

Causes for Concern in Regard to Hunger

In the U.S., more people are turning to local emergency providers as their own incomes drop or disappear. Many soup kitchens and emergency pantries are experiencing an alarming jump in numbers. Many of those asking for food are working, but cannot make ends meet in this economy.

Meanwhile, the big regional food banks, such as Second Harvest, have experienced a drop in the contributions that they pass along. Many companies that used to donate all of their surplus food (such as cereals, canned goods, bread products) now have both become more efficient, with fewer “leftovers” to share, and also in some cases have sold their leftovers to Family Dollar and other such stores. The food banks have had to cut back on what they can provide.

Another source of food has been government surplus foods, bought in much greater quantity in previous years. Emergency food providers still look for the plain tan boxes of canned and packaged goods such as rice, beef stew, vegetables, etc. However, government surplus foods dropped from \$154 million in 2005 to only \$67 million in 2006.

Yet another problem has arisen, with the rush to manufacture ethanol from corn. At this time, 14% of the corn crop is being grown for fuel. By 2010, it is expected to rise to 30% of the crop. This pushes up the price of the remaining corn used for both raising livestock and feeding human beings.

Worldwide, the situation is far grimmer. A number of problems have arisen almost at the same time. Australia, a major producer of rice, has suffered six years of drought. Many farmers have simply given up trying to achieve a crop. Rice is the basic food for half of the world. The cost of wheat and other grains such as barley and oats, has ballooned as well. Citizens of China and India, with prosperity growing in those countries, have developed “Western” appetites for beef and other meats. Cattle need plenty of food to mature, therefore there is more demand for grain and grazing space.

Here in the United States, we are experiencing a price jump for many staple foods, such as eggs and milk, bread, rice, meat and produce. For many who are on tight budgets, food has overridden other budget items, and in some cases, they are seeking help from emergency food providers and/or applying for Food Stamps.

Many of the world’s people, however, are truly desperate for food —of any kind. Some spend 80% of their meager income on food just to survive. There have been riots in many countries, such as Egypt, Indonesia and Haiti.

The United Nations’ World Food Program says it cannot meet its commitments without emergency funding. Rich countries need to contribute, to avoid even greater disaster for governments and for victims. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund have come up with a plan of global food policy that would include cash, food-for-work and assistance with plantings.

Together, perhaps various governments and these international efforts will be able to find ways to deal with these problems. We need to urge our own U.S. government to do its part.



(sources: Hunger Summit, Episcopal Church Center, Chicago, March 2008; Food and Hunger series in [the New York Times](#), April 2008)