

Are we overfeeding low income children?

By David Goodman,
 Executive Director

This year, the 108th Congress has the opportunity to improve the well being of America's children through reauthorization of The Child Nutrition Act. A key component of this legislation is the school meal programs (School Breakfast, School Lunch, Summer Lunch, and After School Snacks).

Unfortunately, not everyone agrees that strong school meal programs are critical in helping to end hunger in America. A disturbing amount of discussion has begun concerning the issue of childhood obesity and "over-certification" (where low-income children who should be paying for breakfast and lunch, are instead benefiting from free meals). As a hunger relief advocate, the irony of discussing childhood obesity couldn't be greater. Considering the great struggle we face as we endeavor to provide improved services for hungry children in our community, being drawn into a conversation with policy makers in which we must explain why some low-income children are overweight is dismaying to say the least.

Let me share with you what I believe to be true about obesity as it relates to low-income people: 1) It is true that some low-income people are overweight. 2) Preliminary studies have linked the obesity experienced by low-income people with their stop-start pattern of eating. That is, when they have access to food, they eat a larger amount. It is thought that the body's metabolism adjusts for the periodic absence of food, and thus stores fat. 3) Low income people are in search of a *complete meal* at a low cost, meals which are most readily available in fast food outlets where fat content is especially high. 4) Sedentary lifestyles and lack of funding for after-school and athletic programs has contributed to obesity in children at all income levels.

During a recent trip to Washington, D.C., I learned that some policy makers believe that there are too many children receiving breakfast and/or lunch for free, when they should be paying for the meal. Some legislators are even making a link between these ill-gotten meals and childhood obesity. They allege that these children are eating two meals - one at home, and one at school - and are therefore becoming obese.

I'm going to go out on a limb and say yes, some low-income children probably are eating breakfast and lunch for free, when they should be paying for a meal. However, I suggest we can't afford to clamp down on these *food thieves*. Schools are already overburdened with administrative costs. If we add to that burden, qualified children will not receive any meal because schools will no longer be able to afford to participate.

Rather than policing the school meal programs, we should focus our attention on reducing the administration required by schools and improving nutrition and nutrition education. A strong school meal program is the first good step in ensuring that all of our children have access to nutritious meals.

This shift in the child nutrition dialogue toward issues of obesity and "over-certification" reminds me of a time when the U.S. Congress attempted to classify ketchup as a vegetable. It seems to me that the challenge facing hungry children is not childhood obesity and over-certification. Rather, it is adult bureaucracy.



Kathy Smith



Margita Tappe



Yvonne Hanlon



Helen Margolese



Edith Rouse



Judy Lindberg



Cheri DeLaRiva

Meet our front desk-

7 hardworking volunteers who answer the phone & all your questions.

When people are looking for food assistance, their first phone call is often to the food bank. With the help of our volunteer staff, they are directed to food pantries and soup kitchens throughout Sonoma County. Of course, some questions are more challenging than others like, "Can I donate a water buffalo?" And how does our volunteer force respond? Without missing a beat, they direct the call to our Operations Manager, Don Lindsay.

Holiday wrap-up

107 businesses, schools, grocery and retail stores, churches, wineries, banks, non-profits and medical facilities gave their time, energy and funds to make REFB's 2002 Holiday Food Drive a gigantic success.

- 90,000 pounds of food collected
- \$156,969 donated

For the third year in a row, Cisco Systems gets our Blue Plate Award for their outstanding response to the needs of the hungry in Sonoma County.

- \$22,000 in donations from company employees
 - \$22,000 match by Chairman of the Board, John Morgridge
 - \$42,000 match by Cisco's charitable foundation
- Rancho Cotati High School leads the pack of industrious students.

- 14,200 pounds of food collected
- Safeway Food and Drug's customers filled our barrels with over 24,230 pounds.

The "Over 1,000 Pounders" list grows bigger every year.

- 7,815 pounds – Boy Scouts of America
- 6,055 pounds – Allied Insurance Agency
- 4,558 pounds – Longs Drugs Stores
- 3,450 pounds – G & G Market
- 1,831 pounds – St. Joseph Health Care Systems
- 1,425 pounds – Brookhaven Middle School
- 1,380 pounds – Willowside Middle School
- 1,170 pounds – Cook Middle School
- 1,135 pounds – State Farm Insurance

Macy's More Community special holiday donation program raised \$18,303 for the REFB through the Santa Rosa and Coddington stores.

O'Reilly & Associates' Halloween party raised \$1,300 and guaranteed another party for next year.

The Santa Rosa Firefighters' Toys for Kids, the U.S. Marine Corps' Toys for Tots and the Sonoma County Sheriff's Department joined forces to see that children in our A Child's Portion programs received over 3000 toys this holiday season. Jim and MaryAnn Kerschner helped organize it all.

We thank each and every person from our generous community for joining our partnership to end hunger in Sonoma County.

Did you know?

- 38% of the people we feed work; and of those unemployed, 46.4% have been without a job for 6 months or less.
- If you donate in April, a man in R.I. will match a portion of your donation.
- We operate with a staff of only 15 full-time paid employees.
- We thrive with close to 1,000 volunteers annually.
- You can donate produce fresh from your garden.
- We have a new truck donated by Paul Newman and Ford Motor Company.
- We serve 6 subsidiary food banks in 4 Northern counties.
- Old-fashioned bartering is the lifeblood of food banking.
- We've paid off our mortgage, now even more money can be concentrated on helping those in need.

150 children get new coats

The Place That Sells Sewing Machines in Santa Rosa donated 150 colorful and warm polar fleece coats to give away at our A Child's Portion distributions. Staff and volunteers, led by manager, Pam Cortese, made all these coats from scratch with matching scarves and embroidery details. Our mothers and children had a wonderful time picking out just the right color and size. An enormous and warm thank-you to The Place That Sells Sewing Machines (and donates coats to REFB.)

What can I do?

All we ask is that everyone just tries to do something.

- Advocate
- Educate
- Volunteer
- Organize
- Donate

Did you know?

We are audited by 6 separate entities

Rest assured the money we receive is put to good use. Six different organizations must give their seal of approval to our organization. They are:

- America's Second Harvest
- California Department of Education
- California Department of Social Services
- California Department of Public Health
- Sonoma County Area Agency on Aging
- Accounting Firm of Doyle and Doyle

Did you know?

Local producers are big donors

Sonoma County businesses have gone out of their way to help feed the hungry. For instance, Amy's Kitchen takes the time to repack their donations in smaller, food-bank-friendlier boxes. Oroweat Bread Stores are so generous we've dedicated a truck and volunteer drivers to their thrice weekly pickups. Local donations from these businesses account for roughly 15% of our food:

- Amy's Kitchen
- Barbara's Bakery
- Fantastic Foods
- Balleto Farms
- Buchanan Food Service
- Ritz Food Service
- Oroweat Bread Stores
- Nucal Eggs

Did you know? Fundraising is fun

We never cease to be amazed by the creativity and generosity of our community. Here are a few examples to inspire, astonish, move and amuse.

- Dr. Venus, a Chiropractor in Rohnert Park devotes all Valentine's Day receipts to charity. This year, she and her patients contributed over \$1400 to REFB.
- Last Halloween, four local teenagers wanted to go trick or treating but were a bit embarrassed asking for candy at their age. Instead they dressed up (one as a can of olives) and asked for food, collecting 112 pounds of food to donate to REFB.
- A senior citizen with a severely limited income recycled cans for months in order to make a cash donation of \$8.42.
- Redwood Empire Star Riders organized their first annual motorcycle rally to benefit REFB. 170 bikers took part in the 3-1/2 hour ride. Richardson ribs, music and fundraising activities followed as the crowd swelled to 500 strong and raised \$1,000.

Did you know?

We barter for food

Like all non-profits we thrive on donations, the bigger the better. But when we receive an entire truckload of perishable food we have to get creative. That's when old-fashioned bartering kicks in. Recently we were able to trade for a load of Power Bars and Frozen Potato products from the Idaho Food Bank.

We also partner with 4 other large food banks in Northern California called a cluster. When our national affiliation with America's Second Harvest makes truckloads of food available, we're able to divide it up into usable quantities as well as share the cost of shipping.

Our cluster also shares the services of 4 food solicitors who call on the growers, packers and processors of the Central Valley to acquire fresh produce, stone fruit, canned vegetables and dairy products.

As you can see, food banking is all about building workable partnerships. By working together, we maximize our efficiency and acquire a large and various assortment of quality food.



Brothers Sam (inside truck) and George McClure pick up bread from Oroweat every Thursday.

Million dollar give-away!

Do we have your attention? National hunger activist and Rhode Island resident, Alan Feinstein hopes to draw attention to hunger throughout America by giving away \$1,000,000 in matching grants to agencies that fight hunger. All donations made in the months of March and April to the Redwood Empire Food Bank will be matched proportionately by the Feinstein Foundation. Together we can all make a difference.

Did you know?

Paul Newman gave us a truck

Traversing the roads of Sonoma County is a colorful new REFB truck emblazoned with the logos of our newest partners in the effort to fight hunger in rural areas. Newman's Own, Ford Motor Company and America's Second Harvest joined together to provide trucks and food to 12 food banks nationwide. Thanks to the skilled grant writing efforts of our Deputy Director, Jean Campbell Larson, REFB was the first food bank in California to receive one of these refrigerated trucks. Inside were pallets of Newman's Own salad dressing and spaghetti sauce which along with other Newman products, has generated 125 million dollars for charities since 1982. Volunteers, Ken Wyman and Frank Jimenez flew back to Michigan and drove the truck home, and Santa Rosa's own Hansel Ford is donating their services to keep our new truck running smoothly for the next three years.

Did you know?

We deliver

Twice a month Jim Dykstra, Emile Houle and David Little deliver Brown Bag food boxes containing canned food, fresh produce, bread and more to 30 homebound seniors in Santa Rosa and Sebastopol. Each of these dedicated volunteers has been at it between 2 and 3 years. When asked why they enjoy it so, Emile tells a story about how volunteer work can't help but inspire. "Last fall, worried that I might slip on a sycamore seedpod, a 94 year old senior started sweeping her path just before I arrived. This sweet lady continues sweeping a path for me to this day."

For David Little, his volunteering serves a dual purpose often bringing along his young helpers, Emma and Laura Bergmann. Even though home schooled, these sisters still need to fulfill their community service hours and their godfather, David Little, is thankful for the help.

As driver Jim Dykstra explains, "Visiting our senior recipients offers me enjoyment far beyond any work it may involve." There are hundreds of homebound seniors throughout Sonoma County who could benefit from groceries delivered to their doors. If you are able to commit to 3 hours twice a month and can drive your own car, please call us at 523-7900 and ask for Jackie.



Did you know?

We are about to expand, without expanding

As need for food assistance grows, so too must our facilities. In an effort to increase warehouse space and backed by generous grants from Hedco, Sisters of St. Joseph Healthcare Foundation and Bothin Foundation, we are about to rereack our warehouse. Narrower aisles, taller more efficient shelving and a sleek new forklift will allow us to increase storage capacity by over 50%. Funding also makes possible a new loading dock and a mechanized food handling system for added efficiency.

Volunteers David Little, Emma Bergmann, Emile Houle and Jim Dykstra deliver food to seniors twice a month.

Did you know?

Even with help, low-income people, including those that work and the elderly, do not have enough food to eat. Families with kids are hit the hardest!

These are only some of the findings from our third Hunger Survey, released March 4th, and titled Understanding the Economics of Hunger in Sonoma County: A Study of Emergency Food Recipients. Although we have distributed millions of pounds of food since the REFB first opened its doors in 1987, we still have a tremendous amount of work to do. As Executive Director, David Goodman writes,

“The REFB maintains that any amount of hunger in our community is more than we should tolerate. Considering that we live in a nation that discards more than 25% or 96 billion pounds of its food supply annually, while spending \$40 billion on weight control related products, there can be no justification for the hunger that we, as a community, have come to accept.” As we understand the nature of hunger in our community, we also hope to discover what we as a community can do to help those in need. Here are just some of the findings:

Finding #1: The high cost of living in Sonoma County leaves people struggling to put food on the table.

- 81.7% of people attending food distributions often or sometimes do not have enough money to purchase food for an entire month.

Finding #2: Households with children are especially vulnerable.

- 75.5% of recipient households with children have incomes below the federal poverty line (\$18,100 for a family of 4).
- When asked if their children were ever hungry and did not eat because they couldn't afford enough food, 24.4% answered yes.

Finding #3: Senior citizens in Sonoma County living on social security experience hunger at an alarming rate.

- 53.5% of seniors interviewed report that they sometimes or often run out of food.

Finding #4: Many people who need food assistance are not fully utilizing programs that exist to help them, or when they do, the programs are not adequate to meet their needs.

- While 70.1% of households in our survey have incomes below the federal poverty line, only 17.6% receive Food Stamps.

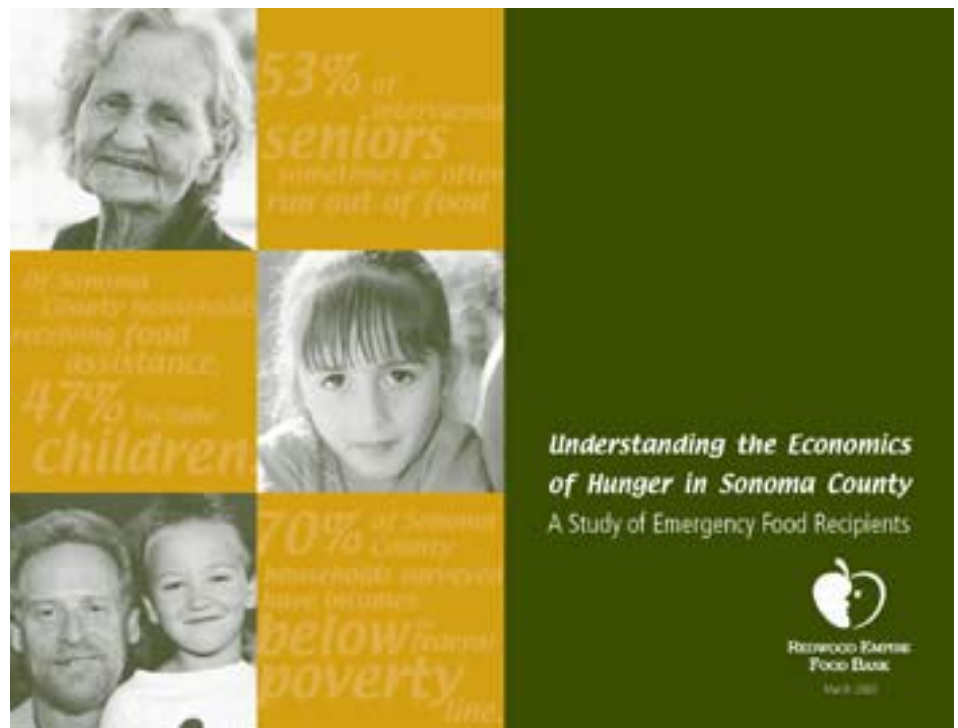
To learn more about hunger in Sonoma County, download our Hunger Survey by visiting our website at www.refb.org.

What can we do?

Recommendation #1: Increase the number of sites for the Summer Lunch program so when the school doors close, low-income children can continue to eat free or reduced priced, nutritious meals during summer recess.

Recommendation #2: Help improve the Food Stamp Program by eliminating California's car rule. Currently, applicants are disqualified from the food stamp program if the value of their car exceeds \$4,650. We believe having access to reliable transportation is crucial to people seeking work and being able to retain their job.

Recommendation #3: Make ending hunger a priority in our community by increasing outreach, establishing more food distribution sites for the elderly and expanding community programs for all low-income people.





Volunteers Needed May 10

The Human Race

Gather pledges in support of REFB and walk, run, skip or hop the 3K or 10K course, May 10 at 7 a.m. Pick up entry forms at Redwood Empire Food Bank or Sonoma County Volunteer Center.

National Association of Letter Carriers Food Drive

The largest, one day food drive in the entire United States. Just place a bag of food near your mailbox and your letter carrier will pick it up on Saturday, May 10. WE NEED VOLUNTEERS. Join us Saturday afternoon starting at 3:30 p.m. to sort food as it comes in from the Post Office. To volunteer, call Lindajoy Vantrease at 523-7900, ext. 17.

Summer Soiree, June 7th

This year's event at the beautiful Kendall-Jackson Wine Center promises to be the most lavish yet with wine tasting, gourmet food, music and auctions all benefiting REFB. Tickets are \$50 in advance/\$55 at the door and can be ordered by telephone (523-7900) or online at www.refb.org.

Volunteer Saturdays

We're open 8 a.m. to 12 noon, April 26, May 31, and June 28. Groups of 15 or more can schedule an evening or Saturday at their convenience. For more information, call Lindajoy, our Volunteer Coordinator at 523-7900 ext. 17.

News Bites is published twice annually and is distributed to 10,000 households, businesses, and other organizations.

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To learn more about the Redwood Empire Food Bank, or to donate or volunteer on-line, visit our website at www.refb.org