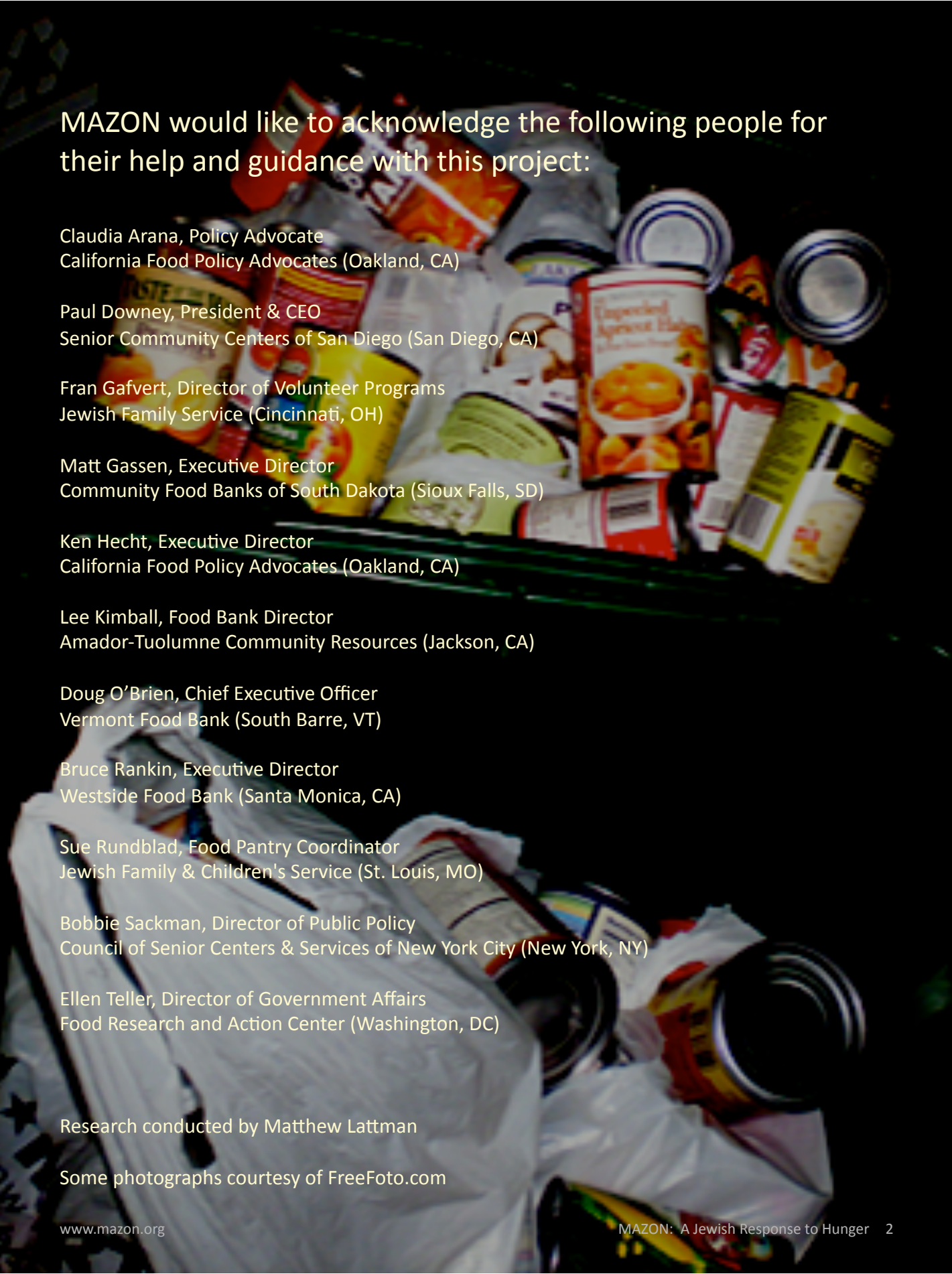
## GAS OR GRUB?

The impact of high food and fuel costs  
on America's hunger relief organizations  
and the people they help.



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# MAZON

## OUR STORY

MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, is the only national Jewish organization whose sole focus is preventing and alleviating hunger. By allocating donations from American Jewish communities to hundreds of nonprofits in this country and abroad, MAZON helps people of all faiths and backgrounds meet life's most basic need. In Hebrew, the word *mazon* means food.

Leonard Fein, editor of Moment Magazine, conceived the idea for MAZON in 1985 when the famine in Ethiopia was devastating the country's population. He wrote an article about the tragedy and proposed a framework for a response by the American Jewish community. He envisioned creating a link between Jewish families' lifecycle celebrations and Judaism's mandate to provide food for the poor.

The concept is deeply rooted in Jewish tradition. In ancient times, rabbis did not allow celebrations to begin until the community's poor and hungry people were seated and fed. To integrate this tradition into Jewish life, MAZON has created the Simcha Project. The Project encourages people to be aware of the needs of the poor by making a donation to MAZON for at least 3% of the cost of their lifecycle celebrations.

With the support of donors from all walks of life, including members of more than 1500 synagogues nationwide, MAZON provides grants to emergency food providers, food banks, multi-service organizations and advocacy groups that seek both short-term and long-term solutions to the hunger problem. In 1986, the first year of MAZON's grant making, we distributed \$20,000 in cash grants to four hunger-relief organizations. In 2007, more than 300 nonprofits shared \$3,000,000 in grants. To date, MAZON's total grants exceed \$40 million and have supported the work of the most effective hunger-relief organizations in the United States, in Israel and in developing countries around the world.

## THE "GAS OR GRUB?" SURVEY

The rising costs of staple products and gasoline have had a tremendous impact on people living in, or on the verge of, poverty and their ability to meet their daily needs. The burden has also impacted the network of food distribution organizations charged with responding to the growing need for food assistance in this country. In July 2008, MAZON surveyed food banks and emergency food providers, both MAZON grantees and non-grantees, to learn how they have been affected by the economic downturn. Their responses underscored the enormous challenges hunger responders are facing and provided insight into the accommodations they are making to ensure that food reaches people at risk of going hungry.

# Letter From the President

Dear Friends,

We've all seen the headlines. Rising food prices and oil costs across the globe have attracted much media attention and sparked protests from Haiti to Egypt. In the U. S., media sources have exposed the sad reality that many people who were formerly donors to food banks and pantries are now beneficiaries of their services.

MAZON was interested in quantifying this phenomenon by understanding how the needs of the anti-hunger organizations we work with have changed, and communicating the results to people working in the hunger relief field, including policymakers whose work influences public benefit programs and our supporters, whose donations make our grants possible.

In July 2008, we surveyed 133 organizations, mostly MAZON grantees, but also other emergency food providers (EFPs) referred to us by our grantees. The responders included food pantries, shelters, soup kitchens, meals-on-wheels programs and social-service agencies that provide food for hungry people as well as food banks, that collect and distribute large quantities of food for distribution to front-line hunger relief agencies. The survey was conducted over a two-week period via the internet. While anecdotal information was collected to give color to the numbers, the purpose of the study was to obtain quantitative information from a cross-section of emergency food programs.

These organizations provided a wealth of information to help us present an overview of a field struggling to respond to a new wave of hunger in this country. The rising prices of groceries, gasoline and other necessities are increasing the financial hardship faced by poor and at-risk families. In addition, many MAZON grantees are also helping increasing numbers of first-time visitors who never thought they would need to turn to charity to access food. Consequently, food pantries and soup kitchens across the country are reporting sharp increases in demand for emergency food. Like the families they serve, they too are struggling to keep pace. Emergency food providers must cope with rising demand and increasing food and transportation costs at a time when the emergency food system is already reeling from an ongoing trend of declining food donations from the corporate and government sector.

MAZON conducted this survey in partnership with our grantees because we have a distinct perspective to share. As a national funder, MAZON is in a unique position to capture a snapshot of the challenges faced by emergency food providers operating in rural communities, suburban areas and major urban centers. The diverse mix of organizations that participated in this survey provided a rich data set reflecting a multitude of organizational approaches to, and challenges when, fighting hunger. They see firsthand the impact of food and fuel costs, home foreclosures and rising unemployment on both people living on the edge and the overburdened community-based organizations that help them.

We want the results of this study to spark concern and discussion among policymakers, the media, the general public, and the tens of thousands of donors who make our work possible. These results seem to foreshadow an acceleration of hunger, as it deepens its reach among poor families and widens into the middle class. They also spell hard times ahead for the nation's emergency food system. While the future is unclear, MAZON remains confident in the resilience, resourcefulness and effectiveness of its grantees, who work tirelessly to help confront hunger in this land of plenty. We will continue to draw upon all of our resources to ensure that the struggle of hungry Americans and the heroic work of emergency food providers get the attention they deserve.

H. Eric Schockman, Ph.D.  
President

# The High Cost of Fuel

Food and fuel prices have increased substantially in 2008, with the World Bank finding an 87% increase over three years in the cost of food worldwide. Furthermore, the price of oil has more than doubled, taking the prices of its byproducts, gasoline and heating oil, with it.

More than anyone, people with fixed incomes are struggling to cope with the increases.

We know from the data and anecdotal evidence that more people are cutting back on food purchases in order to pay for rent, gasoline and other essential costs of living. Across the country they are turning to food assistance programs to help supplement their limited food resources.

Predictably, increased food and fuel costs are hitting the emergency food providers (EFPs) as well. Food pantries that use trucks to pick up products from food banks and vendors feel the impact of the rising cost of gasoline. Food banks that deliver to their member organizations or pick up fresh produce from growers have also seen tremendous increases in their cost of fuel.

In what several executive directors of our grantees have entitled “perfect storm conditions,” and at the time when households are most vulnerable, the organizations charged with helping them weather the storm are struggling to maintain their own stability.

***In the first half of 2008, food bank and EFP fuel bills rose, on average, by 37%, with rural food banks and EFPs increasing 46%, compared to the similar period in 2007.***

For organizations that don't own or rent trucks, fuel is a small line item, averaging a little under 1% of the budget. However, for rural food banks, fuel and transportation costs can be as much as five times greater than those of a comparably sized urban agency. Rural food pantries often have to rent vehicles to bring product from the regional food bank to their distant locations. Food banks frequently rent tractor trailers to pick up produce from growers and may also transport groceries from their facilities to the rural EFPs.

Eighty-nine percent of food banks and 82% of EFPs reported increased fuel costs in the first half of 2008 compared with the same period in 2007. To compensate for the increased expenses, one agency went so far as to turn off the air conditioner in its office during the summer and the heater during the winter. While this is an extreme case, the need for organizations to control this line item are real and immediate.

Also affected are community members who not only volunteer their time, but their vehicles as well. Agencies report that volunteers are asking for non-driving opportunities or for mileage reimbursement. In fact, 32% of organizations utilizing volunteers for offsite pickups or distributions have begun reimbursing for gas.

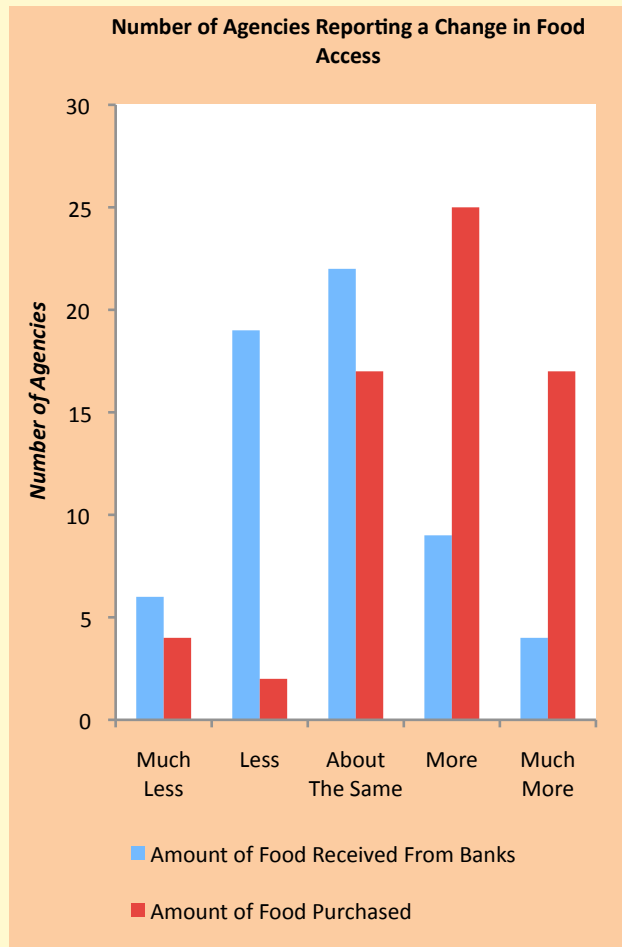
Several pantry operators mentioned that clients living far from the pantry have chosen to forego the food support in order to conserve gas. In response, some food pantries now distribute larger food packages less often. It enables the family to receive the same amount of groceries while making fewer trips to the pantry. However, this puts an additional logistical burden on the facility to store larger amounts of food during peak times of the month. Not all food pantries have the luxury of storage space and therefore cannot make such special accommodations for clients.

# The High Cost of Food

The increase in the price of food staples, reduced donations from individuals and corporations and the uncertain access to USDA surplus commodities have significantly impacted food distribution programs.

- Food banks are paying, on average, 12% more for food in 2008 than they did in 2007, yet total poundage of food they distributed increased by only 3%. This translates into an 8.7% increase in the price of the food required just to meet last year's demand.
- Food banks are receiving fewer donations from corporate donors due to improvements in food production and the increase in the number of discount stores in the secondary market that sell food products.
- People who have traditionally donated canned and packaged products to their local food pantries are impacted by the economic downturn and are donating less and less frequently.
- Forty-one percent of EFPs reported a decrease in the amount of food they receive from food banks, and 65% reported their purchased food costs are growing.
- Agencies report having to divert financial resources from other areas of operation in order to purchase supplies or lowering costs by limiting the number of people they assist.

***“We are doing all we can to maximize donations from existing donors and keep our food and fuel costs as low as possible.”***



**Roughly one in five EFPs have had to turn people away from their programs because of food shortages. The findings show that:**

- An increasing number of people are requesting help and some facilities simply cannot assist more clients due to lack of space, lack of inventory or lack of staff and volunteers to manage the process.
- Food banks report that their inventories are being spread over a growing number of food assistance programs, resulting in less food being available per member agency.

# Changing Populations

In the late 1960s, Senators Robert Dole and George McGovern were trailblazers in bringing the issue of domestic hunger to the attention of the American people. The images of malnourished families in our rural and urban areas shocked the public and resulted in legislation that created government food assistance programs that continue today.

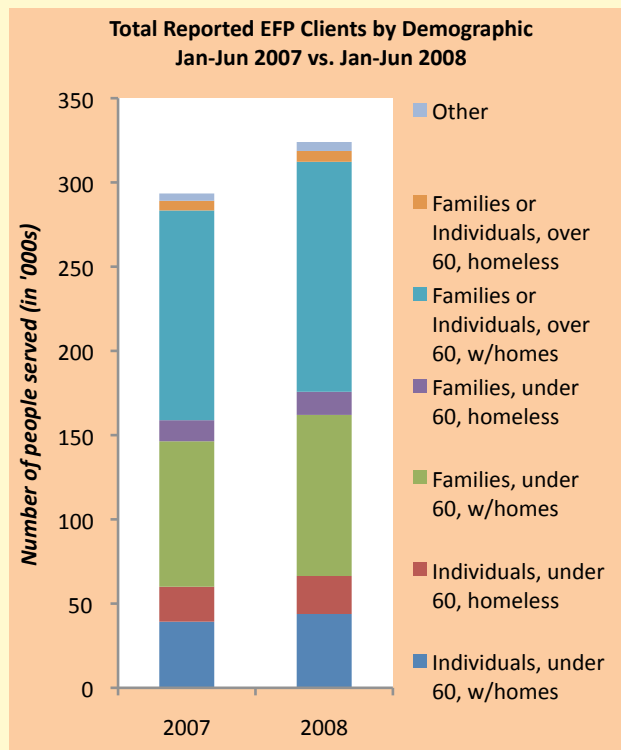
While the media images of domestic hunger may not be as shocking as the as the images of starving people living in third world countries, hunger in this country continues to be a wide-ranging and growing problem. The food pantries we surveyed are now helping the elderly, two parent working families, homeless veterans, people with disabilities and low income families who fall through the cracks in our government benefit safety net.

In 2006, over 36 million Americans were food insecure – not sure if they would be able to access adequate quantities of nutritious food. Millions have turned to the emergency food system for support. Rising food prices, home foreclosures, increasing unemployment, and stagnant wages all contribute to the growing increase in the number of food insecure Americans, and are pushing many into the emergency food system.

**In the last year, 72% of the EFPs have seen increases in repeat visits and 84% have reported an increase in the number of new households, with the average facility aiding 15% more people in 2008 than at this time in 2007.**

Furthermore, five of every six EFPs report an increase in the number of clients seeking information on government services such as food stamps and WIC (the Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children).

**There has been a significant increase in the number of first-time pantry visitors who represent a new client demographic. They are under age 60, live in stable housing, have at least a high school education and have been (or currently are) gainfully employed.** EFPs have also seen an increase in the number of senior citizens whose fixed incomes must now stretch even further to accommodate their rising cost of living.



Increased reliance on food assistance programs by individuals and families with stable housing signifies a change in the type of people seeking aid. Many organizations recounted that their new clients describe themselves, with embarrassment, as people who formerly donated food for the hungry and now find themselves needing help. **The “face of hunger” has indeed changed over the past 40 years as more middle-class Americans become economically at-risk.**

# Nutrition

Health conditions related to diet—including obesity, hypertension and diabetes—are a growing problem within the low-income community. Food distribution programs are taking responsibility for improving the quality of the product they distribute and educating consumers on healthy nutrition. However, consistent access to nutritious groceries is a challenge within the emergency food system. Often, donated products are junk food and products that lack significant nutritional benefit. Protein-rich products are expensive, and many food pantries lack the storage and refrigeration necessary for handling fresh produce and other perishables.

Great strides have been made in getting produce to food banks through farm-direct donations and purchase programs. Survey respondents were asked about their ease of accessing different types of food and whether there have been changes in their ability to access and distribute nutritious products.

## Produce

- Distribution of fresh produce has been a priority of the emergency food system for the last few years. Programs such as California's Farm to Family, create incentives for growers to sell excess produce at a significant discount to food banks. Furthermore, many communities have begun growing programs where local residents donate home-grown produce to the EFPs and food banks.
- Sixty-six percent of food banks and 71% of EFPs reported receiving at least as much produce in 2008 as in 2007, yet this is not entirely driven by increased donations. Food banks reported spending an extra 29% on produce in 2008 versus the previous year. Nearly 20% of programs report that they buy produce directly from a farm.

***“We are relying more on legumes instead of meat for protein in our emergency lunch program, and serving more vegetarian meals in order to cut costs.”***

## Protein

- Protein costs have increased dramatically this year, with the cost of commodities used as feed for milk, egg, and meat producing animals all rising sharply.
- Legume prices have also increased, resulting in higher prices of inexpensive proteins such as peanut butter.
- Food bank spending on proteins, which in the aggregate make up close to 30% of overall food costs for food banks, rose 27% between the first half of 2007 and 2008.
- Although 70% of food banks received at least as much protein in 2008 as a year prior, only 50% of EFPs were able to say the same.
- The demand for protein has increased dramatically while the availability has not. Nearly one in five EFPs reported at least a 25% decrease in the amount of protein received. Only 9% of food banks and EFPs report that they buy protein directly from a farm.

# Kosher Food Assistance Programs

As an organization charged with raising funds within the Jewish community, MAZON has a strong interest in the extent of poverty and hunger in the American Jewish community. Kosher products are more expensive than non-kosher foods and families living in poverty who maintain kosher kitchens, face added challenges. Our survey included organizations that provide kosher food either exclusively or as part of their larger food distribution.

## **Poverty within the American Jewish Community**

- One in 20 Jews live in households that are below the poverty line (\$21,000 for a family of four.)
- Nearly 1 in 10 Jewish seniors live below the poverty line.
- Forty-six percent of Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union live in households whose incomes are less than \$15,000.
- Twelve percent of Jewish children live below the poverty line.
- Eight percent of American Jews who are single mothers live below the poverty line.

Traditionally, kosher food assistance agencies have had a senior focus, providing groceries, home delivered meals or served meals at congregate sites. This is changing. Seniors are visiting food pantries more frequently and are asking for kosher groceries, especially around the Jewish holidays. Kosher food programs surveyed reported a 30% increase in the number of people under age 60 with stable housing who need the support of the emergency food system. As a result, seniors are sharing limited kosher food assistance resources with a growing pool of households.

## **Kosher Food Distribution Programs**

### **Face Challenges**

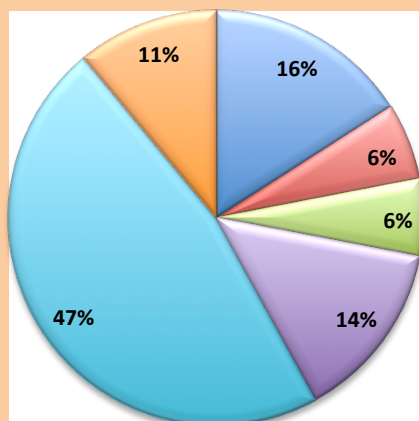
- Three out of four of programs saw an increase in the number of new households, with, on average, each program seeing an 18% increase in the number of families seeking need.
- Sixty-three percent of kosher programs report an increase in the number of repeat visits. More families visit the pantries multiple times throughout the month.
- Fifty-seven percent of programs are also noticing that more people are seeking help with applying for federal benefits such as food stamps and WIC.
- Most programs respond that they have been able to keep the size of meals and food packages constant from 2007 to 2008.
- Despite the increased need, most organizations are receiving no more food from the food bank and donation networks than they were in 2007, with 33% of organizations receiving less.
- Some kosher programs report difficulty in acquiring kosher-labeled food from food banks and describe relying on food drives conducted in their local Jewish communities and retail purchases.
- 53% report an increase in the need to purchase kosher food at retail prices (to ensure proper kosher supervision). Programs report that food expenditures have increased, on average, 22%.
- Fuel costs have also increased, although the 21% increase is lower than average due to the vast majority of kosher programs being located in urban and suburban locales near their where their clients live.

# Advocacy

Food banks and emergency food providers, while important and necessary, cannot alone do an adequate job of feeding the millions of Americans who need their help. As hunger becomes increasingly entrenched in America, it is not enough to simply distribute food. Although the emergency food providers play a critical “on the ground” role in fighting hunger, these organizations are able to leverage their efforts by partnering with government officials to develop effective, responsive government policies and programs to broadly address the tragedy of hunger.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), charitable and private food assistance programs make up a small percentage of total food support, most of which comes in the form of the Food Stamp Program (or SNAP).

**Relative Sizes of the Federal Nutrition Programs and Emergency Food Assistance System, in Meal Equivalents Per Month (USDA Food & Nutrition Service)**



- WIC
- Child & Adult Care Feeding Program
- School Breakfast Program
- National School Lunch Program
- Food Stamp Program (SNAP)
- EFPs

Over the years, MAZON has worked with many EFPs to reduce demand for emergency food by strengthening government food programs and leveraging public funds to prevent hunger. With new links found between hunger and nutrition-related diseases such as obesity, it stands within reason that such investments also have positive benefits in terms of health costs down the road.

To this end, despite the increased demands on the emergency food system, food banks and EFPs still maintain vigorous schedules of public education, policy advocacy, and relationship-building with policymakers. We found:

- 85% of agencies surveyed have written to a member of Congress;
- 79% of agencies surveyed have met with their state delegates;
- 60% of agencies surveyed have written op-ed pieces about hunger issues for their local papers;
- And 82% of EFPs are actively assisting clients with enrollment in government food programs, such as SNAP and WIC.

The increased media and policy-maker focus on food and fuel prices enhances the educational and advocacy opportunity and role that food banks and EFPs can play. Those efforts are essential for strengthening the public-private partnership needed to end hunger in this country.

***“With the poor economy, we are seeing the same number of donors, but a decrease in the donation amount. There just isn't enough to go around. Charity can't do it all.”***

# General Food Program & Nutritional Terms

**Afterschool Snack Program** – The Afterschool Snack Program provides nutritious snacks and meals to low-income children participating in after-school educational or enrichment programs. It is run through both the National School Lunch Program and the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

**Child and Adult Care Food Program** – The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) provides healthy meals and snacks in day care settings. The program primarily serves children but is also available in nonresidential adult day care centers for adults 60 years and older or those 18 years and older who are chronically impaired.

**Commodity Supplemental Food Program** – The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) provides monthly packages of USDA commodity foods to supply nutrients typically lacking in the diets of the target population. Low-income children up to age 6, pregnant and new mothers and seniors are eligible for the program. USDA provides food and administrative funds to states; local agencies distribute food to participants. The program currently operates in only 32 states. Five additional states are authorized to participate in the program but funding has not been made available.

**Emergency food providers (EFPs)** – Emergency food programs, typically run by private, nonprofit community organizations, distribute donated food items to hungry people at local shelters, soup kitchens and food pantries. Food for these programs is usually supplied by food banks.

**Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs** – USDA operates two nutrition programs aimed at getting fresh produce to target populations. The WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) provides WIC participants with coupons for the purchase of fresh, nutritious locally grown fruits and vegetables at authorized farmers' markets and roadside stands. Similarly, the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition

Program (SFMNP) provides low-income seniors with coupons for the purchase of fresh produce.

**Food bank** – Food banks are regional charitable organizations that oversee the collection, storage and distribution of food and grocery products for delivery to agencies directly serving hungry people. Food banks inventory, store, and transport food in line with grocery industry and appropriate regulatory standards. In addition to individual and corporate donations, food banks may also receive federal administrative funding and commodity donations through The Emergency Food Assistance Program.

**Food insecurity** – The limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods, including involuntarily cutting back on meals, food portions or not knowing the source of the next meal.

**Food pantry** – Food pantries are nonprofit organizations, typically small in size, operated by religious institutions or social service agencies. Pantries receive donated food items from food banks and other sources and distribute them directly to hungry people.

**Food security** – Access to enough food for an active, healthy life. At a minimum, food security includes: (1) the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and (2) an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (e.g., without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging or other coping strategies).

**Food Stamp Program** – See Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

**Hunger** – The uneasy or painful sensation caused by a recurrent or involuntary lack of access to food. Many scientists consider hunger to be chronically inadequate nutritional intake due to low incomes (i.e., people do not have to experience pain to be hungry from a nutritional perspective).

# General Food Program & Nutritional Terms

**Malnutrition** – A serious health impairment that results from substandard nutrient intake. Malnutrition may result from a lack of food, a chronic shortage of key nutrients, or impaired absorption or metabolism associated with chronic conditions or disease.

**Obesity** – An abnormal accumulation of body fat that may result in health impairments. Obesity is generally defined by the National Institutes of Health as having body weight that is more than 20% above the high range for ideal body weight.

**School Lunch and Breakfast Programs** – The National School Lunch (SLP) and Breakfast Programs (SBP) are federally assisted meal programs operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions. They provide nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free meals to children each school day.

**Soup kitchen** – Soup kitchens are organizations whose primary purpose is to provide prepared meals to hungry people. Food served at soup kitchens is often obtained from food banks. Soup kitchens are generally staffed by volunteers and run by a church or community group.

**Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)** – WIC provides nutritious foods, as well as nutrition counseling and health care referrals, to low-income, nutritionally at-risk pregnant and nursing women, infants and children up to age 5. WIC participants receive monthly vouchers for the purchase of specific foods that are designed to supplement their diets with the nutrients important for healthy development.

**Summer Food Service Program** – The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) provides reimbursements to schools, local government agencies and community-based organizations for meals and snacks served to low-income children during the summer months and long school vacations. SFSP helps fill the gap for

children who are eligible to receive reduced-price and free meals during the school year.

**Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program** – The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formally the Food Stamp Program, serves as the first line of defense against hunger. The program is the cornerstone of the federal food assistance programs and provides crucial support to low-income households and those making the transition from welfare to work. SNAP provides low-income families with Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards that enable them to buy food items in authorized retail food stores.

**The Emergency Food Assistance Program** – Under, The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), administrative funding and commodity foods are made available by the USDA to states. States provide the food to local agencies, usually food banks, which in turn distribute the food to soup kitchens and food pantries that directly serve the public.

**Undernutrition** – The consequence of consuming food that is inadequate in quantity and/or nutritional quality.

***“We are working with our donors to move food pick-up times earlier in the morning, which allows us to further optimize the usage of our fleet of vehicles and increase the efficiency of our delivery routes.”***