

**For Immediate Release**

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## **Oregon Hunger Rate Surges; Food Stamps Fill Need**

### **Statement by OCPP analyst Joy Margheim on food insecurity data**

Data released today showing a surge in Oregon's hunger rate remind us of the importance of the expansion of food stamp benefits in the federal recovery package.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced today that more than one in eight Oregon households (13.1 percent) struggled to put food on the table at times during 2006-08. Oregon's rate of food insecurity was unchanged from 2003-05 and not significantly different from the national rate for 2006-08.

But the share of Oregon households experiencing hunger, "very low food security," increased to 6.6 percent (one in 15 Oregon households) in 2006-2008, up from 3.9 percent in 2003-05. Among the 50 states and the District of Columbia, Oregon and Mississippi had the largest percentage point increases in their rates of very low food security.

The nation as a whole saw increases in both food insecurity and hunger or very low food insecurity in 2008 compared to 2007. Because it is necessary to combine three years of data to get reliable state-level estimates, the picture at the state level is not as clear.

The USDA data on state-level food insecurity include two years of economic expansion and extend only to the end of 2008, so they do not show the full impact of the recession. More Oregonians today likely face difficulties feeding their families than the USDA figures indicate.

The hardship for Oregon families would be greater were it not for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, or food stamps. Time and again food stamps have demonstrated their effectiveness in curbing food insecurity. Oregon Department of Human Services data show that Oregon's food stamp caseloads have grown by 45 percent since the recession began, with more than 340,000 Oregon families receiving SNAP benefits in October 2009.

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Funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) has been vital in meeting that rising need. Through November 13, 2009, Oregon spent \$80.9 million in ARRA funding for increased SNAP benefits and administrative costs. Oregon is expected to receive roughly \$180 million more in SNAP funds by the end of 2010. These are important federal dollars boosting Oregon's economy.

Because these federal dollars are spent quickly here in Oregon, they generate substantial economic activity: \$1.73 for every dollar in additional benefits.

It's clear that, at a time of great need, federal stimulus spending is helping many Oregonians weather the recession and providing our economy a boost.