



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

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The “Superbowl” Comes a Year Early

by Kim Wade- Food Banks of Northern California

For months, advocates against hunger have been preparing for a big debate in Washington on the federal food stamp program, originally scheduled to begin next year. Some had even called this 2002 debate our “Superbowl,” as we looked forward to the first chance since 1996 to review and reform the nation’s largest anti-hunger program.

But then, as federal funding became tighter, it grew clear to advocates that the schedule needed to be changed, and that delaying food stamp reauthorization until next year would result in less money and less opportunity for any meaningful reforms. In mid summer Congress decided to reauthorize food stamps this year, as part of a dramatically accelerated consideration of the Farm Bill. In July, both the House and Senate were holding committee hearings on food stamps and the EFAP commodities program, as well as farm, conservation and research initiatives. Alarming, an initial “concept paper” released by the House Agriculture Committee in early July proposed only \$2 billion for food stamp reform and focused solely on simplification, only one of the many program areas that needs improvement for people facing hunger.

A Busy Summer...

Supporters of food banks and other anti-hunger advocates quickly swung into action to raise awareness about all the aspects of the food stamp program that are ripe for

reform. One food bank leader, David Goodman of the Redwood Empire Food Bank, testified before a House Committee, while other food bankers across California submitted written testimony. Throughout June and July, networks of food banks, agencies, volunteers and other supporters contacted Members of Congress to educate them about the need for positive reforms to food stamps. Reforms recommended included cutting red tape – such as ending the monthly reports currently required of all California recipients – and increasing inadequate benefit amounts to reflect the rising costs of living.

On July 27 the House Agriculture Committee passed a Farm Bill that includes reauthorization of the Food Stamp Program for ten years. The bill now includes \$3.25 billion

over the ten years (rather than the \$2 billion originally proposed) in food stamp improvements that will increase benefits for certain needy households and ease access to the program, especially for the working poor.

Fast Facts on Food Stamps and Sacramento County

- Currently, less than half (45%) of the families in California who are eligible for food stamps participate.
- Even with this low participation rate, more than \$96 million of federal food stamp dollars are spent in local grocery stores each year by families in Sacramento County.
- If food stamps are reformed and everyone who is eligible for food stamps participates, we will have fewer people experiencing hunger in our community, reduce the strain on food banks and other emergency food providers, and increase dramatically local grocery business.

Source: California Food Policy Advocates www.cfpa.net

The EFAP commodities program, which provides high-quality food to be distributed through food banks to people in need, would receive increased funding, too.

Despite these successes, other needed reforms are not included in the version of the Farm Bill passed by the House committee, and will need to be raised again with the full House, the Senate, and the White House. For example, legal immigrants, who were barred from participating in food

Continued on next page

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Peggy Roark Editor
Stephanie Wilson Contributing Writer

**The Hunger Commission is a program of
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Hunger Commission

109 12th Street, Suite 200
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 447-7063 FAX: (916) 447-7052
hunger@communitycouncil.org

Staff/VISTA

Peggy Roark, ext. 335
proark@communitycouncil.org

Stephanie Wilson, ext. 331
swilson@communitycouncil.org

Sara Marchel, ext 345
smarchel@communitycouncil.org

The Sacramento City/County Hunger Commission is a 21 member voting body comprised of diverse representatives of the Sacramento community. The Hunger Commission was created in 1990 with joint funding from the City and County of Sacramento.

The Hunger Commission believes that hunger can be prevented and is not acceptable in a just society that values the dignity and worth of every individual.

Therefore, the goal of the Hunger Commission is to eliminate hunger by assuring that all people are able to provide themselves adequate food for an active healthy life.

To do so, the Commission addresses root causes of hunger and creatively pursues positive improvements by:

* Effectively advocating for people who are hungry

* Serving as the area's primary information source about hunger and opportunities for the community to eliminate it

* Coordinating community resources to increase opportunities and education for people to become self-sufficient

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Continued from page 1

stamps in 1996, remain ineligible in this bill (fortunately, a state program in California funds food stamps for many legal immigrants here). Also, the minimum benefit amount remains at \$10 a month, although a new level of \$25 per month has been requested. This low level continues to discourage participation by seniors and other single adults in need, who often find that the red-tape involved outweighs the benefits received. Both of these proposals are part of another bi-partisan bill, the Nutrition Assistance for Working Families and Seniors Act, S.583/H.R. 2142, that advocates would like to see fully included in the final Farm Bill.

US Rep. Doug Ose, who represents a district which includes northwest Sacramento County and who serves on the House Agriculture Committee that considered the Farm Bill, deserves a special thanks. He was interested in and responsive to many of the priorities voiced by the Sacramento Hunger Commission, Senior Gleaners, and other local food banks and anti-hunger advocates.

...And A Full Fall Ahead

What's the next stop for this rapidly moving train? The House bill likely will go to a floor vote in September. Meanwhile, the Senate bill isn't expected to be too far behind, with committee consideration and a floor vote also predicted for fall. A conference committee in Congress between the two versions of the bills, and then consideration by the President, will be the final two stages. A process that was expected to take place in 2002 may well be completed before the new year even begins.

Advocates are working now to bring their message of comprehensive food stamp reform and commodities support to the full House, US Senators Feinstein and Boxer, and President Bush. **You can help educate yourself, our community, and our Members of Congress in a number of ways:**

- Write a letter to Senators Dianne Feinstein or Barbara Boxer urging them to support comprehensive food stamp reform and commodities support, beyond what the House Farm Bill provides. (Their address is Senator [name], US Senate, Washington, DC 20510.)
- Sign-up to receive weekly email updates from the California Food Policy Advocates on the progress of food stamp reform and actions needed. www.cfpa.net
- Learn more about hunger in our community by scheduling a one-hour "Hunger 101" interactive workshop for your community, congregation, or civic group, presented by representatives from the Sacramento Hunger Commission.

Contact the Sacramento Hunger Commission at (916) 447-7063 ext. 335 for more information on these and other actions to reduce hunger in our community.

GETTING INVOLVED !

Join the Hunger Commission at the 26th Annual Sacramento Crop Walk

Crop Walk is an event organized by local interfaith groups and other volunteer organizations to raise funds to help stop hunger wherever it exists, to respond to disasters, to empower people to meet their own needs, and to raise awareness about hunger in the world. Twenty-five percent of all funds raised stay in Sacramento County.

Last year, 347 walkers (including infants, pets and a 91-year old woman) raised over \$35,000. Besides the 25% that stays in Sacramento County, walkers may choose to donate to any one of 19 designated international anti-hunger organizations.

HERE'S HOW YOU CAN PARTICIPATE:

1. **Attend a kick off rally and potluck Sunday, August 26th** at the Elk Grove Congregational United Church of Christ, 9624 Melrose Ave in Elk Grove. Come with good food, a great appetite and find out more about CROP WALK. (it is not mandatory to

attend this meeting to walk in the event).

2. **Call the Hunger Commission** and join our group. Commissioners and staff are going to walk together in this fun event. You are welcome to join us. Call Stephanie Wilson at (916) 447-7063 ext 331 for more details.

3. **Walk for the fight against hunger!** This year's Sacramento walk is scheduled for Sunday, October 21, 2001, beginning and ending on the west steps of the State Capitol. Registration begins at 12:30pm. The walk will start at 1pm and participants may choose between a 10k (6.2 mile) walk through downtown Sacramento or a shorter walk around the Capitol.

For more information about CROP WALK, call the Church World Service at (916) 686-1600. We hope to see you there.

Need Volunteers?

People Helping People Care, a program of the Community Services Planning Council (CSPC), is designed to organize community service projects in partnership with community based organizations. People Helping People Care can provide 5-20 volunteers for your one-time or ongoing community service projects that occur in the evening or on weekends.

For more information, visit CSPC's website at: http://communitycouncil.org/phpcare/agency_information.htm or call Melanie Choy at (916) 447-7063 ext 304.



Job Opportunity

Local Food Programs Manager

Manage and coordinate all aspects of several major local food assistance programs. Maintain contact with agencies served; maintain records and generate required reports for all programs; supervise employees, volunteers and students; community outreach and development; grant writing. Must be a detail-oriented person with strong written and verbal communication skills. Food bank experience preferred, commitment to serve the poor required. Fax cover letter and resume to Foodlink at (916) 387-7046.

Nutrition Education and Money Sense Workshops Available

As part of its California Nutrition Network grant, the Sacramento Hunger Commission is offering free nutrition education and Money Sense workshops in Sacramento County.

The nutrition education workshops cover basic nutrition information, how to choose nutritious food for a healthy lifestyle and safe food handling. Each class includes a cooking demonstration and a bag of food containing all the ingredients needed to reproduce the recipe used in the cooking demonstration at home.

The Money Sense workshops will cover the importance of creating and maintaining a household budget, how to save money, how to budget for food and the benefits of using a checking account.

Both workshops consist of four 1 to 1 1/2 hour classes that meet once a week. Interpreters and child care can be provided with advance notice and workshops can be held on evenings and weekends.

If you are interested in scheduling a workshop for your organization, or have any questions regarding the workshops, contact Sara Marchel at (916) 447-7063 ext 345.

Thank You! A generous grant from Foodlink makes it possible for participants to take nutritious food home and try out recipes using skills learned in the nutrition education workshops.



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