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New Report Finds 18 percent of All Children in Arkansas Don't Have Consistent Access to Meals

America's Second Harvest Issues New Report on Children Facing Hunger

CHICAGO, November 15, 2007 – In Arkansas, 18 percent of all children live in food insecure households, which means they do not always know where they will find their next meal. Arkansas has the 19th highest rate of child food insecurity in the nation.

In the United States overall, one out of six children in small towns and big cities lives in a food insecure household. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), 12 million children in the United States live in this condition – unable to consistently access nutritious and adequate amounts of food necessary for a healthy life.

That's enough children to fill every seat in all of the professional league football, baseball, basketball and hockey stadiums and every Division One NCAA basketball stadium across the country at the same time.

Now, for the first time, the extent of child hunger as reported by the USDA has been examined by state in a new study released today by America's Second Harvest—The Nation's Food Bank Network and sponsored by ConAgra Foods Foundation. In 12 states – nearly one quarter of the country – more than 20 percent of the children live in households without consistent access to food.

“Next time you're in a classroom, look around and think about what this means in these states with particularly high numbers,” said Vicki Escarra, president and CEO of America's Second Harvest. “In some states this means four or five students in a classroom of 20 kids do not consistently get the nourishment they need to grow and thrive.”

Researcher John Cook, Ph.D., of the Boston Medical Center and Boston University School of Medicine, a nationally-recognized expert on child hunger, conducted the analysis.

The states with the highest rates of child food insecurity are Texas and New Mexico, where more than 24 percent of all children are at risk of hunger. The other states with child hunger rates above 20 percent are: California, Idaho, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Tennessee and Utah. Washington, D.C. also has a child food insecurity rate above 20 percent.

“This study shows pockets of vulnerability which will help America’s Second Harvest and the ConAgra Foods Foundation’s ‘Nourish Today, Flourish Tomorrow’ partnership develop an overall strategy to end child hunger in America,” said Escarra. “Identifying areas of greatest need can help in targeting Food Stamp program outreach efforts, placement of Kids Cafes and Backpack programs, grants and the expansion of Summer Food Service program sites.”

“We hope this new report is a wake-up call for all Americans,” continued Escarra. “The tragedy of child hunger in America, and the terrible toll it exacts, cannot be overstated. This report shows that child hunger is not a rare event – is not limited to the inner-city or hardscrabble rural areas. Child hunger exists in every state, and in nearly every community. We hope that people will be motivated to help end this crisis.”

Child Food Insecurity in the United States: 2003 -- 2005 analyzes data collected by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Research Service (ERS) over a three-year period. The USDA has collected data on domestic food insecurity since 1995, but has not analyzed it to determine specifically the number of children living in food insecure households by state.

The state-by-state study was sponsored by the ConAgra Foods Foundation as part of its “Nourish Today, Flourish Tomorrow” program focused on child hunger and nutrition education. ConAgra Foods is a major donor to America’s Second Harvest, whose network of food banks and food-rescue organizations serves 25 million Americans every year.

The ConAgra Foods Foundation program is the largest corporate initiative solely dedicated to fighting hunger through America’s Second Harvest. ConAgra Foods contributed more than \$20 million in funding to America’s Second Harvest since 1999.

The ConAgra Foods Foundation has donated three trucks to member food banks in Arkansas to help with the transportation of donated food. They have provided grants to open two Kids Cafes in Arkansas, which are after-school programs that offer food and a safe haven for children in need nationwide.

“Child hunger affects all of society. Children who aren’t eating regularly and healthfully have a tougher time in school, and don’t develop and grow as they should,” said Chris Kircher, president of the ConAgra Foods Foundation. “This study reminds us that child hunger is in every community in this country and we can all help in some way to alleviate this tragedy.”

“We hope that more people will do more to help throughout the holiday season and all year long,” said Kircher. “People can donate funds and food to their local food banks or they can volunteer at a food bank, Kids Cafe or Backpack Program.”

“It is a real eye-opener to see that so many states have such high rates of child food insecurity and hunger,” said Dr. Cook. “Lack of adequate and nutritious food can have devastating effects on a child’s development – both physically and mentally. If a child is impaired at an early age, sometimes that damage can never be reversed – and the child never becomes the adult that he or she should and could have been, simply because he or she went hungry as a child.”

To access the study, please go to:

www.seconddharvest.org/learn_about_hunger/methodology.pdf.

An interactive map showing child food insecurity state by state is at:

<http://www.seconddharvest.org/childhunger>.

America's Second Harvest — The Nation's Food Bank Network is the largest charitable domestic hunger-relief organization in the United States. Through its network of more than 200 member food banks, America's Second Harvest annually provides assistance to more than 25 million people in need, including more than 9 million children and nearly 3 million seniors in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Each year, America's Second Harvest secures and distributes more than 2 billion pounds of food and grocery products to support feeding programs at approximately 50,000 local charitable agencies, including food pantries, soup kitchens, emergency shelters, after-school programs, and Kids Cafes. To learn more, please visit www.seconddharvest.org.

ConAgra Foods Inc. (NYSE: CAG) is one of North America’s largest packaged food companies, serving consumer grocery retailers, as well as restaurants and other foodservice establishments. Popular ConAgra Foods consumer brands include Banquet, Chef Boyardee, Egg Beaters, Healthy Choice, Hebrew National, Hunt’s, Marie Callender’s, Orville Redenbacher’s, PAM and many others. For more information, visit www.conagrafoods.com.

ConAgra Foods Feeding Children Better program is the nation’s largest corporate initiative dedicated solely to fighting child hunger. The Feeding Children Better program has funded the startup of more than 250 new Kids Cafes, supported technology and transportation programs for the America’s Second Harvest Network of food banks (including the purchase of 167 trucks for food banks), and sponsored the Ad Council child hunger campaign. Feeding Children Better is funded by ConAgra Foods, Inc., one of North America’s largest packaged food companies. For more information, visit www.conagrafoods.com

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