

11.9 percent of Oregonians struggle to put food on the table

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

PORTLAND, Ore. — Oregon had 11.9 percent of its households struggling with hunger or "food insecurity" from 2004-06, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) annual report released Wednesday. "Food insecurity" is the USDA term to describe households that struggled with affording enough food. "Too many Oregon families struggle to put food on the table," said Rachel Bristol, CEO, Oregon Food Bank. "The high cost of housing, health care, childcare and fuel make it difficult for low-income individuals and families to have enough money to pay for food." Federal nutrition programs such as food stamps and TEFAP (The Federal Emergency Food Assistance Program) help fill the gap. "But inflation has weakened both programs since they were reauthorized in the 2002 farm bill and both programs are in desperate need of new investments," Bristol said. "Hunger is an income issue," states Patti Whitney-Wise, executive director of the Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force. "With the rising cost of food, the food stamp dollar doesn't cover as much as it has in the past. We have been losing ground in the Food Stamp Program for years because benefits were not indexed to inflation. Most people don't realize the minimum benefit of \$10 has not changed since the program started in 1977." Food stamps serve more than 430,000 Oregonians each month. Along with food stamps, TEFAP commodities are critical to the emergency food supply and serve as the core of the more than 750,000 emergency food boxes that the Oregon Food Bank Network distributes throughout Oregon and Clark County, Wash. Since 2004, TEFAP commodities to Oregon Food Bank have dropped nearly 60 percent, from 11.2-million pounds of food in 2004 to about 5-1/2-million pounds in 2007. Currently, the U.S. Senate is debating reauthorization of the farm bill and will set funding for both food stamps and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) for the next five years. "This is a critical time for Oregon," says Whitney-Wise. "We have made strides in combating hunger, but we still need federal programs to ensure all of our children have enough to eat. Making sure our federal programs are effective and reach people who need them is something tangible we can do today." Bristol and Whitney-Wise encourage Oregonians to call Senators Smith and Wyden and to ask them to continue their work as Senate leaders in the fight against hunger and to pass a farm bill that improves food stamps and TEFAP. "It's so easy to get overwhelmed by the complexity of hunger and its causes, but this is a simple action we can take today that will help many people," says Whitney-Wise.

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