

## Food Assistance is Vital

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As Congress crafts a budget that addresses our nation's long-term fiscal challenges, the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano urges legislators to safeguard nutrition assistance and other safety-net programs. The number of families struggling to make ends meet increased significantly during the recession. With unemployment in California hovering near 12 percent, the need for food assistance continues to grow and food banks throughout the state -- and country -- are pressed to meet needs in their communities.

Some 132,000 people receive emergency food assistance every month through our food bank's direct distribution programs and network of partner agencies, a 35 percent increase in the number of clients served since 2008. Federal nutrition programs provide support not only to struggling working Americans and their families, but also to America's farmers and the agricultural industry. Food banks and their partners could not provide current levels of food assistance without support from the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), nor could we meet added demand if the current funding levels and structure of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and other federal nutrition programs were eroded.

Federal commodities provided through TEFAP are an essential resource to the Food Bank. These nutritious commodities help us to serve the increasing numbers of people in our community who are in need of emergency food assistance.

We are already struggling to keep up with demand for food assistance. With food prices expected to rise as much as 4.5 percent this year and fuel prices already 33 percent higher than a year ago, it will be harder for low-income families to make ends meet, especially if the programs they rely on are cut. Funding anti-hunger programs is not just the right thing to do, it is an investment in our recovery and future. Anti-hunger programs save money in health-care costs and help parents be more fit to work. Children who have access to adequate healthy diets perform better in school.

Unfortunately, federal support for TEFAP could be reduced by as much as 50 percent this year. As a result, we would need to find other sources of funding to maintain the same level of service we are currently able to provide to those in need in our community.

Please urge your representatives to protect nutrition programs that serve vulnerable, low-income families, children and seniors and exempt them from any cuts or budget caps.

**Larry Sly, director**

**Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano**

**Concord**