

## **Fight Hunger at Home**

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Hunger in the United States is a serious problem, yet it goes unrecognized by the general public even though it concerns between fifteen and twenty percent of the population. Like most problems here at home, it lies buried between the occasional human-interest piece and the sports report.

Yet, the cold hard facts should be hard to ignore. According to the Second Harvest organization, a group that provides food services to the poor, 23.3 million Americans sought their services in 2001. Thirty six percent of them had to choose between paying for food or paying for housing. The USDA reports that 10 million households in the United States do not have enough food to meet their basic needs, and that there are 31 million people here who risk hunger or 'food insecurity'.

Hunger in the U.S. is a growing problem. The group Feed America First claims that demand for its services has increased by fourteen percent in the last several years, yet seventy eight percent of charities had to turn people away because of food supply shortages. This is all the more shocking considering the USDA has determined that Americans waste 100 billion pounds of food annually.

Our elected officials have only hindered support for those who are going hungry in the U.S. by cutting billions of dollars from welfare programs and from child nutrition programs.

Another reason for hunger in the United States is poor land use combined with wasteful food practices. According to the USDA, there are nearly two million farms in the United States, but only forty four percent of these grow edible crops. Most of the corn grown is used to feed animals, the other thirty nine percent is used for grazing, and fifteen percent of farms are either idle or their crops had failed.

9.51 billion bushels of corn are produced a year, along with 1.96 billion bushels of wheat. Most of this goes to the livestock industry, which consists of roughly 105 million head of cattle, but only 33 million of those are beef cattle used for food. In the year 2000, cattle, broilers, hogs and turkeys combined produced about 114 billion pounds of meat, which is roughly 380 pounds of meat for everyone in the United States. Most of that is thrown in the garbage or tossed out when it expires.

Unfortunately, waste, governmental mismanagement, and inadequate distribution have combined to make hunger a very real problem in the United States of America, one of the wealthiest countries in the world. We should all do our part to make sure that our neighbors have enough to eat, even if that means we have to give up a little more than canned green beans every Thanksgiving.