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Final report of the Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger and Food Security, 2002

Maine State Planning Office

Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger and Food Security

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Ending Hunger in Maine



Final Report
of the
Maine Millennium Commission
on
Hunger and Food Security

April 2002

STATE OF MAINE
120th LEGISLATURE
SECOND REGULAR SESSION

FINAL REPORT

of the

MAINE MILLENNIUM COMMISSION

ON

HUNGER AND FOOD SECURITY

April 2002

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Table of Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements	
Definition of Terms	3
Executive Summary	5
 Key Premises	6
 Key Findings	6
 Key Recommendations	8
 Immediate Actions	10
 Additional Areas for Consistency in Public Policy	11
Full Report	
I. Introduction	13
II. Ending Hunger – Can We Afford Not To?	
 Recent Findings Concerning the Cost of Hunger	15
 How much Hunger Exists in Maine?	18
III. A New Approach is Needed	
 1. Hunger as a Consequence	19
 2. Hunger as a Cause	20
IV. A Blueprint for Ending Hunger in Maine	

	1. Maine’s Resolve to End Hunger	24
	2. Economic Security	26
	3. Maine’s Food System	33
	4. Changing Lifestyles, Culture and Values	37
	5. A Seamless System of Services for those in Need	45

V. Appendices

	Review of Commission Activities	47
	Draft Proposed Legislation	47
	Commission Members	61
	Resolve, Chapter 117, Chapter 63	62

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For more information: www.stat.me.us/spo/hunger/

Definition of Terms

Food Security. Access by all people at all times to sufficient food for an active and healthy life. Food security includes, at a minimum, the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.

Food Insecurity. Limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods and/or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.

Hunger. The persistent, urgent need for nutrition beyond the control of the person experiencing hunger due to recurrent and involuntary conditions such as lack of income, mobility or access to nutritious food. Though famine, or even severe cases malnutrition, are conditions seen rarely in this country, milder forms of malnutrition, chronic under nutrition and cyclical hunger are common.

Chronic Under nutrition is the consumption of fewer calories and protein than is needed by the body over a long period of time and a deficiency of vitamins and minerals needed for vital health. It often occurs in families where poverty is a chronic problem and there is inadequate income to provide for the basic needs of the household on an ongoing basis.

Malnutrition is the lack of specific vitamins and minerals needed for vital health. Lack of foods rich in calcium for proper bone development, or of vitamin rich fresh fruits and vegetables are the most common causes of vitamin and mineral deficiencies.

Cyclical hunger is caused by monthly, seasonal, or annual variances in production or access to food. It often occurs in families where income is unsteady or fluctuates seasonally with economic or occupational conditions or with the health or presence/absence of wage earners in the home. Cycles of hunger occur when households are forced to choose between food and heat, food and medicine, food and housing, and/or food and child care.

Hunger, End of. The State of Maine is considered hunger free when the annual USDA food security measure finds for more than two consecutive years that 96% of households in Maine are food secure and no households are experiencing hunger. The threshold is set at 96% because social and economic circumstances are such that some risk of hunger will always be present as changes in household structure, health conditions, employment situation, and other related circumstances cause interruptions in income, mobility, and access to adequate amounts of nutritious food.

Nutrition Security. The provision of an environment that encourages and motivates society to make food choices consistent with short and long term good health.

How the USDA Measures Hunger

In Maine, nearly one in ten persons is food insecure according to the USDA.

The USDA measures the food security status of each household along a continuum that extends from complete food security at one end to severe hunger at the other end. The continuum is divided into three ranges:

1. Food secure
2. Food insecure without hunger
3. Food insecure with hunger (further divided into “moderate” and “severe”).

Each household’s location on the continuum is assessed by their response to a series of 18 questions about behaviors and experiences known to characterize households having difficulty meeting their food needs. Some of the questions include:

1. Is this statement often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 12 months? “We worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more.”
2. Is this statement often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 12 months? “We couldn’t afford to eat balanced meals.”
3. In the last 12 months, did you ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn’t enough money for food?
4. In the last 12 months did any of the children ever skip a meal because there wasn’t enough money for food?
5. In the last 12 months did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn’t enough food?

Households answering yes to 3 or more of the 18 core questions were classified as “food insecure”.

The three least severe conditions that lead to a classification of “food insecure” are:

1. They worried about whether their food would run out before they had money to buy more.
2. The food they bought didn’t last and they didn’t have money to get more.
3. They couldn’t afford to eat balanced meals.

Households classified as “food insecure with hunger” reported at a minimum all of the above and that:

1. Adults ate less than they felt they should.
2. Adults cut the size of meals or skipped meals and did so in 3 or more months.
3. These questions were also asked about children if children were in the household.

Households classified as “food insecure with severe hunger reported additional indicators of reduced food intake among adults, such as going for whole days without eating as well as multiple indicators of reduced food intake among children if there are any in the household.

Executive Summary

Thousands of Maine citizens lack food security. Many go hungry for periods of time. In recent years a vast network of services have developed to alleviate hunger among the State's neediest citizens. These programs, though essential, represent an astounding investment of time, dollars, public and private efforts, and involve nearly every sector of the food production and distribution system and social service delivery systems, yet serve merely to alleviate hunger on a day to day basis, not to end hunger.

The Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger and Food Security has spent the last two years examining what must be done to end hunger in Maine. The Commission has learned that the road to ending hunger is not straight or simple. Rather, ending hunger requires substantive changes in society's attitude toward hunger, in our social and economic systems and our food producing and delivery systems, and in public policy.

Hunger, even in its mild forms, has a profound and lasting effect on growth and development, mental alertness, overall health and well being, productivity, and on one's sense of worth and dignity. One person who submitted testimony to a hearing of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Hunger and Food Security in 1996 summed up the situation simply but eloquently: "There is no dignity in having to accept a handout. To avoid it people take risks that endanger their health and even their lives."

Hunger is much more than a hungry person. Although hunger occurs as an individual phenomenon, its impact affects and diminishes the lives of everyone in the community. It is much more than a social problem or a condition of poverty. If we are to end hunger we must "get out of this box" and see hunger for what it is and how it affects all aspects of our lives and the very social and economic fabric of our state and our nation.

The Commission has chosen to lay out a strategy that focuses on long term food security, on ending rather than temporarily alleviating hunger. This strategy includes recommendations of immediate steps needed, a list of additional steps that must be taken to maintain momentum, and the creation of a structure to ensure steady progress toward ending Hunger in Maine.

Key Premises



Hunger costs us all and diminishes us all.



Hunger is much more than a “social problem”. To address hunger comprehensively, we must learn to think in different ways with entirely new perspectives and objectives. The aim should be to end hunger, not simply treat the symptoms of hunger.



We CAN end hunger in Maine.



People who are facing hunger are part of the solution.

Key Findings



1. Maine must resolve to end hunger and ensure food security for every resident of the State.

It is in our interest to do so because the payoff is great – a healthier citizenry, better educated society, healthier and more productive workforce, and ultimately, vastly reduced costs in both monetary and societal terms.



2. Maine must make the problem of Hunger in Maine central to all public policy debates and decisions.

Hunger is typically perceived as a social problem or as a manifestation of poverty. It is in fact much more and has far reaching implications for many other aspects of the quality of life in Maine. The relationship between hunger and learning, hunger and job performance, hunger and health and health care costs, are all well established and debates and decisions relating to these

issues and others must acknowledge precisely the role hunger plays because it impacts on virtually every aspect of our collective well-being.



3. The lack of economic security is a key factor contributing to hunger in Maine.

Nearly a third of Maine workers do not earn a living wage that meets the basic needs for a family of three. As the Maine economy slows or transforms itself, mass layoffs in some sectors of the economy are creating great uncertainty. For those unable to participate in the workforce, the elderly, disabled, and those with special needs or very small children, the programs and services available to them rarely provide a standard of living that is even at or above the poverty line.



4. The link between a healthier diet for Maine citizens and the vitality of Maine farms has been largely overlooked in past attempts to address the problem of hunger.

As a result, Maine's potential to produce is not being reached. The vitality of Maine farms is undermined, farmland is being lost at an unacceptable rate, and a way of life is in jeopardy.

The structure of our food system has evolved in such a manner that few people today consider the value of purchasing locally produced food either in the supermarket or at the farm. Few are aware of where their food comes from or how it is produced, and few know how to access locally grown farm food products. The diets of Maine citizens have become dominated by processed and convenience foods and by foods of diminished nutritional value due to having spent as much as several weeks in the pipeline when local fresh, healthy, and affordable alternatives are available.



5. Our institutions and systems must acknowledge that changing life styles, changing needs of society as Maine's population ages, and a changing food system and technology have revolutionized what we eat and how food is prepared, and must respond with appropriate nutrition information, fundamental institutional changes, and a new array of services and systems to meet present and future needs.

Far too many Maine children go to school hungry, not only because of poverty and lack of food in the household, but also because many parents either lack time to prepare a balanced breakfast for their children or have already left for work themselves. Senior citizens face special problems due to declining mobility, isolation, loneliness, and failing health that affect appetite, energy level, and access to food. Our busy lifestyle leaves many households relying on processed and packaged foods that can be quickly heated in the microwave, and on snack foods and other items that can be eaten on the run. The level of consumer exposure to nutrition information,

suggestions of alternative foods that are healthier, locally produced, and easily prepared has been far too little.



6. **The dignity of Maine citizens has all too often been compromised by the current systems used to deliver services.** We must put in place a seamless system of services for those who are unable on their own to obtain adequate nutrition or adequate income to ensure access to safe and nutritious food that ensures all are provided for adequately and with dignity.



7. **Maine's systems to address, promote and enhance food production, food security, the alleviation of hunger through temporary services, and the provision of nutritional information are fragmented and uncoordinated.**

Maine needs an Office of Food Security to coordinate and enhance the many initiatives and efforts of state government and the private sector, and to monitor the State's progress toward achieving food security for all its citizens.

Key Recommendations

Many actions are suggested in the pages that follow. However, the Commission believes the following short list of recommendations to be immediately needed and presents them as the commission's top priority for ending hunger.



1. The problem of Hunger in Maine must be made central to a wide range of public policy debates and decisions. It must become the policy of the State of Maine to end hunger.



2. Maine must take steps to achieve a living wage for all its citizens.

Maine must act to increase the income of its citizens through higher wages, adoption of a fair tax structure that takes smaller tax bite from the incomes of lower and moderate income working families, and an improved economic climate that will help small businesses compete on a level field with larger businesses and that will enable and strengthen their capacity to participate in programs and provide benefits normally accessible only to larger firms.



3. Maine must make structural changes in the food system to ensure locally produced food is more easily available to all citizens throughout the state and to increase local food consumption and to ensure that Maine makes measurable movement toward greater food self reliance.



4. Maine must recognize that significant social and demographic changes have a profound effect on the nutritional needs of its citizenry. Maine must move toward a universal school nutrition program for all Maine children, begin to put in place the systems that will accommodate a growing elderly population as the baby boom reaches retirement age over the coming decades, and provide improved information on nutritional values and food preparation means compatible with the fast paced life styles of today's working households.



5. Maine must ensure a seamless system of services and programs for those who are in need by making sure that where the parameters and requirements of one program leave off, the eligibility for another take up, closing all gaps through which populations in need may fall.



6. An Office of Food Security is necessary to coordinate the many fragmented activities that relate to ending hunger in Maine.

Specific Immediate Actions

-  1. Resolve to end hunger in Maine.
-  2. Establish an office of food security.
-  3. Increase the earned income tax credit and make it refundable.
-  4. Begin the move toward a school nutrition program available without cost to every child.
-  5. Institute a “free cart” program of breakfast or morning snacks in the schools immediately.
-  6. Make the school nutrition program an integral part of the educational process in Maine schools.
-  7. Ensure interim funding for the Senior FarmShare Program and expand the program to other low and moderate income households over a period of time.
-  8. Close loopholes in the state bid process and create opportunities for small businesses to improve opportunities and benefits for their workers.
-  9. Examine Maine’s tax system to ensure that low-income households do not pay a disproportionate share.
-  10. Require all State agencies and departments to review their services and program guidelines to ensure a seamless system.

Legislation proposed to implement these actions are attached in the appendix.

Key Areas for Consistency in Public Policy

1. Maine must build a strong link between education policy and school nutrition programs.
 - a. Make it the policy of the State of Maine to provide school nutrition services without cost in all Maine schools in order to eliminate the stigma suffered by children under the current fee system.
 - b. The policy and budget development processes of local school districts should reflect the role of nutrition in the learning and nurturing of children and should include the School Nutrition Program as an integral part of the education experience for children from all socioeconomic backgrounds.
2. In order to stabilize and increase the disposable income of Maine families and households, Maine should move with urgency to ensure that Maine has:
 - a. A comprehensive energy policy that protects citizens from volatile prices, ensures a stable, secure and affordable energy supply and that reduces dependence on non-renewable resources;
 - b. A comprehensive health care program for all that ensures affordable health care and prescription drug coverage; and
 - c. An affordable housing policy for Maine.
3. In order to ensure that Maine families have access to employment that affords a living wage, Maine should move with urgency to ensure that Maine has:
 - a. Quality, safe, affordable, and nurturing child care within access of all working families;
 - b. Expanded services to assist low income households purchase a vehicle where needed;
 - c. An improved and expanded public transportation system to accommodate changing work patterns and schedules;
 - d. Support for smaller businesses to improve worker skills; and
 - e. Lifelong learning opportunities available to every citizen.

4. Maine must recognize the link between of community, economic development and land use policies and food production and availability.
 - a. Develop a comprehensive policy on farmland and farming that will stop the erosion of family farms by preserving and protecting the infrastructure as well as the land and farms.
 - b. Establish a state policy and proper planning and land use tools to protect farmland from encroachment, support farms by exempting them from “commercial uses” criteria, reducing the effects of sprawl pressures, and shielding farmland from the effect of rising taxes associated with development.

I. Introduction

Although hunger occurs as an individual phenomenon, its impact affects and diminishes the lives of everyone in the community. The costs we all pay are substantial. Many are hidden costs, from higher health care costs, to higher taxes to provide emergency services, social programs and services, law and order, extra education programs for children with special needs, to list a few. There are quality of life costs and, sadly, spiritual costs, all consuming our human and financial resources while denying us individually and collectively our full potential. We cannot afford to let hunger persist.

The Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger & Food Security has completed two years of work to develop a plan to end hunger in the State of Maine. The Commission believes that Maine has a choice – to continue as we are, doing little to end hunger while the cost of programs and services to alleviate the symptoms of hunger continue to rise, or to take a new approach.

Maine should set high targets. In our interim report the Commission identified three areas for action. After another year of deliberation and study we still believe these three areas hold the many of the keys to ending hunger:

1. Ensure the economic security and well being of all citizens through:
 - a. A livable wage;
 - b. A more equitable tax system that reduces the burden on lower and moderate income wage earners;
 - c. The services necessary to households to have access to work and to food, including quality affordable child care, reliable transportation, and adequate affordable health care; and
 - d. An improved economy and strategic assistance to small businesses to make the benefits available to larger firms easier for them to access, and to enable them to offer the same services and benefits to their workers that are provided by larger firms.
2. Increase access to and consumption of locally produced food from Maine farms through a comprehensive food policy and structural changes in the food system that will:
 - a. Remove barriers that limit access to locally produced foods,
 - b. Improve nutrition information and its dissemination, and
 - c. Provide incentives to lower income households to purchase food locally and thereby change consumer buying patterns.
3. Ensure that resources are available to respond to new needs created by changing lifestyles, culture and values, and aging of the population, such as:
 - a. Moving to a universal school nutrition program,

- b. Expanding the school breakfast program to more Maine schools, and
- c. Increasing the amount of funds available for school meals programs.

Work was begun in the first session of the 120th legislature to address these concerns. It must continue. In this final report the Commission further defines its prescription, or blueprint, for their achievement. In addition, the Commission also offers several further strategies and actions that we believe are critical to ending hunger for the long term:

Maine should make hunger a central factor for consideration in public policy and practice. Maine should recognize that hunger is not only a consequence of other shortcomings, but also a cause of many of the problems faced by Maine and its citizens. Maine must consider the role of hunger in formulating the State's education policies, its economic development policies, health care policies, agriculture policies, rural and urban policies, and others. It is well established in research that children don't learn well when they are hungry, that workers don't perform as well when poorly fed, or that many of the costs of health care could be avoided with adequate nutrition.

Maine needs to start now to prepare for a growing elderly population that will overwhelm systems already stretched to their limits. Maine's population is changing. Most notably it is aging. Over the past couple decades, public policies have shifted toward keeping more elderly, even feeble elderly, in their homes. The problems associated with high cost of health care and prescription drugs, transportation and access to services that are essential to independence and self-reliance as well as to social interaction for a growing elder population will increase in geometric proportion over the next few decades. Maine will need to make a much greater investment to ensure a growing population of elderly are not at nutritional risk. Transportation alternatives are especially critical because mobility and self-reliance are keys to good health as well as access to food.

The Commission has also found that the dignity of Maine citizens has all too often been compromised by the current systems used to deliver services. Maine should move toward systems that ensure the anonymity and privacy of those who must rely on services and programs. These should include universal school nutrition, expanded use of EBT (electronic benefits transfer) cards and other means.

Maine should ensure a seamless system of services for those who are unable on their own to obtain adequate nutrition or adequate income to ensure access to safe and nutritious food. We must ensure that those with the least income and resources are provided for adequately and with dignity.

Finally, Maine must create an Office of Food Security to coordinate these efforts into the future, monitor progress to end hunger, ensure the increased consumption of Maine grown food, and continue the work begun by this commission to create a world where hunger does not exist.

II. Ending Hunger - Can we afford not to?

People at all socioeconomic levels are at risk of poor nutrition. Some do not eat an adequate diet each day because of lack of money to buy sufficient food. Others make poor food choices, either because of lack of time to prepare a balanced meal or lack of good knowledge of nutrition, or because their limited income forces them to choose lower cost foods that often fill but not nurture. Still others find their diets limited or their food dollars not well spent because of mobility factors associated with age, disability, lack of transportation, and even lack of knowledge about where to find good and affordable sources of healthy food. Lack of time for meals has become increasingly a factor in homes where both parents are working and where more children are left to fend for themselves at mealtime or for snacks. In school an increasing number of activities compete with lunch schedules causing children to buy a candy bar or soda from a canteen or skip food altogether.

Yet, the latest information on hunger shows clearly that hunger creates great financial costs, human costs, and social costs that we can ill afford.

Consider:



In 2000, 4th grade reading scores were much lower among children eligible for free and reduced price school lunch.

A US Department of Education study of the reading scores of 4th grade students in 2000 found that only 14% of children eligible for free and reduced price meals performed at the "proficient" level while 41% of non-eligible children were reading at the proficient level (reading levels are divided into basic, proficient and advanced). Sixty percent of eligible children were reading below the basic level compared to only 26% of those not eligible for subsidized school meals. While these statistics indicate the poorer performance of children from lower income families, there is plenty of evidence to link poverty and inadequate nutrition.



Improved diets could reduce coronary heart disease and stroke mortality by at least 20% and cancer and diabetes mortality by at least 30%.

Over \$33 billion in medical costs associated with these diseases each year may be attributed to diet. Lost productivity resulting from disability caused by these four diet-related illnesses alone costs American workers \$9.3 billion each year. This rises to \$28 billion per year when diet-related premature deaths are considered. When other diet-related disabilities are

added (osteoporosis, obesity, hypertension, etc.) the costs is far greater. The cost of diet-related osteoporosis hip fractures is \$5.1 - \$10.6 billion each year.

(Source: USDA, High Costs of Poor Eating Patterns in the United States)



A USDA 1994-96 Survey of Food Intakes by Individuals found that only 12% of Americans had diets that could be classified as "good" according to the USDA Healthy Eating Index.

Less than 20% of those surveyed consumed the recommended number of fruits and less than a third consumed the recommended servings on grains, vegetables, milk and meat groups, while consumption of saturated fat and cholesterol exceeded standards.



An evaluation of the WIC program found that young children whose mothers participated in WIC when pregnant and lactating scored significantly higher on vocabulary tests than mothers who did not receive WIC benefits.

The assessment also found substantial reduction in iron deficiency among young children. Iron deficiency is one of the most prevalent nutritional problems of children in the US, and a deficiency in infancy is known to cause a permanent loss of IQ later in life. Anemia also leads to shortened attention span, irritability, fatigue, and difficulty with concentration, all evidenced in the poor performance of anemic children on vocabulary, reading and other tests.



Children who are hungry are more likely to have behavioral and academic problems than children who get enough to eat. At school, hungry children have more problems with irritability, anxiety, and aggression, as well as higher absenteeism and tardiness (Pediatrics, January, 1998; Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, February, 1998).

Studies by the state of Minnesota, and the Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital found improved math grades, reduced hyperactivity, decreased absence and tardy rates, and improved behavior among students who regularly ate breakfast. According to Tuft's University, low-income children who participated in the USDA's School Breakfast Program were shown to have significantly higher standardized test scores than non-participants.



School lunch programs have been found to play a substantial role in the diets of school age children.

Research conducted by the USDA's Office of Analysis, Nutrition, & Evaluation has shown that children participating in school lunch programs:

1. Have higher mean intakes of Vitamins B6, B12, Vitamin C thiamin, riboflavin, calcium, phosphorus, magnesium and zinc;
2. Have substantially lower intakes of added sugars – 13.2% for participating children compared to 22.9% for non-participants, and
3. Are more likely to consume vegetables, dairy and protein.
4. States that have instituted universal meals programs have demonstrated the cost effectiveness of such programs.



Most recently, the Surgeon General issued warnings this past December about the rising obesity rate in the US and the health consequences. At least 300,000 Americans die each year from illnesses caused by or worsened by obesity, second only to the 400,000 deaths linked to smoking. Today 60% of adults and 13% of children are overweight or obese and the number is rising with each decade. The report groups states according to the extent of obesity. In 2000, Maine was in the second highest category, with 15-19% of the population considered obese.

The report linked obesity to multiple causes and issued challenges to individuals and families, schools, communities, industry and government:

1. The food industry, and especially restaurants and fast food take-outs, has marketed “super sized” junk foods and food products with little nutritive value to the public which has increased the amount of empty calories consumed, primarily at the expense of fresh produce. The food industry is challenged to promote more reasonable portions and more healthful foods.
2. Communities and schools and worksites are encouraged to provide more safe places for all Americans to become more active and to exercise.
3. Schools are challenged to provide for more healthful food in the schools, better enforce federal rules restricting student’s access to junk food in vending machines, and reduce the amount of fat and increase in vitamin levels in school lunches.
4. Government is encouraged to fund projects to increase access to affordable fruits and vegetables.

The report further acknowledges the link between diet and hunger due to lack of income, noting that the poor tend to be the fattest because often the most fattening foods are the cheapest.



America's Second Harvest (A2H) is an organization that serves an estimated 23.3 million different people annually and is the nation's largest organization of emergency food providers. A study conducted in 2001 for the organization and based on completed in-person interviews with more than 32,000 clients served by the A2H network, as well as completed questionnaires from nearly 24,000 A2H agencies found that between 56% and 60% of the agencies surveyed reported that there had been an increase since 1998 in the number of clients who come to their emergency food program sites. (www.hungerinamerica.org) Testimony receive by the Commission revealed the same trends in Maine.



How much hunger exists in Maine? Hunger in Maine is all too real and all too frequent a condition. It is largely an invisible problem because pride keeps many from seeking help and many more fall between the cracks of services that are intended to provide relief.

The USDA annual measure of food security shows Maine to have the highest percentage of food insecure households in New England and one of the highest levels in the northeastern US.

ONE in TEN: people in Maine are hungry or at risk of being hungry according to the assessment of food security conducted annually by the USDA.

FOUR IN TEN of Maine children under 12 years of age are hungry or at risk of hunger. A national study of childhood hunger (CCHIP, the Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project) found 20,000 children in Maine under age 12 living in homes where hunger is a constant concern and another 64,000 children under age 12 at risk of hunger.

EIGHT IN TEN households in the CHIPP survey reported that adults routinely sacrificed for their children by eating less, skipping meals entirely, or by eating less nutritious food. The CHIPP report revealed that adults are even more likely than children to experience hunger in low income homes.

ONE IN THREE jobs in Maine do not pay enough to cover the basic needs of a family. Many others are seasonal, less than full time, or offer only partial benefits. In spite of relatively good economic times, poverty has remained a persistent condition for many Maine households.

More than 100,000 MAINE CITIZENS receive food stamp benefits each month, in spite of program cutbacks and efforts to reduce dependence on public aid programs.

These statistics are only part of the picture. The number of people homeless each night, the hundreds that show up at soup kitchens each day, the thousands that go to a food pantry weekly or monthly, the thousands of meals served to elderly at congregate sites or delivered to the elderly, sick or disabled by meals on wheels programs - all attest to the extent of hunger and risk of hunger in Maine and to the depth of suffering that would exist were it not for the generosity and dedication of many. Even more devastating is the plight of those who go without in silence - elderly who refuse help because of pride, or children who go through the school day hungry rather than accept a free lunch and reveal their economic situation to classmates, or breadwinners who feel they have failed their families because they cannot earn enough to provide adequately.

III. A new Approach is Needed.

For many years society has wrestled with how to tackle the root causes of hunger. In part, the limited progress is due to a lack of a clear understanding of how hunger affects and costs us all. The approaches commonly engaged to address hunger reflect this lack of understanding include:

Social Responsibility Model: At the most basic level, simply feeding people has come to be a strategy to address hunger in the community and as such an extensive network of programs and services to alleviate its effects has been developed.

Behavior Adjustment Model: Categorize hunger as a problem associated with poverty and focus on the poor and try to change their behavior.

Transfer Responsibility: Blame the economy or the “system” or blame the poor.

Public policy has typically responded to hunger with fragmented approaches and, while each may be valid individually, and essential, these approaches have not acknowledged the complexity of the conditions leading to hunger nor the role hunger plays in perpetuating them.

In reality, hunger is both a symptom that results from other conditions and at the same time it is a cause of those same conditions. It is, in the truest sense, a "vicious circle" and as such, requires a strategic approach that considers all of the aspects of hunger.

Hunger as a consequence:

Hunger is a symptom of larger problems affecting individuals and families, such as lack of adequate income, lack of good knowledge of foods and their nutritional values. The technology of food production, processing, packaging, marketing, and distribution has changed how and what we eat and replaced efficient local food systems that link producers and consumers. Lack of time, increasing demands and changing life styles make it difficult if not impossible to eat healthy. Public attitudes that create stigma keep a child from accepting a meal in school or a senior from accepting food stamps.

As such, ending hunger requires addressing those conditions in society that contribute to hunger. This means:



. Ensuring all households have the income they need to purchase healthful food through normal means, including a livable wage for all workers and a decent standard of living to those who for whatever reason cannot work.



. Ensuring a level playing field for small businesses in Maine so they can provide more opportunities, better wages, and greater benefits to their workers.



. Ensuring the tax structure is fair to workers and small businesses.



. Developing a food policy and food system that increases access for Maine citizens to locally produced food.



. Removing the barriers to work, to shopping locally, and to meeting other daily needs by improving public transit systems, increasing access to affordable quality child care and to affordable housing, and providing access to financial options to enable lower income household to get a car loan.

Hunger as a cause:

Hunger is also a key causal factor for many of the larger problems in society such as the burgeoning costs of health care, lost productivity, loss of farms and farmland and an ailing rural economy, and poor educational achievement. These conditions, in turn, perpetuate hunger by reducing the availability of local food, reducing the potential of earning an adequate income to purchase sufficient food, and by increasing other costs, such as the cost of health care, that further erode the amount of income in the household available for food and the amount of public dollars available for the growth and development of the State and its citizens.

As such, ending hunger means seeing hunger as a root cause to many of society's problems and developing policies in which ending hunger is the keystone:



. Ending hunger should be a keystone in our health policy - the link between nutrition and health is well established. Better nutrition leads to better health and lower health care costs.



. Ending hunger should be a keystone in our education policy - the link between nutrition and learning is well established. School nutrition programs should be considered as public health intervention as well as fundamental to learning.



Ending hunger should be a keystone in our agricultural policy - the link between lower income at risk consumers and our food producers is essential to expanding local food consumption and to improving diets.



Ending hunger should be a keystone in our economic policy - the link between nutrition and worker productivity (better health, fewer illnesses, fewer absences, mental alertness, fewer work related injuries) is well established.



Ending hunger should be a keystone in our taxation policy – reducing the tax burden on households in lower income brackets puts money directly in the pockets of people who need it the most and who will spend it immediately. Reducing the tax burden on smaller businesses and providing more incentives to help offset services to workers they cannot afford on their own will lead to greater economic vitality and to improved wages and benefits for workers.



Ending hunger should be a keystone in our environmental and land use policies – the loss of nutritional value of food during shipping and storage is avoidable. Diets can be improved by eating locally produced food. Only a small amount of the food consumed in Maine is produced on Maine farms. Yet Maine has the capacity to supply a substantial portion of the food needed to feed its residents. Better utilization of this capacity would lead to improved diets and better health while at the same time ensuring economic viability of Maine farms, preserving farmland, and strengthening the economy of rural Maine. Maine’s land use policies should ensure farmland is protected from development, encourage direct producer to consumer markets, and improve access to local food.



Ending hunger should be a keystone in our transportation policies. Geography is the greatest challenge to linking producers and consumers. Maine is a vast rural state with little public transportation. For much of Maine, traditional approaches to providing mass transportation will never be cost efficient. Yet Maine has a growing population of elderly citizens and has adopted a public policy of assisting the elderly to remain in their own homes as long as possible, usually long after their ability to drive or their capacity to maintain their own vehicle has been lost. For younger generations, the difficulty finding reliable transportation and the high cost of owning and maintaining a vehicle upon which they can depend for holding a job limit their capacity to earn an adequate income. Maine must explore creative systems for ensuring reliable transportation for all who need it and we must ensure that those who can no longer drive themselves are not forced into a life of dependency, isolation, and deprivation.

IV. Commission's Blueprint for Ending Hunger in Maine

An end to hunger in Maine can be achieved by setting bold targets and working diligently toward their accomplishment. It will not be achieved simply by spending more, by creating more food pantries, or by increasing services to those at risk, though such approaches may be necessary in the short term.

Rather, an end to hunger will be achieved by making strategic and fundamental changes in public policy that affect the disposable income of families and the access of citizens to basic services that enable them to improve their lives, that increase access to locally grown foods, that ensure the dignity and well being of all Maine citizens, and that address changing demographic, social, technological and lifestyle trends.

Though food is the single factor central to ending hunger, hunger is much more than a food issue. The recommendations placed forward in this report reflect the breadth of policies and actions that have a role and a contribution to make to ending hunger in Maine.

The Commission believes that ending hunger in Maine requires five critical steps:

1. A firm resolve to end hunger in Maine that is reflected in public policy and action,
2. An economy that ensures the economic security of Maine citizens,
3. A food policy that recognizes the link between food production and distribution systems and resources, and access to locally produced food and that takes significant steps to increase the consumption of Maine grown food,
4. Major updating and restructuring of many current services and programs to respond to a changing world, and
5. A guarantee of dignity to all citizens and an accessible and seamless system of services to those in need.

1. *Maine's Resolve to End Hunger.*

State government and the public policies established by government have a major role in how the problem of hunger is approached and addressed and how the State moves forward to end hunger within its borders. There is overwhelming evidence that the cost of treating the effects of hunger is great and weighs heavily on the cost of government services. The benefits of ending hunger are “priceless”. If we are to make lasting change, Maine must resolve to make a significant paradigm shift in its approach to hunger and in the public policies that contribute to hunger in the State.

The problem of hunger in Maine must be made central to public policy debates and decisions. We must understand and approach hunger as much more than a social problem or a manifestation of poverty and acknowledge its far-reaching implications for many other aspects of the quality of life in Maine.



Immediate Legislative Actions

1. Establish a State policy to end hunger in Maine.

The Maine Legislature should state clearly its resolve to end hunger in Maine and ensure Maine moves steadfastly toward achieving an end to hunger by requiring that all future legislation, governmental policies, and public actions meet the criteria or test of leading to an end to hunger.

2. Revise and adopt an active and updated Maine Food Policy that reflects food security needs and moves the State toward greater food self-reliance.

In 1984 the Maine Legislature enacted A Food Policy for Maine. The policy is a comprehensive document that provides a blueprint for sustaining and strengthening Maine's agricultural industry, improving the level of nutrition and health of Maine residents, and for ensuring the many components of Maine's food system from producer to consumer are coordinated and integrated.

Because of the importance of a strong bond between Maine's food production capacity and the level of food security and quality of nutrition of its citizens, the Commission believes it essential to update and revitalize this important document. The Commission is especially concerned that Maine's Food Policy include a food security component and contain guidance and mechanisms for implementation and for periodic measurement of results.

3. Establish a Maine Office of Food Security.

The Commission has found that an end to hunger requires the participation of everyone and, though many are not typically perceived in this context, the policies and programs implemented by agencies throughout state government have an important role to play in ending hunger. It is time to bring all the players to the table to understand and address the complexities of hunger in a coordinated and comprehensive manner.

2. Economic Security.

Maine households have the lowest disposable income in New England. Wages are lower and taxes are higher in Maine. Maine is a rural state. The cost of transportation to meet the most basic needs of getting to school, stores, or work takes a larger bite of the household income. Higher energy and heating costs, the rising cost of prescription drugs, lack of adequate benefits, and a slowing of investment in affordable housing all have lead to increasing demands on the income of families and individuals leaving little left for food and other necessities.

In addition, the federal welfare reform that began in 1996 has essentially ended the era of welfare programs that once allowed mothers of small children to remain at home and provide for their care and has replaced it with a new premise that a poor mother's place is at work. Even during times when jobs are plentiful in Maine, many do not offer adequate wages or benefits to provide the support families need in order succeed in the workplace. Most basic of these are a dependable vehicle or transportation service and safe and affordable care for their children.

Opportunities for employment with better benefits and higher wages are often out of the reach of lower income households because they lack a reliable vehicle or a secure child care arrangement. These barriers limit choices and opportunities and keep many in part time positions or in jobs that are closer to their home but pay poorly. As a result, many Maine families have made a transition from welfare poor to working poor. Now more than ever, to prevent poverty among one-parent families, support for child care, transportation, health care and other needs must be solidly in place.

Strategy #1

Ensure all working citizens a livable wage.



Immediate Legislative Action

1. Beginning in 2004, increase the minimum wage by \$.50 per hour annually until the minimum wage reaches a "living wage" and index to the CPI.

The minimum wage was raised from \$5.15 to \$6.25 by the 120th legislature over a two-year period. The minimum wage increased to \$5.75 per hour on November 1, 2001 and will increase to \$6.25 on January 1, 2003. This is a critical first step. However, a living wage for a family of three is currently more than double this amount. A third of the jobs in Maine do not

pay a living wage. Yet, the number of single parent families and single person households dependent on a single income continues to rise.

Strategy #2

Increase the disposable income of Maine households through actions that reduce the cost volatility of essential goods and services and basic needs.



Immediate Legislative Actions

Factors that affect the disposable income of Maine households are beyond the scope and specific mission of this Commission. Yet they are critical to ending hunger because it is well known that people make tradeoffs in their efforts to make ends meet. These tradeoffs are usually between purchasing sufficient food and meeting other needs such as buying fuel or medicine or paying the rent.

1. Thus while the Commission offers no specific recommendation concerning these other necessities, we believe that Maine should move with urgency to ensure that Maine has:

- a. A comprehensive energy policy that protects citizens from volatile prices, ensures stable, secure and affordable energy supply and that reduces dependence on non-renewable resources;
- b. A comprehensive health care program for all that ensures affordable health care, including prescription drug coverage; and
- c. An affordable housing policy for Maine that makes it possible for people to live in traditional neighborhoods, live near their jobs and near the services they need.

Future Actions for Consideration

1. Increase investment in programs to improve housing for low income households, especially increasing access to affordable insulation and related materials that reduce the cost of heat and basic household operation.
2. Develop strategies that will improve the quality of affordable rental housing in downtown and urban areas such as:

- a. Develop a “TIF” style program of property tax incentives to rental unit owners who improve the quality of housing rented to low and moderate income households. Unlike TIFs commonly used to stimulate economic development which usually increase the demand for services paid for with tax dollars such as fire, police, highways and public works, a tax break for improved housing should not cost the municipality but rather result in a savings of tax dollars. Safe and comfortable housing will pay for itself because it has a positive effect on quality of life, such as lower fire potential, fewer family conflicts resulting in domestic violence, better school performance of children with a safe and comfortable place to study and relate to family.

Strategy #3

Make the tax system fair and based on ability to pay by re-establishing greater progressivity in Maine’s tax structure.

Though the income tax is a progressive tax that increases with income, it still is difficult for families with low wages and little disposable income to pay. The Commission has found that all too often other tax policies, fees and assessments levied by the State are structured in such a way that the low income and working households pay more in proportion to their income. Taxes on phone service, or related to owning and operating a motor vehicle (gasoline tax, excise and sales taxes, etc.), for instance, hit lower income households harder.



Immediate Legislative Actions

- 1. Increase the EITC to 25% of the federal level over a 3-year period and make it refundable.**
- 2. Commission a study to evaluate the impact of taxes, fees and other assessments on lower income households and propose remedies.**

Future Actions for Consideration

1. Eliminate the telephone tax on basic phone service.

2. Examine options for increasing the homestead exemption.
3. Identify and take steps to reduce the property tax burden.
4. Create a state child care tax credit for lower income households (possibly refundable).
5. Eliminate the marriage penalty in the tax system.
6. Raise the base level at which families must pay income tax.
7. Eliminate the sales tax on basic materials for home repairs, auto repairs, and related necessities.
8. Reduce the gasoline tax.

Strategy # 4

Ensure that small businesses have the same access to incentives and assistance as available to larger firms.



Immediate Legislative Actions

1. Amend the "Responsible Employer Statute" to close loopholes and to increase opportunity for small businesses in Maine.

Reinstate the "Responsible Bid" language in State bidding procedures and expand the definition of "lowest bid" for goods, services, and capital construction, and ensure that Maine workers receive priority in hiring for contracts in Maine.

Establish incentives for groups or consortiums of small employer/businesses to enter into cooperative schemes to provide services and benefits to their workers such as child care opportunities and group purchasing of health insurance for affected employees.

Future Actions for Consideration

1. Ensure that all state business assistance programs demand corporate accountability in return for incentives to business.

2. Link state offered business incentives to adequate wages, benefits to workers, child care, training, transportation assistance or other appropriate support for workers.
3. Provide tax incentives to help small businesses provide basic services to workers, including tax incentives and other state-offered incentives available now only to firms that are able to hire an additional worker under the Plus1 program.

Strategy #5

Ensure that the services Maine households need in order to maintain a good job are available to them.

For Maine families to hold a steady job that pays an acceptable wage, they must have access to affordable quality child care, dependable transportation, and opportunities to improve and upgrade their knowledge and skills. The policies of the State of Maine concerning these services and opportunities should reflect their important role in the movement to end hunger.

Child Care. The availability of quality affordable child care is one of the most critical elements to ending hunger for many Maine families because it is fundamental to enabling parents to hold a steady job and to improve their income. Progress was made in the last session of the Maine Legislature to improve access to better child care opportunities in Maine. The “Start me Right” program is an important first step, but the momentum must be maintained and a stable funding stream needs to be secured. Maine must work toward ensuring that child care services in Maine offer the following criteria

1. Accessible. Services need to be conveniently located and widely available. In a time when many people are working into the evening, weekend shifts, and a night, services that accommodate work schedules are essential though rare today.
2. Affordable.
3. Safe and nurturing.

Transportation Services and Options. Reliable transportation to work is equally fundamental to holding a steady job. The Commission heard repeated testimony concerning the need for better transportation services and access at the hearings held last year.

With little exception, Maine is a state of small towns and low density settlement. The State has followed the same suburban trend as the nation. Few people live in the same neighborhood where they work. And, because of Maine’s rural character, public transportation systems are confined to urban centers and a few major connector routes. The cost of expanding

such services into more rural areas is prohibitive, making a dependable motor vehicle a necessity for most households.

Therefore, the Commission believes that Maine must take a multi-modal approach to the transportation needs of its citizens, and especially its lower wage workers, that includes both programs to increase the availability of low cost loans to low income workers so they can obtain a dependable vehicle and includes designing and financing transit systems that, like child care, provide services to accommodate changing work schedules. Many jobs in the trade and service sectors of our economy do not operate on an 8 to 5 day. Workers need busses that run until 9 or 10 p.m. when most such establishments close.

Maine's land use and development policies need also to be reviewed to ensure that they are designed to reduce sprawl, build affordable housing near transportation routes, strengthen neighborhoods, and create economic development in centers and within the community, as it is these policies that weigh heavily on making affordable transportation available.

Lifelong Learning and Skill Development. The third fundamental requirement to ensuring workers have quality jobs with adequate earnings is availability of opportunities for lifelong learning and skill development. Affordability and access issues concerning higher education opportunities and adult education programs need to be examined. Maine should seize the opportunities that avail themselves through expanding technology, including television, the Internet, remote access and other means. Help to small businesses to offer worker development opportunities in the workplace is also a critical strategy because it will increase their productivity and viability as well as improving worker skills.



Immediate Legislative Actions

As is the case with several other strategies to end hunger that are proposed in this report which require a new look at policies and programs beyond the scope of this Commission, we make no specific recommendation.

However, the Commission believes that Maine should move with urgency to ensure that Maine has:

- a. Quality, safe, affordable, and nurturing child care within access of all working families;
- b. Expanded services to assist low income households purchase a vehicle where needed;
- c. An improved and expanded public transportation system to accommodate changing work patterns and schedules;
- d. Support for smaller businesses to improve worker skills; and

- e. Lifelong learning opportunities available to every citizen.

Future Actions for Consideration

1. Accelerate the development of a community college system in Maine.
2. Develop programs that parallel the TANF vehicle loan program to make low cost loans available to low income workers so they can obtain a dependable vehicle.
3. Increase funding support to public transit systems to enable them to expand the hours of operation to accommodate changing work schedules.
4. Explore ways to create alternatives to conventional transportation services to accommodate special needs, appropriate to the rural/low density nature of Maine communities.

3. *Maine's Food System*

The system for delivering food in America has transformed from one where most households produced their own food to a system where less than 3% of the population is engaged in agriculture, from neighborhood stores and local markets to malls and supermarkets where food from all over the world appears fresh daily on the shelves. Over the years, the networks and systems that linked consumers with those who grow their food have been replaced by massive global distribution systems.

The structure of our food system today is a lost opportunity for Maine food producers and Maine consumers. While nearly everyone appreciates the chance to have fresh orange juice from Florida or coffee from South America, or some fresh crisp lettuce on the coldest days of winter, the extent to which what Maine people eat is dependent on distant sources has gone far beyond this level. The vast majority of the Maine population today have little knowledge of what food is produced in Maine or how to access it, nor do they know its true nutritional value. The Task Force on Agricultural Vitality reported to the Maine Legislature in January, 2000 findings that question the efficiency of our current system and the nutritional outcomes. They quote a USDA study that found that many fruits and vegetables lose up to 60% of their nutritional value and flavor within 48 hours after harvesting and that over half of the trucks traveling the nation's roads are carrying food. Locally produced foods can be delivered to consumers far more quickly and efficiently, vastly reducing the energy costs associated with transportation and increasing the nutritional quality.

There are gaps in the food distribution system in Maine. In spite of Maine farms producing \$500 million worth of farm products each year, most of the food consumed in Maine comes from other places while many Maine farms struggle to survive and some farmers even go hungry themselves. Only a small portion of Maine citizens purchase food regularly at a farm stand, farmer's market, or from a local farm. For Maine farms, the state's 1.2 million population represents a largely untapped market that could substantially increase agricultural production in Maine and expand the rural economy of the State. The diverse range of crops grown on Maine farms is greater than in most other states, but there are regional differences that create uneven access to food items for consumers and uneven access to Maine markets for smaller farms. Isolation of those in rural poverty, distance and access to farm markets, stands, and even to supermarkets that lie on the outskirts of town, lack of public transportation, and loss of mobility of our seniors and others with disabilities make access to good food difficult for a large portion of those with lower incomes.

Therefore, Maine must rebuild and in some cases reinvent the foundations that make it possible for Maine consumers, especially lower income consumers, to have access to affordable food from Maine farms and that provide Maine's farms better access to the region's consumers. Maine State government has both a policy role and a role in facilitating activities that increase the consumption of Maine grown food.

Strategy #1

Increase consumer access to and consumption of Maine grown food, especially for lower income consumers.



Immediate Legislative Actions

1. Ensure interim funding for the Senior FarmShare Program and expand the Program to other low and moderate income households over a period of time.

The Maine Senior FarmShare program was by all reports, a resounding success that provided significant income to many of Maine farms and provided fresh produce to over 5000 seniors directly and several thousand more indirectly through food pantries and senior meal sites. However, it served only a small fraction of the eligible seniors and did not serve other needy low income families. At this time, funding for future years is uncertain. Even if fully funded at the level proposed in the Farm Bill, the prospects for increasing the number of seniors served in Maine are not bright. In addition, there are many non-elderly low and moderate income Maine households that could benefit greatly from such a program.

Therefore, the Commission recommends that, first, funding to continue the program through the next crop season be secured and, second, begin to expand the benefits of the program to more farms and more needy consumers.

The program offers an opportunity to achieve far greater benefits for both the State's farms and its citizens. The Commission recommends the program be focused to improve the nutrition of Maine citizens and their knowledge of healthy eating so that long term changes in eating habits occur. It should also be a vehicle to engage more of Maine citizens in the habit of seeking out and purchasing Maine farm products. Once the value of the share is exhausted, share holders should have an interest in continuing to purchase their food from local farms or selecting Maine grown food in stores.

Future Actions for Consideration

1. Develop structures to enhance farmers markets and direct marketing opportunities.
2. Improve labeling of locally grown produce in grocery stores so consumers can make a conscious choice when shopping for food in grocery stores.

3. Distinguish between “farm stands” operated by farms and generic produce stands that sell non-local produce or are operated as commercial enterprises not connected to a farm’s effort to direct market their production, and provide a special designation & signage recognizable to the consumer for farm stands.
4. Provide better information about the values of buying Maine grown food and make information about Maine grown food products more accessible.
5. Develop demonstration projects to identify catalysts and systems that work to bring producers and consumers together.

Strategy #2

Make better use of Maine grown food by developing infrastructure to increase the capacity of Maine farms to supply a consistent, quality product and by realigning the distribution system.



Immediate Legislative Actions

1. Create a public-private demonstration food processing venture (small scale commercial).

Food processing/storage in Maine has become limited to a handful of freezer operations and a number of small scale licensed kitchens, none of which are generally available for the processing and preservation of Maine farm produce. Maine has virtually no canneries today and has none of the newer technology for food preservation, such as dehydration. The State’s short growing season makes investment in such as a private venture financially unfeasible. Some of the seasonal surplus is retrieved through gleaning efforts, but most is lost. Maine food products could become more widely available if surpluses during the short fresh market season could be turned into food preparations or preserved food products. A processing facility could be designed to combine the needs of farmers to utilize surplus produce with an opportunity for Maine’s network of food pantries, congregate meal sites, meals on wheels programs and others to process surplus food and disseminate it during the off season. It would have added value to producers by stabilizing markets and prices during the fresh sales season.

2. Increase the amount of Maine Grown food products in school meals and in use by other public institutions.

In the 1980s the Maine Legislature enacted an “Institutional Buying Law”, but a number of barriers prevented both Maine farms and institutions from reaping the full benefits of the law. A broader approach is needed that includes getting more Maine farm products approved for schools to acquire under the USDA surplus commodity program, incentives such as assistance to

institutions to overcome the barriers to using local products, and assistance to farmers who wish to participate.

Further Actions for Consideration:

1. Increase the amount of Maine foods served at public events sponsored by the State, and encourage other public entities to use more Maine produced food in the meals served.
2. Create support for community gardens and gardening generally, including community kitchens to assist families to preserve and store produce.
3. Assist small farms to develop and implement strategies to gain access to larger or more distant markets through collective marketing, cooperative marketing, developing season extender crops and other new technology and by other means.
4. Assist the development of infrastructure, including storage, transportation and distribution facilities and other systems needed to improve market access for farms throughout the state.
5. Increase the investment in technology (State, University) to develop appropriate scale equipment for small farms, season extender technology, testing services (especially nutritional content of foods and quality testing).
6. Create a special micro loan fund for purchasing or adapting equipment to improve efficiency and productivity of small farms and farms engaged in the production of new crops that require new yet unavailable equipment and technology.
7. Stop the erosion of family farms by preserving and protecting the infrastructure that is left, including making available proper land use tools to protect farmland from encroachment, support for farm stands by exempting them from “commercial uses” criteria, reducing the effects of sprawl pressures, and shielding farmland from the effect of rising taxes associated with development.

4. Systems and resources to respond to new needs that are created by changing lifestyles, culture and values.

It has become an economic necessity that, in the majority of Maine families, both parents are working. There are more people in the workforce today than ever in our past. Household structure has changed significantly over the past couple decades, increasing the portion of single parent households and single individuals living alone. Our homes have changed and the technology with which they are run has changed. The products available in the supermarket have changed from basic staples to a myriad of packaged and convenience foods. In the fast paced nature of life there is lack of time to prepare foods, lack of space and materials needed to effect savings by processing and storing food in season, lack of knowledge of good nutrition, or of how to prepare healthy meals.

In many homes today, the parent(s) leave for work before the child goes to school and no one is available to make sure the child starts off with a good breakfast or has adequate nutrition throughout the day. Stigma keeps many children from accepting school lunch and many adults from seeking help at pantries or from social service agencies. Illiteracy keeps others from reading recipes or food labels or comparing prices. All of these factors were described at length by the Blue Ribbon Commission on Hunger and Food Security in their report in 1996. Input from hearings held by the commission and other efforts to gather data confirm them to be chronic problems in our society.

Strategy #1

Maine must move toward a system of universal school nutrition in which all children receive healthful food at school without charge.

SCHOOL NUTRITION

Last year the Maine Legislature made the funds available for starting new school breakfast programs non-lapsing and the eligibility requirements were lowered so that more schools can qualify for aid to establish breakfast programs.

The quality and availability of food to children in Maine schools is a special concern to the Commission. Schools are a pivotal access point for ending hunger because almost all children are educated in a school setting and meal service in the school ensures that children are receiving an adequate diet in their early years. Schools also offer an opportunity at an early age to instill knowledge of healthy eating and develop lifelong behavior and practice of good nutrition.

Yet, at public hearings across the State held by the Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger & Food Security, concern over school nutrition was raised by the public more often by far than any other issue. The Commission heard countless reports of children at school hungry,

the stigma associated with participating in school meals programs, and numerous actions, rules, and events that serve as disincentives to participation. For this reason, the commission believes the topic deserves special attention.

The data shows that less than half of all children in Maine schools participate in the school lunch program. Fewer than a fifth participate in a breakfast program. The reasons are many. Though school lunch is offered in almost all schools today, the breakfast program is far less available. Children and their parents cite unappealing menus, lack of time in the schedule for getting through the cafeteria line, and stigma. Stigma is the major reason for lack of participation in school nutrition programs by low income students.

The link between learning and nutrition is well established. To reach their full potential, every child needs a nutritious breakfast and a balanced lunch regardless of the family's income or capacity to otherwise provide for the nutritional needs of the child. Yet many skip lunch rather than face embarrassment or because the school schedule does not allow time. Many come to school without breakfast in the morning because parents leave for work before the child goes off to school and there is no time to prepare food or local rules prohibit the child from eating once on the bus.

Because of the extent of childhood hunger, the way hunger affects learning and child development, and the important role food plays in quality educational and enrichment activities, many states have passed legislation that support increased participation in school nutrition programs. Programs that offer meals to all children regardless of income, otherwise known as Universal School Nutrition Programs, have been piloted successfully. North Carolina has allocated \$1.2 million dollars so that all kindergarten children receive a free breakfast. During the past 3 years, Massachusetts provided \$3 million dollars each year to fund 16 universal school breakfast pilots. This year, \$7 million dollars will be proposed allowing 245 schools to serve universal breakfast. Maryland began its universal classroom breakfast program in 1998. In the first year, six schools participated. This year, 48 schools will be subsidized with additional funds. In Maryland, an astounding 90% of the students participate in the universal breakfast program model – a 40% increase in participation over 3 years. (*FRAC Building Blocks Newsletter*, January-February, 2001)

Maine's children deserve the opportunity to healthy accessible food in school in a setting without bias. School Nutrition programs deserve to have innovative funding available to creatively design well-staffed, well-equipped foodservice options meeting the needs of the families in their school district. As Commissioners, we have heard all too often that schools do not have the funds to adequately design, implement and maintain the creative aspects of a meal program that is able to compete with vending machines and fast food restaurants. The issue is not about improving a nutrition program that is poor quality. In fact, Maine's School Nutrition Program is very progressive. The Commission's proposal is in direct response to the voices of citizens from across the state. It is about providing a solution for thousands of Maine children who may not achieve their full potential because of a lack of food and about allowing our state School Nutrition Program move forward without politics.

The School Nutrition Program through USDA is one of the most highly regulated programs in Federal government. The intent of this Commission is to support creative growth in program development and student participation despite the many regulations that the program must abide by. A universal program will eliminate the barriers that prevent participation to school nutrition programs.



Immediate Legislative Actions:

1. Make it the policy of the State of Maine to provide school nutrition services without charge in all Maine schools in order to eliminate the stigma suffered by children under the current fee system and to direct the Maine Department of Education to prepare a plan and timeline for implementation of a universal nutrition program in all Maine schools.

2. Assure that each local school district includes the School Nutrition Program in the policy development process and the budget development process, in a manner that reflects the role of nutrition in the learning and nurturing of children, and makes it an integral part of the education experience for children from all socioeconomic backgrounds.

The single largest barrier to enabling school nutrition programs to meet the nutritional needs of children is the funding structure, which places its dependence on federal dollars, and the minimal importance assigned to the meals program and its budget by local school boards. In far too many schools, the school meals programs are, at best, an unwanted stepchild.

The school nutrition program should be an integral part of the school day, linked to the learning results curriculum, using mealtime as learning experience as well as a nourishing experience. Yet today, not only are the nutrition programs separated from classroom experiences, in most schools, the budget for school nutrition is separate from the overall school budget. Those responsible for the meals must operate in such a way that the program pays for itself, often forcing staff to offer less healthy snack foods in order to get children to purchase the meals. In such an environment, pressure to make ends meet consumes energy and dedication of the nutrition staff. The budget and policy process should prioritize fresh, healthy food for each child in Maine schools.

The legislature should instruct the Department of Education, in their upcoming scheduled review of the standards and performance indicators, to develop and propose the incorporation of information on nutrition and food production and its relationship to good health and to begin to develop an alternative budgeting system, such as possibly a dedicated account, that makes school meals programs a sound investment for local schools.

3. Institute right away a “free cart” available in all schools for all students containing healthy snacks, such as apples, vegetables, milk, crackers, etc. with emphasis on Maine foods.

During the last legislative session, funds for starting new school breakfast programs were made non-lapsing and the eligibility requirements lowered so that more schools can qualify. This is an important step to expanding school nutrition services to Maine children. Yet, large numbers of schools will go unserved, and it will not take away the problems associated with the current fee system. To make food widely available to children, the legislature should direct the Department of Education to work with local schools and with the Maine and US Departments of Agriculture and others to offer a “free cart” of food.

Such systems for providing food to children are used widely in schools in this country and have had high success rates. In the spring of 2001 Providence R.I. schools began a pilot program intended to erase what they identified as “the stigma associated with school breakfast being a program for poor kids” in order to increase participation. They offered children in 4 middle schools an alternative style breakfast which they called “grab ‘n’ go” in which students got their breakfast in a colorful bag that they could eat anywhere. By the time the year ended, student participation in the breakfast program had increased 79% and the program was expanded to all of the city’s middle schools in the fall of 2001.

Free food carts are also widely available to students throughout the schools of Maine on the days that MEA tests are given. It is clear that teachers and administrators understand the relationship between good nutrition and academic performance. Children should have no less every school day. Their education depends upon it.

Future Actions for Consideration:

1. Establish a policy and incentives to reduce the amount of unhealthy snacks in vending machines on school campuses. A recent USDA study has found that vending machines undermine the school lunch program as well as compromise the nutrition of children.
2. Explore options for ensuring snacks available in schools are nutritious:

- a. Set nutritional standards for items in vending machines on school grounds.
 - b. Set quality standards.
 - c. Require a portion of the revenues go to fund nutrition programs.
1. Increase amount of Maine products in school meals.
 2. Get more Maine products on donated commodities lists for Maine schools.
 3. Expand and increase the availability of the “Ag in the Classroom” program and make it a part of the learning results curriculum.
 4. Expand meals services to after school child care programs.

Strategy #2

Update nutrition information and resources and make them more accessible, interesting, easy to comprehend and compatible with today’s life styles, and expand nutrition education programs that promote the economic and health benefits of food grown in Maine.

For most of the general public, nutrition education draws a “ho hum” reaction. Even though most know good nutrition is important to their well-being, they perceive it to be dry, complicated, and even preaching and most believe that to practice good eating habits requires more work, more time, and a change in lifestyle.

This perception is in part due to the fragmented efforts that have been in place to deliver nutrition-related information to consumers in a way that is meaningful, useful, and fits into their lifestyle. Nutrition information and education efforts need to be carefully targeted.

The nutrition information consumers have needs constant updating. The way in which nutrients interact in the body to promote health is a rapidly changing science. Micro-nutrients, phytochemicals and antioxidants are examples of substances not known to science a decade ago that are now known to be essential for health. People need new information in order to make good food choices.

The food we eat today is very different, too, and conventional knowledge of nutrition is no longer enough to guide us safely. We consume fewer home produced and preserved foods and increasingly rely on convenience foods, prepared foods, take out foods, all of which offer highly varied nutritional quality, an many of which contain excessive quantities of unhealthy ingredients and very little nutrition.

A very small portion of food consumed by Maine residents today is purchased directly from producers and few structure their diets around food in season or fresh food purchased and processed for later use. A substantial number of consumers no longer have the knowledge even of how to simply prepare many fresh vegetables.

Therefore, a renewed program of nutrition information is needed focused on updating knowledge to reflect new information on nutrition, getting people to pay more attention to what they're eating and make better choices, and to help people increase the use of more locally produced food in their diets.



Immediate Legislative Actions:

1. Invest in a nutrition information initiative that recognizes eating habits, consumer interests and lifestyles and promotes the economic and health benefits of food grown in Maine.

Within Maine there are several organizations that have a role to play in providing nutritional information to consumers. Coordination occurs largely through the Maine Nutrition Network, but has been focused primarily on providing nutrition information to consumers in the food stamp and WIC programs. There is a need to develop new materials and techniques in order to reach a broader segment of the general public with targeted information that is meaningful, useful, and fits into their lifestyle.

Future Actions for Consideration:

1. Encourage supermarkets to display more nutrition facts with products in their stores to help customers pick healthy foods and increase consumer interest in healthy choices.
2. Provide farmers, farmers' markets and other direct marketing outlets with informative nutrition materials for display or use in assisting customers.

Strategy #3

Ensure the services necessary for a growing elderly population are in place.

The elderly population faces many unique challenges. Decreasing mobility and declining health affects appetite and the ability to obtain and prepare food. The disposable income of seniors is dwindling as costs of essential needs such as heating costs, rising medical costs, or the cost of prescription drugs rise, all leaving less money for food. Many seniors have very low income, especially women over age 85. Many also struggle to maintain their independence and pride and resist asking for help.

Maine has historically had a higher percentage of its population over age 65. Meeting the needs of a growing elderly population will be compounded and the systems and resources available stretched to new limits in the coming decades as the huge population of persons born in the “baby boom” years that World War II reach their senior years.

Although many elderly live longer and are healthier than their predecessors, many will not have the financial resources or the health to maintain an independent life style and will require assistance and support.

Future Actions for Consideration:

1. Convene a multi-agency task force to plan for the needs of a growing elderly population.
2. Expanded meals on wheels programs.
3. Consider establishing a triple tax exemption for elderly.
4. Implement EBT for food stamps and other services to ensure anonymity and thus increase participation, especially of the elderly.
5. Decentralize services that may be delivered to the client vs. client come to the service.

Strategy #4

Develop alternative approaches to overcome barriers of various groups of citizens to obtain locally produced food.

Many low income citizens, especially those in urban areas, the elderly, and others find it difficult to get to farmers' markets and farm stands, or to purchase fresh food in bulk direct from area farmers because they lack transportation or have health limitations that prevent access, or find the hours of operation of such markets too distant, limited or in inconvenient locations.

The Commission recognizes that there may not be a single solution, but instead, many different solutions that vary according to the local need. Nonprofit agencies who serve low income clients at nutritional risk are often the first resource to which persons in need turn, and as such are in a prime position to act as a catalyst to develop creative solutions that link their clients and area farmers by addressing barriers such as lack of transportation, access, and affordability, and have the opportunity to create solutions that work on a small scale. We believe that often the best solutions can be designed on a local small scale and that incentives and resources to encourage such should be provided.



Immediate Legislative Actions:

- 1. Create a demonstration fund that can be used by agencies to act as a catalyst to develop systems for linking lower income clients and local farmers that will overcome transportation problems and other difficulties lower income individuals have in gaining access to affordable and healthy local food and will reestablish direct purchasing links between consumers and Maine farms.**

5. A Seamless System of Services for those in Need.

Because the Commission has also found that a confusing and sometimes conflicting myriad of programs, policies and guidelines exist to fill the gap for people in immediate need of assistance, and because ending hunger requires significant changes that will not be accomplished quickly or easily, we also recommend the State move toward a more seamless system where no person falls through the cracks.

Too many people are falling through the cracks or suffering unnecessary delays in receiving the help they need because of gaps in eligibility for various services, humiliation suffered by those who seek help due to inadequately trained staff and volunteers and, especially, for those who are in need for the first time, a lack of any clear entry point or guide to help sort through the programs available and find the ones they need.

The commission heard both from the public and from front line providers that the system for providing aid is complex and cumbersome, often involves a maze of programs, guidelines, and rules that make for great inefficiency and leave people in need falling through the cracks in the system. Providers find they must seek funding from multiple sources, each source having guidelines and categories of need that it can address, and yet see clients routinely that do not fit any of the programs with which they can offer aid.

The stigma associated with having to seek help is the most devastating blow to self confidence, especially at a time when all else seems bleak. It is also what keeps many from seeking help until their situation has reached crisis proportions and the road back has become long and difficult. It is essential to address the problem of stigma associated with seeking help. Maine should ensure that stigma is eliminated from services that are means tested. The implicit and explicit culture that blames the victim is present today and must change.



Immediate Legislative Actions:

1. Ensure that where the parameters and requirements of one program leave off, the eligibility for another take up.

providing no gaps through which populations in need may fall.

Departments and agencies offering services to alleviate hunger and assist citizens in crisis should be directed to review their programs and guidelines to ensure that services are available for all in need, and to work jointly to establish a single point of entry to make it easy for those in need for the first time to find help with ease and dignity.

Future Actions for Consideration:

1. Accelerate the use of EBT (electronic benefit transfer) cards for food stamps and WIC and expand to other services to avoid stigma often associated with services.

Appendices

- I. Review of Commission Activities
- II. Draft Legislation
- III. Commission Members
- IV. Resolve, Chapter 117, Chapter 63
- V. Additional information, articles, news clips concerning ending hunger

I. Review of Commission Activities

The Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger and Food Security has met monthly since it began in December 1999. The Commission heard from many people, including providers of services that address hunger and those in need of assistance. Hearings were held around the State in the spring of 2000 and written comments were solicited. Several citizen groups reviewed the draft report and offered suggestions. Members reviewed the work of other states, the USDA and other agencies and organizations. They sought models from elsewhere that were successful in addressing the needs that had been presented to them. The Commission issued an interim report in January 2001 and proposed accompanying legislation. They then proceeded to address other concerns and refine the many suggestions with which they had been presented. The final report of the Commission contains nine legislative proposals and a lengthy list of other approaches that may also require future legislation. Most notable, the Commission has focused on the need for a shift in public policy and a greater need for consistency of policies that impact both directly and indirectly on the status of hunger.

II. Draft Proposed Legislation

Proposed Legislation for Submission in 2003:

1. Resolve, to End Hunger in Maine.
2. An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger and Food Security to Create a Maine Office of Food Security.
3. Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger and Food Security to Expand the Maine Earned Income Tax Credit Program to Make It Refundable and Increase the Amount of Benefit a Family Can Receive.
4. Resolve, to Study the Impact of Taxes, Fees, and Other Assessments on Low Income Residents and to Recommend Changes in Maine's Tax System to Ensure that Low Income Households do not Pay a Disproportional Share.

5. An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger and Food Security to Amend the Responsible Employer Statute to Close Loopholes and to Increase Opportunity for Small Businesses in Maine.
6. An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger and Food Security and to Expand the Senior Farm Share Program to Other Low Income and Moderate Income Households.
7. Resolve, to Make it the Policy of the State of Maine to Provide School Nutrition Services Universally in all Maine Schools in Order to Eliminate the Stigma Suffered by Children Under the Current Fee System and to Direct the Maine Department of Education to Prepare a Plan and Timeline for Implementation of a Universal Nutrition Program in all Maine Schools.
8. Resolve, to Direct the Department of Education to immediately institute a "Free Cart" of healthy foods in Maine Schools.
9. Resolve, to Instruct the Department of Education to Develop and Propose Amendments to the Learning Results Curriculum that Incorporate Information on Nutrition and Food Production and its Relationship to Good Health and to Ensure that the Meals Programs are an Integral Part of the School Day.

Rough draft language for these nine proposals is found on the following pages.

Resolve, To End Hunger in Maine.

Preamble. Whereas, one in ten people in Maine are persistently hungry or at risk of being hungry for periods of time each year; and

Whereas, the presence of hunger in Maine is unacceptable and the persistence of hunger threatens and diminishes the quality of life of all Maine citizens; and

Whereas, The Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger and Food Security finds that hunger is much more than a social problem; and

Whereas, hunger is both a causal factor for and a result of many of the larger problems in society such as the burgeoning costs of health care, lost productivity, loss of farms and farmland and an ailing rural economy, and poor educational achievement and that these conditions, in turn, perpetuate hunger by reducing the availability of local food, reducing the potential of earning an adequate income to purchase sufficient food, and by increasing other costs, such as the cost of health care, that further erode the amount of income available for food; and

Whereas, ending hunger requires that this State address hunger comprehensively, re-examine its policies and their implications for ending hunger, and begin to develop policies in which ending hunger is the keystone:

Ending hunger should be a keystone in our health policy - the link between nutrition and health is well established.

Ending hunger should be a keystone in our education policy - the link between nutrition and learning is well established and therefore, school nutrition programs should be considered as public health intervention as well as fundamental to learning.

Ending hunger should be a keystone in our agricultural policy - the link between lower income at risk consumers and our food producers is essential to expanding local food consumption and to improving diets.

Ending hunger should be a keystone in our economic policy - the link between nutrition and worker productivity is well established.

Ending hunger should be a keystone in our taxation policy – for the tax structure affects the amount of disposable income available to households and the economic vitality of our businesses to offer improved wages and benefits for workers.

Ending hunger should be a keystone in our environmental and land use policies
- for Maine has the capacity to supply a substantial portion of the food for local consumption and a vital farm economy requires an adequate supply of farmland, infrastructure, direct producer to consumer markets, and improved consumer access to local food.

Ending hunger should be a keystone in our transportation policies - for our road systems and public transportation services are essential to steady and reliable employment, access to food, and to ensure freedom from dependency, isolation, and deprivation.

Ending hunger should be a keystone in our energy and housing policies - for it is the ability to afford these basic needs that all too often causes lower income households to make choices between heat or rent and nutritious food;

Now, therefore, be it

Resolved. We the members of the 120th Maine Legislature declare our commitment to the end of persistent hunger in Maine once and for all, and further declare that the existence of hunger be made central to the policy debates and decisions of all state agencies and legislatures, and that future legislation, governmental policies, and public actions lead to an end of hunger in Maine.

SUMMARY

This resolve declares the commitment of the Legislature and the State of Maine to the end of persistent hunger in Maine once and for all, recognizes hunger is much more than a social problem and must be addressed comprehensively, and directs all departments and agencies of state government as well as future legislatures to ensure that all future legislation, governmental policies, and public actions lead to an end of hunger in Maine.

An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger and Food Security to Create a Maine Office of Food Security.

Be it enacted by the People of Maine as follows:

Whereas, the Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger and Food Security has found that hunger exists in Maine and that it is the result of a complex network of interrelated issues and policies in which hunger is a causal factor for many of the larger problems in society such as the burgeoning costs of health care, lost productivity, loss of farms and farmland and an ailing rural economy, and poor educational achievement; and

Whereas, these conditions, in turn, perpetuate hunger by reducing the availability of local food, reducing the potential of earning an adequate income to purchase sufficient food, and by increasing other costs, such as the cost of health care, that further erode the amount of income available for food; and

Whereas, the Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger and Food Security has found that the approach to Food Security in State Government lacks the cohesive implementation of nutrition education and food programs in each department causing fragmentation of services, duplication of services, and a general lack of comprehensive evaluation statewide. Ending hunger requires that this State address hunger comprehensively, re-examine its policies and their implications for ending hunger, and begin to develop, implement and evaluate policies in which ending hunger is the keystone.

Title/Sec. ___ is amended to read:

MAINE OFFICE OF FOOD SECURITY .

1. Office Established. The Maine Office of Food Security is established in order to facilitate more effective interagency coordination of the State's activities regarding hunger in Maine,

2. State Agency Coordination. An interdepartmental committee made up of State agencies and departments whose activities and policies impact hunger and food security shall oversee the Maine Office of Food Security and coordinate their programs and activities. The membership of the committee is as follows:

- A. The Director of the State Planning Office;
- B. The Commissioner of the Maine Department of Agriculture and Rural Resources;
- C. The Commissioner of the Department of Human Services;
- D. The Commissioner of the Department of Education;
- E. The Commissioner of the Department of Transportation;
- F. The Commissioner of the Department of Economic and Community Development;
- G. The Commissioner of the Department of Labor;
- H. The Director of the Maine Emergency Management Agency; and
- I. Other state agencies and departments may participate as applicable.

3. Maine Office of Food Security to be located in the State Planning Office.

4. Purpose and Duties. Direct the interagency coordination of all activities to end hunger and achieve food security in Maine. The Office shall advise the Governor, the Legislature, and state agencies in the formation of policies to end hunger. Any state, federal, regional, or local agency or private organization may interact and cooperative with the office in fulfilling its goals.

Specifically, the Office shall:

1. Provide the leadership for ending the persistence of hunger in our state by being charged with being the shepherd or steward of the commitment for having Maine be a hunger-free state;
2. Recommend coordinated state policy regarding major programs and proposals that affect hunger and that involve the concerns and activities of more than one state agency;
3. Support the design and implementation of an integrated program to end hunger in Maine;
4. Provide direction to the State's agencies and Departments and encourage coordination and review of these efforts through review and comment on agency programs and plans that relate to ending hunger;
5. Coordinate with other state, federal, local, and non-profit initiatives that address hunger, food security, nutrition, and related concerns;
6. Study specific issues and problems of state level significance in order to develop sound and coordinated policies;
7. Establish benchmarks for the implementation of the long-range recommendations contained in the report of the Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger and Food Security, including defining the measures to be used to define the end of hunger;
8. Establish and utilize advisory councils around the state of Maine's citizens, especially the hungry themselves, so there is a real interaction and feedback mechanism in place that helps shape policy and other decisions that impact people's lives;
9. Work with those involved providing services to those in need to ensure a seamless system is in place at all times and access to it is clear and simple; and
10. Periodically review and evaluate the progress being made towards ending hunger in Maine and report biennially to the Legislature and the Governor.

5. Hire Staff.

6. Establish citizen councils and advisory groups.

7. Accept funds. The Office may seek and accept funds to carry out its work.

8. Funding and Support. May be supported in part by resources of the agencies and departments listed, appropriations by the legislature, and public and private sources.

(Note: No Appropriation requested for first year. It is anticipated that the Office will seek USDA funds to begin its work once established.)

SUMMARY

This resolve establishes a Maine Office of Food Security located at the State Planning Office, directs state agencies to participate by overseeing the Office and coordinating their policies and programs, and provides for advisory councils and citizen input.

#3

An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger and Food Security to Expand the Maine Earned Income Tax Credit Program to Make It Refundable and Increase the Amount of Benefit a Family Can Receive.

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

Sec. 1. 36 MRSA §5219-S, as enacted by PL 1999, c. 731, Pt. V, §1 and affected by §2, is amended to read:

§5219-S. Earned income credit

A taxpayer is ~~allowed~~ eligible for a refundable credit against the taxes otherwise due under this Part equal to ~~5%~~ 15% of the federal earned income credit for the ~~same~~ taxable year beginning January 1, 2002 and equal to 20% in 2003 and equal to 25% of the federal earned income tax credit for tax years beginning on or after January 1, 2004. ~~The credit may not reduce the state income tax to less than zero.~~

SUMMARY

The State does not currently offer a refundable earned income tax credit to lower-income families with earnings. A nonrefundable credit against taxes owed was enacted in the Second Regular Session of the 119th Legislature. The maximum amount of credit a family could receive is less than \$200.

This proposal makes the credit refundable, similar to the federal, earned income tax credit, and increases the amount of refund a family can receive from 5% of the federal rate to 15% in 2002, 20% in 2003 and 25% in 2004 and thereafter.

Resolve to Study the Impact of Taxes, Fees, and Other Assessments on Low Income Residents and to Recommend Changes in Maine's Tax System to Ensure that Low Income Households do not Pay a Disproportional Share.

Preamble. Whereas, the Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger and Food Security finds that lack of adequate income is a primary factor contributing to hunger in Maine and that the high amount of taxes paid by Maine residents in proportion to income further reduces the disposable income of lower income households in the State; and

Whereas, one out of every ten Maine residents is experiencing hunger or is at risk of hunger and countless more worry about having enough money to make ends meet without compromising nutrition; now, therefore, be it

Sec. 1. Study of the Impact of Taxes, Fees and Other Assessments on Maine's Low Income Residents.

Resolved: That the State Planning Office shall study of the impact of taxes, fees and other assessments on the poor and submit a report to the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation that:

1. Inventories existing taxes, fees, and assessments mandated by state statute and analyzes the burden they create at varying income levels, including, but not limited to income taxes, consumer sales, special taxes assessed on gasoline, utilities, licenses, registrations,
2. Identifies those taxes and assessments most burdensome to low income households, and
3. Recommends strategies for reducing that burden.

Coordination. The Office may seek the assistance of the Maine Revenue Services Division of the Maine Department of Administration and Financial Services, and of all other state departments and agencies that levy fees or cause fees to be levied on goods and services within the State,

Report. The State Planning Office shall present a report to the joint standing committee on Taxation by December 31, 2002.

SUMMARY

This resolve directs the State Planning Office to inventory and study the impact of taxes, fees, and other assessments on the poor and to recommend changes in Maine's tax and fee systems to ensure that low income households do not pay a disproportional share and to report to the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation by December 31, 2002. It further directs other state agencies to cooperate and to provide information on taxes, fees, and assessments in their jurisdiction as needed upon request of the State Planning Office for the purpose of the study.

#5

**An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Maine Millennium Commission on
Hunger and Food Security to Amend the Responsible Employer Statute to Close Loopholes
and to Increase Opportunity for Small Businesses in Maine.**

Be it enacted by the People of Maine as follows:

Title 26, Chapter 15 is amended as follows:

Sec. 1301. Local Residents preferred; exception

The State, counties, cities and towns, and every charitable or educational institution which is supported in whole or in part by aid granted by the State or by any municipality shall, in the awarding of contracts for constructing, altering, repairing, furnishing or equipping its buildings or public works, give preference to workmen and to bidders for such contracts who are residents of this State, provided the bids submitted by such resident bidders are equally favorable with bids submitted by contractors from without the State. This section shall not apply to construction or repairs amounting to less than \$1,000 or to emergency work or to state road work.

Any contract for public improvement that is awarded by the State or any department or agency of the State is subject to the competitive bidding process established under Title 5, chapter 155, subchapter I-A. [1995, c. 524, §2 (new).] and

Every contract awarded by the State where the amount of the contract is more than one-hundred thousand dollars, and any subcontract awarded in connection with any such general contract where the amount of such subcontract is more than twenty-five thousand dollars, shall be deemed to incorporated by reference the following provisions:

1. The bidder and all subcontractors under the bidder shall comply with the requirements concerning the payment of prevailing wages to their employees;
2. The bidder and all subcontractors under the bidder must maintain and participate in a bonafide apprentice training program as defined by Maine law for each apprenticeable trade or occupation represented in its workforce that is approved by the Division of Apprenticeship Training of the Maine Department of Labor and must abide by the apprentice to journeymen ratio for each trade prescribed therein in the performance of the contract;
3. The bidder and all subcontractors under the bidder must offer hospitalization and medical benefits for all individuals employed on the project or coverage which is comparable to the hospitalization and medical benefits provided by the health and welfare plans in the applicable craft; and
4. The bidder and all subcontractors under the bidder must properly classify individuals employed on the project as employees rather than as independent contractors and comply with all laws concerning workers' compensation insurance coverage, unemployment taxes, social security taxes and income taxes as respects all such employees.

SUMMARY

This act closes a loophole that allowed bidders to hire contract labor and thus avoid withholding taxes and paying benefits.

#6

**An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Maine Millennium Commission on
Hunger and Food Security and to Expand the Senior Farm Share Program to Other Low
Income and Moderate Income Households.**

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

Sec. 1. 7 MRSA c. 101, sub-c. II-B is amended by repealing the subchapter head note and enacting the following in its place:

SUBCHAPTER II-B

MAINE FARM SHARE PROGRAM

Sec. 2. 7 MRSA §472 is enacted to read:

Maine FarmShare Program. The Commissioner of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources shall develop the Maine Farm Share Program (hereafter the “Program”) which will provide eligible low and moderate income households with free farm products provided directly by Maine farms.

The Program will be administered by the Maine Department of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Resources (hereafter, the “Department”).

Purpose. In order to increase the consumption of locally grown nutritious foods and strengthen Maine’s small and mid sized farms, the Department shall develop and administer the Maine Farm Share Program. Under the Program, participating farmers will provide a certain value of free farm products directly to eligible households through means authorized by the Department.

Coordination with other Programs. The Maine Farm Share Program builds upon and expands the federally funded Senior Share Program begun in 2001, currently administered by the Department. The Senior Share Program will become one component of this Program, with the Department coordinating the federal funds for the Senior Farm Share Program with the broader State funded Program so that the two components are administered in conjunction with each other in such as way that the system, to the customers, is seamless.

Accept funds. The Department may also seek and accept funds from other sources for the purpose of this section.

Value of Shares. The value of farm product provided to each eligible households each year shall be set by the Department at the start of each growing season, based on the amount of available funding and legal requirements. The value may be different for households eligible for the Senior Share program and other eligible households, depending on the amount of funding available from different sources, and on any federal requirements for the use of Senior Share funding.

The target value of farm products to be provided to each household is \$100 per year, which is the current amount provided under the Senior Share program. In no year may this amount fall below \$50 per household. If the amount of available funding is such that the value would fall below \$50 per household per year, then the Department must either carry over funding to reallocate it in a future year or decrease the pool of recipients by providing benefits to only a subset of all those who are eligible. If the Department chooses to decrease the pool of recipients, it must do so in a fair and equitable manner.

Farm Participation. The Department shall establish guidelines for participation of farms in the program.

Reimbursement to Farms. The Department shall establish procedures for reimbursement of farms in the program.

Determination of Eligibility of Recipients. The Department may request the assistance of the Department of Human Services or another appropriate entity to determine the eligibility of client households and to assist with outreach activities as appropriate.

Eligibility Guidelines and Phase-in Period. Eligibility for the Senior Share portion of the overall Program shall be based on federal requirements. Broader Program eligibility shall be based on how the household's income compares with the federal poverty line, as outlined below.

The Program would be phased in over a five-year period. In year 1 (2002), shares would be provided exclusively to those households eligible for support under the Federally-funded Senior Share Program. In year 2, Program eligibility would be expanded to also include all households that fall under the poverty line. In year 4, Program eligibility would be expanded to include all households that fall below 130% of the poverty line, which is the same level at which free meals are provided under the school lunch program.

Administrative Costs. No more than 15% of the funds available for this program may be used to cover the administrative costs of the program.

SUMMARY

This bill would establish the Maine Farm Share Program to provide eligible low and moderate income households with free farm products provided directly by Maine farms. It builds upon and expands the Federally-funded Senior Farm Share Program. It would be phased in over five years to eventually support a large number of low and moderate income households.

#7

Resolve, to Make it the Policy of the State of Maine to Provide School Nutrition Services Universally in all Maine Schools in Order to Eliminate the Stigma Suffered by Children Under the Current Fee System and to Direct the Maine Department of Education to Prepare a Plan and Timeline for Implementation of a Universal Nutrition Program in all Maine Schools.

Preamble. Whereas, the Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger and Food Security has found that children of all ages and from families at all income levels are going hungry at school; and

Whereas, the Commission has found the level of participation in school meals programs in Maine to be inadequate among children who qualify for free and reduced fee meals largely due to stigma and embarrassment; and

Whereas, hunger among children has been demonstrated conclusively by scientific research to impede learning, growth and development, and general health and well being of children; and

Whereas, schools offer an opportunity at an early age to educate about and to instill knowledge of healthy eating and develop lifelong behavior and practice of good nutrition; and

Whereas, it is imperative to the health and educational development of our children to provide a universal system of school meals available to every child; now therefore, be it

Sec. 1 . Plan for developing a universal school meals program. Resolved. That the Maine Department of Education shall develop a plan for a universal school meals free of charge in every school in Maine and shall establish a timeline for implementing such a plan. In so doing, the Department shall review the options for developing universal programs and experiences in other states, identify mechanisms for long term funding, identify statutory or regulatory changes needed, and consider other relevant information.

Report. The Department shall report the findings and recommendations to the Joint Standing Committee on Education by January 15, 2003.

SUMMARY

This resolve makes it the policy of the State of Maine to provide school Nutrition Services universally and free of charge in all Maine schools in order to eliminate the stigma suffered by children under the current fee system and directs the Maine Department of Education to prepare a plan and timeline for implementation of a Universal Nutrition Program in all Maine schools.

#8

Resolve, to Direct the Department of Education to immediately institute a "Free Cart" of healthy foods in Maine Schools.

Preamble. Whereas, the Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger and Food Security has found that children of all ages and from families at all income levels are going hungry at school; and

Whereas, the Commission has found the level of participation in school meals programs in Maine to be inadequate among children who qualify for free and reduced fee meals largely due to stigma and embarrassment; and

Whereas, hunger among children has been demonstrated conclusively by scientific research to impede learning, growth and development, and general health and well being of children; and

Whereas, schools offer an opportunity at an early age to educate about and to instill knowledge of healthy eating and develop lifelong behavior and practice of good nutrition; and

Whereas, it is imperative to the health and educational development of our children to provide a universal system of school meals available to every child; and

Whereas, many Maine schools already offer such a service on days when MEA tests are being administered and a few offer the service on a regular basis to some classrooms; and

Whereas, the shift from the current school meals system to a universal system can be expected to take several years to complete; now, therefore, be it

Sec 1. Institute "Free Carts" in Maine schools. Resolved: The Maine Department of Education shall assist Maine schools not already having such to make available to children a "free cart" of healthy foods.

In so doing, the Department should coordinate with the Maine Department of Agriculture, the USDA and other potential sources to develop access to sources of foods, make special effort to use as many Maine grown foods as possible, seek funding and other needed resources as necessary.

SUMMARY

This resolve directs the Maine Department of Education to assist local schools to offer a "free cart" of healthy foods to their students daily.

#9

Resolve, to Instruct the Department of Education to Develop and Propose Amendments to the Learning Results Curriculum that Incorporate Information on Nutrition and Food Production and its Relationship to Good Health and to Ensure that the Meals Programs are an Integral Part of the School Day.

Preamble. Whereas, the United States Department of Agriculture has recently released data (December 2001) which clearly points to the need of school nutrition programs to have a leadership role in promoting a healthy lifestyle; and

Whereas, the Millennium Commission on Hunger and Food Security has found that the two greatest barriers to enabling school nutrition programs to meet the nutritional needs of children are (1) the funding structure, which places its dependence on federal dollars, and in which minimal importance is assigned to the meals programs in school budgets, and (2) the separation of nutrition programs from the classroom and learning environment; and

Whereas, the Commission believes that mealtime should be a rich learning experience promoting healthy lifestyles as well as a nourishing experience and that the school nutrition program should be an integral part of the school day which is linked to the learning results curriculum; and

Whereas, the Commission finds it is essential that the fiscal process supports the development of fresh, healthy, desirable menus, and strategies for effectively educating children to eat foods necessary for optimum health in each school districts throughout the State; now therefore, be it

Resolved. The Department of Education, is directed, in their scheduled review of Learning Results Curriculum next year, to develop and propose amendments to the Learning Results Curriculum that incorporate information on nutrition and food production and its relationship to good health; and be it further

Resolved. The Department of Education develop and propose an alternative budgeting system, such as possibly a dedicated account, that makes school meals programs a sound investment for local schools.

In so doing, the Department shall develop fiscal processes that

1. assures that mealtimes are treated as an essential part of each student's day;
2. assures enough time for each child to eat a nourishing breakfast and lunch;
3. prioritizes the consistent use of fresh, healthy food for each child in Maine schools; and
4. integrates nutrition and classroom learning.

SUMMARY

Under current conditions, not only are the school nutrition programs separated from educational experiences, in most schools, the budget for school nutrition is separate from the overall school budget. As a result, those responsible for the meals must operate in such a way that the School Nutrition Program pays for itself, often forcing less healthy snack foods in order to increase the number of children to purchasing meals. In such an environment, pressure to make ends meet consumes energy and dedication of the nutrition staff.

The separation of school nutrition programs and the education program in schools places low priority on eating nutritiously, often does not allow children enough time to eat, which results consumption of snack foods as alternative to a meal, and overall poor food choices.

This resolve directs the Department of Education to examine the role of nutrition and school nutrition programs in the school day and, in their scheduled review of Learning Results Curriculum next year, to develop and

propose amendments to the Learning Results Curriculum that incorporate information on nutrition and food production and its relationship to good health. It further directs the Department to develop and propose an alternative budgeting system, such as possibly a dedicated account, that makes school meals programs a sound investment for local schools.

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LAWS OF MAINE
Second Special Session of the 118th

Resolves

CHAPTER 117

S.P. 542 - L.D. 1661

**Resolve, to Implement the Recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission
on Hunger and Food Security**

Sec. 1. Commission established. Resolved: That the Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger and Food Security, referred to in this section as the "commission," is established.

1. Members. The commission consists of 15 members appointed in September 1999 as follows: one Senator from the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over health and human services matters, appointed by the President of the Senate; 3 Representatives from the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over health and human services matters, appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives; one representative of the Department of Human Services, appointed by the Commissioner of Human Services; and 10 representatives of the general public, including representatives of business, labor, religion, private nonprofit charitable organizations, low-income organizations and agriculture and anti hunger organizations, 4 of whom are appointed by the Governor, 3 by the President of the Senate and 3 by the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

2. Organizational meeting. The commission shall hold an organizational meeting, called by the Chair of the Legislative Council, by December 1, 1999 and shall elect from among the members a chair and a vice-chair for the commission.

3. Duties. The commission shall hold hearings on hunger and food security, which, for the purposes of this section, means access through normal channels to nutrition sufficient for daily life and work, and develop a plan for relieving hunger and ensuring food security for people in the State. The commission shall inquire into the experience of hunger in this State and investigate changes in policies and programs that will enable all citizens of this State to attain food security and to move toward self-reliance. This inquiry must include, but is not limited to, consideration of the reform of public welfare and the role of public and private efforts in achieving food security. The commission shall evaluate the progress of recommendations made by the Blue Ribbon Commission on Hunger and Food Security.

4. Staff assistance. The Department of Human Services and the Executive Department, State Planning Office shall provide research, clerical and computer assistance to the commission.

5. Reimbursement; mileage. The members of the commission who are Legislators are entitled to receive the legislative per diem as defined in the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 3, section 2 and reimbursement for travel and other necessary expenses for attendance at meetings of the commission upon application to the Executive Director of the Legislative Council for those expenses. Other members of the commission are not entitled to reimbursement for expenses.

6. Report. The commission shall submit a report, together with any necessary implementing legislation, to the First Regular Session of the 120th Legislature by December 15, 2001.

7. Funding. The commission may seek outside sources of funding.

Effective July 9, 1998, unless otherwise indicated.

LAWS OF MAINE
First Regular Session of the 120th
Resolves
CHAPTER 63
H.P. 777 - L.D. 1021

**Resolve, Extending the Reporting Deadline for the Maine Millennium
Commission on Hunger and Food Security**

Sec. 1. Resolve 1997, c. 117, §1, sub-§6, amended. Resolved: That Resolve 1997, c. 117, §1, sub-§6, as amended by PL 1999, c. 127, Pt. D, §7, is further amended to read:

6. Report. The commission shall submit ~~a~~ an interim report, together with any necessary implementing legislation, to the First Regular Session of the 120th Legislature by December 15, 2000 and a final report, together with any necessary legislation, to the Second Regular Session of the 120th Legislature by December 5, 2001.

www.state.me.us/spo/hunger/

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