

## Minnesota seniors at-risk for hunger.

The USDA finds that one in five low-income households with seniors report “food insecurity,” which means that members of the household “do not have consistent access to enough food for active, healthy lives for all household members during the year.” According to USDA estimates, food stamps serves only about 32 percent of eligible households with elderly members. In June 2009, in Minnesota, there were 17,970 people aged 65 and older enrolled in food Support. In Minnesota, programs like Open Arms, Meals on Wheels, Store to Door, AARP, Loaves and Fishes, and food shelves are all responding to the increasing need for food assistance from Minnesota seniors.



46% of Minnesota seniors spend over 30% of their income on rent and utilities.  
\* Elder Economic Security Initiative



By 2025 – 75 percent more seniors will experience some form of food insecurity and 33% more will suffer hunger.  
\* Meals on Wheels Association of America



The poverty rate for older Americans is 18.6%, or 6.8 million people.  
\* National Academy of Sciences

### Heat or Eat?

Low income seniors and retirees are facing the unfortunate choice of paying the bills or buying enough food. The cold weather months add to the financial burdens because of fuel bills. This troubling situation is also here in part because:

- 75,000 Minnesotans are over 65 with incomes below 125% of poverty\*
- Lost retirement investments in the stock market decline
- Many have seen their home values plummet
- Need to pay for expensive healthcare and prescriptions
- There will be no annual cost of living (COLA) increase from Social Security this year.

\*American Community Survey



Seniors and retirees are delaying retirement or going back into the workforce to rebuild their lost investments.\*

\*MetLife Mature Market Institute

### Promising Policy and Practice Designed to Assist Low-income Seniors

A new outreach program will launch in early 2010 to alleviate the traditionally low participation rate of seniors in the Food Support program. The Twin Cities Hunger Initiative has commissioned the Minnesota Institute of Public Health to design a multi-year campaign aimed at increasing seniors’ awareness of the financial and health benefits of the Food Support Program. The campaign messages and materials will be designed to motivate seniors to use food stamps and will also encourage providers, families, doctors, trusted advisors and advocates to support the behavior change.

A new policy to increase benefits for low-income seniors will become effective January 1, 2010. Low-income Medicare beneficiaries may qualify for direct certification for three federal programs: The Medicare Part D Low-Income Drug Subsidy, Medicare Savings Programs, and Food Stamps. To ease the complexity for individuals, the Social Security Administration will send the qualified applicant’s information to the state Department of Human Services office. This could be mean, on average, an additional \$3,900 in benefits yearly. Over 3,000 Minnesota seniors were recently found to be eligible for these benefits.\*

\*Center on Budget and Policy Priorities



### What’s happening at Minnesota food shelves?

January-June 2009



- Visits to food shelves across the state increased by 26% over 2008. Visits in the metro area increased 43%.
- Counties with above average jumps:  
Carver: 97%  
Lyon: 111%  
Sherburne: 104%  
Wright: 73%
- Out of the nearly 1.3 million visits to food shelves during the first half of 2009, there were 134,768 senior visits.
- That is a 53% year-to-date increase in people 60 and older visiting food shelves.

### 2008 USDA FOOD INSECURITY SURVEY

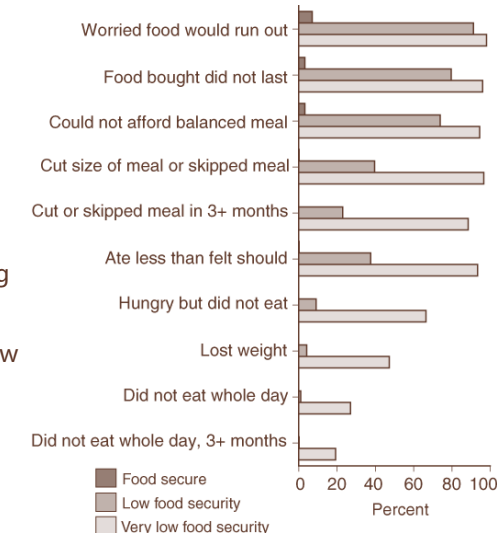
Data show 10.3 percent of Minnesota residents in households struggling with hunger as recession hit.

Everything we are seeing in tells us that a new survey taken today would undoubtedly show far higher numbers of people struggling to put food on the table.

Among the 10.3 percent of people in Minnesota households considered to be food insecure during the 2006-2008 period, 4.1 percent were living in households that were considered to have “very low food security.” People that fall into this USDA category had more severe problems experiencing hunger and cutting back or skipping meals on a more frequent basis for both adults and children.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s annual report shows more than 49 million people lived in households that were food insecure in 2008 – up from 36.2 million in 2007.

Households reporting each indicator of food insecurity, by food security status, 2008



Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2008 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

## Making Ends Meet with Food Support



The average monthly SNAP benefit for seniors in Minnesota is \$80.

The Food Support Program/SNAP helps you and your family have healthy, tasty food options and more buying power (\$207/month/household ave.). The system uses a debit card that is scanned at checkout like a credit card.

The Minnesota Food HelpLine (1-888-711-1151) makes the connections for you or anyone you know does not have enough food. This HelpLine will help enroll persons that qualify for SNAP and help callers find other food assistance close to their home.

The use of food support benefits in Minnesota has increased 26.5% since August 2008. Currently, there are over 380,000 Minnesotans receiving food support benefits - only 17,970 are seniors. Senior participation rates in Food Support have remained flat for the past 19 years.

### WHY IS SENIOR PARTICIPATION LOW?

**MYTH: Elderly people only receive \$10 a month in food stamp benefits.**

**FACT:** \$16 is the smallest amount of food stamps you can receive. The average amount of food stamps for the elderly is \$80.

**MYTH: Elderly people cannot own or be buying a home. If they own or are buying a home, the government will take it.**

**FACT:** Individuals can own or buy a home and still get food stamps. The home and its lot are not counted as a resource in the Food Stamp Program. The Food Stamp Program does not require a person to sign away their home.

**MYTH: Elderly people must go to the food stamp office for an interview.**

**FACT:** If an elderly person is not able to go to the food stamp office, he or she may request a telephone interview. The person may also ask a relative, pastor, neighbor, etc., to attend the interview as an authorized representative. Applicants for and recipients of SSI may also apply for food stamp benefits at the Social Security Office.

**MYTH: You have to go to the food stamp office every few months to keep getting benefits.**

**FACT:** Elderly people can get benefits for up to two years at a time. You don't have to go back to the office unless there are specific changes to your case. You can also ask for a telephone interview. Or a friend or family member can go for you.

**MYTH: Elderly people are only allowed \$2,000 in resources.**

**FACT:** The resources limit for elderly households or households containing one elderly person is up to \$7,000. Vehicles and IRA's are not counted as an asset.

**MYTH: Food stamps are only for families with children.**

**FACT:** Food stamps are for eligible individuals and families, including the elderly.

**MYTH: Other people need food stamps more than the elderly individuals. If an elderly person is certified for food stamps, he or she will be taking them away from others who have more of a need.**

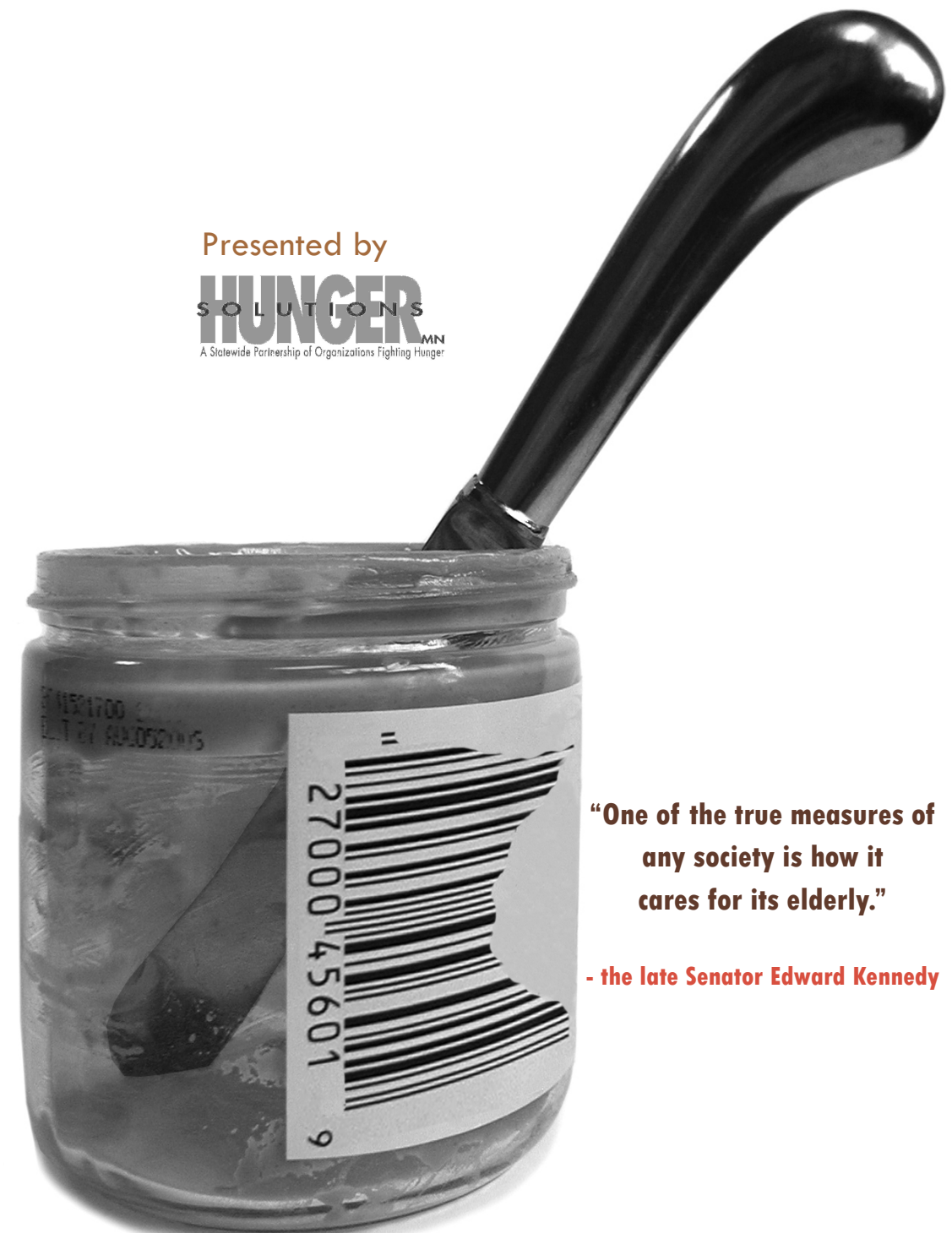
**FACT:** The Food Stamp Program is an entitlement program. In other words, everyone who applies and who is determined to be eligible will get food stamp benefits.



## Keeping Food on the Table

Presented by

**HUNGER**  
SOLUTIONS MN  
A Statewide Partnership of Organizations Fighting Hunger



**“One of the true measures of any society is how it cares for its elderly.”**

**- the late Senator Edward Kennedy**

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hungersolutions.org

Hunger Solutions Minnesota is a comprehensive hunger relief organization that works to end hunger in Minnesota. We take action to assure food security for all Minnesotans by supporting agencies that provide food to those in need, advancing sound public policy, and guiding grassroots advocacy. HSM advocates for the maximum use of all federal public nutrition dollars available and works to improve low income Minnesotans' access to all nutrition programs.

### A Quarterly Review of the State of Hunger in Minnesota

Released November 2009

Senior  
Hunger