EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hunger is a chronic problem for many people in the United States. There are adults in households throughout America who routinely cannot afford to feed their families, who ration food to feed their children, who have to choose between purchasing food or paying rent, who have to go without dinner in order to buy medicine – or vice versa.

Today in the United States, a country plagued by neither widespread drought nor famine, with enough money to feed the world twice over, tens of millions of people do not have enough to eat on a daily basis. In 2011:

- 50.1 million Americans lived in households which were food insecure -- 33.5 million adults and 16.7 million children
- 17.9 million households (14.9 percent) were food insecure
- 6.9 million households (5.7 percent) experienced very low food security

These numbers reflect a stunning increase of nearly 15 million people (41 percent) since 2007, when 35.5 million Americans dealt with food insecurity. They also show that over 16 percent of those living in the United States suffer from some level of food insecurity, a number roughly equal to the populations of California and Illinois combined. Previously released data from the USDA show that there are two groups who are at highest risk for food insecurity: adults aged 60 to 65 who are jobless but not eligible to receive Social Security benefits, and children, who experience even greater challenges on weekends and during the summers when they aren’t able to take advantage of school meal programs (Feeding America, 2012; USDA, 2011).

Food insecurity, the primary measure of the hunger and health of a community, is measured by the USDA through specific criteria:

Standards to define food insecurity (household meets each of the following):
- They worried whether their food would run out before they got money to buy more
- The food they bought didn’t last, and they didn’t have money to get more
- They couldn’t afford to eat balanced meals

Standards to define very low food security (household meets all three previous standards, plus):
- Adults ate less than they felt they should
- Adults cut the size of meals or skipped meals and did so in three or more consecutive months
POVERTY, UNEMPLOYMENT, AND HUNGER

While the causes of food insecurity are complex, hunger is closely correlated to poverty levels and unemployment and underemployment are equally strong predictors of food insecurity. In 2011, the national unemployment rate hovered at nearly nine percent; in October 2012 it fell to just under eight percent for the first time in over four years. The underemployment rate, which includes those “marginally employed,” was nearly twice that. While some generally characterize people living in poverty as healthy-but-lazy adults who don’t want to work, it’s becoming harder to justify this stereotype. Along with those unemployed, a majority (57 percent) of able-bodied adults living in poverty reported to the Census Bureau that they had at least one job. The real trouble is the inability for many working people to support their families on meager salaries, and/or the inability to find steady, full-time work (Berg, 2008; US Census Bureau, 2011).

The statistics for the State of Indiana reflect those found at the national level:

- Approximately 13.5 percent of Indiana households were considered food insecure from 2010-2012, with 6.3 percent experiencing very low food security (Feeding America, 2012)
- In January 2012, the Indiana unemployment rate was 9.1 percent (State of Indiana, 2012)
- An estimated 15.8 percent of Indiana residents (1,001,503 residents) were considered to be living in poverty in 2011 (US Census Bureau, 2011)

The food insecurity and poverty rates for northwest Indiana and Lake County are a bit higher:

- Approximately 16.2 percent of Lake County households were considered food insecure in 2012. The rate for the Indiana 1st Congressional District, which encompasses much of northwest Indiana, was somewhat higher, at 17.5 percent (Feeding America, 2012)
- In January, 2012, the unemployment rate in Lake County was 10.1 percent (State of Indiana, 2012)
- Approximately 16 percent of Lake County residents were living in poverty in 2011, the 16th highest in the State (US Census Bureau, 2011)

HUNGER AND HEALTH

In addition to the obvious general negative effects of hunger, food insecurity also paradoxically often leads to obesity and its associated health risks. A national study involving a representative sample of more than 6,000 adults showed that wages were inversely related to BMI (body mass index, an indicator of levels of body fat), i.e., that those with low wages had increased BMI as well as increased chance of being obese (Kim & Leigh, 2010). Thus those facing the greatest levels of food insecurity were also most likely to carry extra weight.

Nutrition experts explain this is not as contradictory at it appears. People who are food insecure face many challenges, including access to supermarkets stocked with healthy food options (which often are more costly even when available) and the time to prepare meals from scratch. Food insecurity tends to lead to purchases of cheap, processed foods that are richer in calories than in nutrients as the goal is to obtain as much food as possible at the lowest possible cost.
So called “value-meals” promoted by fast food chains seem like good options because they offer larger potions for only a few cents more. And fast food in general is appealing to the stressed parent trying to juggle more than one job with child care and other household responsibilities. Maintaining healthy eating habits on a very tight budget often requires time for menu planning and food preparation, as well as education about nutrition and the development of new eating habits (Berg, 2008). And while food pantries provide a vital lifeline for their clients, the available grocery options frequently consist of canned, boxed, and processed foods; fresh fruits, vegetables, meat, and dairy products are often in short supply.

LAKE COUNTY, INDIANA

The situation for many thousands residing in Lake County, Indiana, is no different. One recent study, *Hunger in America 2010* -- conducted by Mathematica Policy Research for Feeding America, the nation’s largest network of emergency food providers -- details some of the struggles experienced by Lake County’s families. This study describes the challenges that the clients of the Food Bank of Northwest Indiana, which serves residents of Lake and Porter Counties, face on a daily basis.

The statistics are striking:

- 81 percent of food pantries, 57 percent of soup kitchens, and 75 percent of shelters served report an increase in clients from 2006
- 46.9 percent of children are very food insecure
- 43.2 percent of seniors are very food insecure
- 51.3 percent must choose between buying food and paying for utilities and heating
- 45.9 percent must choose between food and paying their mortgage/rent
- 35.9 percent must choose between food and paying for health care
- 45.1 percent must choose between food and gas for their car
- 24.6 percent of their clients, or someone in their home, does not have health insurance
- 57.9 percent have at least one unpaid medical bill
- 49.9 percent earn less than $10,000 a year
- 21 percent earn more than $50,000 a year
- 30 percent have at least one family member in poor health; 12.5 percent are themselves ill
- 33.6 percent of households are run by a single parent
- 42.7 percent have only a high school diploma
- 4.5 percent lost their jobs within three months prior to the Hunger in America survey
- 20.2 percent have been out of work for 1-2 years; 82.4 percent are currently unemployed
- 52.4 percent also receive SNAP benefits (formerly known as Food Stamps)
- 56.1 percent use the school lunch program
- 51.8 percent use the school breakfast program
- 98 percent are U.S. citizens
- 8 percent are on welfare
- 64 percent of households have incomes at or below the federal poverty level
- 50 percent are children or seniors
The following recent statistics indicate the levels of poverty, and by extension food insecurity, in Lake County, Indiana:

- 88,211 families received food stamps in 2010
- 47,521 children received free and reduced lunches in 2011; 42 percent of children were eligible to participate in the program
- The 2010 poverty rate in Lake County was 17.7 percent; for children under 18 the poverty rate increased to 26 percent
- In 2010, on average, 4,182 families in Lake County were receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) payments every month (the second highest county rate in Indiana)
- The unemployment rate was 9.6 percent in June, 2012

(StatsIndiana, 2012; County Health Rankings, 2012)

*Hunger in America, Indiana 2010* reports that of the clients served by the emergency food programs of the Food Bank of Northwest Indiana, 75 percent of households were food insecure, with 45 percent reporting low or very low food security as defined by the U.S. government’s official food security scale. Additionally, among households with children, 79 percent were food insecure and 41 percent of those experience low or very low levels of food security. Further, 41.8 percent of the client households receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP – formerly known as Food Stamps) benefits had low food security and another 32.9 percent experienced very low food security.

When looking at SNAP participation, the following statistics come into play:

- Among all clients with children who participated in SNAP, 6.1 percent stated that, during the previous 12 months, their children were often not eating enough because they just could not afford enough food.
- Among all clients with children who participated in SNAP, 12.8 percent said that their children skipped meals because there was not enough money for food during the previous 12 months.
- Among all clients with children who participated in SNAP with children, 13.9 percent said that their children were hungry at least once during the previous 12 months, but they could not afford more food.
- Sixty-six percent of the clients who are receiving SNAP benefits have been receiving them (often non-continuously) for more than two years.
- For 71.6 percent of the clients who are receiving SNAP benefits, the benefits last for three weeks or less. For 39.7 percent, they last for two weeks or less.
- In Lake County in 2010, 25,918 residents received Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits, nutrition education and dietary supplements -- the second highest total within the counties of Indiana.
- Among the client households that are eligible to participate but are not receiving SNAP benefits, 42.2 percent and 43.0 percent had low and very low food security, respectively.

(Indiana State Department of Health, 2011)
Why is it that some qualifying residents are not participating in or benefiting from the SNAP program? The Indiana State Department of Health’s report indicates that, overall, 31.5 percent of the clients who had not applied for SNAP benefits did not do so because they believe they are not eligible or eligible for only a low benefit amount; 5.6 percent because it is too much hassle; 17.6 percent either because there is no need or because they think others would need the benefits more. In addition, SNAP participation can impact access to local food pantries, as some township trustee offices and church-based food pantries will not provide additional assistance to food stamp recipients.

In addition, many qualifying residents are not participating in special summer food programs. This can be attributed to several factors. Among all households with at least one child younger than age 18, 50.2 percent said they did not know about the summer food program; 6.1 percent said there was no site or program near them, and 2.9 percent said they did not have access to transportation.

Statistics also reveal the general poor health conditions of residents of Lake County, which ranks 84th out of 92 in the state for health outcomes, 82nd for health factors, and 80th for physical environment. Nine percent of adults have limited access to healthy foods (with “limited access” defined as a low income individual who does not live close -- within one mile in urban areas and ten miles in rural areas -- to a grocery store), and 34 percent of Lake County adults are obese (County Health Rankings, 2012).

THE FOOD BANK OF NORTHWEST INDIANA, FOOD PANTRIES, SOUP KITCHENS

There are resources available to address the immediate need of emergency food assistance for those who are food insecure in Lake County, Indiana. The Food Bank of Northwest Indiana, an associated agency of the national organization Feeding America, works with a network of food pantries located throughout Lake and Porter Counties. The pantries are located in churches, township trustee offices, and other public locations. There are also independent food pantries and soup kitchens which are located almost exclusively in church-related facilities. The Food Bank also sponsors a “Pantry on the Go” program, subsidised by area McDonald’s restaurants, which trucks food to various locations (parks, parking lots, community centers) throughout Lake and Porter Counties on an ad-hoc basis.

These resources provide free food to help meet basic nutritional needs and are used on a consistent basis by those in need. According to responses from the client survey, 79 percent of pantry client households used one food pantry during the previous month, 14.8 percent used two different food pantries, 4.7 percent used three, and 1.2 percent used four. According to the same survey, 11.5 percent of pantry clients used one soup kitchen during the previous month and 2.5 percent used two kitchens, and, among kitchen clients, 89.7 percent used one kitchen during the past month, 5.3 percent used two, 1.5 percent used three, 1.3 percent used four, and 2.2 percent used five or more kitchens. Finally, in the absence of a particular agency helping the clients, 73.4 percent of them said that they would go to another agency, but 12.5 percent of the respondents said that would try to cope by eating less, skipping meals, or reducing the size of meals (Feeding America, 2012).
Income levels drive food pantry and food bank use, as would be expected. As the following table shows, households with incomes less than or equal to 130 percent of the poverty line are much more likely to live with low or very low food security.

### Income in 2008, by Food Security Status

**Food Security Status at Client Households (Lake County)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income in relation to poverty line</th>
<th>All Client Households</th>
<th>Food Insecure</th>
<th>Food Insecure with Low Food Security</th>
<th>Food Insecure with Very Low Food Security</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 percent</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-50 percent</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-75 percent</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76-100 percent</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101-130 percent</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUBTOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>84.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>76.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>89.1</strong></td>
<td><strong>84.4</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>131-150 percent</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>151-185 percent</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>186 percent and up</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUBTOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>15.3</strong></td>
<td><strong>23.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>10.9</strong></td>
<td><strong>15.6</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Size (N)</td>
<td>214</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

-From *Hunger in America 2010*

Equally important is the ability of households to not only have access to food, but, more specifically, to have enough nutritious food in order to eat balanced meals. The *Hunger in America 2010* client survey revealed the following:
Adults in 27.4 percent of Food Bank of Northwest Indiana client households had to cut the size of meals or skip meals because there was not enough money for food almost every month of the previous 12 months and 56.8 percent of the clients ate less than they felt they should because there was not enough money to buy food at least once during the previous 12 months. Additionally, adults in 41.2 percent of client households were hungry but did not eat because they could not afford enough food at least once during the previous 12 months, and adults in 24.1 percent of client households did not eat for a whole day at least once during the previous 12 months because there was not enough money for food.

In addition:

SOUTH LAKE COUNTY

Looking specifically at south Lake County, defined as the six southernmost townships located primarily south of highway US 30 (Cedar Creek, Center, Eagle Creek, Hanover, West Creek, and Winfield), some additional statistics provide further information. In 2010, the population of these six townships was 74,844 with Center Township by far the largest with nearly 32,000 residents.

In aggregate, 10,768 (14.4 percent) south Lake County residents lived in households that had an annual income of $25,000 or less; 2,845 (3.8 percent) had annual incomes under $10,000. Unemployment in south Lake County totaled 4.2 percent of 55,251 residents aged 16 and over, and 4.5 percent reported receiving SNAP benefits in the past 12 months (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

These statistics are reflected in the school systems serving the six townships in south Lake County. Data from 2010 data indicates that in the Crown Point School Corporation, 22.3 percent of the 8,013 students received free or reduced lunch, as did 26.6 percent of 2,177 students in the Hanover Community Schools and 24 percent of the 3,454 students in the Tri-Creek School Corporation. In aggregate, approximately 3,250 students within these three school districts receive free or reduced cost lunch based on family need (Indiana Department of Education, 2012).
The 2006-2010 *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates* include the following data points by township:

### Annual Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Township</th>
<th>Annual Income $25,000 or Less</th>
<th>Annual Income Under $10,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cedar Creek Township</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center Township</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eagle Creek Township</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanover Township</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Creek Township</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winfield Township</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Unemployment Rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Township</th>
<th>Unemployment Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cedar Creek Township</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center Township</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eagle Creek Township</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanover Township</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Creek Township</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winfield Township</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Receiving SNAP Benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Township</th>
<th>Receiving SNAP Benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cedar Creek Township</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center Township</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eagle Creek Township</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanover Township</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Creek Township</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winfield Township</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of References


