

Texas Food Policy Roundtable

Our Mission:

The Texas Food Policy Roundtable (TFPR) is a broadly based group of Texas leaders who have joined forces to develop, coordinate, and improve the implementation of food policy to address hunger and promote equitable, sustainable, and healthy food in Texas. The roundtable will focus on four areas of food policy:

- Improving access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as Food Stamps) to prevent hunger and help Texas families afford a nutritious diet;
- Increasing participation in the Summer Food Programs so that children in Texas continue to learn and grow when school is out;
- Promoting policy solutions to increase nutrition, reduce and prevent obesity; and
- Creating a local, sustainable, and accessible food system for all Texans.

STEERING COMMITTEE:



For more information, email txfoodpolicy@gmail.com or visit www.txfoodpolicy.org

ENDNOTES:

¹ "Household Food Security in the United States, 2008," Mark Nord, Margaret Andrews, and Steven Carlson, Economic Research Service, USDA, November 2009.

² 2007 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau

³ 2008 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau

⁴ Texas Department of State Health Services, <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/obesity/default.shtm>

⁵ United States Department of Agriculture

⁶ Brown, J.L., Shepard, D., Martin, T., Orwat, J. Harvard School of Public Health study: The Economic Cost of Domestic Hunger; Estimated Annual Burden to the United States; June, 2007.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Tufts University Center on Hunger, Poverty and Nutrition Policy

⁹ The Health Consequences of Hunger, Food Research Action Center, http://www.frac.org/html/hunger_in_the_us/health.html

¹⁰ Proceedings of the Roundtable on Understanding The Paradox of Hunger And Obesity, Food Research and Action Center, November 22, 2004.

¹¹ Commissioner Staples' letter to mayors inviting them to join his Mayor's Challenge initiative to increase access to summer food. <http://netx.squaremeals.com/SNP/summerfood/sponsors/forms/MayorsChallenge.pdf>

¹² To learn more about the Texas Public School Nutrition Policy, visit the Texas Department of Agriculture's web site at www.squaremeals.org.

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

ACTIVE Life Movement
 Angel Food Ministries
 Austin Sustainable Food Center
 Capital Area Food Bank
 Center for Public Policy Priorities
 Central Dallas Ministries
 High Plains Food Bank
 Houston Food Bank
 Houston Food Policy Workgroup
 McLennan County Hunger Coalition
 Methodist Federation for Social Action, Austin District
 Rose of Sharon Baptist Church
 San Antonio Food Bank
 Texas Action for Healthy Kids
 Texans Care for Children
 Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission
 Texas Baptist Community Ministries
 Texas Food Bank Network
 Texas Health Institute
 Texas Hunger Initiative
 Texas Impact
 University of Texas School of Public Health - Austin Regional campus
 United States Department of Agriculture
 Weinberg & Vauthier Consulting
 World Hunger Relief, Inc.



FOOD POLICY AFFECTS ALL OF TEXAS

Nutritious & Affordable Food Available for Every Texan

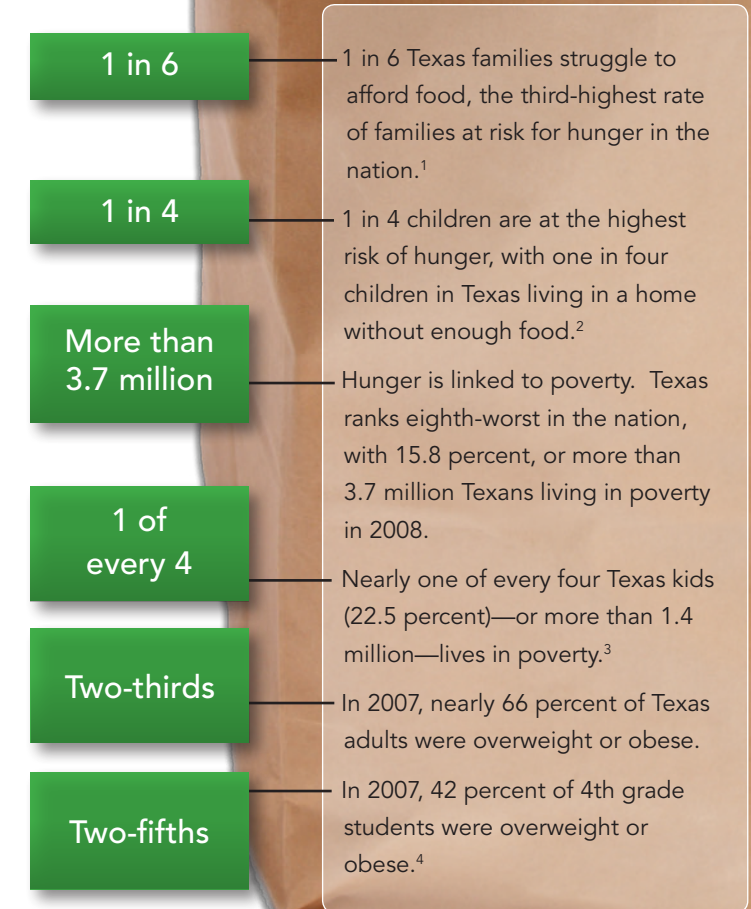
The Nutritional State of Texas: Family Food Security

We know that our economic competitiveness and prosperity as a state depend on a healthy and well-educated workforce. Children must be well-nourished—in mind and body—to grow into productive and contributing members of our society. Unfortunately, too many Texas families struggle to afford a nutritious diet on a regular basis. This is known as “family food insecurity,” which is caused by a lack of financial resources and limited access to affordable and healthy food.

Severe malnutrition rarely occurs in this country thanks to our federal nutrition safety net, which provides funding to states to prevent low-income families from going hungry. However, the problems associated with inadequate nutrition can have adverse effects on learning, development, productivity, physical and mental health, and family well-being. Food insecurity can also lead to obesity from eating cheap, high-calorie foods, which has lasting physical, social, and emotional consequences and increases the risk of costly, diet-related illness. **All of these problems have huge economic consequences for the state of Texas—costs that the entire community must bear.**

Texas cannot afford to ignore the problem of food insecurity any longer. **The Texas Food Policy Roundtable** challenges the Legislature to take a comprehensive look at the causes, consequences, and costs of food insecurity and take the necessary action to make Texas food secure. We can improve the health and productivity of Texas to:

- **Increase** access to food assistance and nutrition education to give families the resources they need to make better food choices.
- **Improve** the quality of meals served in childcare centers and schools.
- **Make affordable**, fresh, and healthy food more accessible to low-income communities through expansion of supermarket availability, farmers markets, and community gardens. Such initiatives would support efforts creating a local, sustainable, and accessible food system and spur economic development in low-income and rural communities.



WHAT IS "FOOD SECURITY?"

Household food security means access by all family members at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.⁵

Food security includes, (1) the availability of nutritionally sufficient and safe foods, and (2) a guaranteed ability to acquire nutritional foods in socially acceptable ways – without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies. In some developing nations where famine is widespread, hunger manifests itself as severe and visible clinical malnutrition. In contrast, the signs of food insecurity may be hidden. When people are food insecure, they may skip meals or cut back on the quality or quantity of food they buy. Over time, the recurring and involuntary lack of access to food can lead to malnutrition.



The Costs of Food Insecurity

Food insecurity affects all of us, even those of us who have access to three nutritious meals a day. It is estimated that hunger costs the nation more than \$9 billion annually for the costs of charity, illness, and lowered productivity.⁶ The increasing prevalence of obesity in children and adults poses an even greater risk to Texas. If the increase in obesity persists, state health officials project that the annual costs to Texas could reach \$15.6 billion in 2010 and could soar as high as \$39 billion by 2040.

Education & Economic Competitiveness:

- Hunger has a negative impact on children's ability to learn. Hungry and food insecure children are more likely to need special education, miss school, be suspended from school, and repeat a grade.⁷
- In addition to having a detrimental effect on the cognitive development of children, poor nutrition results in lost knowledge, brainpower, and productivity for the nation.⁸

Health:

- Hunger can stunt a child's growth and cause iron-deficiency anemia, which can lead to developmental and behavioral disturbances that can affect children's ability to learn how to read or do mathematics.
- Hungry children are twice as likely to suffer unwanted weight loss, fatigue, headaches, irritability, and frequent colds than children who are not food insecure.

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The federal nutrition safety net includes 15 food assistance programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly called Food Stamps), the School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, WIC, the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), Senior meal programs, the Summer Food Program for children, and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), which provides commodities to support private charitable food programs.

PROGRESS IN TEXAS: KEY LEGISLATIVE ACTIONS TO FIGHT HUNGER AND IMPROVE NUTRITION

- 1985** Passed the Omnibus Hunger Act of 1985 improving access to WIC, senior feeding, Food Stamps, and emergency food
- 1995** Required low-income school districts to offer breakfast programs
Increased access to WIC by expanding clinic hours
- 1997** Mandated low-income school districts to offer summer food programs
- 1999** Allocated \$2 million in funding for food programs outreach
Increased access to food stamps by revising asset limits and authorizing phone interviews
- 2001** Allocated \$300,000 to support food bank efforts to provide fresh produce to hungry families
Required school districts to participate in a coordinated school health program by 2007
- 2005** Made it easier for children on Food Stamps to automatically enroll in school lunch program
Required school districts to establish School Health Advisory Committees to provide leadership in the identification and dissemination of school health best practices and resources for school policymakers

- Infant mortality and low birthweight are closely linked to inadequate quantity or quality in the diet of the infant's mother.
- Hunger and poor nutrition also affect seniors by exacerbating chronic and acute diseases and speeding the onset of degenerative diseases.
- Being obese has social and emotional consequences and increases the risk of serious illness, including heart disease, stroke, type-2 diabetes, and some cancers.
- Obesity poses separate and distinct health risks, but can co-exist with food insecurity in the same household.¹⁰ This is because hunger and obesity are often the flip sides of the same coin—insufficient resources for a good diet, as well as limited access to healthy, fresh foods.

Improving Nutrition in Texas

The 15 federal food assistance programs that make up our national nutrition safety net play a critical role in preventing hunger and improving nutrition in Texas. Most of these programs are federal-state partnerships, in which 100 percent of the funding and rules come from the federal level and the state has responsibility for implementation. Combined, they serve millions of low-income Texans and provide over \$7 billion in federal funding for Texas annually in order to:

- Ensure that millions of low-income families have access to healthy and nutritious foods.
- Help schools, afterschool and summer programs, and childcare providers feed children in safe and nurturing environments.
- Improve educational achievement, economic security, nutrition and health.

Over the last few decades, Texas has made discrete investments in policies that prevent hunger and improve nutrition. But more is needed to prevent hunger, fight the rising tide of child obesity, and improve nutrition in Texas. For example:

- Last summer, only one-third of the low-income children who rely on free or reduced-price meals during the school year took advantage of federally funded summer food programs.
- Only two-thirds of eligible Texans enrolled in SNAP.
- Just over half of the low-income children eating school lunch participated in the school breakfast program.
- Though Texas has made progress in improving the food served in schools, cafeterias still rely heavily on highly processed foods¹² and menus don't always include fresh fruits and vegetables.

Targeted investments that strengthen access to food assistance, improve the quality of meals served in childcare centers and schools, and increase access to affordable and healthy food can prevent hunger and improve nutrition in Texas.

The Texas Food Policy Roundtable looks forward to working with the members of the Texas Legislature to accomplish these goals.

- 2007** Mandated a study to explore ways to increase school breakfast participation
- 2009** Established grant program to promote school-based and early childhood nutrition education programs
Created an advisory committee to study the availability of healthy foods in underserved areas of Texas
Established a farm-to-school task force to promote the availability of locally grown fresh foods in public schools
Created the Early Childhood Health and Nutrition Interagency Council to develop a plan for increasing physical activity and healthy nutrition in early childhood care settings
Made P.E. requirements consistent with national standards
Allowed specialty license plate fees to fund the Safe Routes to School Program
Allocated \$20 million in grants to low-income middle schools to support physical education and fitness programs
Allocated \$4.7 million to support evidence-based obesity-prevention initiatives

"As Texans we are proud of our leadership in many areas, but in 2009 our state was highlighted as being our nation's leader in child food insecurity. Texas ranks no.1 in many things.

HUNGRY CHILDREN CANNOT BE ALLOWED TO BE ONE OF THEM.¹¹

*--Texas Agriculture Commissioner
Todd Staples*