

SEND HUNGER PACKING

Food Bank Pilots New Child Hunger Program

Over a quarter of a million children in New Jersey live in poverty. For these children, living in a household where there is insufficient income or resources to adequately feed the family is a daily fact of life. Fortunately, during the school year, these children are able to receive free or reduced-price breakfast and lunch.

But what happens over the weekends?

Is there enough food in the home to provide three square meals?

Not always, which is why the Food Bank started a new initiative this spring, modeled after Feeding America's Back Pack Program, to provide hungry children with nutritious, easy to prepare food to take home on weekends. In partnership with a nearby elementary school, 12 at-risk children were identified and enrolled in the pilot program. Every Friday, during the last nine weeks of the school year, the children received a back pack filled with kid friendly, easy-to-open nutritionally sound food, supplied by the Food Bank, to get them through the weekend.

We have named our program **Send Hunger Packing** and we know it made a difference. As one child said, *"We really didn't have enough food over the weekend. All we had was mac and cheese out of the box. Now we have tuna. I love it! And the juice...we never have juice at home"*.

Plans are underway to expand the program to four schools during this school year and to be able to serve 60 children.

To learn more about how you can help, please contact the Food Bank.

Childhood hunger hurts. Children who are hungry do not learn.

- Hungry children are more likely to be in poorer health, more susceptible to certain illnesses and infections, more at risk for iron deficiency anemia and experience a higher incidence of hospitalizations than children from homes where access to adequate healthy, safe food is not a problem.
- Hungry children have more difficulties getting along with their peers, are more likely to be suspended from school, show more aggression, and have greater needs for special counseling and education services. Hungry children are more anxious, irritable, and hyperactive.
- Hungry children do not perform well on achievement tests, are more likely to repeat a grade, have higher rates of tardiness and absences from school than children who have access to adequate healthy, safe food.



DONATIONS FOR SEND HUNGER PACKING ARE MOST WELCOME. PLEASE SELECT FROM THE LIST BELOW

- Shelf stable (i.e. Parmalat)
2% reduced fat milk
8 oz single serving size
- Individual size (single serving)
cereal bowls or boxes
- Starkist Tuna to Go
(or equivalent)
- Bumble Bee Tuna Salad with
crackers Ready to Go
(or equivalent)
- Chef Boyardee Microwaveable
bowls (or equivalent)
- Hormel Completes
(or equivalent)
- Campbell microwaveable soups
(or equivalent)
- Peanut Butter (18 oz)
- Jif to Go
(little peanut butter cups)
- Grape Jelly in PLASTIC
container (14 to 18 oz)
- Yo on the Go (a yogurt smoothie
drink in shelf stable brick packs)
- Individual size fruit cups,
applesauce, pudding and Jell-O
- 100% Fruit Juice boxes
- Raisins (individual size box)

Dear Partner,

Crumbling financial markets and institutions have radically changed the landscape of Wall Street. On Main Street, people are feeling the pinch of high food, gas, and utility costs, not to mention unaffordable healthcare, a tight credit crunch and foreclosures.

So, one may ask how is all this affecting us on Silvia Street?

Not well.

What once was a steady and reliable flow of food donations from food companies has dried up as computerized inventory systems have eliminated production overruns and excess inventory; improvements in manufacturing have reduced packaging errors; and the spread of secondary markets (such as dollar stores) has gobbled up groceries that used to be donated.

The amount and variety of food we receive from the US Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) has been reduced as the purchasing power of the USDA diminishes because of sharp price increases.

The amount of food we purchased with grants has also shrunk because of high food prices and we have stopped purchasing certain foods altogether.

Even the volume of food taken in from food drives has gone down as people who once contributed to a food drive are now on the receiving line.

At the same time, we are seeing as high as a 20 percent increase in demand for food at member agency sites as consumers are facing the biggest jump in food prices in nearly 20 years.

The cost of gasoline to fill the Food Bank truck keeps straining our budget, as does our utility bills.

However, it is not all gloom and doom and in fact, there is some bloom on the horizon.

With the passage of the Farm Bill (see story on page 5), we are optimistic that the amount and variety of USDA commodities we receive will be restored to prior levels and food gaps closed.

We are finding more sources of food. We now receive donations of meat, poultry and bakery products from Sam's Club; we search high and low nationwide for the best prices for food; and we are collaborating with other food banks, such as the Community Food Bank of NJ, to maximize resources.

With funding from a grant, we hired a Community Resource Liaison to mobilize community support; expand food drives and food collections; and foster and cultivate relationships with food retailers to secure food donations.

We are not sitting idly by but rather taking the necessary steps to ensure that we have the food supplies and programs that sustain the emergency food network in Mercer County.

And we reach out to our supporters for the contributions that make this all possible. Thank you for your continued investment in our work and mission.



THE ADVOCATE'S CHAIR

As Congress debates the possibility of a second economic stimulus package that would include providing more money for food stamps, New Jerseyans can certainly do their part to stimulate the economy by increasing our food stamp roles. Did you know that every \$5 of food stamps spent generates \$9.20 of local economic activity. This is even more evident when times are tough. An increase in food stamp benefits translates into increased overall spending by recipient households.

According to the Food Research Action Center, only 58% of those who are eligible for food stamps in New Jersey participate. New Jersey ranks 41st out of the 50 states and the District of Columbia in this regard. Participation rates are particularly poor among seniors, immigrants and low-income working people. Increased participation will translate into dollars for the local and state economy.

In order to bring this issue to light, the NJ Anti-Hunger Coalition, of which Mercer Street Friends Food Bank is an active member, in conjunction with the County Welfare Directors Association co-sponsored seven regional forums entitled, "Food Stamps: Creating Partnerships to Increase Participation." Mercer and Middlesex County's forum was held on June 5, 2008 at the Princeton Alliance Church in Plainsboro. The forum was attended by staff from the USDA Food and Nutrition Service Mid-Atlantic Regional Office, NJ Division of Family Development, Mercer County Board of Social Services and the county Food Stamp office, Mercer Street Friends Food Bank; community based hunger organizations and private citizens.

The forum allowed for open communication, collaboration and the development of concrete recommendations to address the poor participation rates in New Jersey. All stakeholders present shared the common goal of making the Food Stamp Program, the nation's first defense against hunger, more accessible to those who need it the most. A press conference is being planned at the state house to unveil the recommendations.

In the meantime, as private citizens and advocates we can all do our part to increase participation in the Food Stamp Program, help our fellow citizens and stimulate our local and state economy. We can:

- Educate our friends, co-workers and relatives about the stress our current economic situation is placing on hard working people and that many citizens are for the first time turning to our federal nutrition programs for assistance. Explain to them that the Food Stamp Program is a nutrition support program designed to help families stay healthy during tough times.
- Be aware of other's situations. Our elderly relative, co-worker, neighbor, or acquaintance may not be aware that they may qualify for food stamps. We can inform them of the availability of the Food Stamp Program and its accessibility (online at www.NJHelps.org or by phone in Mercer County at 609-989-4491) in a gentle and sensitive way. This may prove invaluable for them.
- Advocate for and support legislative changes recommended as a result of the statewide food stamp forums. Contact sjones@mercerstreetfriends.org for specific updates and information. Request to be added to our email distribution list for advocacy.
- One of the most important ways to raise your voice as a hunger advocate is to let your elected officials know that you want them to make hunger relief a priority. As we are embroiled in election year politics, let us be responsible voters and make an effort to educate ourselves about the candidates' commitment to help those in our country who are less fortunate. Visit www.voteagainsthunger.org.

Susan Jones



America's Second Harvest has a new name.

On September 1, 2008, America's Second Harvest changed its name to Feeding America. Why the name change?

For nearly 30 years, America's Second Harvest has led the fight against domestic hunger; yet the public at-large remains unfamiliar with the organization and efforts to truly engage the public have been limited by a lack of name recognition.

The name America's Second Harvest – The Nation's Food Bank Network, is rooted in its origins, but it does not clearly capture the organization's aim and purpose. On the other hand, the name **Feeding America** more clearly defines its

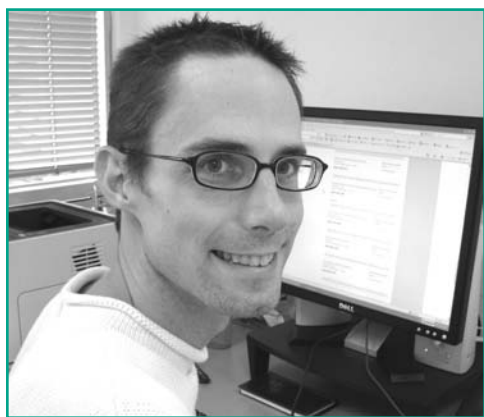
mission and will provide the foundational support to bring about the change this country needs.

With a new brand and identity, the national network of food banks will be better positioned to build the support we need to:

- Feed one million more people each year;
- Significantly increase participation in federal nutrition programs;
- Inspire the public to support our efforts.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT: BRIAN J. PETERSON

Food Bank Welcomes New Staff



Mercer Street Friends announces the addition of Brian J. Peterson to its Food Bank team. Brian will serve as Community Resource Liaison and his primary role is to increase and mobilize community support for the work and mission of the Food Bank.

His responsibilities include fostering and cultivating relationships with area corporations, businesses, schools, higher education institutions, government agencies, houses of worship, and youth and civic groups, etc. to promote food drives, volunteering and monetary donations.

As a Life Member of Alpha Phi Omega, a national co-ed service fraternity, Brian led several projects, such as Project Stay

Awake for people who lost their homes to fire, the Marine Corps Toys-For-Tots Campaign, and volunteering at the Community FoodBank of New Jersey and at veterans hospitals.

Brian graduated from Seton Hall University as a music major, and volunteered as an entertainment therapist with autistic children and families dealing with a comatose family member. Brian plays trombone and since 1994 he has performed in numerous musicals for the South Plainfield Summer Pit Orchestra. Brian is also excited to perform in his 15th year in the Seton Hall Pep Band for regular season basketball games at the Prudential Center in Newark, and has played previously at the Meadowlands, in Big East Tournaments at Madison Square Garden and other NCAA Tournament venues.

Brian Peterson's enthusiasm and outgoing nature, combined with the satisfaction he receives in helping others, will be a great asset to the Food Bank.

If you are interested in learning how you can organize a food drive or volunteer, please contact Brian at 609-406-0503 or bpeterson@mercerstreetfriends.org.

Recent Grants and Awards

Bonner Foundation:

To purchase nutritious food for faith-based hunger relief programs.

The Concordia Foundation:

To increase access to healthy foods for people at risk for hunger and food insecurity.

Princeton Financial Systems - State Street New Jersey:

To support the Food Bank's Healthy Eating Initiatives and nutrition focused programs.

Volunteer Counts

Thank you to the following groups for helping in the warehouse in the spring.

Number of Volunteers.....**163**
 Number of Hours.....**537**

GROUPS:

- BlackRock
- Bristol-Myers Squibb, Hopewell
- Bristol-Myers Squibb, Nassau Park
- Goldman Sachs
- Johnson and Johnson
- Mercer County Central Labor Council
- National Association of Letter Carriers
- NRG Energy, Inc.
- Ortho McNeill Janssen Pharmaceuticals
- Princeton Financial Systems - State Street New Jersey
- Princeton University Community Action
- Sandoz
- USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Mid-Atlantic Regional Office

Connecting with Our Community to End Hunger



Lawrenceville and Hamilton sponsored a “Your Loss is Their Gain” weight loss contest during the spring, pledging to donate \$1 for every pound lost. At the end of the contest, Gold Gym presented the Food Bank with a donation of \$1,000.

asking for food assistance, the letter carrier food drive helped meet an urgent need.

COOK BOOK SALES RAISE SOME ‘DOUGH’

The Insurance Women of Mercer County raised \$1,600 for the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank through the sale of *Bon Appetit*, a cookbook compiled by members of the organization. Presenting the donation to Phyllis Stoolmacher, Food Bank Director, are IWMC members (left to right): Grace Phipps, Jessie Chamberlain, Erica Licari and Erin Mayer.



STAMP OUT HUNGER FOOD DRIVE DELIVERS THE GOODS

Postal tubs overflowing with food donations filled the Food Bank’s warehouse as the result of the May food drive sponsored by the National Association of Letter Carriers. With the down economy pushing ever more numbers of families over the brink and



HOLIDAY FOOD DONATIONS SOUGHT

Donations of holiday food may be dropped off at the Food Bank Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and from 9:30 a.m. to noon on Saturday, November 22.

In addition to the turkey and the traditional fixings to make a Thanksgiving meal, we are also looking for canned fruit, canned vegetables, tuna, rice and cereals.

TIPPING THE SCALES FOR THE FOOD BANK

To motivate their members and to simultaneously raise awareness of hunger and the work of the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank, Gold’s Gym of

YES! I want to help end hunger. Here is my contribution of:

\$50 \$100 \$250 Other _____

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____



Please make check payable to:
Mercer Street Friends Food Bank
824 Silvia Street, Ewing, NJ 08628

Your contribution is tax-deductible as allowed by law.

The Mercer Street Friends Food Bank is a division of Mercer Street Friends, a Quaker-affiliated, nonsectarian human care organization providing compassionate and practical solutions to the problems of poverty and health. The organization serves more than 30,000 people a year from seven locations and 15 program sites. Our programs serve infants, children, youth, parents and adults, and the disabled and elderly.

To learn about the other programs of Mercer Street Friends, please visit our web site at www.mercerstreetfriends.org

If you would like to volunteer, please call us at (609) 406-0503.

Congress Overrides Presidential Veto and Enacts New Farm Bill

It took a very unusual chain of events, but the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, commonly known as the Farm Bill, has become Public Law-110-234. In May, the bill passed in both houses of Congress, was vetoed by President Bush, and the veto overturned by a huge majority. However, it was quickly discovered that the legislation sent to the President was missing 34 pages that applied to the delivery of US food aid abroad. To be certain that this aid continues amid a global hunger crisis, the whole process had to be repeated and the House and Senate voted again to approve the legislation, the President vetoed the bill and the Senate voted by a margin of 80-14 and the House voted by a margin of 317-109 to override the veto. (In our nation's history, 2,550 bills have been vetoed by the President. Very few garner enough votes for a Congressional override. The Farm Bill became the 107th piece of legislation to become law by a veto override.)

The Nutrition Title of the Farm Bill contains provisions of particular importance to the Food Bank.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

This program authorizes the US Department of Agriculture to purchase farm commodities, which are allocated to the states based on poverty and unemployment numbers. The states, in turn, direct the food to organizations such as food banks, which in turn distribute the commodities to food pantries, shelters and soup kitchens.

TEFAP commodities historically accounted for 40 percent of the food we distribute, but not this year as rising food prices have significantly reduced the amount of food the USDA is able to purchase. The Farm Bill includes mandatory funding of \$250 million for TEFAP food purchases in FY 2009 and \$250 million with annual indexing beginning in FY 2010. These amounts represent a \$50 million increase this year and a \$110 million increase for FY 2009,

which begins October 1, 2008. The legislation also directs that \$50 million be spent immediately to address food shortages. We are optimistic that we will see the benefits of this funding by January.

While we are very pleased and happy with the substantial increase in funding available for TEFAP food purchases, we hope that rising food prices do not wipe out any potential gain in the amount of food that we receive.



Empty racks which previously contained pallets of USDA commodities

The Food Stamp Program

This vital food and nutrition program and safety net for food insecure households is to be renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Eligibility for Food Stamp benefits is based on a household's financial status. To qualify, households must have gross incomes at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty income guidelines (currently about \$1,800 a month for a three-person household) and there is a stringent asset test. The amount of the benefit is supposed to close the gap between what a household can afford for food out of its own cash income (assumed to be 30 percent of countable income) and the estimated minimal cost of an adequate diet, based on the USDA's Thrifty Food Plan. In reality, Food Stamps rarely close the gap and with

grocery prices spiraling upwards, the gap is only widening.

The Farm Bill contains positive changes:

The minimum benefit amount will be increased from \$10 to \$14, of particular importance to needy senior citizens and persons with disabilities. The current minimum benefit has not been raised in over 30 years and its purchasing power is only about one-third as much food as could be bought in 1979.

The bill raises and indexes the standard deduction, a component of the benefit formula which is subtracted from family income to determine eligibility and benefit level. In 2008, a typical working parent with two children received \$37 less in food assistance because of prior cuts to the standard deduction. The bill partially restores benefit levels that have been lost by increasing the standard deduction from \$135 per month to \$144 and indexing that amount to inflation.

The current deduction for child care is capped at \$175 per month, nowhere near the average monthly cost of \$631. The new legislation allows full deduction for child care expenses in calculating family income and food assistance benefit levels.

The "asset test" specifies that if a household has more than \$2,000 in assets (\$3,000 for seniors or disabled), it is ineligible to receive food assistance. The limit has remained largely unchanged for 30 years. The new legislation indexes the asset limit to keep up with inflation and exempts the value of retirement and education accounts (heretofore, otherwise eligible households had to choose between liquidating savings or foregoing food stamps).

Sometimes, the additional pay military personnel receive as a result of deployment to a combat zone raised the income enough to make their families ineligible for food assistance. In order to ensure that families of military personnel serving in Iraq, Afghanistan and other combat zones are not penalized, the legislation includes a provision to exclude combat zone pay as income in determining eligibility.



TableTalk

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Add a little for those who only have a little... and Check-Out Hunger

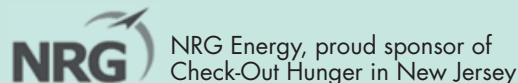
Each time you shop at your favorite supermarket, please think of those who are having a tough time making ends meet, and make a donation to **Check-Out Hunger**. So many more children, adults and seniors are at-risk for hunger as a result of the economic downturn.

Please look for the Check-Out Hunger display along the check-out aisles at your favorite supermarket. Simply tear off a slip, hand it to the cashier and your donation will be added to your grocery bill. 100 percent of donations made in Mercer County go to the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank.

The dollars raised from Check-Out Hunger enable our food bank to keep a steady and reliable supply of food flowing from our warehouse to our network of member agencies and into communities to feed those who experience the pain and indignity of hunger.

Look for Check-Out Hunger displays at

- Marrazzo's Ewing
- Marrazzo's Robbinsville
- McCaffrey's
- Pennington Quality Market
- ShopRite
- Superfresh
- Wawa
- Wegmans



**Shop at a store outside of Mercer County?
Forgot to make a donation?** Now you can donate to Check-Out Hunger online at www.checkouthungernj.org. Be sure to click on the Mercer Street Friends logo or choose Mercer Street Friends Food Bank from the drop down menu on the donation page.