



## **Missing Meals:**

A Report on Unmet Food Needs in Washington State  
September 2008

### **Research Background:**

#### ***Why the research was conducted:***

- We know that hunger exists in Washington because of data from the USDA Food Security Report and because individuals and families are turning to food banks, meal programs, and the federal nutrition programs for help. However, until now, it has been unclear how many more meals are needed to address the problem and ensure that all low income people have access to three meals a day, 365 days a year. Food Lifeline embarked on the Missing Meals research project to begin to quantify this need so that we, along with our partners in the hunger-relief community, can understand the scope of the problem and provide solutions.

#### ***Methodology:***

- The Missing Meals research was collected using secondary data from a variety of sources, including U.S. Census Bureau, the state Department of Community Trade and Economic Development, the Department of Social and Health Services, and a myriad of local hunger-relief programs. The guiding formula for processing the data is as follows:

Total Meals Needed for All Low Income Washingtonians for One Year

MINUS

Number of Meals Low Income People Can Provide for Their Families

MINUS

Number of Meals Provided by Federal and State Nutrition Programs

MINUS

Number of Meals Provided by Nonprofit Hunger-Relief Programs

EQUALS

***Total Number of Meals Remaining to End Hunger in Washington***

- The formula used to calculate how many meals low income people and families could be expected to provide for themselves is:

Total population (the estimated number of people living in households with incomes below 185% of the federal poverty level)

MULTIPLIED BY

Weighted average income for this population (varies by county)

MULTIPLIED BY

0.1487 The percentage of expenditures that the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates this population spends on food (0.1487)

EQUALS

*The number of meals that low income people could provide for themselves*

### **Results:**

- Food Lifeline's Missing Meals Report shows that more than 163 million more meals are still needed each year in Western Washington to ensure that all low income families and individuals have three nutritious meals a day. 219 million more meals are needed across Washington State.
- This means that even after low-income families utilize resources such as federal nutrition programs and nonprofit food banks and meal programs, as well as their own ability to purchase food, 16.5% of the food they need is still missing. (14.8% in Washington State.) This is the equivalent of all low-income families missing dinner for 2 weeks every month.
- Our research shows that only about one-third of the meals needed to end hunger in Western Washington are currently being provided through public nutrition programs and hunger relief organizations.

### **Moving Forward:**

- In order to end hunger in Western Washington, access to and participation in the federal nutrition programs must be improved, more food must be made available through food banks and meal programs, and the buying power of low income people must be increased.
- The Food Stamp program currently provides 19% of the meals needed to feed low income people in Western Washington. In October 2008, a variety of changes to the food stamp program will go in to place, which will positively increase both eligibility and benefits. These changes include state policy which increases the income level to 200% of poverty level and federal Farm Bill policies which increase minimum benefits and allow deductions for child care and other employment expenses. Outreach, education, and application assistance is needed to increase participation in the program.

### **Additional Information:**

- The Missing Meals results are available by county and region. For more information, please contact Kelsey Beck, Public Policy Manager 206-545-6600, ext. 263 or [KelseyB@fll.org](mailto:KelseyB@fll.org).

**Detailed Results, by Area:**

