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Obama Administration Officials Respond to Report on Hunger in NYC, and Discuss President's Pledge to End Child Hunger by 2015

Obama Administration Announces USDA Grants for New York to Increase Food Stamp Participation and Boost Farmers' Markets

While the number of New Yorkers forced to use the city's soup kitchens and food pantries soared by 21 percent in the last year, because federal anti-hunger spending through the economic recovery bill and the Food Stamp Program increased in New York City by more than \$500 million in the same period, fewer agencies ran out of food than the year before, according to the annual survey of the New York City Coalition Against Hunger.

This announcement, at an event with high-ranking Obama Administration appointees and leading elected officials, not only graphically demonstrates the negative impact of the recession, but is also one of the first concrete indicators anywhere in the country regarding the success of the federal economic recovery bill in battling domestic hunger. Although the report showed that 55 percent of emergency feeding agencies lacked enough food to meet the growing demand, that was a significant improvement over 2008, when fully 69 percent of the pantries and kitchens did not have sufficient food.

"The economic downturn has created a hurricane of suffering for hungry New Yorkers, but the good news is that a massive increase in federal funding has provided a food life-raft for struggling families," said Joel Berg, executive director of the Coalition. "While it is obviously appalling that more than half of the feeding programs in the city still need to ration food, the situation is far less catastrophic than it would have been had the President and Congress not increased anti-hunger funding in the recovery act and had not protected the Food Stamp Program as an entitlement that expands when times are rough."

The survey, titled, "*NYC Hunger Catastrophe Avoided (For Now): Soaring Demand at Food Pantries and Soup Kitchens Counter-Balanced by Food Stamps Surge and Extra Recovery Bill Funding*" is available at http://nyccah.org/files/AnnualHungerSurveyReport_Nov09.pdf. The report was released at a Manhattan food pantry event attended by two key Presidential appointees from the U.S. Department of Agriculture – Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services Kevin Concannon and Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs Edward Avalos – who announced two new federal grants to the City, one to expand food stamps participation and one to boost farmers' market usage. Public Advocate-elect Bill de Blasio, New York City Council Member Gale Brewer, Council Member David Weprin, and other prominent New Yorkers also attended the event.

USDA Under Secretary Concannon, who is the top federal domestic anti-hunger official, announced a grant of \$609,292 to the City's Human Resources Administration, the New York City Coalition Against Hunger, and the Food Bank for New York City to enable existing participants the Food Stamp Program (recently renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP) to re-certify their eligibility for benefits online at pilot food pantries and soup kitchens. Concannon also reiterated the importance of the goal set by President Barack Obama and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack to end child hunger in the U.S. by 2015. He explained that passing a strong federal Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization bill in the next year was one of the most important steps towards reaching that goal.

"The Obama Administration has put in place unprecedented measures to promote job creation and combat hunger in our Nation, a problem that the American sense of fairness should not tolerate and American ingenuity can overcome," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "The Department of Agriculture's nutrition assistance programs provide a safety net that improves food access to those with critical needs, but addressing the root of hunger requires a broader strategy. By improving access to federal nutrition programs and working with our partners at all levels of government and society, we can make progress in our effort to reduce and eventually eliminate childhood hunger."

USDA Under Secretary Avalos, the Obama Administration point person in charge of helping farmers - including small farmers - market their goods, announced a grant of \$100,000 from the Farmers' Market Promotion Program to help NYC Greenmarkets, a program run through the Council on the Environment of New York City, to expand markets in the city and enable more of them to accept SNAP/food stamp benefits. Avalos discussed how the grant advanced the Administration's "Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food" initiative, which connects consumers with local producers to create new economic opportunities for communities.

"This grant from the Farmer's Market Promotion Program not only helps small and medium-size farmers in the region earn enough money to stay on their land, it also brings fresher and healthier food to New Yorkers in previously underserved communities," said Edward Avalos, USDA Under Secretary, "Through efforts like those of the New York City Greenmarket, supported by USDA's 'Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food' initiative and the Farmers Market Promotion Program, we are helping promote and enhance producer-to-consumer direct marketing efforts; boost local economies; alleviate hunger; and increase access to fresh, healthy, and nutritious food in low-income neighborhoods."

Additionally, USDA officials announced that, as part of the "United We Serve: Feed a Neighbor" initiative launched today by the Obama Administration through the Corporation For National and Community Service and the USDA, the federal government published a tool kit to help citizens fight hunger. They highlighted the Coalition's innovative online volunteer matching system (www.hungervolunteer.org) as a success story.

Fully 91 percent of agencies responding to the Coalition's survey reported feeding an increased number of people in the last months. More than 58 percent said this number increased "greatly." However, the percentage of agencies forced to ration food and turn people away dropped from 59 to 48 percent, and the percentage of agencies able to meet the growing demand increased from 31 to 45 percent. Also, the percentage of agencies reporting decreased overall government funding dropped from 72 percent last year to 52 percent this year.

Funding for NYC in the federal FEMA Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP), distributed through the United Way of NYC, rose from \$4,581,417 last year to \$7,492,125 this year, of which \$2,340,980 was from the recovery bill. This equals a 64 percent increase in that one year. Survey respondents also noted this increase in EFSP funding with 59.4 percent reporting an increase. Fifty-one percent of survey respondents also reported an increase in federal funding from the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) through the USDA.

State funding stayed relatively stable, and, because the New York City Council rejected the proposals of Mayor Mike Bloomberg's to decrease City funding for pantries and kitchens, City funding remained constant too. Thus,

although City and State resources didn't increase, because federal funding grew so dramatically, overall government food and support to emergency food providers was also boosted significantly.

"As our City faces the continuing hunger crisis, President Obama has taken great strides to help us weather the storm. But even in the face of this progress there is still much more work to be done. Now it is our responsibility to work with the President to build on his efforts and to provide better support to the over one million New Yorkers who don't have enough to eat," said Public Advocate-Elect Bill de Blasio.

"While hunger remains a critical problem in the City, this survey by the New York City Coalition Against Hunger shows that the number of agencies running out of food is shrinking, thanks to an increase in federal funding," said Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer. "This time of year, with Thanksgiving right around the corner and winter fast-approaching, it's more important than ever to make sure that the City's food programs are fully funded so that no New Yorker goes hungry."

Not only did the government assist feeding agencies through stimulus funding for emergency food, increases in the SNAP/food stamp benefits program, significantly relieved the further strain that pantries and kitchens would have faced had SNAP funding not increased. The recovery bill also increased benefits for families participating in the program, thereby encouraging more people to apply. The results were positive: between September 2008 and September 2009, participation in SNAP rose from 1,297,108 to 1,583,581 (a 22 percent increase).

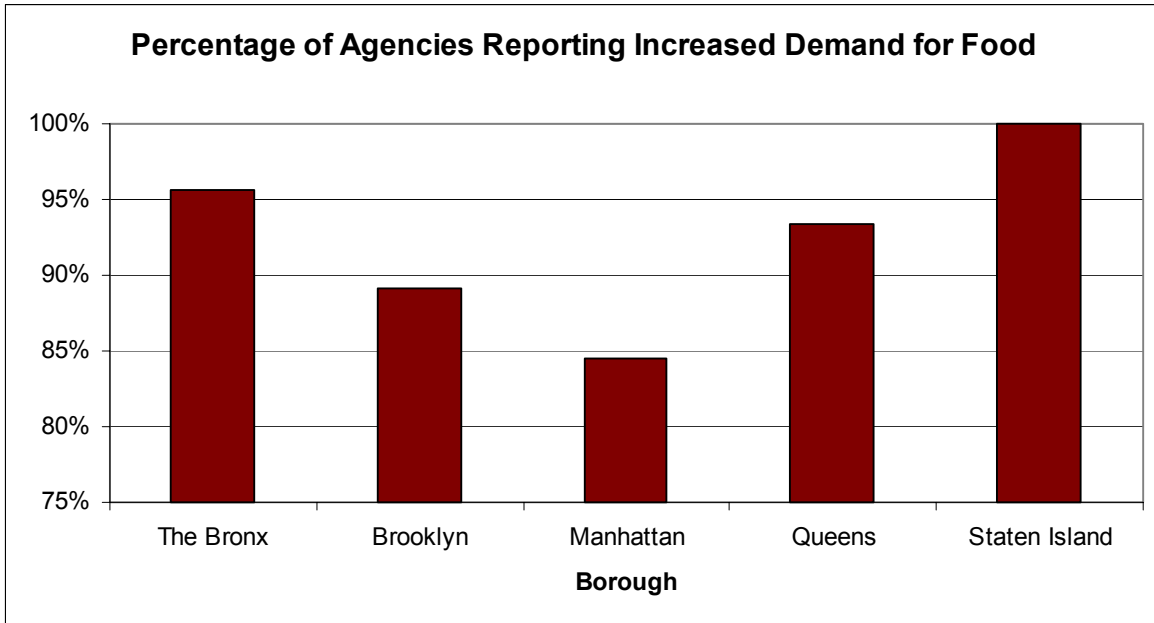
As a consequence of both the hike in the number of participants and the increased average benefits due to the recovery bill, the federal government will spend at least an extra \$568 million SNAP/food stamp benefit dollars in New York City this year, on top of the \$2.1 billion it was already slated to spend.

Pastor Ray Bagnuolo of Jan Hus Presbyterian Church, which runs the food pantry that hosted the event, said, "This past year was difficult for the people we serve - in fact, demand has tripled over the past year. Increases in government food and funding have helped us in this crisis, but we're still running out of food to distribute. There is always more to do."

Commented Council Member Gale Brewer, "City government needs to do more to fight hunger during this economic downturn. People are struggling to make ends meet, put food on the table, and find jobs. The City can help through expanded SNAP/food stamp benefit outreach."

Council Member Jessica Lappin remarked, "These survey results are a tragic reminder that we still have extensive work to do to ensure that all New Yorkers have access to nutritious and affordable food as well as access to food stamp and SNAP benefits. As a city and as individuals we need to do everything we can to ensure that everyone has enough to eat."

Said Council Member Garodnick "Food stamps have an important economic ripple effect," said Council Member Dan Garodnick. "They are not only fundamental to the 1.3 million New Yorkers facing hunger each day, they also benefit the local stores and Greenmarket producers who accept them. The Council has made excellent strides in expanding food stamp registration and availability, and now we must continue to take up the commitment of our partners in the Obama administration to erasing the hunger of our neighbors."



Borough	% of agencies at which demand for food increased	% of agencies at which the amount of food was not enough to meet growing demand	% of agencies forced to ration food by limiting portion size, reducing hours of operation, and/or turning people away
The Bronx	95.6%	66.7%	58.1%
Brooklyn	89.1%	59.2%	49.3%
Manhattan	84.5%	39.7%	35.8%
Queens	93.4%	60.4%	57.1%
Staten Island	100.0%	40.0%	12.5%

Some Key Findings From Manhattan Respondents to the Coalition’s survey:

- 84.5% of responding agencies reported feeding an increased number of people in the last 12 months. 39.7% said this number increased “greatly.”
- Of the populations that increased “greatly” at responding agencies, the fastest growth was seen among homeless people (24.4%) and families with children (21.3%).
- 82.0% of responding agencies believe that their need will continue to increase in the next six months. 32.0% of responding agencies believe it will increase “greatly.”
- 57.1% of responding agencies reported receiving less *government* food and money in the last 12 months (and 11.9% reported no change).

- 45.0% of responding agencies reported receiving less *overall* food and money in the last 12 months (and 7.5% reported no change).
- 39.7% of respondents reported being unable to distribute enough food to meet current demand.
- 35.8% of responding agencies reported having to turn away hungry New Yorkers, cut portion sizes and/or cut hours of operation in 2009.
- 19.6% of respondents reported using their own personal money “often” or “always” to support their feeding programs (47.9% do this “sometimes,” “often” or “always”).

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