



FRESNO METRO MINISTRY • www.fresnometroministry.org
1055 North Van Ness Avenue • Suite H • Fresno, California 93728
PHONE: 559/485.1416 • FAX: 559/485.9109 • EMAIL: edie@fresnometmin.org

**Excerpts and Summary of the 46th Community Hunger and Nutrition Forum
Wednesday, August 11, 2004 12:00PM –1:30PM**

Trinity Lutheran Church, Fresno

Sponsored by Fresno Metro Ministry

Supported by

USDA, Community Food Project

California Dept. of Health Services Cancer Prevention
and Nutrition Section- USDA

MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

California Food Policy Advocates

The following is a summary of the reports made at the forum compiled by Phoua Moua and Carey Berend.

**FOCUS: Reflections on the Hunger Project,
Highlights of the last 4 years of Fresno Metro Ministry's Hunger &
Nutrition Project**

Looking Back, Moving Forward

Edie Jessup: Today's agenda is going to focus on the last four years of work that Fresno Metro Ministry's Hunger and Nutrition Project has done. Hopefully we can talk amongst ourselves about what we're looking forward to doing in the next year or two and what needs to be done here in Fresno to assure that all our neighbors have adequate, affordable, nutritious, culturally appropriate food for their good health.

Fresno Metro Ministry's Hunger & Nutrition Project Goal: The Fresno Community Hunger and Nutrition Collaborative will plan and identify, promote and implement the policy changes and actions needed so that low-income people in Fresno County will have access to the food and nutrition they need. It is all about ACCESS.

Hunger and Nutrition Forums: So far, there have been 45 Forums that convene the community players who recognize that we have really concerning food security issues. The monthly forums have publicly raised food security issues to a level where they become important to the whole community. All Forums are recorded, transcribed and edited, and mailed to the HNF mail-list, included in packets, and posted to our website www.fresnometroministry.org.

Samples of Past Forum topics:

- **Reclaiming our Best: Healthy Food in our Heritage:** a panel discussion by a variety of ethnic and cultural representatives. Cultural issues that impact hungry people in Fresno.
- **Advocacy Training: Learning Effective Advocacy Skills for Legislative Issues in a Tough Budget Year**
- **No Money Left for Food: Senior Hunger and Senior Nutrition**
- **Accessible Produce for All of Fresno; Farmers Markets,** Selling Farm Fresh Produce, and using the new EBT Food Stamp Card.
- **Fresno Unified School District School Board Candidates Forum:** Vision for Healthy Schools.
- **03-04 California Legislative Agenda, CFPA**
- **Food: Prescription for Recovery-** a panel discussion on needs and access to nutritious food for recovery from HIV/AIDS, substance abuse and other illness.

- **Body and Soul- A health ministry:** An African American Church Community's Life Saving transformation through healthy eating and Physical Activity
- **Opportunities and Successes for Healthy Kids,** Update on School Nutrition Programs: FUSD, Sequoia Middle School, FCOE, and Food Policy
- **Food Justice: Access to State Resources, CFSC.**
- **Soda in the Schools**
- **Gleaning Fresno's Bounty**
- **Child Nutrition: Linking Poverty, Access to Enough Food, and Food Quality Issues**
- **Reframing the Debate: Diet Based Chronic Disease, Individual choice or an issue of the environment?**
- **Geo-Mapping Food Access-** the Fresno Community Food Assessment
- **Emergency Food: The Community Food Bank**
- **Bread and Roses, Public Charge as a Barrier to Food Stamps and Health Care.**

The forums led to five task groups which have operated over the last four years; The Food Stamps Advocacy Group, Senior Nutrition, Community Food Assessment 'Fresno Fresh Access', Child Nutrition Task Group, and a Food Resources Group.

Food Stamp Advocacy Group has been an ongoing, regular monthly meeting of community-based organizations, low-income people, and the Fresno County Employment and Temporary Assistance office staff who deal with food stamps. This meeting has led to some really important outcomes, furthering the enrollment and making it easier for low-income people to access Food Stamps. Food Stamps are the best supplement to their food budget because Food Stamps are regular, every month, and allow some choice in food purchases. This group meets the fourth Thursday of each month, and actively works with California Food Policy Advocates at a statewide level. Everyone is invited to attend.

- **ABAWD (Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents) Waivers** –Through this meeting the county has asked for the ABAWD waiver, which by rules is a population that are not allowed to have food stamps. However, if you live in a county or a labor surplus area where the unemployment rate is high enough you can apply for a waiver and that will allow those folks who have not been able to find jobs to get food stamps. Fresno County has led the state in asking for that waiver; numerous other counties have followed suit. Each year the county has to reapply for the waiver, which they have done.
- **AB 231**, an Assembly Bill that eliminated many barriers to Food Stamps. We have worked recently with the county on quarterly reporting issues.
- **Outreach and Advocacy:** Getting the word out about more people being able to qualify for food stamps has been something this group has done. We have worked with the county on hard issues, things like what happens to folks when they get sanctioned and how does their family continue to get food stamps or CalWORKS benefits. The county has been brave and courageous along with the community-based folks who have come to talk about these issues.
- **Public Charge:** We have worked on eliminating barriers to food stamps by clarifying Public Charge. Public Charge is a fear on the part of the immigrant and refugee population that if they utilize food stamps it will go against them if they change their legal status. *Food stamps are not a public charge* issue and it is a constant work to talk to folks about that.
- **Food Stamp Applications:** The County has trained some community-based organizations to take food stamp applications as a way of extending outreach to families eligible for this nutrition program from USDA.
- **EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer- The New Food Stamp Card):** This committee worked with the county to solve a number of issues around the roll-out of the EBT card, which is new technology for many people. We worked on language issues and access. Three major things have happened with EBT. We did a state materials review here in Fresno and held local trainings on EBT in multiple languages for folks. We were also involved in exposing an early

fraud on retailers with EBT by a business that was going around in the Central Valley trying to sell the EBT or POS machines to small stores, when the state was providing them for free. We alerted the state and they were able to prosecute and get the money back for a couple of retailers who had been taken in by that fraud. We are continuing to work on EBT for more uses at farm stands, farmers' markets, and the flea markets.

Senior Nutrition Task Group worked with community-based organizations that work with seniors and the Fresno/Madera Agency on Aging on access issues for good food for seniors who are poor. Some of the things that we have worked on are:

- Focus groups and survey on hunger in the Hmong/So. East Asian senior population.
- Advocated for SSI recipients receiving Food Stamps in California.
- Changing cultural competence of Senior Nutrition Sites
- Emergency Food provider awareness of Senior nutrition needs

Community Food Assessment 'Fresno Fresh Access' Project started as a result of a Community Food Assessment Training held in May of 2002 that was facilitated by Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC). Many participants were interested in doing a Community Food Assessment in Fresno County and Fresno Metro Ministry decided to take the lead on the project. In Fall of 2003, the USDA Community Food Project Grant allowed for the expansion of this project that the California Nutrition Network began in late 2002. This is one of the largest food assessments in the nation because we are assessing the whole the county. Most assessments are only done in small cities or neighborhood areas. We continue working with CFSC for technical assistance.

The purpose of the project is to address "Where do we get food? What kind of food do we get?" and to identify key factors in food availability, accessibility, affordability and quality in Fresno County.

Objectives for the Community Food Assessment:

- Begin community survey in the summer '03.
- Involve local residents, and community volunteers in the survey process. *Train the Trainer model.*
- Empower community members to make food **policy** recommendations to local officials to improve access to healthy food.
- Create a Food Policy Council and local Action Plan from data collected from the assessment. Recommendations and a Food Policy Council will be the result in Fall of 2005.

The 'Fresno Fresh Access' project has engaged diverse focus groups to create the Consumer and Retailer surveys which are the main tools for the assessment. We developed a Train the Trainer Model for community neighborhoods working on surveying the community; met with City Council and County Board of Supervisors to engage their support. We are collaborating with Fresno State to analyze the surveys collected and to create a GIS map of the data collected. So far, 30 organizations have pledged to assist with the project, 70 neighborhood and community people have been trained, and 250 surveys have been collected in five different languages (Russian, Cambodian, Hmong, Spanish and English).

Retailer Survey: to find out what kinds of food are in stores in Fresno neighborhoods. Some of the preliminarily findings from Retailer Surveys are;

- The time of day the survey is conducted is important due the different times markets restock produce and food items.

- People seem to be “paying for convenience,” meaning that people are paying more for basic food and/or choosing less fresh food items at corner markets and general markets because the stores are closer and more convenient for them.
- There is a lack of fresh produce in convenience stores.
- There is a lack of low fat, 1% and skim milk in convenience stores and local markets.
- There is a lack of delivery service for markets.

Consumer Survey: to find out where people get their food, how people get to the food they need and want, what stores in the neighborhoods are most used by the people that live in that area, and how people feel about the way they get food. Some of the preliminary findings from Consumer Surveys are:

- A lot of people buy their fresh produce from Flea Markets.
- Barriers to fresh food are; not having enough money to buy the food and that there is no EBT (Food Stamp card) access at Flea Markets. Flea Markets in Fresno are not set- up to take the EBT card.
- What people considered the healthiest foods are not available in some neighborhoods; e.g., there is only one Whole Foods and Trader Joes, which are higher in prices and out of some of the neighborhood transportation areas.
- There are cultural food needs are not met for many immigrant and refugee families.

Some of the lessons that we have learned so far while conducting the surveys:

- There are issues of language barriers for some of our volunteers: English speaking volunteers surveying neighborhoods of monolingual Spanish or Hmong. We will resurvey those areas again with bilingual volunteers. We worked on issues of 3-way language access where a volunteer collaborated with another volunteer to do oral translation and surveys in her native language and the other volunteer transcribed the responses into English.
- Interview-type surveying is best because we get more stories and in-depth answers to our qualitative survey questions.
- Outlining the ‘neighborhood’ area before doing the surveys allows us to see where we need to extend our surveying.
- Group and teamwork is best both for safety and for effective evaluation process.

Next steps for the ‘Fresno Fresh Access’ Project: We are working on policy, community changes and actions that are needed to improve access to the food and nutrition we need to stay healthy. Hopefully, we will create a local Food Policy Committee with the ability to act on barriers to food. We feel the key to this is by evaluating the information we collected by City Council and County Board of Supervisor Districts.

Child and Nutrition: Research Action Policy (RAP) Group encourages an end to child hunger, and promotes good nutrition for kids in schools and the expanded use of federal nutrition programs

- **Research:** collecting good research and what we know about the nutrition of children and the status of child nutrition and health in Fresno.
- **Action: Acting** as a collaborative group to improve child nutrition in Fresno County.
- **Policy:** Out of the Obesity Summit last year, the Child Nutrition Group decided that policy change was needed to address the great health crisis we face with our kids.

This group looked at research materials on childhood obesity and decided that a comprehensive school nutrition and physical activity policy would be the quickest and best way to make difference in Fresno. The group examined policies in the local school system and childcare arenas, and advocated for state legislation. Some of the things that this group has worked on and helped to promote are:

- **Healthy School Environment Policy Committee** - In June, this group went before the Fresno Unified School Board of Trustees with a request for the establishment of a Healthy School Environment Policy Committee which would work on recommendations for a comprehensive policy for Fresno Unified, the fourth largest school district in California. The

Fresno County Public Health Officer supports and participates on this committee. This formal committee is a result of 6 months of work that involved School Food Services, Health providers, parents, community groups, School Vendor Contracting, and many others. We hope it will be a model for other valley school districts to use to change their nutrition policies.

- Promotes and uses examples of **Cutler-Orosi Universal Classroom Breakfast** and **Orange Center Universal Cafeteria** as great examples Universal School Breakfast Programs which ensures that their students have breakfast to assure readiness to learn and good health.
- **School Lunch** Program is promoted, especially with schools that have a high percentage of low-income students.
- **Summer Lunch Summits** resulted in increased Summer Lunch sites in Fresno County and in participation. Fresno County Economic Opportunities Commission (EOC) Food Services Dept, which is one of the main sponsors, went from 25 sites last year to 40 sites this year. EOC had to get a waiver to increase their sites and they did it because they understood the need for more sites through the Summer Lunch Summits. One of those sites this year is at Stone Soup in Fresno-- they are currently feeding about 150 kids a day. This site does the lunch program in the late afternoon because it is too hot during noontime and it is when Stone Soup has a youth program. Another site is in Selma. The Selma program, which was a pilot last year to do lunch during the 'gap' time between summer school and school start up in the fall, has had over 100 kids every day this year. This program is held at a park this year and is support by the Selma Unified School District and several churches.
 - **Pilot at Burroughs Elementary School-** This summer, Burroughs provided lunch to kids who are 'off track' at this year-round school. We're hoping to take this model to the other year-round schools to see if it can work so more kids have access via 'Summer Lunch' year-round.
- **After School Snacks** are promoted at Schools and after-school programs at Community Based Organizations.

Food Resource (Gleaners) started out with interest in gleaning. We know that we are #1 in agriculture production here in Fresno County. We know that Fresno County feeds the world with all the food that we produce. Yet, many people in Fresno are hungry. This group addresses how we could get produce that is grown here into the local food system so that people can have access to it. This group had focused on Community Food Bank needs. The Community Food Bank are installing cold storage, which will allow them to rescue more fresh produce and distribute it to low-income people.

A **Community Garden** group is expanding the number of gardens-- so that we can say 'Fresno farms in 100 languages' and people can have access to fresh produce because of their knowledge of how to grow food.

One of the important things that the Food Resources Group is looking at is working with the grower community, farmers, and looking at solutions with them for more local produce being available in neighborhoods. We are hopeful about perhaps being able to start some sort of co-op with them so that local entities can purchase local food. The school district has said that they would buy local produce if they could make one call and get what they needed.

For four years, we have been working with the Fresno community and we are really very thankful for the range of folks who have worked with us on food security. Some of the things that we have done and participated in are: a pantry inventory and reported to the community about the lack of access, a Public Charge Forum, EBT Action Team, a Hunger Summit, and Obesity Summit.

We have more work that is left to do, such as continuing the **Summer Lunch** expansion, working on **Universal School Breakfast**, expanding **Community Gardens, Farm-to-School** and **School Gardens** as a way of learning good health and farm issues. We are working with the **Central Valley Diabetes Resource Network** on community health issues and the **Regional Nutrition Network**

Collaborative on outreach and nutrition education issues. The Hunger and Nutrition Project has connections with the local groups and state and federal Food Security organizations. **Edie Jessup has been on the Joint Steering Committee and the Executive Committee of the California Nutrition Network, and co-chair of the State Food Security Taskforce. We work with California Food Policy Advocates as their regional office. We work with the California Hunger Action Coalition, the Community Food Security Coalition, the State EBT Project Client Advocates Forum, and the California Food and Justice Coalition. I've been on the African American Taskforce as a delegate from the Food Security Group. We've worked at the State Food Stamp Forum; we presented at the state MAZON Conference, and the American Heart Association Minority Summit on Health Disparities, and done presentations at the local, state, and national level.**

Hunger Action Day has been a great event for many diverse ethnic Fresnans who yearly make their voices heard on hunger issues in Sacramento. They have visited with their legislators and expressed their hunger needs. One of the most exciting things about the project has been working with Metro's **New Leaders for Better Health**. This last year due to multiple funding sources, we have been able to take 51 low-income representatives to Sacramento. For two years, we have nominated local Fresno heroes for the statewide **Hunger Fighter Awards**. **Gary Joseph from the EOC** in Fresno got that award from the state group this year for his advocacy in expanding Summer Lunch and before that **Sequoia Middle School** was honored for getting rid of soda, and candy from their campus.

Our funding partners are **California Nutrition Network, California Food Policy Advocates, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, USDA: Community Food Project, Kaiser Permanente, The California Endowment, and Rosenberg Foundation**. We've had the local support of over 70 community groups and contact through our mailing list of 750 participants for the last four years. We have over 100 New Leaders who are ready to work on assuring the access to adequate, culturally appropriate, affordable food by the low-income community.

What's next? We will work on issues on the table. The Healthy School Environment Policy Committee is leading on the child nutrition and health issues with the Fresno Unified School District. The US Congressional Hunger Center Fellows will be here soon, and the partnership with the Community Food Bank, Tulare County Food Link, and USDA with Metro is going to be very important for our next year. We're hoping to develop a Food Policy Council as a result of the final Community Food Assessment. We will continue to work on advocacy and policy changes emerging from the low-income community at local and state levels. We hope to improve the rescue and distribution of food to low-income folks and develop a food co-op with growers that will increase access to fresh local produce. We want to see all farmers' markets and flea markets using EBT so low-income people have access to fresh produce, and we want to work on increasing community gardens. We will continue to emphasize and expand culturally competent food, nutrition programs and to focus the media on poor health outcomes that we are seeing here in Fresno communities. We will work to facilitate local solutions to solving these issues. Hopefully, in the next year we will begin working with a regional organization on hunger and nutrition issues here in the San Joaquin Valley.

There is no scarcity of good food except that we have created that scarcity. We can fix this. Lastly, I think that out of the four years that we have been working on this Community Hunger & Nutrition project I have come to the conclusion that we hate the 'fish story'. The story goes; if you give someone a fish they will eat for today and if you teach them to fish they will fish for a lifetime. But that is not necessary so. Because if they have no access to the water, if someone else owns or controls the land around the water, they cannot fish, and they can die of hunger-- full of knowledge about how to fish. So they will say to us what we told them was true. They should eat right. But they are still hungry.

So, organize with us and with others, and fashion a solution together for food security and good health for all.

Thank you for listening to four years of work by just a whole lot of people here in Fresno, We're anxious to move forward and do more with you to assure the Food Security here in Fresno. Thanks.

Questions and Comments:

Catherine Quinn, Calif. Health Collaborative: First, I just want to commend Edie and the Hunger and Nutrition Forum for having food security become so much on our screen here in the area and providing the leadership that never lets us forget, and also lets us better understand the real issues. Having said that, the to-do list is long and I would continue to rate use of EBT everywhere as a continuing issue; and would use the successes so far with Fresno Unified school food policies. I've learned from you, and **share your frustration that we have so much food and yet we're not getting our fresh farm produce into the hands of the people that need it.** Figuring out a way to do that efficiently is a major challenge.

Daytra Latin, Community Food Bank: I think, as mentioned before, one of the things that I'm seeing is that a huge issue is seniors not being able to access food stamps. The other issue that was discussed, too, is that the **African American Taskforce with Five-A-Day is a plan that we can accomplish and see what the health disparities are over the next year. It's so important in our valley to focus on that.**

Catherine Quinn: Now that the food bank is going to be able to increase cold storage, and I know it's a drop in the bucket, but can you field donations just from homegrown produce? All the folks that do the backyard gardens end up with way more than they could ever consume personally. If folks were to bring that to the food bank after more cold storage is in place, would you guys be able to turn that around and get it out to hungry people?

Edie Jessup: The Community Food Bank will be able to do that. Plant a Row for the Hungry also has worked with home surplus and one of the nice things that the food bank can do right now is if people have extra produce they can take it to a commodity distribution site near their home. **There are commodity distribution sites in every zip code and you can call the food bank and they could say, "Well, on Thursday there's a distribution at Trinity Lutheran," and you could take it there and people could just pick it up when they're there.** So, that is a way for it to be distributed without having to make it go through the food bank.

Thank you all. I appreciate your participation in assuring Fresno Food Security tremendously. I will be calling on all of you to do more good work.

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