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Excerpts and Summary of the 40th Hunger and Nutrition Forum

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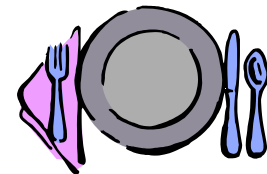
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

California Food Policy Advocates

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

FOCUS: ‘The State of the Plate’

**A look at What’s on the Plate following Budget Cuts—
Who’s Plate is Full, Who’s Plate is Empty?**



Edie Jessup: I am privileged to work for Fresno Metro Ministry on their Hunger and Nutrition Project. This is “The State of the Plate,” and we will be addressing the budget cuts today. Fortunately, we have wonderful people with us from the community to talk about how these cuts are going to impact their programs and what they’re seeing in terms of the needs here in Fresno.

Participant self-introductions

Edie Jessup: Thank you all very much for being here. I want to draw attention to the materials that are in your packet. The cover of your packet is our graphic of the **State of the Plate** in terms of the Governor’s budget and how it is going to impact people who are on the edge already. We’re looking at the cuts to CalWORKs, to SSI and SSP, which are our elders and disabled, cuts to CalWORKs, problems of denying healthcare by **capping** and Healthy Families, etc. There are other subtle grants, cuts that will cut the child grant to children. It looks like there is going to be an attempt to roll back the law which now allows transitional food stamps to CalWORKs leavers, food stamp eligibility for folks so that own a reliable car, and a variety of immigrant restrictions that are going to block access to healthcare. (This graphic of the Budget Cuts that will affect the ‘State of the Plate’ is attached to this summary). You’ll also find in your packet a copy of the state legislative agenda from California Food Policy Advocates and several analyses of the Governor’s budget and the impact on folks who have low-incomes. The new budget cuts are going to impact more and more people. One of the things I want to call your attention to is the information from California Budget Project indicating what it costs to live in Fresno County. If you compare that to what the grants are for folks on CalWORKs and on SSI **you will see that what it costs to live in Fresno County is more than the grant amounts for SSI and CalWORKs, and when we’re looking at cutting them it makes it even worse.** I also have included from Fresno County the caseload for food stamps which indicates that there are **95,000 people as of October that were utilizing food stamps here in Fresno County. Those are the**

people that we are talking about as we're talking about these cuts. It's going to hurt them first and foremost. That's nearly 100,000 people and those are just the folks who are enrolled in that program (enrolled is estimated at 1/3 to 1/2 of people eligible for food stamps). There are several announcements in the packet: 1) the Summer Lunch as a hunger-fighting program. **If all kids who are out of school were able to access the Summer Lunch Nutrition Program, it would help family budgets.** 2) This is Martin Luther King weekend. I encourage you to attend events. 3) There is a copy of *Children's Advocate*, and inside there is a full page on Fresno and hunger, and there are quotes from people who are going to be impacted by the State of the Plate, telling about how hard it is *already* to put food on the table.

Once again, welcome.

To begin this meeting, I will suggest the context by reading an editorial by Sister Simone Executive Director of Jericho, the Voice for Justice, and Elizabeth Sholes who is the Policy Director for the California Council of Churches IMPACT, on behalf of the Save the Safety Net Coalition.

A quote from Martin Luther King: "Let us be dissatisfied until those that live on the outskirts of hope are brought into the metropolis of daily security. Let us be dissatisfied until slums are cast into the junk heaps of history, and every family is living in a decent sanitary home... Let us be dissatisfied until every state capitol houses a governor who will do justly, who will love mercy and who will walk humbly..." Martin Luther King, Jr. (8/16/1967)

Today, the day before the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., we are reminded that life with dignity, free from hunger and needless suffering is still just a dream for millions of Californians. It is a dream that we see slipping further from reality in these early days of 2004. Over the past two years state and local governments have cut healthcare, child care, hunger relief, shelter, and other essential health and human services. These cuts have affected all of us in our community with the least fortunate paying the largest price to solve the state budget crisis. We are dissatisfied.

Now Governor Schwarzenegger has proposed millions in budgetary cuts that would force families and seniors onto the streets, take food from the tables of the working poor, and make the disabled and ill do without vital healthcare. These cuts will put California's most vulnerable in harm's way and for some will have severe, even deadly, consequences. We are dissatisfied.

The programs the Governor proposes to cut were created as safety nets for all Californians to help us overcome unforeseen hardships and recover from crisis with dignity, security, and hope. We are dissatisfied.

These cuts are unjust and unnecessary. Sufficient revenues can be raised to avoid the worst of these cuts if those of us who *have* will be willing to give *some* in the form of taxes; and *if those who have the most will be willing give more.*

To commemorate Dr. King, to declare dissatisfaction with the slashing of California's safety net, and to implore the adoption of a just and merciful budget, thousands across the state are uniting on January 15, tomorrow, for the first ever We Have a Dream Day of Action coordinated by the newly formed Save the Safety Net Coalition.

At the dawn of a new year we hope that prayers and the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., will be heard and his dream, our dream, answered **so that every Californian can live with dignity and human decency. This is what Californians want.**

I thank you, and I now invite our panel to come forward so that we can hear about your programs, about what you are seeing in the community and what impact the proposed budget is going to have on your constituency.

Don McClellan, Fresno County Employment & Temporary Assistance (Food Stamps & MediCal): Good afternoon. My name is Don McClellan, and I'm the program manager working with

E&TA that works primarily with the Food Stamp and Medi-Cal programs. Just so you know, we also do outreach into almost all areas of Fresno County and we take applications on all programs throughout. My colleague, Johnie Belford, is going to be passing out some more information for you so that you can take a look at it. What we're seeing almost everywhere are some programs that are hit harder than others. The information on the program cuts by the state in the California Food Assistance Program (food assistance for immigrants), is that the federal government is now funding food for some of those losing state benefits. So, the federal dollars out of the Food Stamp programs are being used, instead of state dollars. So what that shows you, I guess to some degree, is there is some transfer of funds and responsibility in some areas. For instance, I was looking over the budget information that shows \$4.1 billion in lost revenues are going to go back to the counties. These were revenues that were lost because of the rescission of the vehicle license fee, which brings in a great deal of money into this county and during the past realignment, and it says an additional \$1.3 billion will be treated as a loan so if the county takes it they have to pay it back in a year or two. As you know, our county, like any other county, doesn't have a lot of funds to be repaying loans.

Major problems for our area is **Stage Three Childcare is almost eliminated, which means that those families who have been able to remove themselves from the welfare rolls under CalWORKs with childcare paid, will lose that option.** It's hoped that other programs will be able to help them with their childcare needs. It gives them one additional year to enroll in those programs, whereas the waiting list right now is three years, so there could be a problem there. It reduces the threshold at which those families begin to pay for the childcare down another 10%. **These are families who are already considered to be working poor**, and it comes down from 50% of the federal poverty level down to 40%. **The Governor's budget is providing for state cost savings by not giving the participant populations, the clients in CalWORKs, a raise in July for cost of living.** In addition, **the state is looking at rolling back the previous increase.** If a family can even try to get by on welfare, you have in front of you what it costs in Fresno County to live (less than the CalWORKs grant) and then the proposal to have that rolled back an additional 3% from what they received this year.

For the client I can say it certainly does not look good. From the County administrative standpoint, I think it looks worse. The County is losing a substantial amount of money. The red sheet on the pie chart shows exactly what we're losing, **in the \$4 million range, but that doesn't talk about the \$6 million additional incentive funds that we're losing out of the CalWORKs program.** Trying to figure out how that's going to work in the next year is difficult, to say the least. I love the theme here today, 'The State of the Plate'. Have you ever been to a buffet where they have all the things covered and you don't know what's in them? Well, that's kind of the state of the plate. The Governor comes up and he gives you this budget announcement, but with everything being moved around on the buffet table you really don't know what's going to be available on your plate.

When I look at the state budget today, I say, "Well, how is that going to affect me and my programs?" Take a look at the fiscal charts that we've given out. Look at the one that says Fresno County Food Stamps PA, NA. PA means Public Assisted household. That means that they're receiving CalWORKs. NA means non-assistance-- those are households that are not receiving public assistance programs. It shows that today we have 95,101 people with 31,281 cases. Basically, while we had a high in 1998 and 1999 of 97,000 we went down to 81,000 in 2000-2001. The reason that I'm looking at what we call the public assistance and non-assistance chart with the number of families is because what you're seeing on that chart is showing during periods where there was economic growth, and at the very beginning of welfare reform (1996) you'll see that the caseloads began to increase. That increase stopped about the year 2000 and then began to climb again. The state expects this to climb further. There are 95,101 persons and 31,000 cases on this one aid program (Food Stamps) alone. **Not including Medi-Cal, we basically have one out of six people in the county on these programs alone, so we have a large poor population. As a result, in our county the estimate is between one in four and one in three that are on some type of public assistance including the Medi-Cal program.** So that gives you an idea of where we stand today as far as caseload goes. The same trends are actually statewide. To the best of my knowledge **I am not aware of a county that continues to decrease on the rolls. The rolls continue to go up even**

in counties that have low unemployment rates. We have a number of individuals who have been in CalWORKs for a while and they're **falling off public assistance because they're losing their eligibility, but they're still poor.**

Fresno County E&TA is beginning to work with community agencies in helping the County take the applications for Food Stamps, because the bottom line is the County workers can't take them all. We don't really have enough staff to take all of the eligible applications that are going to be out there. What we've done is we're coming up with some ads (promoting Food Stamps) in English and Spanish (we're looking at some other languages). The ads say 'A small reason to apply for food stamps' and it has a picture of a child. I love them. For instance, we're working with the Community Food Bank in taking applications. I do think, however, that we do need to strengthen our interaction. **We just trained at the Community Food Bank. They have taken seven Food Stamp applications that have been delivered to the County, but the problem is follow-up. Only three of those families have followed up.** The others did not come in (to the County office) to complete their application forms, so there are four out of seven families that will not be receiving food stamps. So if we're going to take the applications we need to be able to follow up and we need to work that out with the other agencies to be able to do that. That's where we're at.

Eddie Jessup: Thank you, Don, so much. I know that it's almost worthy of a whole session. I think that taking applications for food stamps and other eligible programs by community agencies could make a huge difference in access to needed help for low income neighbors. Organizations that work with low-income people can call Don and talk to him about that. The number is 453-5047, and Don has some cards available. Please consider helping people enroll in Food Stamps if you're a church, if you're a nonprofit organization, if you're a preschool, and help take some of those applications and follow up with your own clients to make sure that they get enrolled. That would be wonderful! Paula is going to talk from Salvation Army.

Paula Scribner, Salvation Army: I'd like to talk about the Salvation Army Food Pantry. Our clientele hasn't really changed over the last two months. We still have the same groups – the seniors, unemployed, the farm workers, and families who have run out of food stamps. Part of our concern, what we're finding in our clients, is **people usually will spend their finances on food last. First they pay their rent and they pay their utilities, they pay their medical expenses, and they buy food with what's left over. The requests for PG&E assistance in California is twice what it was last year at this time. There are just two caseworkers and we see between 25 and 30 people a day, but we turn away at least that many people.** They get shut off because they don't have the resources to keep their PG&E on. Then, people have no way to provide food. They rely on very low incomes or CalWORKs or SSI, and many times after they pay their rent there's just nothing left. We are seeing more people than we were last year at this time at the Salvation Army Food Pantry.

Eddie Jessup: How many times in a year can people get food from the Salvation Army?

Paula Scribner: Right now they can get it six times a year, or every two months, or if they have a special situation and they're unemployed and they're looking for work, we'll give them food up to six times. They can come in every week for six weeks and get food.

Eddie Jessup: Thank you.

Holly Porter, Community Food Bank: Hi. I'm Holly with Community Food Bank. The **'State of the Plate'** at Community Food Bank is that we are in a period of transition right now. I don't know if you've heard, but our president and CEO recently left the company and our second person in charge also left, so we **will have a new president and CEO any day now.** The previous person, Sue Fenske, has committed to working part-time to make the transition easier. **In terms of food flow it's pretty normal right now. There is nothing really to note there in terms of shortages or anything of that sort.**

We recently completed a pretty extensive survey or study called *Faces of Hunger*. If there are people who haven't seen this there are some copies available at the table. We basically went to over 65 different emergency food sites throughout Fresno County and surveyed or interviewed people who were coming to get emergency food. This is the result of that survey. One of the things that we found is that **76% of people who are receiving emergency food are not receiving food stamps, and we thought that that was interesting and sort of decided to launch, with cooperation from the county, a food stamp outreach project, which is definitely in its infancy stages.** (Partial funding is from the California Nutrition Network). We've only been out to our second site the second time being this morning, so we've been to the Hinton Community Center and to Second Baptist Church. Those are two emergency food distribution sites. **What we're doing is helping people fill out the first and second part of the Food Stamp application and then the county has been gracious enough to give us a hotline that we call and make an appointment for that person to go in and speak with a Food Stamp caseworker.** From our perspective it's worked out really well. Both times that we've gone out we have been busy the entire time helping people fill out the applications and have been successful, and the county has been very responsive in getting an appointment for them right away and giving them that piece of paper so they know where to go and what to bring and that kind of thing. Don said that out of the first batch of seven only four people have actually responded and are receiving benefits, and that seems kind of typical from what I've heard from other Food Stamp outreach programs from other food banks in other communities. So we're hoping that number goes up, of course, that if we take the time to go through this process with them that they actually receive the benefits.

Something to note, though. As a result of this survey that we did we found that of those 76% of people who were coming to get emergency food that said they did not receive food stamps **we asked them why they weren't receiving food stamps and the biggest number of responses that we received was that they thought that their income or their assets made their household ineligible. The second most often given response was that someone in the household or the applicant received SSI disability and they were not eligible because of that. The third most frequent response was that it was just too much of a hassle,** and that's sort of the population that we hope to reach in doing this food stamps outreach project, helping them get through the application. *I actually this morning ran into one gentleman who we helped last week fill out the application and he went to the appointment and I guess he got emergency aid because he's already receiving his benefits. He was coming there to get food and we were back there again and he said, "Hey, I just wanted to say thank you so much for being here. It was so much easier to go through it with you guys and it saved me so much time when I went into the office. He said he was already getting his benefits and it helps a lot. So I got feedback already and I felt really excited about that because we just started this.*

So, that's what we're doing and why in terms of food stamps and outreach. **We did recently, which I haven't shared with Edie yet, sort of a random survey of our agencies, the soup kitchens and food pantries that receive food from the Food Bank, asking them how often they allow their clients to access food, and we received about 35 to 37 responses back and the vast majority of them said as often as the client needs it.** I think there were only two or three out of the ones who responded who said differently than that, so **I'll get you that list of agencies that have said that they supply food to their clients as often as they need it.** So that's what's going on at the Food Bank from an emergency food standpoint.

In terms of the state budget cuts we don't have a direct funding stream from the state. However, of course with all of the cuts in the different social service programs that will affect the clients who are recipients of emergency food we do expect an increase in demand because of the cuts. With the repealing of the car tax, of course, the counties are getting far less money, and whether or not the city and the county are going to continue with social service funding is also a question, although the amount of money that the Community Food Bank receives from the city and county is relatively small. That is sort of up in the air as to whether they'll continue with that.

Edie Jessup: Do you have enough food to serve the needs in Fresno County?

Holly Porter: I get that question a lot, and my answer is always **no because I think there can always be more agencies that have pantries or soup kitchens.** You can always add in different gaps. *There are gaps in the service areas, in other words, in outlying communities. I'm sure there are places where it would be great if there was a church or an organization that opened a soup kitchen or a food pantry.* **We're not running out of food. There's not a shortage or anything of that sort, but is everyone who's hungry receiving emergency food? I really doubt it.**

Edie Jessup: Thank you. Jeremy.

Jeremy Hofer, California Rural Legal Assistance: Edie invited me here today to talk about a recent forum that I worked on around **sustainable agriculture.** It was last October and I convened conventional, organic, and even biodynamic growers, environmentalists, farm worker advocates, the Farm Bureau, and the agricultural commissioner. A lot of these comments that I'm going to make here today are from that conversation that took place. It was about an hour-long discussion. It's available on the web as well as I can get people a CD if they'd like it.

The question really was "**How do we sustain our family farms?**" **because they're our foundation here in this valley,** and I actually came out of this discussion very optimistic, a lot more optimistic than I thought I would be. I started with the general understanding of NAFTA and the global market forces that NAFTA is helping to create, and now as we look towards the Free Trade Area of the Americas right now in Miami we have this kind of expanding geographic area of what NAFTA has already done. **Here in the valley, for our agriculture, NAFTA has been pretty detrimental in the sense that it's encouraging consolidation of farms because of economies of scale. It has also forced a lot of immigrants to cross the border illegally and it's encouraging the levels of undocumented immigrants to rise. We have environmental regulations in California that are by far higher than NAFTA's regulations or international regulations set by the World Trade Organization, and this is one of the reasons why it's difficult for growers because they have these regulations in place and at the same time they're competing with growers in Argentina and other places that do not have these regulations,** so it's an unlevelled playing field to start with.

One of the growers that was at this forum owns **T&D Willey Farms.** **I'm going to use them as an example of a sustainable practice, something that is competitive and gives a lot of benefits to the community.** They operate about **75 acres,** which is an extremely small farm in Fresno County. They have **50 full-time employees, which is a high amount proportional to the acreage. A lot of farmers hire seasonal labor and there is a different level of care given to the labor force when it's full-time versus seasonal. They feed 250 families directly through what's called a Community Supported Agricultural product.** This product is supplied in a box once a week to clients that pay on a monthly or a quarterly basis. This is kind of one step further than a farmers' market where they're actually building that relationship with the grower very directly. A Farmers Market is helping to build a relationship in the sense that they actually go up to the grower and buy food from the grower.

Another positive aspect that came out of this forum was the **Fresno County Agricultural Commissioner, Jerry Priado, brought up the Buy California campaign** that has been recently promoted and signed by Governor Gray Davis. The basis of that campaign is that **California has some of the highest quality produce in the world** and there are actually people in other countries that are tearing off labels of California Grown and copying them and putting them on boxes of their products just because we produce some of the best produce in the world. This Buy California campaign is something out of this forum that **I would like to see expanding to encourage local consumption of our produce as well as other products** for many reasons. One of the main reasons is because **the farther that we ship our produce the less sustainable that system becomes and that's because it becomes more and more based on fossil fuels. The less that we can base our agriculture on fossil fuels the better from an ecological standpoint as well as an economical standpoint.** For Example: When an apple is grown with a high level of pesticide use, which is a fossil fuel, as well as shipped 3,000 miles across the country there are health risks,

health detriments to the environment and to the people that work in the field as well as to the air that we're breathing, and those **health costs are not added into the cost of that apple, so essentially our health system is having to bear these costs. The more that we can move away from industrial agriculture in the sense of highly mechanized farm operations that are dependent on fossil fuels, and high levels of fossil fuels, the better.**

To tie this into the State of the Plate, **on the statewide level I would recommend that the state continues and expands the Buy California campaign. I think we need to really put some funding into that and market ourselves as well as we need to shift some of this funding, billions and billions of dollars that are going towards industrial agricultural practices which are non-sustainable in an ecological sense and I would say in an economic sense, too. We need to shift those funds that are going to those practices to look into local food networks, sustainable practice research, research on how to grow organically, how can we extend our seasons, how can we grow four seasons in the valley rather than just one, as many, many farmers are doing now. I would also say we need to back down from some of these international trade agreements until they have strong environmental and labor codes in them.** Thank you for inviting me. If anybody wants to get that CD I can talk to you later.

Edie Jessup: Thank you very much, Jeremy. In your packet there is a copy of the **California Food Policy Advocates' legislative agenda** for this year, and I will be in touch with all of you to work on this because there are elements of this **that can begin to address how to get food to people. Clearly, our emergency food system needs to be bolstered, our local economy needs to get our local produce into that system and rescued. We have no gleaning operation of large scale here in the valley, and we could be getting food for people. People need to be fed now. They need to be fed right now, and the next part of that is we need to solve the access to food for folks in a sustainable way for them systemically. It is why food stamps are so important because people can depend on getting additional income until their income gets large enough for food every month and they aren't having to go from pantry to pantry to get food to put on their table.**

The legislative agenda includes **some school measures because that is a place where we could universally get food to kids immediately and make a big change in their health and access.**

The other elements are **eliminating finger imaging.** If you get food stamps in California the adults in your household must be fingerprinted, and this costs \$10 million a year. An audit by the state shows that they are catching no fraud this way, so that is one of the things that could be eliminated. **Instead of cutting access to food and to healthcare for low-income families we could stop fingerprinting them.**

We could make school lunches healthier and preserve current investments in nutrition. This is just really crazy. The other thing that ties into Jeremy talk is the Electronic Benefits Transfer card, which is how people get food stamps now. **Making it possible for people to use that at farmers' market and for fresh produce in their neighborhoods would make a big difference in the quality of food low-income people could get.** So I won't go on any further. Let's hear from Sharon about the situation with the refugee population.

Sharon Stanley, Executive Director of Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries, Inc.:

Thank you, Edie. It's good to see all of you and bring you some updates that are related in particular ways to refugee populations here in the Valley. There are four articles that I brought that are related to one of the concerns. **I want to say, though, that as I talk about concerns that are impacting folks locally I want to place it within the national and really an international context of what is being experienced by refugees, especially since September 11th. Our own United States refugee program is in the biggest point of crisis that it has ever been in the history of the program, which started at the end of World War II, and that has come about because of increased tensions related to folks entering into the United States which have unfortunately greatly impacted refugees who are, I would say, the most heavily screened populations who**

have ever come into our country. In the last two years since September 11th we have had much, **much lower refugee arrival numbers than ever before.** For example, in 2002 only slightly over 27,000 refugees were allowed into the country for the whole year. As a comparison basis the years before were closer to 120,000 refugees. At a national level **we have been working throughout the last year to establish in Congress a bipartisan refugee caucus.** We have been successful in working together locally, and Cal Dooley has joined that caucus. We're still working on Radanovich. We're hoping that he can join as well and that helps to have an impact on all of these issues related to refugees.

One of the biggest issues that is hitting the communities now is the **loss of SSI benefits for many refugee elders.** For folks who are 65 and over, for those who at the time of the onset of welfare reform on the day of August 22, 1996, individuals who were not yet at that point receiving SSI benefits and came into those benefits either on that day or later, from that point they're eligible to receive SSI for seven years after that point, seven years from the time of the onset of welfare reform. **That seven year date was hit last summer on August 22, 2003, and that means that refugee elders then as the paperwork has been processed through Social Security Administration had just started to receive these cutoff notices in the beginning of October through November and through December.** So we're in a really intensive time now of **identifying those cases, putting the faces and their families' stories together with their realities, and expressing how almost all of them have been already in the process of trying to obtain their citizenship.** As you know, you have to live in the United States for five years before you're eligible to begin that process of becoming citizens. Then you have the pleasure of entering into INS/CIS paperwork trails to become citizens. On the CIS side, which is Citizen and Immigration Services, actually at this point their own processing has become much quicker than it was several years ago. **However, due to homeland security issues the FBI has now imposed a new identity security check that doesn't begin to be in process until after the time that maybe an 87-year-old Hmong woman who didn't know how to hold a pencil when she first came into this country and went to citizenship classes for the last four years, after she finally passed the test against tremendous odds, and so we have a number of families who have been notified, as an example, that they are losing their SSI benefits or have lost them already and yet they have passed the citizenship test but they're still in the midst of that approval process through that additional FBI security check. So what happens to them in the meantime? So far it's been that they lose their benefits.** We're working on seeing if there is a way that they can be covered in the interim time. I just was talking to Social Security Administration folks before I came to this meeting today, and there is some slight chance that if refugee elders had applied under the category of being aged to receive the SSI benefit and have been receiving those benefits and then have been cut off of those because of the seven-year time limit, if they feel like they have a legitimate case to plead they could **possibly receive SSI under the category of being disabled.** They can enter into that process and there is some chance that they might be able to still continue to receive benefits. Otherwise, we're at this point trying to **direct those elders into the CAPI Program, and as you know, the Governor has asked for the CAPI program to be capped.** We didn't want him to be so strict literally according to that name. **Fresno County has very recently established a CAPI office where they have multiple language competent staff who can help to process those applications, especially for this group of refugee elders who maybe have lost their SSI benefits.**

Unfortunately, the reality of the **current housing crisis here in Fresno County impacting especially Latino and refugee low-income populations** is meaning that more people than ever before have been **displaced from their apartment units due to purchases of a number of complexes that for many, many years were very low income, multiple raises in rents over the last year. Two and three times are common for almost every apartment complex.** Our organization is working with about 25 complexes at this time, so that's all hitting at the same time and one of those additional impacts has been that Social Security Administration and INS/CIS are now losing contact with clients for whom the old address no longer works, so from the community

perspective we're trying to help folks get back in touch with each other, contact those agencies if families have moved, and help that process happen better.

So the **concerns are about CAPI** and the need to keep that program in as healthy a condition as possible in the midst of the cuts that are being anticipated, **working with Social Security Administration, and then the other issue that I want to give you the most recent updates on is related to the 15,000 Hmong refugees, some of whom have been for 20 years almost in a Buddhist temple that's about an hour-and-a-half outside of Bangkok, Thailand.** This is an amazing story where the primary monk in that temple, talk about radical hospitality, offered a place for these Hmong refugees who needed to get out of the refugee camps for a number of reasons. Some of it was related to opium addiction. Many of them had fought for so many years with the United States and were freedom fighters and knew they couldn't go back to Laos but also really didn't want to resettle in the years when the camps were open for resettlement and they wanted to stay and continue to work for Laos to become free somehow from Communist dominance. So the number in those camps has grown over the years. Our government has recognized that there are a particular group of long-stayers who need to be offered some sense of a final, durable solution. The latest information that has been given to us are that their **cases will begin to be processed as early as April or May through the U.S. Embassy** in Bangkok, Thailand. What does that mean for Fresno? Part of what it means for Fresno is that **we have a lot to do to get ready. We don't even have an open refugee resettlement agency in our city any more so there are many relatives who live here. Whether people can come and where they can come will depend on where their relatives are located, so we're working with communities to try to make a match of who is here and who is in the camps so that that resettlement process can happen as quickly as possible.** We don't anticipate a flood of new arrivals immediately. The first folks who will come we're being told would come **as early August, probably only 2,000 in the whole United States** in this calendar year and maybe 8,000 or so next year. Some people probably will end up opting not even to resettle at all.

So with these kinds of issues it **continues to be in the food arena particularly crucial to try to help as many of the community gardens** that we worked on collaboratively with many organizations to begin. *Several years ago 15 were established. About half of those still remain.* Those are an important way that families can stay psychologically healthy and be able to feed their own children using the gifts and abilities that they have.

Edie Jessup: Thank you, Sharon. Refer to the 'State of the Plate' graphic. This whole half here which has to do with SSI and SSP, notes that the cuts that are going to happen with SSI are huge. As you will recall, elders on SSI are not eligible in California for food stamps (the only one of all the states with this rule). If you will refer again to the cost of living in Fresno County for people, which is just about double what either CalWORKs pays or what SSI pays. . There are other cuts to immigrants that are going to be happening and all of these people are going to show up at the pantries.

Phil Traynor, Executive Director, Catholic Charities: I'm Phil Traynor with Catholic Charities. The person managing our food program is **Greg Schultz**. To give you a perspective, Catholic **Charities has food distribution programs in Merced, Fresno, Laton, Visalia, Porterville, Farmersville, and Bakersfield.** A major part of what we're doing is in Fresno, and I think that's what we're interested in here. What we're doing in our program on Fulton and Divisadero **is when the people come in the door we do transportation, we do clothing, we provide shelter, we do budget management for people that are on SSI and other areas if they're just not able to manage their own budgets, we do senior companion programs providing companions to seniors who are either sick or homebound, and we do food.** We see about **6,000 people each week in Fresno.** We give them a **bag of food or a couple bags of food depending on the size of the family.** The major problem we're having is we ran out of food. We ran out of budget and we ran out of food maybe three months ago. What we're doing now is we're hustling **churches, they're getting us money, and with that money we're buying food to continue providing food for these people.**

As number of poor continues to increase our budget decreases and decreases and decreases and so we have to do more with less consistently and we're going to be seeing more

and more of that. Sharon was talking about the 15,000 refugees that will be coming into the United States. We're figuring about 5,000 of them are going to come to Fresno. That's more need and less resources to do it with. **We look to the government to help us and they think in a market approach. The market's going to do it. Maybe it will do it five years from now, but what am I going to do with that family that comes to my door every day, five days a week for food and I have to say, "We can feed your family every four months, but that's it," because if we did more than that we wouldn't have any food to do it with.** We would love to be able to feed people every day, everybody that comes to the door.

So what do we make the poor do? They hustle us. They'll come to us for something and then they've got to go to Salvation Army and they have to go here and they've got to go there, and it's sad. We don't give them enough food and we don't give them food as often as they need it. Our numbers are increasing, the amount of food we have is decreasing; the amount of money we have to buy the food is decreasing.

The only thing that's increasing in our program, thank God, are the volunteers. We have volunteers there every morning bagging food, sorting food, going out and getting food from wherever they can get it and bringing it to us. **We also have organizations like Centro La Familia coming in and doing food stamp applications and we're willing to do as much food stamps applications as we can and whatever else we can do.**

We have a new program we're putting together that we think will help, and **Greg** is going to key in this. If somebody comes into our door and they need food we give them food and send them home but you know that they need a lot more than food, so **we're doing a care plan for them much like you'd see in a hospital. When somebody comes in they develop a care plan to see what the needs for that person are. What we want to do is find out what their needs are and put it into a system so that we can follow up with them.** We have some student interns from Fresno State that are helping us in that program so that we can follow these people to find out what are their healthcare needs, what are their shelter needs, are there problems with spouse abuse or things of that nature, where do they live.

It's kind of interesting looking at the trickle down phenomenon that the government advocates. I was coming to work the other day and there was this guy that I see very frequently sitting on our step at about 7:30 in the morning and I said, "Hey! What ya doing?" He looked up at me from his seat on the step and he said, "I'm waiting for someone to trickle down on me." That's tragic, but that's exactly what's going on. **We're open five days a week from 9 to 5 distributing food to families that come to our door. The tragic part is that we can only give out food to a family once every four months.** If the government would say 'We're going to have a long-term program, market economy is going to do it, and this is our short-term program,' we could work with that. But the state is saying there is no long-term program and to hell with the short term. It's becoming more and more difficult.

Edie Jessup: Just for clarification for everyone to remember that **Food Banks are the point at which food comes there and gets distributed to pantries like Salvation Army, like Catholic Charities, like other pantries and distribution points. Phil makes such a great point about having to limit people that are legitimately in need and where it is going to get worse.** I want to introduce Perry Christiansen, who is new to United Way to work with FEMA money. You need to understand that there is Federal Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) money that comes to our county from FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency), and United Way convenes the board that gives grants to organizations like the Community Food Bank, Catholic Charities and Salvation Army and other distribution agencies. FEMA funding is to purchase and distribute food, and to provide for emergency housing. I'll let him do the rest.

Phil Christiansen, Fresno United Way: Greetings from Homeland Security, because FEMA is part of Homeland Security. EFSP is part of FEMA. We have an EFSP local board and United Way is the administrative agent and the fiscal agent for that Board. Let me give you some dollar amounts. **Back in 2000 the federal government gave Fresno County \$1,030,000 for emergency food and shelter.** That's for served meals, it's for emergency housing, it's for rental and mortgage assistance,

and it's for utilities. **In 2001 it jumped up by about almost 16 or 17 percent to \$1,314,000. In 2002 it went up to \$1,350,000** and people were starting to think, "This is wonderful! This is good stuff." **In 2003, last year came around and it jumped down to \$1,110,000. It was under 1,000,000 when we started out the year. We had an additional allocation that came about July and the board got together and distributed that.** This year, **2004, we are at \$1,093,000, so we are down another 1.5%.** This is the money that Salvation Army and many groups here are using to buy the food to help people who don't have enough resources to put food on their family's table.

The real concern is that we don't know what's going to happen. We kind of think that **that big drop two years ago was partially because of homeland security. I can't say that for sure and I don't want to say that that's an official statement, but it seems to be what's going on.** It's certainly not going up to meet the need that is coming from the state, coming from the County. So we're concerned about that. **The local board that actually makes those funding decisions is made up of many of the same groups that are receiving the money.** The federal government structures who is on the local Boards. You just have to understand it includes the United Jewish Communities, Catholic Charities, National Council of Churches, Salvation Army, Red Cross, and then United Way as the administrative agent. We have a homeless person who participants on this board. As a matter of fact, we have to have a homeless person by law. So it's an interesting makeup.

My one-sentence summary would simply be: **'Homeland Security' when people are going hungry is not an acceptable trade.** We need to balance needs in some other way. People who are being fed when there is no security is also not an acceptable solution, so we need to be careful and we need to communicate with the federal government about the effect of moving funding from the poor here in Fresno County to some notion of national security.

Eddie Jessup: Can you tell them about the application process for FEMA grants?

Perry Christiansen: If you are interested in applying for EFSP funding you can go to our website, www.unitedway.org, and download the application. The deadline is Monday, January 23rd. It's coming up very close. The application needs to be filled out, and submitted with 15 copies to give out to board members. If you have questions you can also call me at United Way.

Eddie Jessup: Thank you. **When did you run out of housing money? The Salvation Army was administering the emergency housing money this last year? So you ran out of emergency housing money in October.**

Perry Christiansen: Right. **Salvation Army ended up taking money from emergency food money to use for housing/utilities.**

Eddie Jessup: It took money from emergency food money to help out with housing needs? Okay, so the community's response to the Food Bank's **Postal Food Drive allowed Salvation Army to use some of its FEMA food funding to help see that some people did not become homeless. But, it is still taking food out of the food stream to keep a roof over people's head.** So we're short no matter what. Yolanda Randles is not here. Phil Erro sent his regrets about not being here but has just a very short statement from a farmer's perspective on this issue. Phoua's going to read that and then we'll take questions.

Phoua Moua **reading a Statement by Phil Erro, Farmer:** "I don't see federal budget cuts impacting farmers who produce fresh fruits and vegetables. **Farmers do not receive direct crop subsidies for fruits and vegetables.** In the past 10 to 15 years there has been a change in the way farmers are paid for fresh tree fruits like peaches. **Fifteen years ago farmers took freshly-picked fruit to packing sheds where damaged fruit was sorted out and the rest of the fruit was sorted according to size and put into boxes. A document stating how many boxes of each size of fruit came from each farm was written. Within 30 days the packing/shipping companies paid the farmer for his fruit. Nowadays the packing/shipping company sorts and boxes the fruit on**

a fee basis and makes its profit by charging for services. The farmers' fruit is sold on consignment. If the fruit doesn't sell the farmer still owns it after it spoils and must dispose of it, probably at a landfill. The returns of fruit growers have declined dramatically in the past two years resulting in **thousands of acres of fruit trees being pulled out on the east side of the San Joaquin Valley.** Regarding local vegetable production, the large commercial growers of lettuce, peppers, and melons are centered in Huron in western Fresno County. Fewer than 10 large companies dominate this market. They sell more than half of their produce by contract to grocery chains and restaurant chains. They speculate on the remainder of their produce and make huge profit or take big losses depending on the market at the time of harvest.

Small vegetable growers around Fresno and other San Joaquin Valley cities tend to grow vegetables for specific ethnic groups, for example, the Southeast Asians. These growers tend to sell to poor people and need help with Electronic Benefit Transfer Food Stamps (Farmers-Farmers Markets cannot take the Food Stamp EBT card because of technology/electricity issues in California).

Food retailing is skewed toward affluent consumers. Chain supermarkets have historically served these customers but they are losing market share to discount retailers like Wal-Mart and Costco. ***Chain supermarkets are presently getting cost pressure by striking workers, rising labor costs, and shrinking revenues. The discount retailer pressures will likely cause some supermarkets to shut their doors in the Fresno/Clovis area.***

The poor neighborhoods of Fresno are served by convenience markets, which tend to stock high-sugar, high-fat foods instead of fresh fruits and vegetables.

In summary, **federal budget cuts affect the demand side of food availability to the poor, for example, food stamps, summer school lunch programs, and the like, but not the production of fruits and vegetables, which is not directly subsidized to date.**

(Phil wishes he could have been here and he thanked all of us for fighting for food for all the poor.)

Edie Jessup: Thank you. I have a couple of questions submitted on cards.

QUESTION: Don McClellan, your two posters show black and Hispanic children. Is this to say the largest segments needing food are the Black and Hispanic communities? Are there any white or Hmong posters? Are there any demographics on ethnic groups needing food?

Don McClellan: That was actually what was available on the Internet. Are those the largest populations? The answer is yes and no. The Hispanic population is the largest population that we serve right now. Depending upon the program, 59% of the individuals are of Hispanic origin. The black is not represented with those kinds of figures. They're in the 10 to 13 percentile. There is on the Internet, I believe, at the Fresno County site, a client's survey that's out there if you want to know the exact ethnic breakdown. I did the posters myself by what was available. I do have a Southeast Asian poster that I did put together, so those are the three that I have done so far.

Edie Jessup: Okay, and perhaps some of the refugee groups and immigrant groups can help with that or other people to take pictures. Maybe Holly has pictures from her study.

Don McClellan: I need pictures.

Edie Jessup: You need pictures. Okay. Thank you.

QUESTION: Sharon Stanley, I understand 15,000 more Hmong are coming to Fresno shortly. Is the federal government providing food programs for this potential increase?

Sharon Stanley: I want to clarify. Fifteen thousand Hmong are not coming to Fresno. Fifteen thousand Hmong are in the camp in the temple in Thailand and are eligible to be interviewed to

be considered to be refugees to go somewhere in the world, probably in the United States. Within the United States the anticipation is that California, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and North Carolina are the four states that folks are most likely to resettle in, again, because **it's on a family reunification basis** and that's where their relatives tend to most be located already. **The best guess is that 2,000 or so may come here. At the state refugee forum meeting on Monday I can say that in terms of healthcare, state workers in healthcare are very concerned because, no, dollars are not going to be following to food agencies, to health agencies, to be helping them. There will be initial resettlement assistance dollars and some dollars which will be allocated to the county for the first five years, which is the Office of Refugee Resettlement's general format.** After that time it's our public responsibility. To have effective resettlements, to get people as immediately as possible even into citizenship training classes and language training classes and into employment that are specifically focused on their populations is going to be critical. We should be able to do that pretty well now. We've had a lot of years of practice.

There will be a follow-up meeting on January 29 at 9:30 in the morning in the 2nd floor Congress Room at Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministry's office on the elder SSI loss issues. We'd love to have a food representative and a public health representative at that meeting.

QUESTION for Dr. Ed Moreno, Fresno County Public Health Officer: I would like to hear from the public health side-- looking at the cuts that are coming and the additional impact not only in health issues but the kind of public health issues. We're seeing a lot more fires because of crowded housing; we're seeing health issues because of lack of good food. Can you make a quick comment about that?

Dr. Edward Moreno, Fresno County Public Health Officer: All I can tell you is that Bart Bohn (County Administration) is basically wondering whether we're going to some guidelines on increased refugee health issues. You probably know that there have been no specific guidelines, just talk of what might be. There are several programs we have that would be impacted as more services are requested from the Health Department as far as ability to respond with the public health nursing. We're currently pretty low on staff in terms of what we were **we** used to have in public health nursing staff. We're also in a hiring freeze at this time. We haven't been able to hire public health nurses despite increased needs.

Edie Jessup: Thank you very much. **The impact on the county is in its ability to respond because they have not hired to keep up with the population. This is a serious outcome of the state budget crisis and the federal budget crisis.**

Alex Rodriguez, Fresno Food Bank: Right now I'm assistant director of the Fresno Food Bank. That's the other food bank in town on G Street. I heard what everybody was talking about, and I think we're on the same mission, to feed the community. This is a very good project. We are the poor food bank. We survive on miracles. We don't have an emergency program established. Our basic program is every day. We don't request food stamps to help the people who come into our food bank. I would like to pass my business card to you guys and I would like to get your business cards and I can tell you what it's all about and what we do in the community. We're here for the community, and I would like to share this. We feed the community in areas that some others don't feed. We go to Hanford, Avenal, Huron, Parlier, the low income people are there. We know about how to feed the community. I would like to pass out my card and thank you for the opportunity, but I would like to be on the program next time.

**Join us for the next Community Hunger & Nutrition Forum
Wednesday, February 11, 2004 12 Noon – 1:30
Trinity Lutheran Church (Cedar between Ashlan and Dakota)
RSVP: Fresno Metro Ministry 485-1416**