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FOOD FOR LIFE AND WORK THROUGH NORMAL CHANNELS:

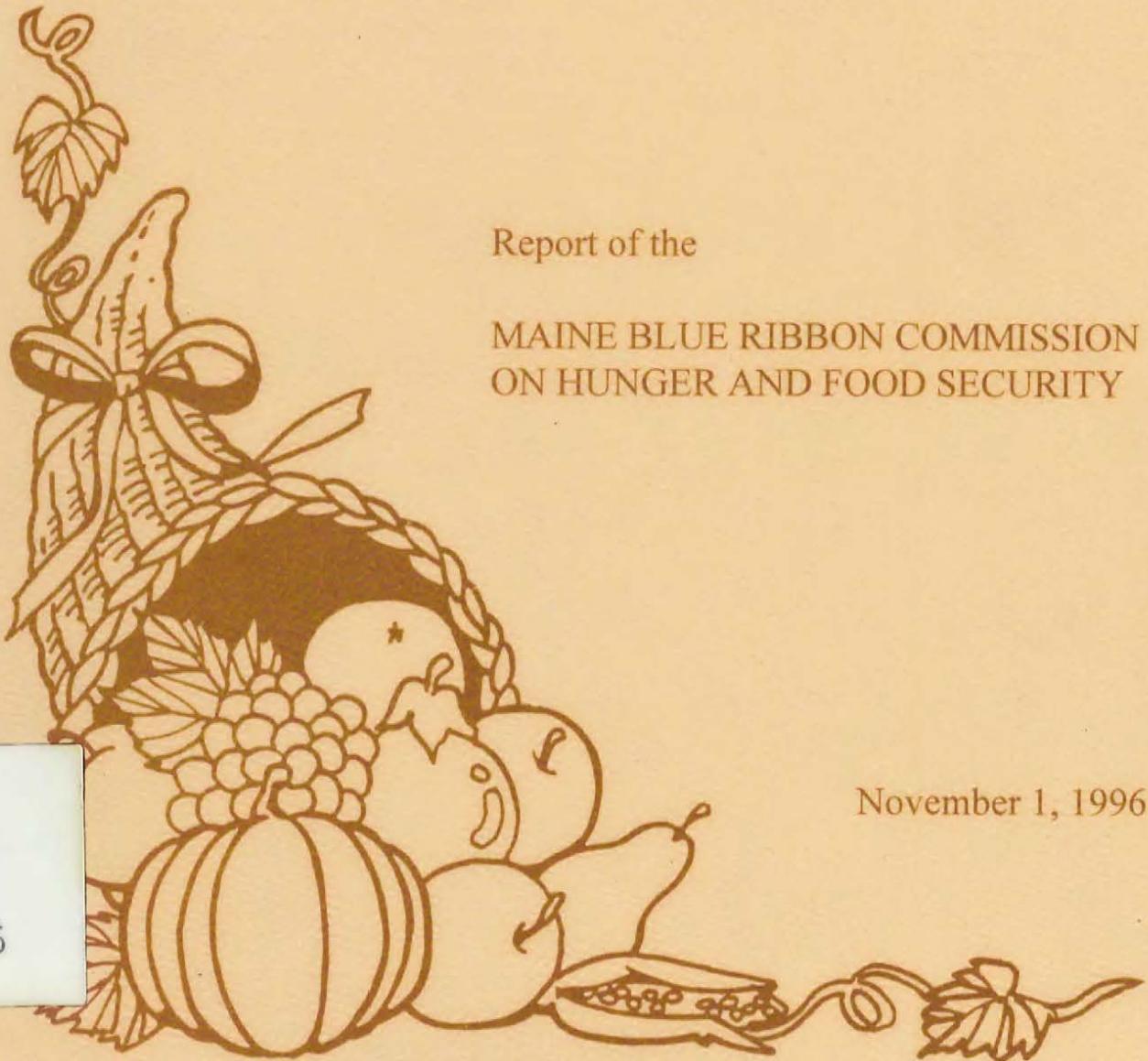
ENDING HUNGER IN MAINE

Report of the

MAINE BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION
ON HUNGER AND FOOD SECURITY

November 1, 1996

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Our Vision for a Hunger Free Maine

Imagine a Maine--- in which every man, woman and child has the opportunity to live a healthy and productive life.....

Imagine a Maine--- in which every child excels in school.....

Imagine Maine Communities and Organizations--- providing an environment of support that enables every resident to live a life which is satisfying and nurturing.....

Imagine Maine People--- mentally and physically productive, regarding themselves and others highly.....

Imagine our State--- healthier, safer, with less crime, less violence, and more economic vitality.....

Imagine a Maine--- in which no child goes to bed hungry, in which no family fears for its next day's bread, in which no human being's future and capacity is stunted by malnutrition.....

This is our vision of a hunger-free Maine. Together we can make it possible.

The Maine Blue Ribbon Commission on Hunger & Food Security
November 1, 1996

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Your questions and comments are welcomed by Commission members and staff.



MAINE BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION ON HUNGER AND FOOD SECURITY

November 1, 1996

The Honorable Jeffrey Butland, Senate President
The Honorable Daniel Gwadowsky, Speaker of the House
117th Maine Legislature
State House
Augusta, Maine 04333

Dear President Butland and Speaker Gwadowsky:

The Blue Ribbon Commission on Hunger and Food Security is pleased to submit its report. Implementing legislation is being prepared and will be provided shortly.

The Commission was established in 1994 by the 116th Maine Legislature for the purpose of developing a plan for relieving hunger in Maine that will ensure food security for all Maine citizens and will enable Maine citizens to move toward self-reliance. The Commission first convened in October, 1995. We have worked diligently during the past twelve months to achieve our assigned purpose. To carry out our work we:

1. gathered data from a wide range of public and private agencies and organizations on issues related to hunger and the conditions that contribute to hunger in Maine;
2. reviewed information related to the activities in Maine of State and federal public programs and key private, voluntary programs engaged in combating hunger;
3. held hearings and public forums in each county in Maine in order to facilitate maximum public input regarding the causes and effects of hunger in Maine, and to identify programs and approaches that are working to reduce hunger for Maine citizens; and
4. solicited and compiled written comments and recommendations from persons experiencing hunger and from other concerned citizens throughout the State.

Our findings present a grim reality in which unnecessary hunger and malnutrition are seriously affecting the life chances of thousands of low-income Maine citizens. Hunger in Maine is real. Hunger and the risk of hunger in Maine have been increasing in recent years. Whether this trend will continue or whether hunger will be replaced by food security for Maine citizens will depend upon continued and expanded public/private partnerships. Replacement of hunger by food security will require difficult, but, we believe, absolutely essential public policy choices.

As sources of federal and State funding shrink, and private sector aid is stretched to the breaking point, it is necessary to reconsider traditional approaches for ameliorating hunger and assisting those in need. We must re-examine, too, the web of factors that contribute to hunger and jeopardize the potential of Maine citizens to achieve food security.

We believe that hunger can be ended and food security ensured for Maine citizens through a combination of adequate income, high quality education, full employment, community and citizen involvement, personal and corporate responsibility, and government support. We believe that the legislative initiatives which we have proposed meet the tests of enhancing self-reliance, relying upon normal channels, fostering human dignity, and offering measurable outcomes.

Implementation of our recommendations will go far toward realizing our vision of a Maine in which no child goes to bed hungry, in which no family fears for its next day's bread, in which no human being's future and capacity is stunted by malnutrition. We look forward to working together with the Legislature and the people of Maine to secure the resources necessary to bring this dream to reality.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William H. Whitaker". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

William H. Whitaker
Chair

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1. Summary of Testimony Presented at Hearings & Written Comments
2. Draft Proposals and Legislation

Acknowledgments

The Commission wishes to express its sincere thanks to the many individuals, organizations, churches, and communities throughout Maine for their generosity and their contributions.

We express our special thanks to the many local organizations that helped organize hearings in their communities, to those concerned enough about the problem of hunger in their communities to come and testify, and to the many Maine citizens who took the time to send written comments.

The work of the Commission was enhanced in countless ways by the excellent support of its staff.

Finally, the Commission expresses its appreciation to the Maine Coalition for Food Security for its support and assistance with mailings, publicity, and information.

Without you, this study would not have been possible.

I.

Introduction

“I was one of those people. I was a single mother with two children and I worked. But I couldn’t make enough to get by. I was so ashamed for years. The poor are isolated in society and are very proud.”

- Rockland

Hunger in Maine is real. It has also been increasing in recent years. As public sources of funding shrink and private sector aid is stretched, we must reconsider the traditional approaches for dealing with hunger and serving those in need, and re-examine the factors that contribute to hunger and that jeopardize the potential for every Maine citizen to achieve food security.

The Blue Ribbon Commission on Hunger and Food Security was established by the 116th Maine Legislature for the purpose of developing a plan for relieving hunger in Maine that will ensure food security for all Maine people and will enable Maine people to move toward self reliance.

The Commission was first convened in October 1995. It has worked aggressively over the past twelve months to achieve its assigned purpose. To carry out its work the Commission gathered data from a wide variety of sources on the issues relating to hunger, and the conditions that contribute to hunger in Maine. We collected information on the activities of state and federal agencies related to food and hunger, and from private entities engaged in combating hunger. Hearings and public forums were held in every county throughout the State to attain widespread public input as to the causes of hunger in Maine and to identify programs and approaches that have worked to reduce hunger for Maine people, and written comments were collected from persons experiencing hunger and other concerned citizens throughout the State.

1. **Commission Approach:**

The presence of hunger in the United States and its effects on U.S. residents have been well documented. The number of people resorting to food pantries and soup kitchens has been steadily increasing. The number receiving food stamps or who are eligible for free and reduced price school lunches has reached an all time high. Repeated studies have shown that hungry children are less

attentive in school and are less effective learners. Sustained hunger, even at a moderate level, has been shown to affect mental development and alertness, physical development, stamina, job performance, and overall health. Poor nutrition during pregnancy is a major cause of infant mortality, premature births, and of birth defects, mental retardation, and low birthweight among newborns. The costs of hunger to individuals and to society are lasting, and are avoidable.

The Commission did not seek to reassess or to dispute these findings. We attempted to:

1. inquire into the experience of hunger in Maine,
2. identify those most at risk of hunger or who are experiencing hunger in Maine,
3. identify the key underlying causes of hunger in Maine,
4. examine the effectiveness of efforts to combat hunger,
5. investigate changes in policies and programs that will lead to a reduction of hunger,
6. consider the reform of public welfare and the role of public and private anti-hunger efforts,
7. present a strategic plan for eliminating hunger in Maine, and
8. make recommendations and propose specific legislation that will lead to the replacement of hunger in Maine with food security for all Maine residents

“The basic problem with the system now in place for meeting the needs of the hungry is that they have to ask first and many won’t.” - Norway

2. Definitions:

The Statute which created the Blue Ribbon Commission on Hunger and Food Security charged the Commission with the task of developing “a plan to relieve hunger and ensure food security for the people of Maine.” The legislation defined Food Security as “access through normal channels to nutrition sufficient for daily life and work.” The legislation also charged the Commission to create a plan that would move Maine citizens toward “self-reliance”.

“The support system that made victory gardens possible has eroded. It is now replaced by food pantries and other types of services that increase dependency.”
- Belfast

The Commission realized early in its deliberations that the definition of Food Security held many components which had different meanings for the Commission members themselves and for the

public. What is sufficient or adequate nutrition? What is access? What are normal channels? What is self-reliance as it relates to hunger? In order to start on common ground the Commission defined these terms as follows:

Access means availability of food to consumers. Specifically, it means having the ability to acquire food, through having adequate financial resources to purchase food and having transportation to places where food is sold.

Sufficient nutrition means a level of food (in quantity and nutritional quality) adequate for daily life and work.

Normal Channels means methods for procuring food which are commonly used by most Maine residents, such as shopping at a supermarket, farm stand or farmers' market, buying direct from a producer, growing a garden, joining a cooperative, etc. It also means being able to choose which food to buy and to pay for it.

Normal channels are ones that meet the following criteria. They must (1) **Be Sustainable** over the long term, as a family's sustained capacity to purchase food, (2) **Give Dignity** to all persons, (3) **Provide Choice**, i.e., people are able to choose the food they eat, (4) **Use a method of transaction** similar to that used by society at large (cash, check, debit card), (5) **Be accessible through the same sources** used by society at large - stores, farmers' markets and farm stands, home gardens, etc., and (6) have **Access that is not limited** by eligibility criteria or other restrictions, i.e., be equally available to all.

Self-Reliance means the ability to rely on one's own resources to obtain food.

3. **Creating a Strategy:**

The Commission recognized, however, that while the ideal situation is for everyone to have enough income to be able to purchase food in a normal manner and the knowledge and information they need to make wise choices, there are always people who have fallen on hard times or who are in transition, such as those between jobs, recovering from illness, etc. In addition some Maine residents are unable to be self-reliant due to age, illness, and infirmity, and will need long term support services to ensure they have an adequate diet. Therefore food security depends upon both transitional services and ongoing services for persons who require them as well as improvements in income and economic opportunity that lead to self reliance. To meet these needs, food security requires improving access to existing sources of food and creating new services which fill gaps in existing services.

The Commission also recognizes that to achieve food security requires the actions of many. Just as there is no single cause of hunger, there is no single cure and no single entity that can be held

accountable or responsible. In its recommendations the Commission has sought to present a comprehensive package and has sought to strike a balance so that responsibility is shared by all. In considering its recommendations, the Commission has chosen those solutions and strategies that offer dignity, permanence and responsibility.

4. Principles for Achieving Food Security in Maine:

“There is no dignity in having to accept a handout. To avoid it people take risks that endanger their health and even their lives.”

-written comment in reference to fishermen going out in bad weather

We are living in a time when attaining the goal of food security and ending hunger for all Maine citizens is not only possible but a moral imperative and a practical necessity. Like a chain that is only as strong as each of its links, Maine will only be as strong and as healthy as each of its people.

A critical first step for achieving this goal is to develop a “framework of thinking” that is consistent with what must be done to achieve food security on a permanent and sustainable basis. The Commission recommends several principles guide us in establishing this new “framework of thinking”:

- * Affect the root causes that allow hunger to persist;
- * Address the issues related to hunger as a whole;
- * Engage with ending hunger as a matter of human empowerment and community;
- * Foster the building of human potential and the capacity for self-reliance;
- * Promote human rights and responsibilities;
- * Enhance human dignity;
- * Generate political and popular commitment for ending hunger;
- * Build public-private partnerships at all levels of society;
- * Provide transitional services for everyone;
- * Identify what it really takes for people to succeed;
- * Specify measurable outcomes;
- * Recognize the importance of patience, compassion, and understanding;
- * Implement actions that produce both immediate short term results and actions that produce long term sustainable results.

The principles defined:

1. Affect the root causes that allow hunger to persist: Hunger is merely a symptom of a much greater need. Feeding someone today will stop hunger for today, but to achieve food security the

persistence of hunger must be stopped as well.

2. Address the issues related to hunger as a whole: There are a variety of conditions and causes that contribute to hunger. They need to be addressed as a whole, not as separate parts. Actions taken to end the persistence of hunger need to be in harmony with each other and implemented as a comprehensive strategy.

3. Engage with ending hunger as matter of human empowerment and community: Achieving food security is not primarily a matter of producing or distributing more food. Ending hunger is a human issue. It is an issue of relatedness. It is an issue of community. It has more to do with how we organize our communities and treat each other as human beings than it has to do with providing food or other physical things.

Ending hunger will require the creativity and productivity of both hungry and non-hungry people, an unleashing of the human spirit. It will take thousands of actions, coupled with hundreds of effective strategies, to create a statewide environment in which all Maine people have access to adequate supplies of nutritious food through normal channels.

4. Foster the building of human potential and capacity for self-reliance: A hunger-free Maine will be possible when the vast majority of its citizens have the opportunity and ability to be self-reliant. People must be the primary actors working on their own self-reliance. Programs must treat people as the solution, not as the problem.

People's ability to express their self-reliance is a function of the opportunities they are provided by their community. The work of ending hunger requires the creation of supportive family and social structures through which people have the opportunities and empowerment they need to build lives of self-reliance. Ending hunger can be achieved by extending this process of human empowerment throughout the State.

5. Promote human rights and responsibilities: Food is necessary to sustain human life. No Maine citizen should be denied a sufficient amount of food to sustain a healthy and productive life. At the same time, people have the responsibility to do all that is within their power to obtain sufficient food through their own legitimate efforts.

6. Enhance human dignity: The highest priority of all programs, whether emergency relief or long term services, should be to enhance human dignity.

7. Generate political and popular commitment for ending hunger: The persistence of hunger is tenacious and tough. It will take an aggressive commitment and a dauntless human spirit to build a hunger free Maine. Generating a strong political and popular commitment will be a key ingredient in having a state with food security and self-reliance realized.

8. Build public-private partnerships at all levels of society: Ending hunger and obtaining food

security must be a priority at all levels of society. No one institution can insure food security. Therefore, it is essential that all relevant institutions, including families, communities, churches, civic organizations, for profit and not-for-profit organizations, businesses, government, and most importantly, hungry people themselves, all work together to see that food security is achieved.

9. Provide transitional services for everyone: Many Maine citizens are no more than a paycheck or two away from hunger and homelessness. There are dramatic and sweeping changes happening in the workplace today. Programs need to be designed and implemented for people in transition. These programs should recognize the responsibility of individuals and should provide training and counseling to support people's transition from one livelihood to another.

For those who are truly unable to provide for themselves, such as some elderly, handicapped, and children, it is imperative that society provide what they need to lead a decent and meaningful life.

10. Identify what it really takes for people to succeed: Programs that give recipients the opportunity to grow and to end their own hunger must adequately address the fundamental impediments, such as lack of access to decent jobs, transportation, education and training, health care and child care, that often prevent a person from succeeding.

11. Specify measurable outcomes: We must be able to measure the progress or lack of progress toward achieving food security. Measurable outcomes are an important component of the programs and services implemented for contributing to ending the persistence of hunger in Maine.

12. Recognize the importance of patience, compassion, and understanding: The road out of the woods is as long as the road into the woods. Transforming Maine into a state whose citizens are self-reliant and able to obtain food through normal means will take time. Ending the persistence of hunger will take a long term commitment.

13. Implement actions that produce both immediate short term results and actions that produce long term sustainable results: Both short and long term actions need to be taken. Some actions, like raising the minimum wage, will provide immediate benefits for people, but will not, by themselves, achieve food security. Other actions, like teaching skills for self reliance, will take longer to produce results, but will provide a foundation for Maine to become a hunger free state on a permanent and sustainable basis.

Part II.
FINDINGS

1. The Nature and Experience of Hunger in Maine

“Hunger is only what shows. Underneath it [hunger] all are joblessness, transportation, lack of wages.” -Machias

Hunger is a symptom of a much bigger problem in our society. It is largely an invisible problem. Pride prevents many from seeking help. Many more fall between the cracks of the services that exist to provide relief.

Many families face a daily struggle to make ends meet. Many are forced to make difficult choices between food and heat, rent, utilities, fixing the car, or medical care. Often food loses.

A 1992 study of hunger among children and their families¹ found hunger and the risk of hunger to be more widespread in Maine than anticipated. It also pointed out the lengths to which families go in order to provide adequate food for their children.

As the Commission traveled to each of Maine’s sixteen counties to hold public hearings, we heard hundreds of stories of pain and suffering, of humiliation, and of the struggle which many face daily as they try to feed their families. The testimony presented at the hearings reinforced the findings of the CCHIP study. It also revealed additional findings, such as rural and urban differences, regional differences, the problems faced by the elderly, infirm, and by able bodied people who are having difficulty finding a stable job and economic security. More importantly, the testimony made it clear that the problems found in 1992 still exist and that ending hunger must be taken seriously if we are to improve the quality of life for all Maine citizens.

¹ A Report on Childhood Hunger in Maine, Maine Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project, May 1993.

“There is a public attitude that the poor deserve to be poor. This attitude is also in the legislature, evidenced in the lack of support for programs that help people move upward.” - Dover-Foxcroft

The voices of Maine’s hungry: Key findings:

1. The presence of hunger in Maine is unnecessary and unacceptable.
2. The causes of hunger in Maine are multiple. There is no single solution.
3. Inadequate household income is the major contributor to hunger in Maine. For some, the cause is lack of work or lack of enough work; for others it is low wages and no benefits; for still others, it is inadequate retirement, disability, or unemployment benefits.
4. Hunger in Maine is still largely a hidden problem in spite of the growing visibility of food pantries and soup kitchens. Pride keeps many people from seeking help.
5. Maine families are often required to chose between heat, medical care and food.

“Most of the people who use our food bank are either underemployed or unemployed. After rent, fuel, lights, there isn’t much left for food.” - Winthrop Food Bank

6. The child care and transportation services needed in order to obtain a better job or to shop more effectively are lacking for many.
7. Rural households are especially disadvantaged because for them prices are higher, there are fewer choices of where to shop within their community and often they lack transportation to larger urban centers.
8. Many Maine families who receive food stamps try to stretch them to cover their entire food purchase for the month, even though food stamps are intended to be supplemental and the national allocation formula does not consider regional variations in diet or food costs. Many feel guilt when they fail and have to turn to food pantries at the end of the month.
9. The number of needy is growing because of changes in the economy. More often the people coming to food pantries are those who have been recently laid off, seen their wages or hours of work

cut, or who have suddenly become unable to work - people who have never sought help before. For them there is no “safety net” to catch and stabilize their situation until they can get back to work or adjust to their new circumstances.

“Most of us believe as told by our parents. Pay the bills that are due first. With what’s left over you get what you need. Back in the ‘40s and 50’s you could afford meat, milk, eggs, bread. Back then you could afford food....and there were no food pantries.”

-written comment

10. As a consequence of changes at the national level, there is a danger that there may be more hunger than in the past.

11. Hunger is not always linked to lack of income to purchase food. Illiteracy prevents people from reading labels, following recipes or comparing prices. Confusion over what is good nutrition exists at all levels of society. Among older citizens living alone, lack of interest, lack of appetite, physical limitations and other circumstances are common factors.

12. There is a resentment of “means tested” services. Many feel humiliated by the questions asked. Others feel insulted by conditions they’re asked to meet, feeling that they’re being judged as not doing enough or as lacking responsibility. Food, they argue, should be offered with compassion and without blame.

“Work requirements are not the answer...What people need most is encouragement.”

- written comment

13. Yet, at the same time, most who receive aid want to give back to the system or service that helped them in a time of great need. They desperately want to contribute.

14. Some of the services and programs available to intervene in hunger have not worked well in Maine. Some follow an urban model that has not been effective in large rural areas. To replace hunger in Maine with food security will require new and more creative approaches.

15. The responsibility for food security has been shifting from government to the private sector.

16. Local food pantries that were once expected to provide occasional emergency supplies of food are now expected to provide ongoing regular food supplies to people who are receiving less government assistance or no government assistance. The volunteers in pantries and soup kitchens are doing Herculean work but are being overwhelmed by the need.

17. There is great concern among the public that programs that have been critical to preventing severe hunger in Maine such as food stamps and the school lunch program are in jeopardy.

18. There is widespread agreement in Maine that hunger is unacceptable and that hunger should be replaced with food security.

19. Maine is a “can do” state in which public/private partnerships at every level of society can be created. Working together, Mainers can ensure -- in the words of the United States delegation to the 1974 World Food Conference -- that in our state “no child will go to bed hungry, that no family will fear for its next day’s bread, and that no human being’s future and capacity will be stunted by malnutrition.”

The data in the pages that follow reveal much about hunger in Maine. But as the above so clearly shows us, Maine people, through their oral testimony and written comments, have told us much more.

2. The Extent of Hunger in Maine

The Commission first examined the extent to which hunger is a problem in Maine and the underlying factors that cause hunger to exist. We found that hunger is widespread among Maine people. We also found hunger to affect people of all ages, in all kinds of family and household settings, and in all walks of life.

Though cases of severe malnutrition are infrequent today, hunger remains a widespread problem in Maine. The most notable recent study of hunger in Maine is the Maine Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project (CCHIP)² conducted under the auspices of the Maine Nutrition Council and the Food Research and Action Center of Washington, D.C. This study was carried out in 1992 and included Maine families from thirty-one communities - a cross section of the State. CCHIP was an exhaustive study of hunger among children under the age of 12. The findings were troublesome and were a key factor that led to the formation of this Commission.

Further analysis by the Commission indicates that hunger and the risk of hunger are still widespread in Maine. The following paragraphs describe the conditions that cause various groups of Maine citizens to be at a greater risk of hunger. The Commission found that not only are there high levels of risk among various groups of Maine residents today, but that future trends and anticipated changes in public policy indicate that the risk of hunger in Maine is likely to increase unless preventative actions are taken.

A. Hungry Children:

"I was a hungry child. My father got polio and couldn't work for several years. Many people today go through long periods without a paycheck."
- Old Town

The CCHIP study focused on childhood hunger. It found that hunger is a major problem and a common experience for all too many of Maine's children. CCHIP found that over 7500 children were hungry and over 31,000 were at risk of hunger. Updated information presents an even more bleak picture for Maine children and their families. A new national CCHIP study released in July,

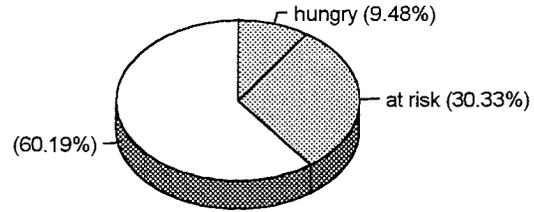
² A Report on Childhood Hunger in Maine, Maine Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project, May 1993.

1995³ reported almost 20,000 Maine children experiencing hunger and an additional 64,000 at risk - 40% of the State's children under age 12.

“Women with children don’t use soup kitchens as much as single men. It’s a matter of transportation, not lack of need....Men can walk, women can’t get there with their children without transportation.”

- written comment from Kennebunk

Children under age 12 in Maine Experiencing or at Risk of Hunger



1990 Census, 1995 update

B. Hungry Adults of Working Age:

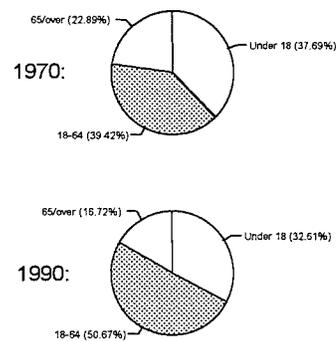
“People’s income doesn’t go far enough for the working low income. There is no system in place to give support as long as one is trying to work.”

- Rockland

Hunger is also a problem for many adults. The CCHIP study documented substantial hunger and poor nutrition among parents. Four out of five households surveyed (79.2%) indicated that they sacrificed for their children either by eating less, skipping meals entirely, or by eating less nutritious foods. Many adults in lower income families are routinely not receiving an adequate diet.

Since the 1970's poverty has increased at a faster pace among working age adults than among any other age grouping. Adults between the ages of 18 and 64 accounted for only 40% of

Persons below the Poverty Line By Age, 1970 and 1990



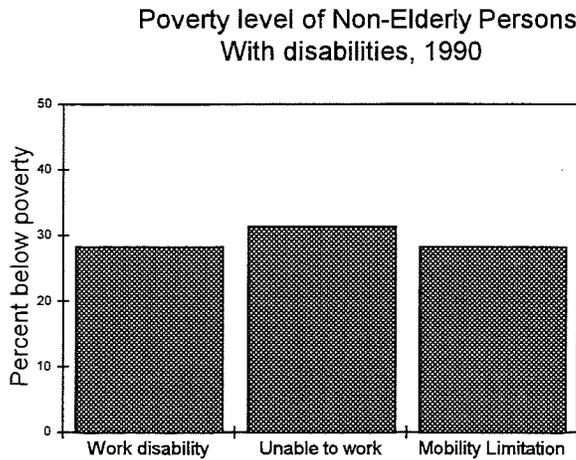
³ Food Research and Action Center, Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project: A Survey of Childhood Hunger in the U.S. , 1995

the poor in 1970. They have grown to 51% of the poor today.⁴

The growing number of working age adults living on incomes below the poverty line is a major concern because most of Maine's low income citizens are found in family units headed by a working age adult and where children are present. Maine's low income population is characterized as working families who either earn low wages or who are underemployed or both. In addition, the population living in poverty in Maine is increasingly made up of single parent families whose capacity to earn an adequate income is diminished by the absence of at least one breadwinner.

C. Disabled Persons:

The 1990 Census found over 80,000 adults between the ages of 16 and 64 with a work disability in Maine. Of these, almost half (39,623, or 5% of Maine's adults under age 65) have a disability that prevents them from working. Another 34,000 are in the labor force, many with the assistance of adaptive equipment, who have retrained, or who have found a job in which their disability is not a problem. In 1989 the poverty rate for working age adults with a work disability was 23.3%. For those unable to work at all, the poverty rate was 31.3%.



For most low income adults with disabilities the main source of income is SSI (Supplemental Security Income). In 1996, 23,000 Maine residents received SSI benefits.⁵ The maximum amount of benefits allowed in 1996 under the SSI program (assuming the recipient has no other income) is \$480 per month for a single person and \$720 for a disabled couple. This amounts to an income of only 56% of the current poverty level for a single person and only 71% of the poverty level for a 2-person household. Most rely on the food stamp program to supplement their SSI income and meet their nutritional needs.

An increasing number of persons of retirement age continue to work today either because they wish to remain active or need to supplement their retirement income. Many are unable to work or are limited by a disability. Of the 154,000 persons age 65 and over, 43,300 (28% of the elderly) have

4

While having an income below the poverty level does not mean that one is hungry, most people today rely on cash income to purchase food. The poverty level is one measure of the number of persons who lack adequate cash income and are hungry or most likely to experience hunger.

⁵ There are also persons with disabilities who receive only social security disability benefits or who have other private income sources, supporting spouses, etc.

a work disability. Most receive Social Security benefits. There are 4,000 low income disabled elderly receiving SSI benefits in Maine today.

D. Persons with Special Needs:

“Food Stamps marks you as a person with problems.”
- Damariscotta

There are other groups of Maine citizens that are also at high risk and have special needs. Persons with mental illness, addictions, certain health conditions, and other problems are often prevented from earning an income adequate to purchase a nutritious diet. Others lack basic living skills such as meal preparation, shopping, budgeting, etc. Most do not own a car or hold a drivers’ license.

In 1990, the Census Bureau began measuring the number of persons with mobility limitations and/or self care limitations for the first time. While some have disabilities so severe as to require institutional care, most live on their own or in family settings. The Census found 15,000 non-elderly persons and 22,000 elderly persons with a mobility limitation who live in normal household settings. Only 3200 are employed. The Census also found 18,361 non elderly Maine residents and 15,448 elderly Mainers with self-care limitations. Often people with disabilities have multiple limitations. Nearly 7,000 adults under age 65 have both a self care and a mobility limitation.

As public policy swings toward community based living for people with special needs, fewer are institutionalized today. Many who have been institutionalized are released after many years of institutionalization and need intense assistance. The number of individuals with special needs and conditions that prevent them from attaining a sufficient income to purchase food or that have limitations that prevent them from purchasing and preparing adequate meals is expected to increase.

E. The Elderly:

“Hunger [among the elderly] is due to lack of money and loneliness.”
- Portland

Too many elderly are at high risk of hunger. Thousands still live below the poverty level or on the brink in spite of reforms to the social security system made in the 1970’s that slowed the rate

of increase in poverty among the elderly. Today poverty among the elderly is rising, especially among older women.

For those able to draw the monthly maximum amount of social security benefits (\$1248 in 1996) their income is at 146% of the poverty level (\$1872 for a retiree with a dependent spouse, or \$1248 each if both have a work history that makes them eligible for maximum benefits). However, most don't receive maximum benefits. For many Maine retirees who have spent their lives working in low wage or seasonal jobs, or women who have interrupted their work career to raise children or taken early retirement to care for a spouse in failing health, benefits are less than the maximum.

Often women face drastic cuts in income when they become widows. Their income is reduced to either their own benefits which reflect their own work history or to the benefit their husband had received. Many women who retire early to care for an ailing spouse fall into poverty because their own benefits are reduced to reflect their early retirement age or they become eligible for only two thirds of their spouse's retirement. For most this means a substantial cut (often as much as half of their former household income) even though their living expenses are not substantially reduced.

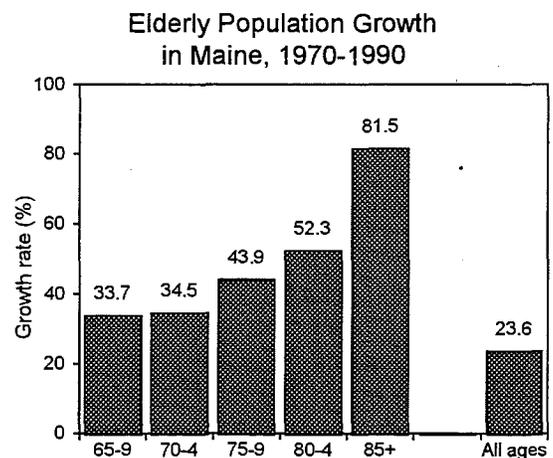
"I wish just once I could get by and have enough food to last me a whole month and the money to buy what I want...But I know it will never happen."

- written comment from an elderly woman in Oxford County.

The elderly are among the fastest growing groups in the Maine population, especially elderly women. Over the past twenty years (1970-1990) Maine's population grew by 23.6%. The number of persons age 65 and over increased by 42.4%. The number over 85 increased by 81.5%. Of the persons age 85 and over in Maine, 75% are women.

In spite of rapid growth in the elderly population, the number of elderly residing in institutions (primarily nursing homes) has remained almost unchanged through the 1980's (climbing only from 9,200 to 9,500 in 10 years). Policies to reduce the number of nursing home patients who do not need constant nursing care have served to reduce the number in nursing homes. Since 1990, the number of persons in nursing home facilities receiving Medicaid coverage has dropped from 8,000 to 6,000.

An additional 1200 elderly resided in boarding homes and other group quarters of a non-institutional nature in 1990. This figure remained



virtually unchanged between 1980 and 1990. But since the 1990 Census was taken, the number of elderly who reside in boarding homes or in congregate housing and “assisted” living arrangements has grown as nursing home residence has declined.

Most of the new housing arrangements are designed to allow their residents to live as individual and independent households. Additional services are provided to ensure the safety of their residents and to assist with certain needs, but those who reside in such quarters are responsible for their own living quarters and for preparing their own meals. As more and more elderly live longer, and more of them live in independent households, the needs of the elderly for assistance with meal preparation, shopping, etc. will grow steadily. The need for assistance will begin to skyrocket around 2010 - 2020 when the post WWII “baby boom” begins reaching retirement age and more and more live into their 80’s and 90’s. Programs that are present today to assist the elderly, primarily congregate meal sites and meals on wheels service for those unable to prepare their own meals or to get out on their own will be woefully inadequate.

F. Rural-Urban Disparities:

“Location is a form of access. If the supermarket moves out to the mall, people no longer have access.” - Rockland

Maine citizens with the greatest level of need and with the lowest incomes are concentrated in the State’s most rural regions and in the inner cities of Maine’s largest urban places, while, increasingly, services are located in shopping malls on the outskirts of the city in suburban locations.

Many low income persons lack adequate transportation to travel to larger shopping destinations where they have more choice and are likely to find a better price. Many of our older citizens are no longer able to drive. Yet the trend toward malls as a standard environment for consumer activity has penetrated every corner of the State. The creation of malls assumes a mobile society in which the auto is standard equipment for every household. It does not take into account the State’s many households with limited incomes who do not have cars or who have cars that are undependable.

Access to services is greatly limited by the rural nature of the State. Rural residents have fewer choices of where to shop in the attempt to stretch their money further. There are fewer services available in rural areas. Prices are often higher. The cost of transportation and the time required to reach larger urban places that offer more options often make savings negligible.

“...energy costs make shopping for sale items difficult. People have to travel to several stores to get the lowest prices and that uses expensive gas.” - Orland

Distance and sparse population are major barriers to commerce and to service deliverers alike. Even though over half of the State’s population lives near the I-95 Corridor, most Mainers live in small towns. Maine is the third most rural state in the nation according to the Census Bureau, with 55.4% of its population residing outside of metropolitan areas. Maine is the only state that has become increasingly more rural since 1970.

It was argued by some who testified before the Commission that the nation’s models for addressing hunger and other human needs are urban models that don’t work well in a large rural state. For example, the summer meals program is underutilized in all except the largest Maine municipalities because the meals are usually offered in conjunction with urban recreation or summer camp programs where large numbers of children are present. Rural children are separated over great distances when school is out of session, making these programs more difficult to implement.

Urban residents also face problems obtaining access to affordable sources of food. As younger populations fled to the suburbs, urban downtowns suffered and services declined, leaving many low income and elderly downtown residents to shop for major needs at high-priced convenience stores because they lack transportation to outlying commercial districts. Participants at the Rockland hearing said the location of supermarkets and other needed services is an access issue. They encouraged the community and the State to develop ways to support stores that provide essential services in downtown areas and in parts of the community where large concentrations of elderly or low income persons reside.

3. Factors that Contribute to Hunger in Maine

The Commission's investigation turned up many reasons that cause hunger to persist. The causes of hunger are complex. The testimony of Maine citizens at the public hearings held throughout the State make it clear that there is no single cause nor is there a single solution. For most, the problems are economic - lack of an adequate income to meet basic needs. For others, the problem is lack of access, lack of information, lack of education about nutrition and consumerism, loneliness and loss of appetite, and a myriad of other needs.

A. Underlying economic conditions that affect income

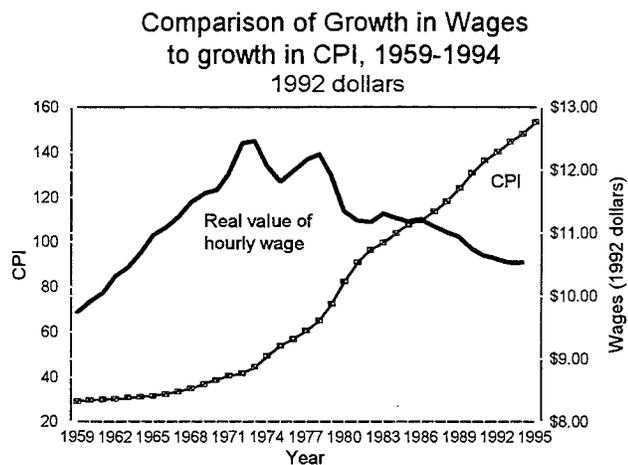
"Our current economy is destroying our families and our youths. We won't need as many programs if we start with the fundamentals."
- Dover-Foxcroft

There are several major trends in the economy of Maine and the nation that contribute to the problem of hunger in Maine. These and their impact on hunger in Maine are described briefly below.

1. The cost of living (i.e., the cost of food, energy, medical care, etc.) has been outpacing income growth.

Though inflation has slowed in comparison to the high rates of inflation seen in the past decade and has held at a modest 2.5-2.6% per year over the past 3 years, growth in wages and other forms of income (earnings, SSI, Social Security, public assistance programs, etc.) have lagged further behind. Real gains in income made in the 1950's and 1960's have eroded steadily since the mid 1970's.

In 1982, U.S. Dept. of Labor figures show that the average hourly earnings for



Maine wage and salary workers was \$7.68. By 1994 wages had increased to an average of \$11.12 per hour, but after inflation, the 1994 earnings were worth only \$7.40 - 28 cents less than the hourly earnings twelve years earlier. The average Maine family is finding that its money does not go as far today.

Prior to recent action by Congress to increase the minimum wage to \$4.75 per hour, the minimum wage not changed since it was set at \$4.25 in 1991. The minimum wage has been declining in real value since the 1960's. In 1969 the minimum wage was \$1.60 per hour. When inflation is accounted for, the \$1.60 earned in 1969 would have bought \$6.12 worth of goods and services (in 1992 dollars), while the current minimum wage of \$4.75 will buy only \$4.26 worth of goods.

It takes an hourly wage of \$5.31 to earn an income equivalent to 100% of the poverty level for a household with two persons today. Even with the increase in minimum wage, a household containing more than one person that must rely on a minimum wage job would still be below the poverty line. If the rate of inflation continues at its present pace, a minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour in 1997 will provide a family of two an income equal to only 94% of the federal poverty level. The income of a full time year round worker earning minimum wage will fall \$5,300 short of the 1996 poverty line for a family of four and will purchase 15% less than did a worker earning minimum wage during the 1970's.

Table 1.
Comparison of Minimum Wage Levels to the Poverty Rate
By Size of Household, 1996 and 1997*

At \$4.75 per hour in 1996:

Household Size:	Poverty Level	Minimum Wage as a Percent of the <u>Poverty Level</u>	Minimum Wage needed to reach <u>Poverty Level</u>
1	\$ 7,930	124.6%	\$4.05
2	\$10,230	96.3%	\$5.31
3	\$13,160	75.1%	\$6.81
4	\$15,570	63.5%	\$8.06

At \$5.15 per hour in 1997:

Household Size:	Poverty Level	Minimum Wage as a Percent of the <u>Poverty Level</u>	Minimum Wage needed to reach <u>Poverty Level</u>
1	\$ 7,918	126.1%	\$4.10
2	\$10,632	93.9%	\$5.50
3	\$13,345	74.8%	\$6.91
4	\$16,059	61.2%	\$8.31

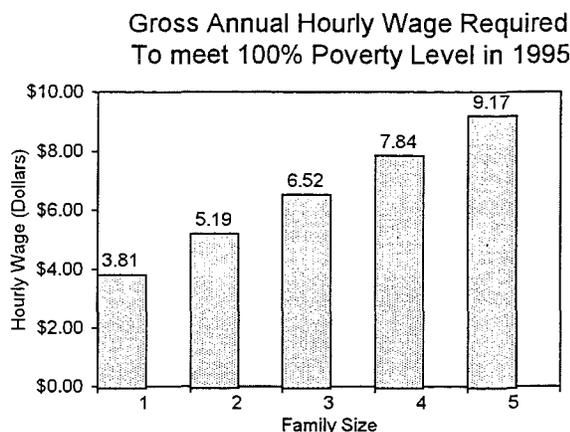
*1997 estimated. Adjusted from 1995 based on assumed rate of inflation of 3%/year.

“We should stop talking about the “minimum wage” and start talking about a “living wage.”

- Rockland

Although Maine wages on average are above the minimum wage, studies⁶ have shown that many of those who do earn minimum wage are household heads with families. A study conducted by the Bureau of Labor Education at the University of Maine in Orono found that 69% of those earning minimum wage in Maine are adults 20 years of age or older.

Additionally, in many low income families, the earnings of youths contribute significantly to the household income.⁷



“A lot of people don’t know how to read. Teens leave school to support the family....”

-Machias

Persons who must rely on public assistance programs such as SSI or AFDC live on income at levels substantially below the poverty level. As noted earlier, the value of SSI benefits to the disabled is less than 75% of the federal poverty level. AFDC benefits amount to less than a third of the poverty level. A single mother with one child receives a maximum of \$312 per month, equal to only 30.8% of the income required to bring a 2-person household up to 100% of the federal poverty level. Individuals and families for whom such benefit programs are the sole source of income face severe poverty. Food stamps, public transportation services, subsidized or public housing, and other programs help, but do not fill the gap.

Though Social Security benefits have been indexed to the rate of inflation since the 1970’s, rising costs of Medicaid, companion plan health insurance programs, and the cost of medications not covered by these programs have substantially reduced the amount of income available to the elderly for other living expenses. These trends, coupled with the sudden reduction in income of older women who become widowed, have served to increase the risk of hunger among the elderly.

⁶ “What’s Important to Know about the Minimum Wage”, Bureau of Labor Education, University of Maine, Orono, Maine, Sprint, 1995.

⁷ Maine State Planning Office, Poverty in Maine, 1970-1980.

2. For the last two decades, there has been a widening income gap between rich and poor.

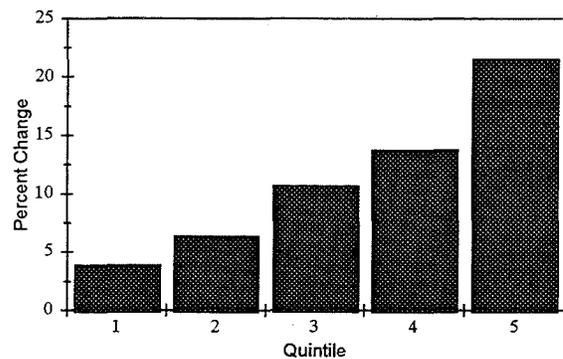
Though Maine's poverty rate generally reflects the national average, Maine has a smaller proportion of severe poverty than most other states. Maine has a larger population living at or slightly above the poverty line. These Mainers are working but simply don't earn enough to attain an adequate level of income to meet their basic needs.

In 1990, the bottom fifth of the workers in Maine with full time employment earned an average of \$9,630 each while the top fifth earned an average of \$41,213. When all sources of cash income are considered, the bottom fifth of the households in Maine has only 4% of the total state income while the top fifth has 46%.

Compared to 1980, the gap is widening. Income grew by only 3.8% for the bottom one fifth of Maine households between 1979 and 1989 while the top fifth of Maine households saw income rise by 21.5%. Census surveys

conducted annually since the 1990 census show continued growth in the gap during this decade.

GROWTH IN FAMILY INCOME
BY QUINTILE, 1979-89, MAINE



The recession that began in 1990 deeply affected the income of Maine residents. Personal income in Maine has grown more slowly than the national average. The U.S. Survey of Current Business recorded a growth in total disposable personal income in Maine of 4.3% compared to 5.9% nationally between 1989 and 1994. Maine's ranking in per capita income fell from 22nd in 1989 to 32nd in 1994.

3. There is high level of underemployment in Maine.

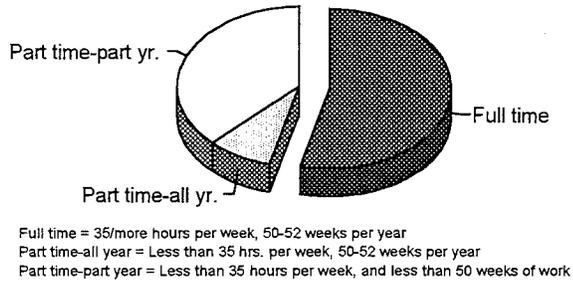
“Seasonality is our best asset -- and worst.”

-Machias

According to the 1990 census, almost half (47%) of Maine adults who worked in 1989 were employed in a job, or in a series of jobs that, combined, offered less than 35 hours a week and and/or less than 50 weeks of work. Maine's economy has typically had a high level of seasonal flux, especially in rural areas and along the coast where tourism is an important part of the economy. In addition, there is a growing number of jobs that offer only part time work.

The problem of finding enough work to go throughout the year was cited in testimony from nearly every county, but is clearly a much greater concern to those living in more rural areas. While some find enough work to carry them through the seasons, most experience gaps in income at various times throughout the year.

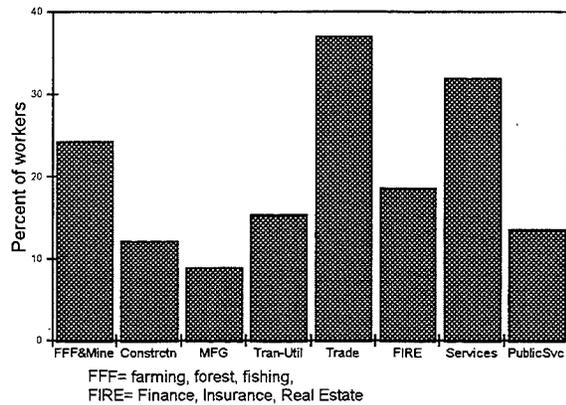
Amount of Employment in 1989
Persons in Labor Force with Earnings



“Washington County’s jobs are like migrant work but the laborers don’t migrate, the jobs do.”
- Machias

A growing number of Mainers are employed in jobs that are part time, i.e., jobs that offer less than 35 hours of work per week on a year round basis. Many of these jobs are found in the retail trade sector of the economy. Many retail jobs are also seasonal and are associated with the tourism trade. The 1990 census indicates that 22% of those in Maine who worked in 1989 (over 150,000 people) worked full time but for only a portion of the year. These people experience varying periods of involuntary unemployment.

Underemployment by Industry, 1990
Percent working less than 35 hrs/wk



4. Official unemployment figures do not reflect the actual number of Mainers who need work.

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that the official unemployment rate reflects only 40% of the actual number of people out of work. In addition to those who are receiving unemployment benefits or who have registered with the Employment office in search of work, there are many others who have exhausted their benefits and have given up looking, who are working occasionally and don’t work enough to qualify for benefits, or who find temporary work for long periods of time

without finding a steady job. Others move in and out of the labor force on a seasonal basis because nothing else is available to them during the off-season. Still other groups, such as those who receive AFDC benefits are not considered as members of the labor force even when employed part time or seeking employment.

Many others, primarily women, are forced to leave their jobs due to the lack of child care or of affordable child care. Lack of transportation or unreliable transportation is also a major reason that many low income workers are forced to “voluntarily” quit their jobs.

Census figures show that the number of persons in Maine who report periods of joblessness during the year is twice as high as the average unemployment rate for the year.

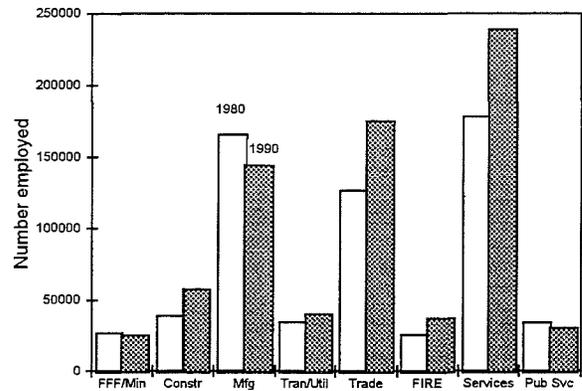
5. The structure of the economy is changing. Since the 1970’s, job growth has been concentrated in low wage occupations and industries.

Maine’s economy has shifted from a goods producing economy to a trade and service economy. Manufacturing jobs, considered to be full time steady employment for most, made up 30% of the jobs in Maine in 1970. By 1990 they had declined to only 18%.

Continued losses are occurring in the 1990’s primarily due to downsizing in the defense industry nationally. One in nine jobs (11%) in Maine was directly tied to the defense industry in 1989 (associated with military installations in Maine or in factories that produced goods for the nation’s defense).

Studies show that by 1994 only 8% of the jobs in Maine were derived from defense related activities⁸.

Employment by Industry, 1980 and 1990



This general trend has been exacerbated by the recession that began in 1990 during which 6% of Maine’s jobs were lost, and the continued downsizing of larger firms and mass layoffs, in spite of improvements in other economic indicators. In spite of the continued restructuring, Maine has recovered nearly all of the jobs lost during the recession. However, the new jobs that have replaced them are not as good as the ones lost. People are back to work but most are earning less and have fewer benefits.

⁸ Maine State Planning Office, “A Defense Adjustment Action Plan for Maine, Report of the Task Force on Defense Realignment and the Maine Economy”, March, 1993, and update prepared by Planning Decisions, Inc., 1996.

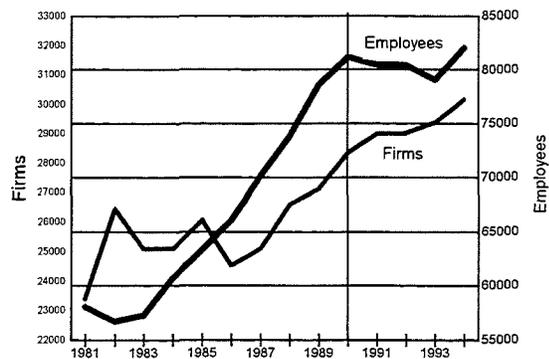
Most new jobs are in service and trade sectors, industries that typically hire the greatest number of part time employees. Both the Maine State Planning Office and the Maine Department of Labor project⁹ that the trend will continue. The largest number of job openings is expected to be for waiters and waitresses, at 754 jobs per year. The average hourly wage for waiters and waitresses is only \$5.19.

Table 2
Occupations with the Largest Number
of anticipated job openings between 1992 and 2005

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Annual Openings</u>	<u>Due to Growth</u>	<u>Due to Replacement</u>
Waiters/waitresses	754	242	512
Retail salespersons	739	263	476
Cashiers	656	154	502
Nurses aides and orderlies	514	394	120
Registered nurses	396	248	148
Food preparation workers	324	149	175

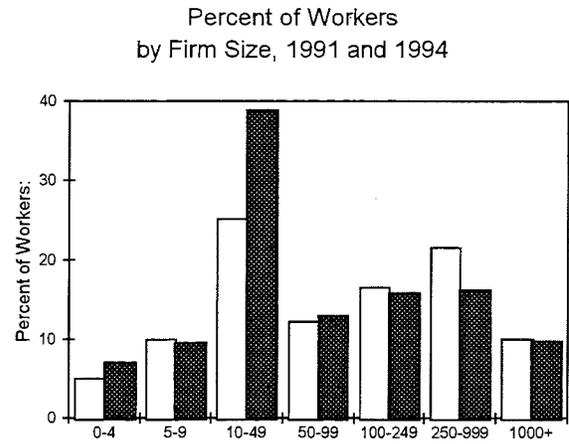
Most of the new jobs are being created today are created by small firms. Though not exclusively the case, small firms typically have fewer resources and offer lower wages and fewer benefits. In 1994, the average wage of a worker in a small firm (under 10 employees) was only 55% of that of large firms (i.e., firms with 500 or more employees).

Firms with less than 10 Workers
Maine, 1982-1994



⁹ Maine Department of Labor, Employment Projections for all Occupations in Maine, 1992-2005, Supplement. See also, Maine State Planning Office, Long Range Economic Forecast, December, 1993.

The trend toward corporate downsizing is also contributing to the trend toward smaller firms. As firms restructure and downsize, many employees are forced to accept lower wages and benefits in exchange for job security. Concern about the trend toward fewer benefits was widely expressed among attendees at the Commission's hearings.



B. Non-Income Conditions Leading to Hunger

Hunger is not always linked to lack of income to purchase food. In addition to the ability of an individual or family to earn an adequate income to provide for the daily needs of the household, there are many other barriers to ending hunger in Maine. Some are the result of our changing society, the changing structure of the food industry, and the role of public policies that affect food supply and food prices. Others relate to the need for more consumer information and to greater investment in human capital.

1. Changing demographic profile and changing lifestyles:

There are more people who need assistance with basic needs today. As Maine's population ages, there will be an increasing number of elderly who can no longer drive, who can't prepare meals on their own, and who are lonely and suffer from lack of interest and loss of appetite.

“The elderly don't eat right because they are bored and alone. It's not a matter of money. A social response is called for. We need to understand the social function of food.”
- Belfast

Consumers of all ages face many obstacles that prevent them from providing adequate nutrition for themselves and their families. These result, primarily, from changing lifestyles and social change. Fresh produce from all corners of the planet is available all year in the supermarkets. People no longer spend hours processing and storing foods from their gardens for the winter months. Much of this knowledge is lost to younger adults. As American households have come to depend on the microwave, pre-packaged foods and instant mixes, the knowledge of how to prepare food from scratch has lessened.

Our homes look very different today. Not only is the microwave a prominent appliance in many kitchens, but our homes are not designed for food preservation and storage. Homes and apartments are often small and lack space for a freezer or for storing canned goods. Many low income homes in Maine even lack a decent stove, refrigerator, or water supply. Bulk purchasing, especially of perishable food items in season, therefore, is not an option for many.

“We need help to stretch time as well as dollars...”
- Old Town, mother who worked, attended school and raised a small child

Many people spoke to the commission of a lack of time to prepare meals or to preserve and store food. Today two thirds of Maine families have two wage earners and there are a growing number of single parents juggling work and family with little or no help.

The effects of changing life styles and their impact on everyday household activities such as feeding the family was reflected in conflicting ideas about how hunger should be addressed. There were suggestions that the poor should do more to be self-reliant. Yet others indicated a feeling that a double standard exists in which society expects the poor to cook from scratch, can and freeze vegetables, maintain a garden, etc. while it is acceptable for middle income people to buy processed foods that can be quickly microwaved. In fact, they argued, the poor may have less time for meal preparation and related activities because other tasks require more time and more arranging. For example, doing the family laundry is a simple task in a middle income home with a washing machine, and shopping is convenient if one has a good car. But for the poor who must arrange for a ride, arrange child care, and engage in a host of other preparatory tasks simply to get to the grocery store or to the laundromat, far greater energy and time is required.

2. Changing systems for access:

Many persons who spoke at the public hearings lamented the loss of the options for obtaining food that used to be more prevalent in Maine. They believe that alternative channels for accessing food have become fewer and more difficult to find.

Faced with limited income, many Maine households have sought other ways to meet their needs. They clip coupons, shop at liquidation stores or places where they can purchase bulk quantities, buy direct from producers, raise gardens, hunt, fish, and glean from farmers' fields. Yet there is a widespread fear that these options, too, may be only temporary.

“...more help and information on ways to plan and stretch the food dollar. Families are planning better today than in the past but they still come up short.”
- written comment

Citizens express concern that there is a decline in the availability of alternatives for accessing low cost food. There are fewer farms, food cooperatives, and fewer supermarkets that will mark down food in the store rather than donating it all to a charity in order to benefit from a charitable contributions deduction on income taxes.

Others noted the loss of farmland, the lack of adequate land use planning to ensure that farming can continue, and the lack of coordinating mechanisms or linkages to connect urban consumers to rural producers and other sources.

Finally, others expressed concern about the lack of information networks to let people know where to find bargains, lack of transportation to stores, and increasing distance to larger stores where discounts are greater as such stores relocate to suburban areas.

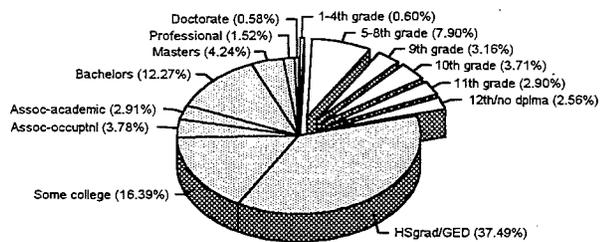
3. Illiteracy.

Illiteracy contributes to hunger in Maine because it prevents people from reading labels, following recipes, or comparing prices. Illiteracy rates in Maine are too high and unacceptable.

Literacy/illiteracy is defined in several ways. The National Adult Literacy Survey (1995) defines literacy as “Ability to read, write, and speak in English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential.”¹⁰

Persons with less than 8 years of formal education are considered to be functionally illiterate. The Maine Department of Education considers anyone without a high school diploma to be lacking in skills that enable them to function effectively in society.

Educational Attainment of Maine Adults
Age 25 and over, 1990



Nearly a quarter of Maine adults age 25 and over lack a high school diploma or GED. Almost one in ten have gone no further than the eighth grade. The number of persons with low educational attainment increases with age and is more prevalent in rural regions where access to educational opportunities has historically been less.

“Education is important. Low income people have low self esteem, Many cannot read so they cannot read recipes. They’re reluctant to go to classes and admit they cannot read.” - Orland

¹⁰ National Adult Literacy Survey, 1995.

4. Great need for consumer information:

“We should assume that everyone [not just the poor] could benefit from nutrition education and information...” - Old Town

Confusion over what is good nutrition is widespread. There are several reasons the average consumer is confused. Recent actions by government such as replacing the “basic four” with the food pyramid require re-education of consumers. Revised labeling standards make it easier to compare foods but people need to know what items are important to compare. The many new terms create confusion because they are not well explained - anti-oxidants, electrolytes, “good” and “bad” cholesterol, etc. And, there is a large volume of information in the media about new products, “wonder” foods, and substitutes for normal nutrition such as cereals and beverages that are presented as total nutrition and can be consumed in place of or in addition to eating a balanced meal. Together, these many changes and developments make it difficult for most consumers to select the food items best for their needs.

Consumers are interested in information on how to read labels. They need to know how to make price comparisons (some stores post price comparisons; others do not). Many are interested in consumer tips, such as information on what are nutritious foods, good buys, where to go to find food at a bargain, etc. Others wish for more knowledge of how to prepare or store food.

5. Changing sense of “Community”:

“The community has a role in helping to change lifestyles.”

- Belfast

“There is a lack of support for each other. People are more isolated than ever in their own communities.”

- Dover-Foxcroft

It is common today for people to live and work and shop in very different places. We are a highly mobile society. Our “community” no longer ends at the municipal boundary¹¹ and our sense of community is perhaps both more global and yet more detached at the same time. Typically the community offered the first base of support beyond the family - for educating children, teaching values, morals, sense of worth, a work ethic, etc. There is a growing feeling that these functions are

¹¹ Maine Rural Development Council, Economic & Social Conditions and Trends in Rural Maine, prepared by the Maine State Planning Office, January 1995. See also, Maine State Planning Office, “The Costs and Impacts of Development Patterns in Maine, Interim Report”, August, 1996.

lessened today.

“We assume community where there is no community. There are groups of individuals, not communities. In a community, the community informs us of what it wants to do rather than us doing something and expecting others to get on board.” - Brooks

Many persons at the public hearings advocated for the community to take a compassionate role toward its needy. Some believe that services can be delivered more efficiently at the community level because local people know each other and can make sure that those in need of aid can get it. Others disagreed, arguing that pride keeps people from seeking help locally for fear of being judged by their neighbors or of revealing their plight to others in the community. Instances of people traveling great distances to shop so their neighbors would not see them using food stamps or going to the food pantry in another town were cited at nearly every hearing. Those citing these problems believe there must be major changes in the community before such programs could be successful.

“People that are really hurting are the ones that don’t come to the food pantries. In rural areas pride holds them back, but it is also easier to know who needs it. We need to give them more local support.” - Caribou

There is also a growing sense of the need to re-build the community and re-establish the support functions that once are believed to have been present. A lengthy discussion of the changing role of the community and the loss of “community” occurred at the public hearing held in Brooks. Those present advocated linking community and economy, suggesting that in the past the economy focused on providing for the community needs rather than on the shortcomings of the individual. Today, in contrast, individuals are on their own and the role of the community to give support has weakened. They advocated that Maine needs to train community builders.

“A community garden is a tool for bringing people together to learn more about how to overcome hunger.” - Belfast

4. The Food System: What's available now?

There is no doubt that food is a major part of our culture, beyond being a basic necessity. People access food in a number of ways. Normal channels in Maine include over 1500 food outlets such as supermarkets, convenience stores and places where you can pick up bread and milk for supper while filling the family car with gas. These numbers are supplemented by countless vending stands, especially in the warmer months. Some people also get at least some of their food through co-ops, military commissaries, milk and bread routes or at communal dining centers.

Food plays an important part in activities year round. The bases of Maine's ski resorts are populated with a variety of restaurants. Food concession stands are one of the mainstays of festivals, fairs, and summer events. Medical institutions and group living arrangements provide meals as a part of their service. Even so, the problem of access to the least expensive, good quality food varies by geography as does the ability to get people to the food (or to get the food to the people).

At our public hearings, many people mentioned their dependence on food salvagers (stores which buy slightly damaged or out of date foods) for much of their food purchases. Others, especially persons living in rural areas, lamented that savings by purchasing food at these types of stores were off-set by the cost of transportation to get to them.

Mainers also provide for themselves. Gardening is popular with the people of Maine whether they have a small plot of land or use containers to grow a few vegetables. Some who live in rural areas even have a few livestock or chickens to supplement their purchased food. Fishing and hunting in Maine continue to be popular, although few depend on wildlife for more than a diversion from purchased food.

Farm stands and farmers' markets exist throughout the State. In addition, many purchase food direct from local farms. Agriculture in Maine is a \$500 million business. In 1992 the USDA estimated 5776 commercial farms in Maine. The State Department of Agriculture estimates that in 1994, there were 7,600 working farms in the State. The number of small farms has been increasing in Maine in recent years.

Although there are a number of government programs which consider the cost of food in their benefits (such as subsidized housing), most programs which provide direct food benefits or the means to obtain food are administered at the federal government level by the

Department of Agriculture. During its deliberations, the Commission heard from staff which administer these programs and people who use them. The major food programs include:

- Food Stamps. Begun in 1961 and expanded in 1964, the Food Stamp program serves 62,000 households each month in Maine. The program provides a coupon which can be used to purchase food, including food seedlings. Stamps can be used at retail food stores, farmers' markets, and other establishments approved by the federal government.
- Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). The WIC program provides a voucher allowing low income pregnant and postpartum women as well as infants and children under age 5 to purchase specific brands of approved foods such as milk, juice and cereal at retail stores. Participants are also given vouchers which can be used at farmers' markets. The purpose of the program is to improve the health of participants by providing supplemental food and nutritional education. WIC serves 27,222 people in Maine each month.
- National School Lunch Program. The NSLP provides foods and financial reimbursement to schools and residential child care institutions which provide lunches for children. In 1995, 16,883,013 meals in this, the School Breakfast Program and the Summer Food Service Program were provided to Maine's youngsters, many at free or reduced cost.
- School Breakfast Program. The School Breakfast program also provides free or reduced cost meals to low income youngsters. This program is not as common in Maine as the School Lunch Program but does provide a nutritious meal for many Maine youngsters.
- Summer Food Service Program. The Summer Food Service Program provides funding for a noon meal during the summer school vacation. All meals are provided free of charge with the federal government reimbursing the organizations which provide them. This program is an integral part of some municipal recreation programs and serves 47 sites.
- Nutrition Program for the Elderly. This program provides Meals-on-Wheels and congregate meals to Maine's elderly each month. The federal government provides commodity foods and cash to the State which, in turn, contracts with local agencies to provide the meals.
- Commodity Distribution to Charitable Institutions and to Soup Kitchens and Food Banks. This program provides surplus commodities and some purchased foods to non-profit agencies which feed low income individuals.
- Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP). EFAP used to be a major supplier of commodities, both surplus and purchased, to food pantries. Recently, however, funding has been cut and food supplies significantly reduced. The program is recognized by the federal government as a means of distributing surplus commodities and still maintains that responsibility.

In addition, there are a number of ways available currently to supplement income from wages to enable people to access food. Among these are the Earned Income Credit for Federal taxes, subsidized housing, Medicaid, Unemployment Compensation, subsidized child care, Workers' Compensation, loans for post secondary education, welfare benefits, and other government and non government grants.

Several communities and agencies throughout Maine have developed innovative programs which can be used as models for other groups. Some, which came to the attention of the Commission during its studies demonstrate the diverse approaches taken by Maine people to meet their food security needs. The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association Head Start Community Gardens Project, which originally began as an opportunity for Head Start students and their families to raise their own food, has grown to involve low income persons of all ages. MOFGA members and Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners worked together to develop gardens enhanced by donations from seed companies, manure, tilling and other needed services and items. Families have been introduced to new vegetables and bettered their nutritional intake because of their involvement. They have met and worked cooperatively with neighbors.

East End Kid's Katering, a subsidiary corporation of the East End Children's Workshop, began in 1992 to provide affordable, nutritious meals to child care centers and other human service organizations in the Portland community. East End Kid's Katering also sponsors the USDA summer food program in the Portland area serving over 1,200 meals to children under the age of 18 during the summer months.

A third program, Heifer Project International, provides livestock, training, and technical support for families throughout the world. Using groups organized at the local level, the organization is currently active in 34 countries. Local groups develop plans to use HPI expertise and assist in fund raising so that the group can be self sustaining at the end of a few years. Individuals and families helped through the project are expected to provide one or more female offspring of the livestock they receive to another family participating in the project. Technical assistance is available to the group even after HPI's financial role is ended.

SHARE offers yet another approach. It consists of local groups affiliated with a New England and national coalition which provides monthly about \$30 worth of preselected foods for \$14 plus 2 hours of community service. The program began as a means of getting individuals involved in volunteer work with their community, using low cost food as an incentive. It has become a major source of nutrition for a number of people throughout Maine and the nation.

Many of Maine's low income individuals and families have access to emergency food through the 165 food pantries, 45 soup kitchens, 53 on-sight feeding facilities, and 15 shelters located throughout Maine. Many of these facilities have an informal network of food exchanges which involve the importation and distribution of food from out-of-state to the various pantries.

However, in spite of the many options for purchasing food and the many services and programs that provide food or increase access to food, many Maine families go hungry. Many simply fall between the cracks, lacking adequate income to purchase the food they need

for a healthful diet while not qualifying for (or being too proud to seek) programs and services that help to fill the gap.

PART III:

Action Plan for Food Security in Maine

Because there are multiple causes of hunger in Maine, a plan to replace hunger with food security must be multi-faceted and comprehensive. There is no single solution to the challenge of persistent hunger. The Commission has identified eight cornerstones for a strategy to replace hunger with food security in Maine. They are:

1. Adequate income
2. High quality education
3. Full employment
4. Community involvement
5. Citizen participation
6. Personal responsibility
7. Corporate responsibility
8. Government support

This section of our report presents our recommendations for public and voluntary actions related to these cornerstones. Taken together, we believe these actions provide the basis for ending hunger in Maine and ensuring that all Maine residents have access through normal channels to the quantities of nutritious food sufficient for daily life and work.

In preparing a strategy for achieving food security, the Commission considered the need for immediate actions and for long term changes that will lead to permanent and sustainable declines in hunger. We have sought to present a comprehensive approach that addresses the complex web of conditions that contribute to hunger in Maine. We call upon all sectors of society -- government at all levels, business, service agencies, religious communities, farmers and others throughout the food production and distribution system, and upon every citizen of Maine to act in concert to replace hunger with food security.

We believe our recommendations meet the tests of enhancing self-reliance, relying upon normal channels, restoring human dignity, and offering measurable outcomes. While not every commissioner agrees with every specific recommendation, all of us are committed to the strategy which we have proposed for ending hunger and enhancing food security in Maine.

Recommendations of the Commission are separated into those that require action of the Maine Legislature and those that can be implemented without changes in law. A third section reports additional proposals derived from testimony heard by the Commission at the public hearings we conducted in every Maine county. They include many interesting ideas which we have not had time to consider and develop fully. We report them as food for thought which may be developed into actions in the future as Maine continues to work on its commitment to ensure food security for all Maine residents.

A. Proposals for State Legislation

Hunger is most often, although not always, a direct result of inadequate income. In Maine we expect those who are able and who have access to appropriate jobs to earn their livelihoods through work. Those who cannot work because of age, or physical or mental infirmity, or because jobs paying a liveable wage are unavailable should have their needs met adequately and with dignity. For some who cannot achieve self-reliance through work, the condition is temporary. Transitional support must be provided through which self-reliance can be achieved. For others, age or infirmity make the achievement of self-reliance unrealistic. They require permanent support.

In recent years the numbers of well-paying blue collar and white collar jobs in Maine have been reduced substantially. Newly created jobs which have replaced them pay less well. As a consequence, economic security has been undermined as Maine families have lost their livelihoods, their benefits, and their sense of security. If we expect people to achieve self-reliance through employment, full-time, year-round work should provide a more adequate foundation of economic security.

Therefore, our Commission is making several recommendations which will foster self-reliance and reduce hunger by making work pay.

Recommendations related to wage levels

1. Increase the minimum wage in Maine to a level 25 cents higher than the federal minimum wage.

Rationale: When the federal minimum wage is raised to \$5.15 as slated under recent legislation, the annual pay of a full-time worker earning the minimum wage (approximately \$10,300), after taking inflation into account, will still be 15 percent below the purchasing power of the average minimum wage during the 1970's. The increased federal minimum wage will fall \$5,300 short of the 1996 federal poverty line for a family of four. An increase of 25

cents in the Maine minimum wage will increase the pre-tax income of a full-time worker by \$500 per year. Nevertheless, such a worker's income will still fall \$4,800 short of the 1996 poverty line. Twelve states have minimum wages which exceed the federal minimum prior to October 1, 1996 of \$4.25. Three of them already have minimum wages exceeding \$5.15.

2. Establish an indexed Maine Out of Poverty Wage as a minimum wage for State employees and employees of organizations with which the State contracts.

Rationale: We recommend amending Maine law to ensure that state employees and employees of organizations receiving contracts, grants, abatements, or subsidies from the State pay wages which ensure that they earn at least enough to bring a family of three to the federal poverty line. This would require a minimum Out of Poverty Wage of \$6.05 (after tax net income) in 1996. The minimum Out of Poverty Wage would be adjusted annually to the amount required to produce, for 2,080 hours worked, an annual income equal to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' most recent poverty guideline for a family of three.

Recommendations related to the income tax

3. Establish a refundable Maine Earned Income Credit (EIC) program similar to that of Vermont.

Rationale: By making work pay, Earned Income Credit programs are an additional incentive for moving from welfare dependency to employment based self-reliance. Minnesota, New York, Wisconsin and Vermont have refundable EICs in operation. Vermont pays 25 percent of the federal EIC to poor families with children and to very poor families without children. Such a program in Maine would add a maximum of approximately \$500 per year to the income of qualifying low-income families. Eligibility for the Maine EIC would be determined by eligibility for the federal program.

4. Raise the no-tax floor for the Maine income tax to eliminate state income tax liability for filers with adjusted gross annual incomes of \$11,000 or less. Index the floor below which there is no state tax liability, adjusting it annually to reflect changes in the Consumer Price Index.

Rationale: Maine is one of only 20 states which require single-parent families of three with incomes at the 1995 poverty line (\$12,156) to pay state income tax. Maine is one

of only 22 states which require two-parent families of four with incomes at the 1995 poverty line (\$15,570) to pay state income tax. State income taxes on the poor work against reducing welfare caseloads by making it more difficult for welfare recipients to transition from welfare to work. State income taxes push poor families deeper into poverty and reduce their ability to meet basic needs such as food and work-related expenses such as transportation and child care. At present, a Maine family of three with gross income at the poverty line pays approximately \$3 per year in state income tax; a family of four with income at the poverty line pays approximately \$13 in state income tax. Thirty percent of those filing Maine state income tax returns have adjusted gross incomes of \$11,000 or less.

Recommendations related to Unemployment Insurance

Many Maine workers fall into poverty and experience hunger and food insecurity when they experience spells of unemployment. While Unemployment Insurance is intended to provide access to income to involuntarily unemployed workers until they can find new jobs, one out of four involuntarily unemployed workers in Maine did not receive unemployment insurance benefits in 1994. The Unemployment Insurance system should ensure that workers who lose their jobs through no fault of their own qualify for unemployment compensation.

5. Adopt permanently the optional trigger for extended unemployment insurance benefits.

Rationale: In 1993, Congress established an optional trigger mechanism under which states qualify for extended unemployment insurance benefits during economic recessions. The federal government pays 50 percent of the costs and the state pays 50 percent. Maine adopted the trigger temporarily, permitting workers to qualify for extended benefits during the recent recession, but that legislation has expired. The optional trigger should be adopted on a permanent basis. The intent of this recommendation is to re-establish the former state policy authorizing the optional trigger mechanism.

6. Broaden the list of acceptable reasons for leaving work "voluntarily" to include involuntary loss of child care or transportation.

Rationale: States are permitted to allow workers who leave work "voluntarily" for good cause to receive benefits. Many single parents are unable to continue working when child care or transportation arrangements collapse involuntarily. The intent of this recommendation is to provide unemployment benefits based upon appropriate documentation of legitimate, involuntary loss of child care and/or transportation necessary for employment.

Recommendations related to reducing dependency on welfare and increasing self-reliance

7. Preserve Transitional Child Care in Maine.

Rationale: Lack of child care is a major barrier to getting and keeping a job for low income families. In 1991 child care costs consumed on average 27 percent of monthly income for families with income below poverty. A Government Accounting Office (GAO) report to the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues found that providing a full subsidy to mothers who pay for child care could increase the proportion of poor mothers who work from 29 to 44 percent and the proportion of near-poor mothers from 43 to 57 percent. A dozen states are pursuing waivers to extend the length of time that families leaving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF, formerly Aid to Families with Dependent Children, AFDC)¹² for work can receive "transitional child care."

Under present Maine practice Transitional Child Care is available for one year to AFDC/TANF recipients leaving welfare for employment. Last year the Maine Legislature directed the Maine Department of Human Services to apply for a waiver extending eligibility for Transitional Medicaid to three years. Taken together, Transitional Child Care and Transitional Medicaid remove the two most significant barriers to AFDC/TANF participants achieving self-reliance through employment. Transitional Child Care should be preserved under the new welfare block grant. Subsidized child care should be available as needed to all families leaving TANF for employment.

8. Provide additional resources for the Maine "At Risk" Child Care Program.

Rationale: The Maine "At Risk" Child Care Program enables low-income working families, which might otherwise have to resort to TANF, to remain employed. Subsidized child care should be available as needed to all families at risk of returning to TANF or of needing to turn to TANF for the first time in order to meet basic needs.

9. Extend Medicaid in Maine to low-income working families.

Rationale: Lack of access to affordable health care is a major barrier to the continued employment of low-income working families. "1115 waivers" expanding Medicaid

¹² Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) is the name of the program which will replace the AFDC program given by the U.S. Congress in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act of 1996. In implementing the provisions of the new law, the State of Maine may give Maine's program this title or a different title.

eligibility have been approved in eleven states and were pending in ten more states as of June 1996. Children are eligible for Medicaid in Maine if they fall within the following family income/age ranges: up to 185 percent of the poverty level from birth to age one; up to 133 percent of the poverty level ages one through five; and up to 125 percent of the poverty level ages 6 through 18.

Maine should seek a "1115 waiver" to make Medicaid available to children and adults in all low-income working families (including coverage during spells of unemployment) until their incomes exceed 185 percent of the federal poverty level.

Recommendations related to federal food programs

10. Expand the School Breakfast Program to include all schools in which 35 percent or more children are eligible for free or reduced price school lunches.

Rationale: Not having enough food or not having enough of the right kinds of food can affect a child's health, the child's ability to perform well in school, and ultimately the child's ability to function in the workplace. The Maine Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project (CCHIP) demonstrated that Maine children who were hungry or at risk of hunger were significantly more likely to experience fatigue, irritability, frequent headaches, and inability to concentrate in school than were children from non-hungry families. The School Breakfast Program is a federally funded entitlement that improves the ability of participants to function in school. The federal reimbursement for school breakfasts ordinarily covers the full costs of the program.

Nearly all (730) Maine schools participate in the federal School Lunch Program. Of these, 456 also offer school breakfasts. There are 82 Maine schools in which at least 35 percent of the children are eligible for free or reduced price school meals but that do not offer school breakfasts.

We recommend that all Maine schools in which 35 percent or more children are eligible for free or reduced price school lunches be required to offer free and reduced price school breakfasts. Such school breakfast mandates currently are in effect in 21 states. In order to reduce the local burden of this expansion, school boards would be permitted to request through majority vote waivers delaying initiation of the program for up to three years. Also, the State agency responsible for school meals would be authorized to establish a hardship grant program to assist schools in starting the program.

11. Develop a Coordinated Food Security Outreach Program to inform Maine residents about potential eligibility for participation in existing nutrition and nutrition education programs.

Rationale: Food programs which are not taken up by hungry people do not contribute to food security. The Maine CCHIP study identified large numbers of persons who were apparently eligible but not participating in existing government food programs. Many persons were either unaware of the programs or believed inaccurately that they were ineligible. Others choose not to participate because of the stigma of receiving welfare.

We recommend that the State coordinate and strengthen current outreach programs to ensure that all eligible Maine residents are made aware of and encouraged to participate in existing nutrition and nutrition education programs. The outreach program would include but not be limited to food stamps, school meals, the Summer Feeding Program, Meals for ME, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). Responsibility for the Coordinated Food Security Outreach Program could be placed in the proposed Maine Office of Food Security or in a specific state agency (perhaps the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Human Services, or the State Planning Office.) It could be implemented in collaboration with the University of Maine Cooperative Extension network and with the Maine Anti-Hunger Corps which we propose elsewhere.

Recommendations related to voluntary funding for food security activities

12. Create an optional Food Security License Plate.

Rationale: It is desirable to provide structured, voluntary opportunities for persons to contribute financially to food security activities. In addition, the Food Security License Plate will provide visibility to Maine's commitment to ensure food security to Maine residents.

Charges would be equivalent to those of the present optional conservation (loon) and University plates. Revenues generated would go into a Maine Food Security Fund for support of public/private partnerships that promote and contribute to the achievement of food security (access to nutritious food sufficient for daily life and work and available through normal channels of acquisition) for all Maine residents. Funds would be awarded to qualifying organizations in an annual competition by a committee established and staffed by the Maine Office of Food Security. The committee would include representatives of the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Human Services, the food industry, farmers, social service providers, and advocates and representatives of low-income persons. One potential plate

design would be a cornucopia. Potential slogans include "Food Security for Maine" or "Ending Hunger in Maine."

13. Create a voluntary State income tax check-off for food security/ending hunger.

Rationale: Modeled on the current "chickadee check-off" this State income tax check-off would provide an opportunity for income tax filers to make a voluntary contribution to the Maine Food Security Fund. The fund would be utilized and operated as described in connection with the proposed Food Security License Plate.

Recommendations related to the coordination and monitoring of food security efforts

14. Establish a Maine Office of Food Security to coordinate and monitor State efforts and to promote public/private cooperation and initiatives designed to end hunger and to foster food security in Maine.

Rationale: A serious commitment to ending hunger and establishing food security in Maine needs to be carefully coordinated and monitored. It is important to establish a center of responsibility for these functions. It is essential to nurture public/private collaborative efforts to foster food security. The Office of Food Security would be housed in the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Human Services, or in the State Planning Office (perhaps in conjunction with AmeriCorps and the Maine Anti-Hunger Corps).

15. Establish a Maine Anti-Hunger, Nutrition, and Empowerment Corps.

Rationale: The Maine Anti-Hunger, Nutrition, and Empowerment Corps (MAHC) would work with Maine communities to establish Food Policy Councils addressing at the local level strategies for enhancing food security and ensuring that safe, nutritious food is available to local residents on a regular basis. The MAHC would work to increase utilization of existing public and private food programs, to enhance community and individual involvement in reducing hunger, to address root causes of hunger, and to enhance self-reliance. The program would be operated through the present AmeriCorps program housed in the State Planning Office. Similar programs are currently in operation in Vermont and at the state level in India.

16. Create a State of Maine Millennium Commission on Hunger and Food Security.

Rationale: We believe that the proposals of the current Blue Ribbon Commission on Hunger and Food Security, when enacted and implemented, will result in major progress toward ensuring food security for Maine residents. Our recommendations reflect our vision and strategy. Much urgent, unfinished, and challenging work must be accomplished before that vision becomes reality. It will be essential periodically to assess the progress which is being made toward ensuring food security for the residents of Maine. The Millennium Commission on Hunger and Food Security would be modeled on the Blue Ribbon Commission on Hunger and Food Security. It would carry out its work during the year 2000 in time to make recommendations to the Maine Legislature that convenes in 2001.

B. General Recommendations of the Commission

The Commission also makes a number of recommendations which are non-legislative in nature. These recommendations include the need for study, analysis, and investigation of conditions which many feel are unduly contributing to hunger. Also included are actions which can be taken by government, non-governmental entities, and by private citizens that will contribute to ending hunger in Maine.

The establishment of food security should take into account three basic principles:

Principle 1: Distinguish between transitional and long term needs. Different responses are required to meet the transitional needs of those with the potential to achieve self-reliance and the long term needs of those for whom self-reliance is an unrealistic expectation.

Principle 2: Focus on meeting specific needs, rather than on specific existing programs. Many programs in place today may not be available tomorrow. Today's programs may or may not be responsive to tomorrow's needs.

Principle 3: Address needs in ways that most closely approach normal channels. This is essential for reducing stigma and enhancing human dignity. For example, a program of school lunches would be perceived as a normal channel, if provision of lunches were viewed as an integral part of the education process, if all children had access to school lunch, and if any payment structure eliminated differentiation by income.

Recommendations to the Federal Government

- 1. Reassess trade policies with an eye to their effect on local jobs and income.*
- 2. Reverse the trend of cutting funds for aid to people in need while knowing that there are not enough state or local solutions in place to replace the lost federal dollars.*

Recommendations to Local Governments, Community Organizations and Schools

3. *In return for tax breaks given to businesses, demand that they create quality jobs with living wages and benefits for their workers.*
4. *Establish Food Policy Councils in all Maine Communities to empower people to address food security needs within their communities. This could be supported by volunteers working through AmeriCorps.*
5. *The State of Maine, Division of Regulations under the Department of Agriculture, should support the findings of the Second Harvest National Food Bank Network in regard to the inspection of canned foods, and in conducting inspections of canned goods in Maine food banks, the Department should employ the criteria established as a result of those findings.*
6. *Communities should act to preserve local farmland through sound zoning and land management practices. The State Planning Office should assist communities in this effort.*
7. *Provide help to establish or strengthen local farmers' markets and cooperatives such as SHARE.*
8. *Establish and strengthen community gardens in every Maine community. Use municipal land or private land.*
9. *Programs and Services offered at all levels should strive to keep paperwork to a minimum and treat all people in need with dignity.*
10. *Reduce school dropout rates.*
11. *Eradicate illiteracy.*
12. *Teach methods of food preservation so that the seasonal bounty can be stretched throughout the year.*
13. *Engage local organizations in educating people about good nutrition and buying habits. (Example: a Girl Scout Troop visit to the local grocery store or farmers' market).*
14. *Expand the availability of school breakfast and lunch programs and the summer food program, especially in areas where there are significant numbers of low income children.*

Recommendations to Businesses, Farmers and Producers

15. Strive to improve benefits for workers by providing livable wages, health care and retirement income.

16. Invest in technology that produces quality jobs and increases the output and profitability of Maine businesses.

17. Find ways to save and share more food that is now wasted in fields, processing plants, and retail food outlets. If there is too much for local use, work through the Good Shephard Food Bank in Lewiston to share with other parts of the State.

18. Support food security efforts by collecting donations at retail sites, For example, Shop 'n' Save has conducted a temporary checkout coupon program to benefit the Good Shephard Food Bank.

19. Make transportation available to bring available food to meet local needs. (Example: McCain's Trucking often brings food from the Good Shephard Food Bank in Lewiston to Aroostook County.)

20. Eliminate excessive food packaging, processing, and unhealthy additives. Pass the savings on to consumers.

21. Create not-for-profit farms that are supported by individual shareholders in each year's production, with a substantial amount of production dedicated to support local food security efforts. (Note: This idea is based o the Food Bank Farm of Western Massachusetts, 115 Bay Road, Dept. P, Hadley, Mass. 01035.)

Recommendations for Individuals and Families

22. Treat your neighbors in need with dignity.

23. Grow your own food. Begin or expand a garden. Share the bounty with needy neighbors.

24. Support local efforts such as farmers' markets, food cooperatives, food pantries, soup kitchens, and meals on wheels with your time and money.

25. Support local educational efforts. Volunteer in school or join Literacy Volunteers. Teach English as a second language to immigrants. Become a foster grandparent.

26. Support local food growers and processors by buying as much locally produced food as possible.

27. Support local businesses that provide quality jobs with living wages and adequate benefits.

C. Additional Suggestions from the Public Hearings for Future Consideration

In addition to the specific recommendations made in the above pages, the Commission, through its public hearings and from written comments, heard many ideas and suggestions from a wide range of citizens throughout the State. Many are reflected in the preceding set of recommendations. Because of their volume, however, the Commission did not have time to carefully study each one and to develop a specific strategy or recommended action to address the problem raised.

However, many of those listed below are worthy of further investigation, development and incorporation into a strategy to end hunger in Maine. Organized by general themes, the following list is presented for future consideration.

Suggestions for strengthening the Maine economy

“To get full time work I have to work at three part time jobs. None pay benefits.”

- Skowhegan

“There’s not a lot of hope for jobs right now in this region.”

- Skowhegan

Economic conditions were foremost in the minds of most who testified at the hearings held by the commission. The following list of suggestions address a strategy for strengthening the Maine economy as a means of increasing employment and income to workers.

“Not everyone is going to get a job as a CEO of a corporation. We need to value everyone’s work. All have as much right to a dignified life as anyone else.”

-Dover-Foxcroft

The State of Maine should:

1. Be supportive of small businesses and self employed seeking to increase their earning capacity, markets and production, and to provide adequate income to workers.
2. Attract businesses that bring quality jobs to Maine.
3. Provide training that will move people into jobs with adequate incomes.

4. Invest in technology that produces quality jobs and increases the output and profitability of Maine businesses.
5. Improve the public education system in Maine and set a goal of 100% literacy, reducing further high school drop out rates, and increasing further the percent of high school graduates who go on to advanced training or education.
6. Improve economic situation for persons on fixed incomes.
7. Buy locally, support local enterprises.
8. Reassess trade policies/evaluate their effect on Maine jobs and income.
9. Address problems associated with a seasonal economy in rural areas. For example, small businesses are concerned about losing workers during blueberry harvest. Rural areas believe they need more diversity in order to attract significant numbers of tourists to make tourism a viable economic activity..
10. Increase efforts to assist those working in troubled industries (for example, the fisheries industry, defense dependent firms).
11. Government and the public need to re-define work, recognize that there is not a traditional "job" for everybody and engage in strategies that create more "work-type" programs such as those during the depression and that value volunteerism as work.
12. Improve benefits for workers.
13. Develop a more meaningful economic development strategy. The prevailing wisdom of providing tax gimmicks to lure large industries does not work. Evidence: since the recession we have created enough jobs to replace those lost but many are part time, lower in pay and lack benefits. It does not make sense to give shelters to big corporations to come to Maine when they don't provide quality jobs. A better approach is to provide for those down on their luck, assist locally grown jobs.
14. Create a safety net for people who go back to school and retrain. Expand assistance to those who attend school/training part time.
15. Maine's economic development strategy should recognize the value of exports as a means of expanding the economic base, but also place great emphasis on producing within Maine the things that Maine people need.
16. Develop advocacy programs to assist the long term unemployed.

Suggestions for strengthening existing income resources

“People’s income doesn’t go far enough for the working low income. There is no system in place to give support as long as one is trying to work.” - Rockland

There was overwhelming agreement that incomes of Maine citizens should be adequate for individuals and families to purchase the food necessary to meet their nutritious food needs. We need to examine the programs that contribute to income or that substitute for wages in times when people are between jobs, unable to work, etc. In addition to the actions proposed for legislative initiative, it is important to consider raising the benefits for all assistance programs to help those who are not in the labor force.

Suggested actions to increase the amount of household income available for food

“You have so much around you (paying for rent, medical, heat, housing) that sometimes food is not at the top of the list.” - Bath

Suggested actions:

1. Adopt a policy to prohibit subsidized housing units from having electric heat.
2. Develop ways to reduce child care costs for working low income households.
3. Take actions that will reduce the cost of gasoline and of operating a car.
4. Repeal the tax on food items.
5. Develop ways to reduce the cost of health care, including dental care costs for working low income households.
6. Investigate fuel pricing mechanisms. (Note. Several public commenters indicated that they believed that cost of heating oil rises unnecessarily in the winter.)

7. Investigate insurance costs. (Comments were made concerning the high cost of insurances, especially home insurance and basic auto insurance).
8. Address the need for more affordable housing, and invest in greater efforts to address homelessness in Maine.

Suggestions for improving transitional programs

“We all get into these situations at times [loss of income, can’t make ends meet]. People need to help themselves but they also need a helping hand.”
-Dover-Foxcroft

“People are losing their jobs who have never been out of work in their lives.”
- Damariscotta

People are especially concerned with the perceived lack of a “safety net” to prevent those who have suddenly fallen on hard times from hitting bottom.

Suggestions:

1. Develop services for which means tests do not apply so that those who have suddenly lost their job, got sick, etc. can get help to get back on their feet while they still have some resources of their own.
2. Food Stamps should be for everybody and people would pay on a sliding scale based on their income.

“It seems you have to be poor, have nothing, and really not want to do or have anything for these programs to help you.”

-written comment from Bryant Pond resident

“Most of the people who come to the [food closet] are people who have run out of food stamps, just moved in, lost their job, been deserted by the breadwinner, or had an unexpected expense during the month - usually extra fuel or medical need.” - Farmington

The public also made numerous comments concerning the need to do more to help people who have hit bottom to move back into the economy.

“I was getting AFDC. Then I got a job but the pay was low. I felt great. Then I found I had no money left after paying child care and the rent. I work hard and someone else is getting to raise my child any my economic condition is no better.” - Damariscotta

Suggestions:

1. The Legislature should help by creating incentives. Today’s system puts people down, forces people who can’t make ends meet to go on welfare and then cuts them off when they start to get back on their feet . A system is needed that rewards people who try to make their own way.

Suggestions for the food industry and food delivery infrastructure

“The role of the Dept. of Agriculture should be to help people eat as well as to help farmers produce.”

-Rockland

To increase access and affordability of food:

1. The State should investigate and address issues that impact the ability to obtain food through normal channels. For example, access to low cost good quality food varies greatly across the state. Several reasons cited include:
 - a. lack of competition in rural areas drives up prices in grocery stores,
 - b. fewer farms, access to farms especially in urban areas, and
 - c. some stores have sales the week before food stamps come out and no sales after food stamps are distributed.
2. Encourage stores to have “bargain days”, and to mark down prices on day-old items.
3. Stores could develop a program similar to the senior discount card for low income people who could use the card and get a discount on certain items.

4. The Maine Department of Agriculture should take a more active role in making Maine food available to Maine consumers.

“We don’t need a soup kitchen in this area. What we need is low cost food.”
- Dover-Foxcroft

To increase access to local producer capacity:

In general, those who attended the hearings believe that Maine farms have the capacity to produce a far greater share of the food needed by Maine people. This capacity is underutilized in Maine. Food producers need to be engaged in solving the problem of hunger in Maine. Increasing the farmer role can help increase markets for local farm products. This, in turn, would increase the economic viability and sustainability of agriculture in Maine by increasing farm income.

Suggestions:

1. Create opportunities for Maine producers to meet Maine’s food needs and create linkages between producers and consumers.
2. The purchase of locally grown food through producer-to-consumer direct sales, farmers’ markets, farm stands, producer/consumer cooperatives, etc. are “normal channels” that have been much under-utilized and need to be promoted.
3. A policy is needed to create more connections between consumers and local farmers:
Some components of such a policy include:
 - A. Voluntary food programs should diversify their activities to act as a link between producers and urban consumers by establishing buying clubs, cooperatives, promoting participation in community supported agriculture (CSA) arrangements, and other options.
 - B. The USDA should make it easier for farmers to accept food stamps.
 - C. Facilitate development of CSA-type arrangements linking low income consumers with farmers.
 - D. Expand WIC farmers’ market program to increase participation.
 - E. There should be full funding of the State share of the WIC farmers’ market program.

F. The state and municipalities should use zoning and land use management practices as a means to preserve open space for food production.

G. The Department of Agriculture should revise its policies and re-focus its efforts to give more emphasis to production of more diversified crops. The emphasis now placed on exports should be balanced with initiatives to meet local food needs.

H. Fully Implement the Maine Food Policy enacted by the Legislature in 1984.

I. Make it easier for farmers to farm by addressing such concerns as the cost of land for farm use, the lack of “infrastructure” for agriculture as farms dwindle (e.g. distance to nearest equipment repair, transportation costs for imported feed grains, etc.).

4. Excess, seconds, or damaged farm produce is all too often wasted because there is no mechanism in place to process food for later use and no mechanism to delivering fresh produce to needy families. People need produce year round - farm supplies are seasonal.

Suggested actions:

A. Food groups, with the assistance of the Maine Dept. of Agriculture should develop listings of local producers who sell seconds at bargain rates, establish a network of local farmers willing to participate, distribution networks, and other support services.

B. Teach methods of food preservation so that the seasonal bounty can be stretched throughout the year.

C. Develop canneries and frozen food processing in Maine. Maine’s last cannery closed several years ago.

D. Encourage more gleaning.

E. Help for farmers to get their food distributed.

F. Encourage development of more farmers’ markets. Some regions lack a market.

To improve quality of food

1. There needs to be greater availability of natural food products.

2. Food processors should eliminate excessive packaging, processing, and unhealthy additives.
3. Unit pricing on all food items is needed using a standardized, easily understood format.
4. Supermarkets and department stores need closer scrutiny. Many don't change prices in the computer when sales are in effect. The poor are paying more because often they don't dare speak up, or cannot read or compute well and don't know they're being mis-charged.
5. Educate store clerks/personnel in the value of various foods and how to use them so they can advise customers.
6. Encourage more stores to offer bulk sales.

Suggestions for food production and access options to increase self-reliance

Numerous suggestions were received concerning the capacity of people to grow their own food and to process and store food. While some who testified before the Commission viewed gardening and home production of food as a means of increasing their capacity to achieve food self-reliance and as a permanent part of their life style, others viewed home gardening as a transitional measure until their income reaches a sufficient level for them to purchase adequate food. For others, home food production is impractical, such as for those with physical or age limitations, people who lack land or who live too far from a community garden site.

Suggestions:

1. Communities should make available gardening opportunities for all who want them.
2. Maine should establish a goal of a community garden in every Maine community.
3. The University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service (UMCE) should increase master gardener training, and offer more technical assistance to families growing and preserving their own food.
4. Fund more programs that provide seeds, packaging materials for canning or freezing, etc.
5. Assist the development of local food cooperatives, bartering programs, and other traditional methods of obtaining foods that have fallen in use in recent years.

Suggestions to restore dignity

“People do not CHOOSE poverty. We need to stop blaming the poor and look at the problems they face.”

- Old Town

“We should assume that everyone, not just the poor, could benefit from nutrition education and information rather than singling out the poor. How it is offered is the key.”

- Old Town

Many comments were expressed concerning the need for reduced paperwork in government-sponsored assistance programs and, to a lesser extent, in some of the privately offered services. Many others focused on the restrictive nature of means tests and the need of the poor for anonymity.

Suggested strategies:

1. There needs to be better training for workers/volunteers to avoid “judgmental” attitudes by those delivering assistance. Training is needed that show service providers how to focus on making people feel empowered to improve their lives.
2. Food distribution programs need to create more “credit” systems where people who receive aid can contribute to help others (methods to reduce the feeling of receiving charity).
3. Illiteracy must be eradicated. It is the biggest factor leading to lack of confidence, lack of self respect, and feelings of dis-empowerment.

“The basic problem with the system now in place for meeting the needs of the hungry is that they have to ask first and many won’t.”

- Norway

4. Expand food stamps to everyone with incomes under \$100,000 - upper income pay for them on a sliding scale.
5. All charitable programs should seek and use approaches that have no income guidelines.

“Paperwork strips you of your pride when you already feel bad.”

- Damariscotta (single father)

6. Expand access to telecommunications for the low income so that it may serve as a means to access knowledge, arrange transportation, engage in bulk buying, locate items the need, etc.

Suggestions to improve consumerism in Maine

Many suggestions were received regarding the need for consumers to be better informed. Citizens in Maine believe that people are empowered by knowledge and that greater attention is needed for programs and educational opportunities that will make people more knowledgeable consumers.

1. UMCE/EFNEP (food and nutrition education program) should refocus to help people make better choices by teaching people how to use the food pyramid, read labels, engage in comparative pricing, etc.
2. School systems should assume greater responsibility. They should teach children about the food pyramid and emphasize good eating habits so that children grow up with it.
3. Radio stations should offer more public service announcements with tips on food production, comparison shopping, sources of bargains, farms that sell bulk to consumers, and other useful information.
4. The State of Maine should include consumer information and tips in the mail with monthly food stamp allotments.
5. Local school districts could offer an adult education course in being a good consumer.

Suggestions for restoring “community”

“We assume community where there is no community. There are groups of individuals, not communities. In a community, the community informs us of what it wants us

to do, rather than us doing something and expecting others to get on board.”

-Brooks

“An economy that focuses on providing community needs rather than individual needs. Today it’s all up to the individual’s own initiative or capacity, not up to the community to give support.”

-Brooks

“There is a lack of support for each other. People are more isolated than ever within their own communities.”

-Dover Foxcroft

Suggestions:

1. Government and private sector groups must learn to work together at both state and local levels.
2. Programs and systems that restore or reinforce a sense of community are needed.
3. Train community builders who can go to neighborhoods and teach/show people how to become a community again.

Suggestions for preserving and improving the public programs that make a real difference

Citizens had numerous suggestions concerning the major programs that have played a critical role to ensure that people have food.

A. Food Stamps Program

1. The State of Maine should move toward electronic transfer systems because they present a more “normal means” and increase confidentiality for food stamp users.
2. When electronic methods are adopted, cautions should be taken to assure that farmers, farmers’ markets, small stores, etc. can still take food stamps so that people do not lose access to traditional sources of low cost food.
3. Food stamp allotments should be adjusted to reflect the needs of individual family members of different ages and those with special dietary needs.

4. Lottery machines or other systems already in place should be adapted to process food stamps so that small stores don't have to invest in more equipment and can afford to continue to serve low income customers.
5. Relax guidelines to help people with temporary needs.
6. Relax asset requirements, especially pertaining to vehicle value.

B. Delivered meals programs:

Increase funding for delivered meals programs. Though historically not viewed as "normal means", the needs of society are changing as the population ages and the need for home delivered meals programs will grow.

C. Expanded services to assist with shopping and transportation must be planned for as the elderly population grows.

D. School Lunch and Breakfast Programs

1. Funding for the school lunch and breakfast programs should be expanded, not reduced.
2. Breakfast programs should be available in all schools.
3. Revisions to the school lunch program are needed to create greater anonymity and increase participation of students.
4. Expand the summer meals programs and revise policies to enable creative solutions for rural areas where children are dispersed.

E. Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP)

1. Increase funding for EFAP.
2. Provide more foods in appropriately sized containers and more appropriate food types for the clients served (for example, the elderly can't eat many items, such as foods with nuts, and need food packaged in small single serving units, not in #10 size cans).
3. Use more Maine-produced food products.

F. The Thrifty Food Plan should not be used as the basis for determining food stamp allotments or other program service levels.

Suggestions to enhance the capacity of emergency services

1. Enhance food recovery from restaurants by making it easier for them to donate food that is now being thrown away.
2. Create a surplus food program to use excess production from Maine farms.

Suggestions for funding alternatives for food security efforts

1. Increase municipal assistance. Towns have come to rely on food pantries to provide emergency food needs to their citizens.

APPENDIX 1

Resolve, to create the Blue Ribbon Commission on Hunger and Food Security

Sec. 1. Commission established. Resolved: That the Blue Ribbon Commission on Hunger and Food Security, referred to in this resolve as the “commission,” is established; and be it further

Sec. 2. Members. Resolved: That the commission consists of 15 members as follows: one Senator from the Joint Standing Committee on Human Resources, appointed by the President of the Senate; 3 Representatives from the Joint Standing Committee on Human Resources, appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives; one representative of the Department of Human Services, appointed by the Commissioner of Human Services; 10 representatives of the general public, including representatives of business, labor, religion, private nonprofit charitable organizations, low-income organizations, agriculture and antihunger 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; and be it further

Sec. 3. Organizational meeting. Resolved: That the commission shall hold an organizational meeting, called by the Chair of the Legislative Council, within 30 days of the effective date of this resolve and shall elect from among the members a chair and a vice-chair for the commission; and be it further

Sec. 4. Duties. Resolved: That the commission shall hold hearings on hunger and food security, which, for the purposes of this resolve, 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; and be it further

Sec. 5. Staff assistance. Resolved: That the State Planning Office and the Department of Human Services shall provide research, clerical and computer assistance to the commission; and be it further

Sec. 6. Reimbursement; mileage. Resolved: That the members of the commission are not entitled to reimbursement for expenses or legislative per diem except that legislative members are entitled to reimbursement for mileage upon application to the Executive Director of the Legislative Council; and be it further

Sec. 7. Report. Resolved: That the commission shall submit a report, together with any necessary implementing legislation, to the Second Regular Session of the 117th Legislature by November 1, 1995; and be it further

Sec. 8. Funding. Resolved: That the commission may seek outside sources of funding; and be it further

Sec. 9. Appropriation. Resolved: That the following funds are appropriated from the General Fund to carry out the purposes of this resolve.

1994-95

LEGISLATURE

**Blue Ribbon Commission on Hunger
and Food Security**

All Other	\$7,000
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Resolve, to Extend the Reporting Deadline for the Blue Ribbon Commission on Hunger and Food Security

Sec. 1. Resolve 193, c. 74, §7 amended. Resolved: That Resolve 1993, c. 74, §7 is amended to read:

Sec. 7. Report. Resolved: That the commission shall submit a report, together with any necessary implementing legislation, to the Second Regular Session of the 117th Legislature by November 1, 1996; and be it further

APPENDIX 2

PUBLIC HEARINGS BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION ON HUNGER AND FOOD SECURITY

County	Responsible Commissioners	Lead Organization	Location	Date
Androscoggin	JoAnn Pike, Paul Christian	Good Shepherd Food Bank	High Street Congregational Church. Auburn	March 28, Thurs. 6-8 p.m.
Aroostook	Paul Christian, Bernard Shaw, Heidi Mott	Catholic Charities Maine	Holy Rosary Church Community Center Vaughn St. Caribou	May 8, Wed. 7-9 p.m.
Cumberland	Mark Swann, Sen. Benoit, Rep. Johnson	Preble Street Resource Center	Community Resource Center, Preble St. Portland	March 19, Tues. 7:30-9:30 p.m.
Franklin	Sen. Benoit, Paul Christian	Fairbanks Union Church	UMF, North Dining Hall	March 11, Mon. 7-9 p.m.
Hancock	Judy Williams, Paul Hamilton, Bill Whitaker	H.O.M.E.	H.O.M.E. Chapel, Rt. 1, Orland	April 24 10-12 a.m.

Kennebec	Ned McCann, Bernard Shaw, Joel Rekas, Mark Swann, Sen. Benoit	AFL-CIO	Jewett Hall UMA Augusta	May 13, Mon. 7-9 p.m.
Knox	Charlie Frair, Mark Swann	Hand-to-Hand	Tradewinds Motel, Rockland	March 14 7-9 p.m.
Lincoln	Bernard Shaw, Charlie Frair, Sen. Benoit	Parent Resource Center	Mobius Community Center Old Business Rt. 1 Damariscotta	May 15 Wed. 7-9 p.m.
Oxford	Sen. Benoit, JoAnn Pike	Community Concepts	Second Congregational Church Cnr Main & Paris Sts. Norway	May 17 Fri. 7-9 p.m.
Penobscot	Bill Whitaker	Penobscot Area Ministries	Old Town Methodist Church, Stillwater Ave.. Old Town	May 1, Wed. 7-9 p.m.
Piscataquis	Bill Whitaker, Charlie Frair	The Resource Exchange	YMCA 30 Park St. Dover-Foxcroft	May 6, Wed. 6:30-8:30 p.m.
Sagadahoc	Joel Rekas, Ned McCann	Coastal Economic Development	Bath Senior Center Bath	May 7 Tues. 6:30-8:30 p.m.
Somerset	Judy Williams	Skowhegan Community Food Cupboard	Federated Church Rt. 201, Skowhegan	April 16 Tues. 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Waldo	Paul Hamilton, Charlie Frair	Greater Bay Area Ministerium	First Congregational Church Rt. 7, Brooks Midcoast Christian Fellowship Church 17 High Street Belfast	April 13, Sat. 10-Noon 2-4 p.m.
Washington	Judy Williams, Paul Hamilton, Bill Whitaker	Machias Food Pantry	Congregational Church. Machias	April 22 Mon. 10-12 noon
York	Joel Rekas, Paul Christian, Rep. Johnson	York County Shelter/York County CAP	Brothers of Christian Instruction Shaker Hill Road Alfred	May 1, Wed. 9-Noon

APPENDIX 3.

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