

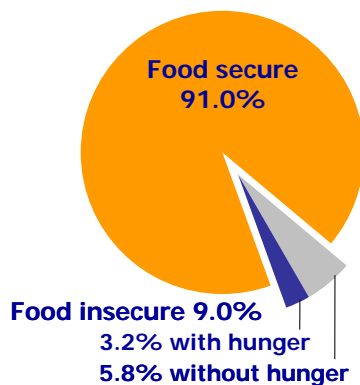
## Family Living Programs Fighting Hunger in Wisconsin Communities

### Situation

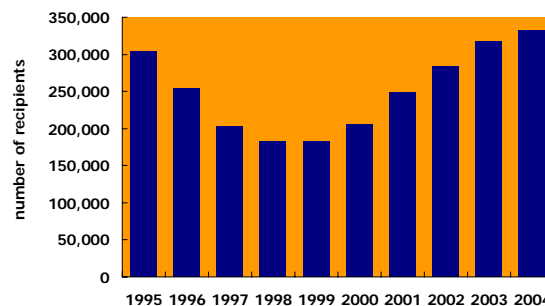
Hunger and food insecurity are *real* problems for Wisconsin families. Statewide, approximately 540,000 people live in households that are food insecure<sup>i</sup>—they do not have access at all times to enough food for an active healthy life. This means one out of every eleven Wisconsin households is food insecure. Low-income families have alarmingly high rates of food insecurity (44 percent) and hunger (19 percent)<sup>ii</sup>.

According to 2000 Census data, 8.7 percent of Wisconsin citizens and 10.8 percent of Wisconsin children live in poverty. In many more households, incomes are considered above the poverty line, but are still low enough to qualify families for government assistance programs such as food stamps and Badgercare health insurance. In total, over one-fifth of our population, or more than one million Wisconsin citizens, are considered to be low income or in poverty.

There are indications that things may be getting worse. Statewide unemployment rates are increasing—5.5 percent in 2004 compared to 3.0 percent in 1999<sup>iii</sup>. Relative to other states, Wisconsin households have become more food insecure and hungry<sup>iv</sup>, and are seeking more food assistance.



**Number of Wisconsin Food Stamp recipients**  
October monthly totals 1995-2004



### Response

University of Wisconsin-Extension works in local communities to raise awareness about food insecurity and poverty, and to help low-income families gain knowledge and skills to improve their situations. Educational programming related to food security is provided on the individual level (such as by teaching families how to stretch food dollars), and at the community level (such as by convening a local hunger task force).

### Outcomes

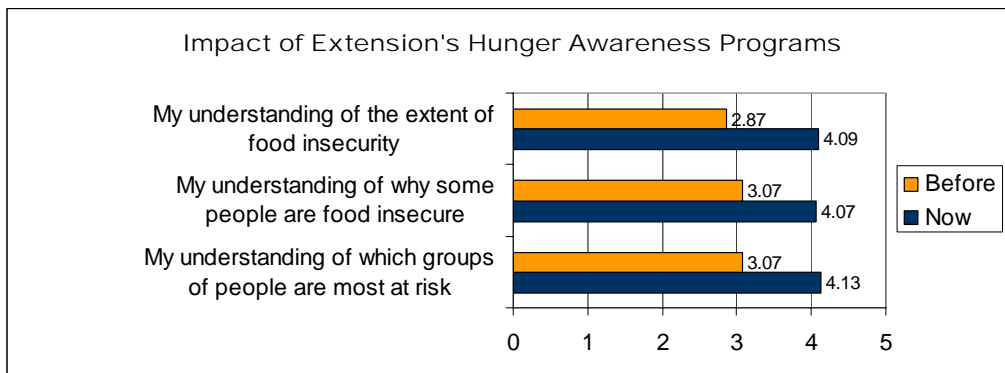
#### Collaborations

In 2004, 26 active hunger prevention coalitions were serving 30 Wisconsin counties, with UW-Extension playing key roles. In Pierce County alone, the hunger prevention council distributed nearly 3,000 pounds of donated venison to more than 800 individuals and families.

UW-Extension and the Department of Health and Family Services are convening a statewide hunger prevention coalition. UW-Extension helped create an online tool to identify local resources and service gaps, an annual state Hunger Report Card, and an examination of federal and state policies to improve capacity to distribute emergency food.

**Understanding Hunger**

UW-Extension provides hunger awareness education to help communities better understand the scope of the problem, underlying causes and potential solutions. UW-Extension created a publication series, *Hunger Close to Home*, to help educators and other stakeholders share research-based information in their community. In 2004, county-based UW-Extension staff reported that programs based on *Hunger Close to Home* are making a difference. Participants report a greater understanding of the extent of food insecurity and hunger. When asked to name the most important thing they learned about hunger, participants said: “It’s closer to home than I thought.” “The stats were staggering!” “It’s a huge problem!” “It is a real and serious issue that needs to be addressed.” “Too many people are hungry.”



**Poverty Education**

Poverty and food insecurity are closely linked. UW-Extension provides poverty awareness education and training for working with a low-income audience. UW-Extension has facilitated over 75 local poverty awareness programs reaching more than 4,000 people statewide. Evaluations show striking increases in understanding among participants, and changes in the way they interact with low-income clients. There are 25 programs taking place in 2005.

UW-Extension has trained 141 people to conduct programs on working more effectively with families in poverty. In the past three years, trainers have facilitated over 135 workshops, reaching more than 3,000 staff and volunteers from more than 40 agencies and organizations. Participants gain greater knowledge and understanding of generational poverty issues and the skills they need to work with families in poverty.

**Research**

UW-Extension conducts research to better understand the extent of food insecurity and hunger in Wisconsin, and the characteristics of food insecure households. A survey of food pantry clients showed that 25 percent have a long-term disability or health problem that limits their ability to work. 33 percent are employed, and 44 percent have at least one employed person in the household, yet only 18 percent of employed clients earn more than \$8/hour. The survey has led to increased awareness and steps aimed at alleviating hunger.

UW-Extension also helped communities conduct a school-based survey of the food security status of local families, their participation in federal nutrition assistance programs, child and parent preferences related to school meals, and more. In 2003 and 2004, 42 schools in 14 counties participated.

### **Supporting Community Food Production Resources**

UW-Extension enhances access to locally produced fresh produce through community gardens or farmers' markets, providing increased quantity and quality of nutritious food to low-income families. FEAST, the Nutrition Coalition of the Chequamegon Region, created a Mobile Farmers' Market to reach rural Ashland and Bayfield Counties, where no markets exist for senior citizens and WIC participants to use farmers' market vouchers. The Mobile Market made 17 visits to seven sites. 84 percent of seniors and WIC clients surveyed said that they were eating more fresh fruits and vegetables and 97 percent said they would use the market next year. Producers benefited from this new outlet for their crops.

The Dane County Hunger Prevention Council created a South Madison farmers' market so that WIC families and low-income seniors may use farmers' market vouchers, bringing more fresh fruits and vegetables home. Of the 27 vendors in 2004, more than 20 were certified to accept WIC vouchers. WIC and senior shoppers have increased by over 50 percent.

### **Supporting Child Nutrition Programs**

UW-Extension improves access and increases participation in school meals. Free and reduced price school lunch and breakfast, free summer meals and after school snacks provide nutritious meals for children who might not otherwise receive them.

Statewide, UW-Extension has helped facilitate the development of summer meal sites. Brown County WNEP and program partners started a summer breakfast program, serving over 6,000 meals at three sites in the initial year. Due to its success, the Green Bay School Food Service continued the program, expanded it to include lunch, and now serves over 1,500 children on an average day at 38 sites around the county.

UW-Extension partners with the state Department of Public Instruction to improve access to school breakfast. In 2004, school districts received \$623,782 in direct grants to start new breakfast programs and improve participation in existing programs. UW-Extension is researching innovative models for improving access to school breakfast and documenting and sharing best practices.

### **Contact**

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<sup>i</sup> Nord, Mark. US Department of Agriculture. Personal communication citing data from 2001-2003. 2004.

<sup>ii</sup> Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, WIC unit.

<sup>iii</sup> Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, Local Area Unemployment Statistics

<sup>iv</sup> Sullivan, Ashley F., and Choi Eunyoung. 2002. *Hunger and Food Insecurity in the Fifty States: 1998-2000*.

Brandeis University, Center on Hunger and Poverty: <http://www.centeronhunger.org/pdf/statedata98-00.pdf>.