



## Press Release

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### **New survey reveals Food Banks struggle as record unemployment send many Americans in search of food**

*Missouri among states hardest hit*

**SPRINGFIELD (Sept. 24, 2009)**—Food banks across the nation—including Ozarks Food Harvest—report that the current recession and the continuing rise in unemployment are having a profound effect on their ability to feed millions of Americans living at risk of hunger, according to a new survey released today by Feeding America, the nation’s largest domestic hunger relief charity.

The increase is nearly universal—99 percent of all participating food banks reported a significant surge in demand for emergency food assistance over the past year; the hardest hit states include Colorado, Florida, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina and South Carolina.

Food banks report that the increase is particularly driven by first-time users of the food assistance system (98 percent of food banks) and more people who have recently lost their jobs (92 percent). More than half (56 percent) of food banks reported that they are seeing more children as clients.

“More and more families are waiting in lines who had never had to rely on emergency food assistance before, and they never dreamed they would find themselves in this situation,” said Bart Brown, president and CEO of Ozarks Food Harvest.

More than half (55%) of food banks reported that they or the agencies who help distribute the food they provide have had to turn people away in the last year.

The survey showed an average increase of 30 percent in requests for emergency food assistance since July 2008, with increases ranging from 5 percent to more than 100 percent.

—More—

Transform Hunger into Hope™ at [ozarksfoodharvest.org](http://ozarksfoodharvest.org)

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More than 175 Feeding America food banks responded to the survey, which collected information about the economic challenges faced by the nation's food assistance network, and the ability of food banks, soup kitchens, emergency shelters and other providers to respond to the need.

"While local economic circumstances, like plant closings, can have a significant impact on food banks, the most critical change we've seen over the past year in the ability of low-income families to put food on the table is a shift from the challenges of increasing food and fuel costs to unemployment and underemployment," said Vicki Escarra, president and CEO of Feeding America. Escarra. "We frequently hear stories from around the country that people who once donated to food banks are now waiting in lines as clients."

Ozarks Food Harvest dedicated its larger, more efficient distribution center on Sept. 15, 2009. It is the only food bank in southwest Missouri and serves more than 350 hunger relief organizations, reaching more than 55,000 people each month in 29 Ozarks counties. OFH distributed seven million pounds of food during its last fiscal year—the highest distribution in The Food Bank's 25-year history—made possible due to its network of charities and direct-relief programs such as the Weekend Backpack Program™, Kids Cafe® and the Mobile Food Pantry™ program. Learn more at [ozarksfoodharvest.org](http://ozarksfoodharvest.org).

The Food Bank is embarking on a three-year strategic initiative plan to address the dramatic increase in requests for food assistance in southwest Missouri. For more information, call (417) 865-3411 or contact [lneddenriep@ozarksfoodharvest.org](mailto:lneddenriep@ozarksfoodharvest.org).

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#### **About Feeding America**

Feeding America provides low-income individuals and families with the fuel to survive and even thrive. As the nation's leading domestic hunger-relief charity, our network members supply food to more than 25 million Americans each year, including 9 million children and 3 million seniors. Serving the entire United States, more than 200 member food banks support 63,000 agencies that address hunger in all of its forms. For more information on how you can fight hunger in your community and across the country, visit [www.feedingamerica.org](http://www.feedingamerica.org).

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