

## Food Security - Why is it Important?

**Food Security** means access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food security includes at a minimum: 1) ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and 2) an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.<sup>113</sup>

**In 2004, the 11.9 percent of American households (13.5 million U.S. households) were food insecure.** At some time during the year, these households were uncertain of having, or unable to acquire, enough food to meet the needs of all their members because they had insufficient money or other resources. According to the results of a Census Bureau survey as well as several studies<sup>114</sup>, those at greatest risk of being hungry or food insecure live in households that are: headed by a single woman; African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans; or with incomes below the poverty line. For families in poverty, food is often the first thing cut out of budgets when faced with high rent, utility bills, and medical expenses. California, along with seven other states, has food insecurity and hunger rates that are significantly higher than the national average.<sup>115</sup> According the California Food Policy Advocates, 29 percent of Alameda County residents are touched by hunger and food insecurity.<sup>116</sup> Unfortunately, this data was not collected at the city level, though what follows is in an attempt to analyze contributing factors of food insecurity in Oakland.

Historically, there have been two strategies to alleviate issues of food insecurity in the United States. The first has been Federal allocations for food assistant programs, such as Food Stamps and WIC (Women Infants and Children), which are programs managed at the county or municipal level. The second strategy has been the emergency food system, which consist of food banks, food pantries, and soup kitchens. A recent report announced that more than 25 million Americans, including nearly 9 million children and 3 million seniors receive emergency food assistance last year from America's Second Harvest, a food bank network of charitable agencies. This represents an 8 percent increase since 2001.<sup>117</sup> Though these two strategies have helped to feed millions of food insecure individuals and families, food security continues to represent a major concern for people where sufficient income and healthy food are absent in underserved communities. This issue should be given higher priority by Federal, state, and local agencies as traditional strategies are proving to be only short-term, temporary measures for individual and family well-being.

Over the past two decades there has been an evolution in the way that many local communities have approached food security. An emerging third strategy, **community food security**, while recognizing the continuing need for federal and emergency food programs, approaches food security with the view that the economic, physical, social and political infrastructure of the local and regional community, when arranged appropriately, are the best resources to alleviate issues of food insecurity. Community food security initiatives focus on viable and long-term strategies that can make healthy, nutritious, and affordable food

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<sup>113</sup> Definition from United States Department of Agriculture.

<sup>114</sup> Poppendieck, Janet. *Sweet Charity?: Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement*. New York: Penguin Putnam Books. 1999; and Linda Burnham. Working Paper Series, No 2: Racism in U.S. Welfare Policy: A Human Rights Issue. Produced for Women of Color Resource Center. 2002.

<sup>115</sup> Center on Hunger and Poverty, Institute on Assets and Social Policy, Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University. "Hunger and Food Insecurity Increase for 5th Straight Year," Center for Hunger and Poverty Bulletin. October 2005.

<sup>116</sup> California Food Policy Advocates. *Touched By Hunger: A County-by-County Report on Hunger and Food Insecurity in California*. 2005.

<sup>117</sup> "Hunger in America 2006." *America's Second Harvest*. 24 February 2006. <<http://www.hungerinamerica.org>>.

accessible to an entire community. While the community at large is the focus, there is special concern for getting local and nutritious food into communities where hunger and malnutrition are present, thereby improving individual health in underserved neighborhoods.

Community food security strategies have included improving access to good supermarkets and farmer's markets, linking local farmers with soup kitchens and food banks, and creating urban gardens in underserved neighborhoods. In addition, farm-to-cafeteria and farm-to-institution programs bring regional food directly from farms into communities, challenging fast food cultures and improving the health of youth and adult residents. However, a major challenge for these initiatives has been the fact the cost of local and fresh foods are typically prohibitively to expensive for grocery stores to serve low-income communities or for institutions such as public schools and hospitals to purchase outside of their existing system. In order to make a community food security initiative work, not only does nutritional education need to improve individuals' knowledge on healthy eating habits and thus increase the demand for healthy, local food, but the issue of cost must be addressed. Additionally, community organizations and local government agencies need to be informed of and linked to each other's food security initiatives in order to be more effective.

## **Assessment of Food Security in Oakland: Access, Health and Nutrition**

### ***Access***

Shortage of food has never been the problem for food security; it is the distribution of and access to healthy food that has been the primary problem. In the past, neighborhoods in low-income Oakland have lost large grocery stores and have been increasingly reliant on small convenient stores for their primary food needs. Not only are these stores often deficient of fresh and healthy foods, but it is common to see prices for food that are 30-100 times higher than in well-stocked grocery stores. Public health officials, community food security advocates, and some planners have noted, especially in recent years, that the lack of food access and particularly the lack of supermarkets in the inner-city, contribute to residents paying more for groceries in nearby convenience stores, spending more time traveling to distant supermarkets, and possibly incurring other costs related to forgone consumption or poor food habits developed as a result.<sup>118</sup> Physical access to and the affordability of food are the primary contributing factors to food insecurity in most cities across the U.S.

There are multiple barriers to obtaining a healthy diet in Oakland's food system. The most commonly cited factors are cost and convenience. On a limited income, the cost of food can greatly influenced decisions about what and where to eat.<sup>119</sup> Three studies conducted over the course of the last two years by the University of California at Berkeley, two of which were partnerships with the Alameda County Public Health Department. These suggest that residents in Oakland's low-income neighborhoods are unable to access healthy foods due to lack of proximity to vendors that stock affordable, healthy foods. The studies were based on surveys and focus groups within the East and West Oakland communities.

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<sup>118</sup> Pothukuchi, Kameshwari. "Attracting Supermarkets to Inner-City Neighborhoods: Economic Development Outside the Box." *Economic Development Quarterly*, 19.3 (2005): 232-244

<sup>119</sup> Tsai, Sandra. "Need Assessment: Access to Nutritious Foods in East Oakland and South Hayward." *Community Food Security Coalition*. Produced for UC Berkeley School of Public Health and Alameda County Public Health Department. 2003. 10 October 2005.

<[http://www.foodsecurity.org/cfa/eosh\\_needs\\_assessment.pdf](http://www.foodsecurity.org/cfa/eosh_needs_assessment.pdf)>.

Overall, the studies suggest that increased availability of healthy foods is a critical concern to these communities. Based on focus group responses, the studies also conclude that more education is necessary to inform residents of food options, and that access must be improved by adding grocery stores with healthy foods, farmers markets, fruit and vegetable stands, and community gardens to these neighborhoods.<sup>120</sup> Table 1 below outlines responses from a focus group that commented on the barriers to accessing nutritious foods.

**Table 4.6: Focus Group Responses in “Needs Assessment: Access to Nutritious Foods in East Oakland and South Hayward”<sup>121</sup>**

<b>Factors that affected eating behavior:</b>	<b>Barriers to buying nutritious foods:</b>
Cost	Cost
Convenience	Poor quality produce/meat
Food preference	Abundant fast food places
Habits	In-store marketing
Motivation	Lack of time, access
Junk food advertising	Attitudes towards public assistance
Food preparation	Lack of nutrition knowledge
Transportation	Family/social environment

Since poverty is directly correlated to food insecurity, it is worth looking at some basic income statistics for Oakland. As of 2004, 20 percent of Oakland’s population had incomes at or below the Federal poverty level. Families with children under the age of 18 whose incomes was below the poverty level were also 20 percent.<sup>122</sup> The Federal guideline for 100 percent poverty line for individuals is \$8,980 per year and the poverty line for a family of three is \$15,260/year. In California, and especially in the Oakland where the cost of living is much higher than the U.S. average, earnings must be significantly higher for families to meet basic needs. The California Budget Project determined that a family of three in California needs to earn \$36,012 per year to meet their basic needs. In 2004, about 29 percent of all Oakland families (about 23,000 families) were earning under \$35,000 per year in Oakland.

Vehicle ownership is another demographic characteristic that should be looked at when assessing a community’s ability to access food. As of the 2000, 20 percent of Oakland households did not have motor vehicles.<sup>123</sup> Figures 1.2 and 2.2 below represent the percentages of residents that had access to a vehicle on a daily basis and the number food outlets and distribution of poverty among East and West Oakland. Together, these maps

<sup>120</sup> Harris, Nicholas. “Assessment of New Approaches to Food Security in West Oakland” Produced for UC Berkeley Environmental Sciences Department. 2005. 10 October 2005. <<http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~es196/projects/2005final/>>; Nanes, Cynthia. “Food Pricing and Availability Assessment in East Oakland and South Hayward.” Produced for UC Berkeley School of Public Health and Alameda County Public Health Department. 2004.; Tsai, Sandra. “Need Assessment: Access to Nutritious Foods in East Oakland and South Hayward.” Produced for UC Berkeley School of Public Health and Alameda County Public Health Department. 2003. 10 October 2005. <[http://www.foodsecurity.org/cfa/eosh\\_needs\\_assessment.pdf](http://www.foodsecurity.org/cfa/eosh_needs_assessment.pdf)>

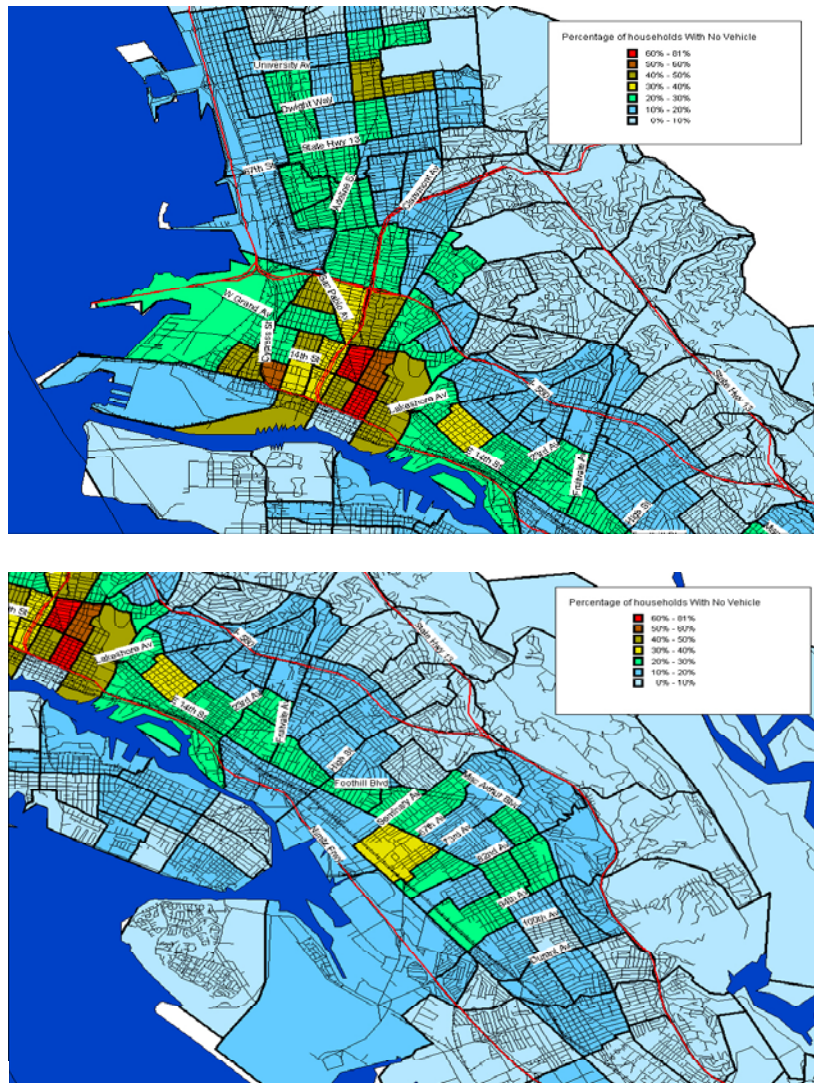
<sup>121</sup> Tsai, Sandra. “Need Assessment: Access to Nutritious Foods in East Oakland and South Hayward.” *Community Food Security Coalition*. Produced for UC Berkeley School of Public Health and Alameda County Public Health Department. 2003. 10 October 2005. <[http://www.foodsecurity.org/cfa/eosh\\_needs\\_assessment.pdf](http://www.foodsecurity.org/cfa/eosh_needs_assessment.pdf)>.

<sup>122</sup> U.S. Census 2000

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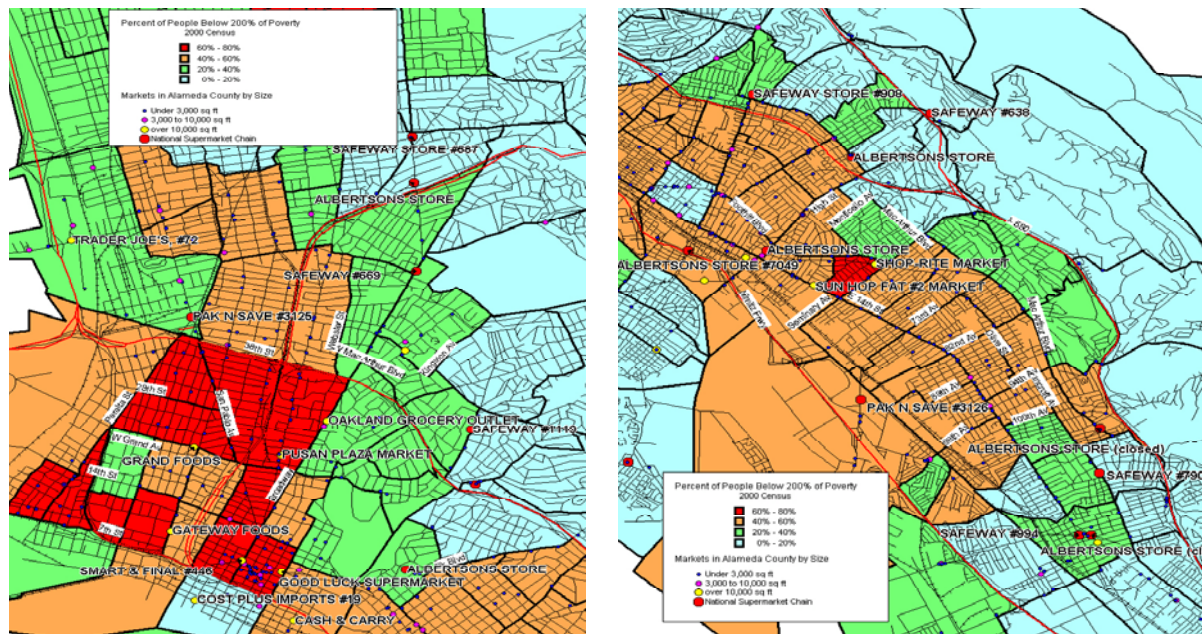
show that where vehicle access is low, there are also high concentrations of poverty, and in many of these areas there are few grocery stores that are accessible by foot. However, there are many convenience and liquor stores, which could lead to the assumption that many people are walking to these stores to take care of their everyday food needs. Though there are several bus lines that run through these neighborhoods, it can be cumbersome and time consuming to rely on bus transit for food shopping needs. Overall the information in these maps is indicative of the problems that the City's low-income population experience in accessing food on a daily basis.

**Figure 4.4: West and East Oakland Vehicle Access**



Source: Alameda County Public Health Department

**Figure 4.5: West and East Oakland Food Stores/Poverty Rates**



Source: Alameda County Public Health Department

## Health

Studies have found that food insecurity is associated with malnutrition resulting from a reduced consumption of certain foods, these often being fruits and vegetables. Children of low income families often consume insufficient calories, have higher prevalence of fair to poor health and iron deficiency, and are more likely to experience stomachaches and headaches associated with a poor or insufficient diet. In addition to hunger-related symptoms, food insecurity and malnutrition are associated with increased risk of obesity. Obesity is a serious chronic disease with many medical risks and complications, including hypertension, type II diabetes, and orthopedic and pulmonary disorders, which are frequently seen in obese children. Although genetic predisposition toward obesity plays a role, the nation-wide obesity epidemic is due largely to changes in diet and exercise habits: eating larger quantities, consuming higher calorie foods, and less physical activity.<sup>124</sup> In addition, most studies reveal that diet-related disease is more prevalent among African American and Latino populations than Whites and Asians.

In Alameda County, 14 percent of children have been diagnosed as obese.<sup>125</sup> The Oakland Children's hospital reports that 40 percent of children admitted to Children's Hospital are obese or at risk of being obese.<sup>126</sup> A study done by the California Center for Health Advocates in 2004 shows that out of the 8,997 5th, 7th, and 9th graders in Oakland, 30.7

<sup>124</sup> Community Assessment, Planning, and Education Unit, Alameda County Public Health Department, Health Care Services Agency. Select Health Indicators for Cities in Alameda County. 2004.

<sup>125</sup> California Food Policy Advocates. *Alameda County: A Profile of Poverty, Hunger & Food Assistance*. 2002.

<sup>126</sup> Personal communication with Karen Amorde-Spalding MS, RD, CSP, Children's Hospital and Research Center of Oakland, Clinical Nutrition Department. 4 January 2006.

percent were considered overweight.<sup>127</sup> For Alameda County, this same study concluded that 26.1 percent of 5th, 7th, and 9th graders were overweight.<sup>128</sup>

**Table 4.7: Childhood Hunger Indicators for Alameda County, 2002**

Low Birth Weight	7.7 %
Anemia	21.6 %
Stunted Growth	7.5 %
Underweight	2.8 %
Obesity	14 %

Source: California Food Policy Advocates. Alameda County: A Profile of Poverty, Hunger & Food Assistance

For adults, a study showed that obesity in California adults almost doubled from 1991 to 2002, from 10 percent to 19 percent. For Alameda County, the 2001 data show that 18 percent of adults were obese. Though data on obesity for Oakland's adult population was unavailable, data on diabetes and coronary heart diseases, both diet-related diseases, showed that Oakland had among the highest rates of Alameda County cities. With regard to rates of diabetes, Oakland ranked in the top five of all twenty cities and above the county average. For rates of coronary heart disease, Oakland ranked fourth among Alameda County cities.<sup>129</sup>

## Nutrition

Nutrition education in Oakland is an important component of food security for the City in that it helps people to make healthier food choices and to a certain extent can drive the demand for better, healthier food in the community overall. Throughout Oakland, there are several organizations that provide nutrition education for people of all ages. Though nutrition education is not a required by California Department of Education, through a new nutrition policy, Oakland Unified School District has committed to increasing collaboration with community organizations to develop curriculum and deliver non-school based nutrition education to students and their families. Programs such as Food Stamps and the Women, Infants and Children program, and organizations such as Clinica de la Raza, the Alameda County Community Food Bank, the Alameda Cooperative Extension, and the Alameda County Health Department have been the primary providers of nutrition education for Oakland's children, parents, and seniors. The City has also been a major source for nutrition education with City-sponsored programs such as the Hunger Program, Community Action Partnership, the Lower San Antonio Initiative, Head Start, Oakland Fund for Children, and Oakland's senior centers. A brief description of each of these City programs is discussed below. In addition, most of the urban garden projects discussed in Chapter 2 have been an important resource for nutrition education at the neighborhood scale.

<sup>127</sup> "The Growing Epidemic: Child Overweight Rates in California's Cities and Communities, 2004." *California Center for Public Health Advocacy*. 2004. 4 January 2006.

<[http://www.publichealthadvocacy.org/policy\\_briefs/320citylist.pdf](http://www.publichealthadvocacy.org/policy_briefs/320citylist.pdf)>

<sup>128</sup> The most common measure used to determine overweight or obesity status is the body mass index (BMI), calculated as weight in pounds multiplied by 703, divided by height in inches squared. Healthy weight is considered 18.5 to 24.9 BMI, overweight is considered 25-29.9 BMI, and obese is considered 30 BMI and above.

<sup>129</sup> Community Assessment, Planning, and Education Unit, Alameda County Public Health Department, Health Care Services Agency. *Select Health Indicators for Cities in Alameda County*. 2004.

## Federal Food Assistance Programs

### *Food Stamps*

The most accessible and extensive Federal program to fight hunger is the Food Stamp Program which supplements income for people who cannot afford food and other basic needs. Eligibility is based on household size, income and assets, and non-financial criteria such as citizenship status. Locally, this program is administered by the County of Alameda, Department of Social Services. The Alameda County Cooperative Extension administers the Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program (FSNEP) and is working with eight elementary schools and four community organizations in Oakland.

In Oakland only 23 percent of individuals eligible for food stamps are currently enrolled in the program.<sup>130</sup> Of those enrolled, 66 percent have children. A common reason for nonparticipation is that households simply are not aware that they are eligible for food stamp benefits. Other factors include language barriers, perceptions of stigma surrounding the program, low minimum benefits, the belief that there is a five-year time limit on benefits (there is not), difficulties getting to food stamp offices during the work day, and possible deterrent effects from the many verifications required by the program. One of the biggest reasons people do not participate in the program is simply that people feel embarrassed using food stamps in line at grocery stores, even though food stamp debit cards are available and look to similar an ATM card. As a result, low-income people in need of food lost over \$54 million of dollars in unclaimed federal benefits in 2003, a loss also to Oakland retailers.<sup>131</sup>

There are 400 retailers in Oakland that accept food stamps. Of these 88 are convenience stores, 179 are small and medium grocers (many of which are liquor and corner stores), 40 are specialty stores such as meat or deli shops, 35 are supermarkets, six are farmers' markets, five are produce stands, four are homeless meal providers, and only two are health or natural food stores. The remaining are split between gas stations, general merchandise stores, drug and/or alcohol treatments programs, and "other" retailers such as Walgreen's. While the majority of food stamp dollars in an average month are spent in the grocery store category, convenience stores represent the fourth largest spending category out of 15 types of establishment that accept food stamps. Food stamp dollars spent at farmers' markets was nearly last at only \$134 spent in an average month among all seven farmers' markets in Oakland.

The Food Stamp Program, which has supplemented the income of low-income people for 63 years, has been faced with stints of instability under the current presidential administration. Last year, President Bush put forth a major proposal to reduce food stamp

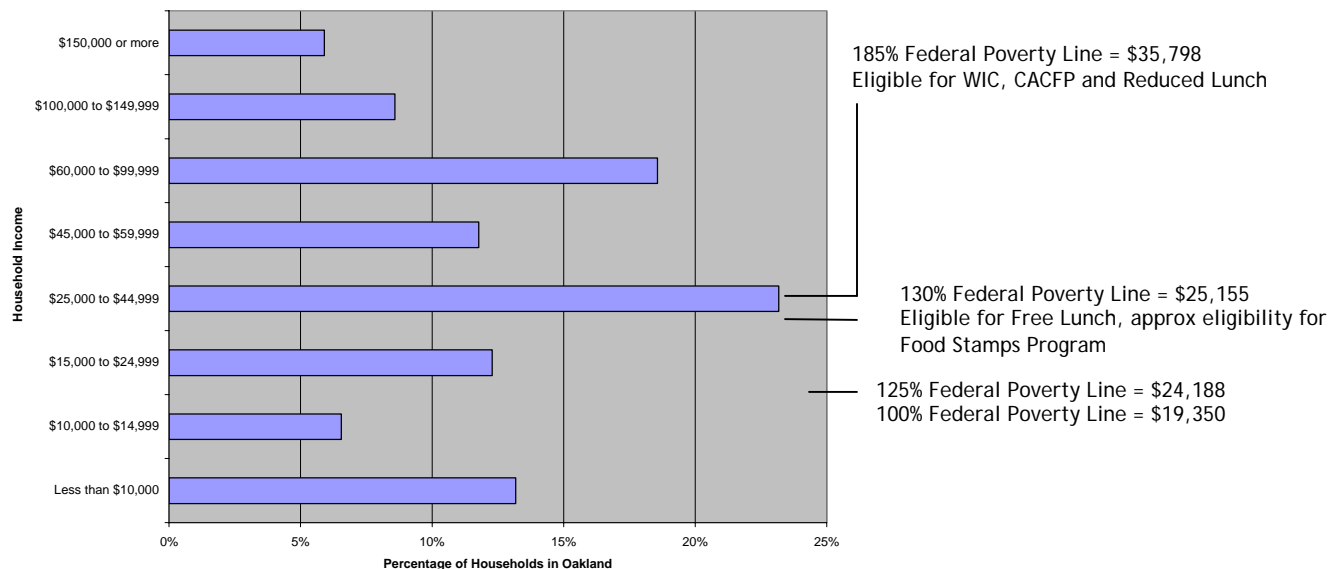
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<sup>130</sup> Food Research and Action Center. *Food Stamp Access in Urban America: A City-by-City Snapshot*. September 2005. In considering the enrollment rate of 23 percent, other factors should be considered. In California, households that are eligible for food stamps are also eligible for Supplemental Social Security Income (SSSI) in lieu of food stamps, so households that chose this option cannot enroll in the food stamps program. Furthermore, 23 percent represents the percentage of individuals who would qualify based solely on U.S. Census income data. When other non-eligibility factors are considered for low-income groups such as student status, sponsored immigrants, and convicted felons, the eligibility-to-enrolled ratio might increase. Data was not available to reflect these considerations.

<sup>131</sup> Food Research and Action Center. *Food Stamp Access in Urban America: A City-by-City Snapshot*. September 2005.

spending by \$500 million over the next five years, thereby dropping from the program approximately 300,000 low-income people in an average month. Though this proposal was taken off of the agenda for fiscal year 2006, the reauthorization of the 2007 Farm Bill, which reauthorizes the Food Stamp Program and its eligibility requirements, is approaching. With possible cuts in the future, a significant change in eligibility requirements would make Oakland's low-income households vulnerable.

**Figure 4.6: Oakland Households Eligible for Federal Food Assistance Programs**



\*Poverty level assumes a family of four. 2005 Health and Human Service Poverty Guidelines.

### *Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)*

The Federal funded Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is administered by locally by the Alameda County Health Department with two WIC offices in Oakland. The program is aimed at safeguarding the health of low-income women, infants, and children up to age five who are at nutritional risk by providing supplemental food (e.g. milk, eggs, cheese cereal), nutrition education, and referrals to health care services for low-income pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women. To be eligible, household income must be at 185 percent of the Federal poverty level. In October 2005, about 90 percent of Oakland's eligible population was enrolled in the program.<sup>132</sup> The number of Oakland residents enrolled in WIC in October 2005 was 16,344 and the number of residents receiving WIC food vouchers was 15,406. The total value of food vouchers in October 2005 amounted to \$873,323. WIC farmers' market coupons redeemed in the same period were worth \$5,914.<sup>133</sup> There are nine WIC clinics in Oakland that provide health and nutrition education and food vouchers. All Oakland farmers markets and 31 stores in Oakland accept WIC vouchers.

### *National School Lunch Program and National School Breakfast Program*

<sup>132</sup> California Department of Health Services, WIC Supplemental Nutrition Branch.

<sup>133</sup> California Department of Health Services, WIC Supplemental Nutrition Branch. Numbers for October are said to be representative of all months in 2005.

National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and National School Breakfast Program (SBP) are Federal entitlement, subsidized nutrition programs. All public and private nonprofit elementary and secondary schools are eligible to participate. A student attending a participating school is eligible to receive free or reduced-price school meals if his or her family income is no greater than 130 or 185 percent of the poverty level, respectively. Oakland Unified School District is the sole administrator of these programs for all Oakland schools. In Oakland, 106 schools offer the NSLP and 92 offer the SBP. A total of 26,945 students, or 67 percent of the student population, qualify for and are enrolled to receive free or reduced price meals. On average the school district serves 448,784 free or reduced price lunches per month, which suggests that the majority of those who are eligible are using the program. The district serves 156,985 free or reduced price breakfasts per month, which suggests that about a quarter students eligible are using this program. OUSD received \$11.4 million in Federal reimbursement, and \$887,600 in state reimbursement in the last fiscal year for both the NSLP and SBP.<sup>134</sup>

### *Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)*

When school lets out for summer, low-income children lose access to the school breakfasts, lunches and after school snacks they receive during the regular school year. The Summer Food Service Program is a crucial to filling this gap by providing meals and snacks to children who might otherwise go hungry. The program is often provided in conjunction with educational, developmental, and recreational activities.<sup>135</sup> The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is a Federal entitlement program administered at the state level by the California Department of Education and locally by the City of Oakland's Department of Human Services under the Oakland Fund for Children and Youth. The program delivers free meals to children in Oakland neighborhoods through 57 sites. Approved sites must be located near schools where over 50 percent of students receive free or reduced lunch. Most sites in Oakland are "open sites," meaning any child from the community is eligible to receive lunches. There are only three "closed sites," meaning children are eligible based on verification of household income. Over the past three summers, the numbers of children receiving lunch through this program has grown from 62,209 in 2003 to 83,531 in 2005, representing an impressive 25 percent increase in participation.<sup>136</sup> The Alameda County Community Food Bank (ACCFB) has commended Oakland for their successful work in tackling some of the gaps in summer food service and making this program widely used.<sup>137</sup> Some of the City's partners for the Oakland Summer Lunch Program include: City of Oakland Recreation Centers, various non-profit organizations serving children, churches, and Alameda County Community Food Bank (ACCFB).

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<sup>134</sup> Information provided by Jennifer le Barre, Food Services Director, Oakland Unified School District. 2 February 2006.

<sup>135</sup> "Federal Food Program, Summer Food Service Program for Children (SFSP)." *Food Research and Action Center*. 13 January 2006. <[http://www.frac.org/html/federal\\_food\\_programs/programs/sfsp.html](http://www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/programs/sfsp.html)>.

<sup>136</sup> Information provided by Carmela Chase, City of Oakland, Children and Youth Services, Department of Human Services. 29 March 2006.

<sup>137</sup> Chanse, Ursula, Alameda County Community Food Bank. "Finding the Gaps in Child Nutrition: A Report on the Summer Food Service Program in Alameda County." June 2003

### *Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)*

The Child and Adult Care Food Program is a Federal entitlement program administered by the California Department of Education. It provides healthy snacks and meals to children and adults who receive day care. The CACFP child care component is a state and federally funded program that gives financial aid to licensed child care centers and day care homes. The objectives of the program are to improve the diets of children under 13 years of age by providing the children with nutritious, well-balanced meals and to develop good eating habits in children. Any public or private nonprofit institution providing nonresidential day care such as child care centers, day care homes, infant centers, preschools, Head Start centers, and Even Start centers are eligible.

The adult day care component of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is available to public or private nonprofit organizations, or certain for-profit organizations, who provide nonresidential day care services to functionally impaired adults or adults who are 60 years of age or older. Examples of adult day care facilities that may participate are adult day care centers, support day care centers, adult day health centers, and approved Alzheimer centers.

The figure below shows that participation in the program for both children and adults combined has decreased over the last year. In Oakland, enrollment in this program has decreased by 6 percent or 525 people. Total meals served decreased disproportionately by nearly 20 percent or 38,570 meals. We were unable to assess the cause of the decrease in enrollment and meals served.

*Table 4.8: Child and Adult Care Food Program in Oakland 2005 and 2006<sup>138</sup>*

January 2005	January 2006
18 Sponsors	17 Sponsors
185 Sites	189 Sites
8698 Total Enrollment	8173 Total Enrollment
5746 Average Daily Participation	5188 Average Daily Participation
\$209,379 Reimbursement	\$210,521 Reimbursement
194,853 Total Meals Served	156,283 Total Meals Served

## **Emergency Food**

### *Alameda County Community Food Bank*

**The Alameda County Community Food Bank** is a linchpin organization for tackling widespread hunger and food insecurity in Oakland and in Alameda County. Though they are emergency food providers, their mission reflects the principles of community food security: to provide nutritious food and nutrition education, promote self-sufficiency, educate the general public on hunger, and advocate for systematic change that addresses the root causes of hunger. They deliver food on a daily basis in large bulk quantities to community-based organizations throughout Alameda County. In a given month they serve 120,000 adults and children, or 12 million pounds of food per year. However, they believe that these numbers only account for just under a third of the 340,000 people that are in need

<sup>138</sup> Information provided by California Department of Education, Nutrition Services Division. 17 March 2006.

in emergency food in the County. Though they do not have the capacity to reach every hungry citizen in the County, they are making strides through their partnerships with 300 community-based organizations and the educational and advocacy initiatives that are integrated into their food distribution.

ACCFB is unique in their approach to delivering emergency food. Many food banks do not prioritize nutritional quality as much as does ACCFB, which strives to distribute at least 75 percent nutritious food. With 45 percent of their food coming from the Federal surplus program, 15 percent from the county, and the remaining 40 percent from donations, there is little flexibility in for acquiring fresh and nutritiously and culturally appropriate foods. Local foods have been the most difficult to acquire. Last year ACCFB was able to acquire fresh produce from a farm located 78 miles north of Oakland through a grant from City's Commission on Aging and the Goldman Foundation. A resounding success among the seniors who received the food, ACCFB applied for funding a second year and was turned down. They hope to revitalize these relationships again in the coming years.

In addition to food distribution, they are equally involved in raising awareness about access issues and the structural causes of nutrition-related public health crises that affect low-income communities. In 2002, they conducted a survey to inform policymakers and the general public about the circumstances of people who request emergency food assistance in Alameda County. The survey, which attempted to address deep-rooted social concerns, had the following major findings:

- Children are especially vulnerable to hunger
- Poverty and low wages are the most critical determinants of hunger
- Federal nutrition programs are underutilized and don't meet the basic nutritional needs of low-income families.
- Many families have to make difficult choices between food and other pressing household expenses.

ACCFB and the City have had working relationship through the City's Hunger Program. ACCFB has received food security funding from the City of Oakland's Hunger Program to distribute food to Community Development Districts, and has worked with the City's Hunger Program to address the underutilization of Federal nutritional programs. ACCFB sees the City's involvement in the Immigrant Food Stamp Promotion Project as a key component for addressing the underutilization of food stamps. According to ACCFB, the City has been the most active and responsive city in Alameda County with the Federal Summer Lunch Program. This program, which is implemented in a partnership between the City, ACCFB, and other organizations, provides lunches to children of all ages at 57 sites throughout the Oakland. Though it has been considered a success in reaching vulnerable children, ACCFB feels that there are still children who are not getting their nutritional needs during the summer vacation months. "My impression of many kids in Oakland is that they

go home and there is nothing there for them to eat,” commented executive director of ACCFB, Suzan Bateson.<sup>139</sup>

ACCFB believes there are several additional roles for the City play in promoting healthy and nutritious diets of its citizens. They believe that currently, there is a need for more coordination around their distribution efforts and the efforts of the City’s Hunger Program. They are also interested in reaching more children through a school distribution program that would allow children to take home a bag of nutritious food once a week and see the City as a possible partner in this initiative. Additionally, as an organization that prioritizes nutrition, ACCFB believes there is a need to educate through hands-on experience where people are able to see food growing and better appreciate the nutrition of fruits and vegetables. Edible landscapes, school gardens, community gardens, and farmer’s markets are all educational tools that ACCFB believes can help people to better understand food and their diets. These are tools that the ACCFB believes the City could support and that would greatly contribute to the over health of Oakland residents at risk of hunger and food insecurity.

### *The City of Oakland Hunger Program*

**The Hunger Program** is the City’s primary program focused on issues of food security. The program is housed under the Department of Human Services and provides nutrition education and brown bags of emergency food to low-income families in the seven Community Development Districts of Oakland five times a year and does food distribution during certain holiday seasons. The City has committed \$100,000 (FY2002-03) from its general fund to fight hunger under this program. Community Development Block Grants are used to help fund ACCFB’s procurement of food in bulk from large wholesalers and other outlets as well as provide opportunities for Community Development Districts to contribute funds to purchase food for their districts. While the Hunger Program and ACCFB work in partnership on food distributions, the Hunger Program distributes only approximately 210,000 pounds of food annually, while the ACCFB distributes approximately 12 million pounds annually. One of the goals of the Hunger Program is to support and strengthen the network of emergency food providers throughout the City. The Emergency Food Providers Advisory Committee (EFPAC), a membership organization comprised of approximately 25 local churches and community organizations, helps to expand this network and provides oversight over the expenditure of City allocated resources related to emergency food. A major concern of EFPAC is the availability nutritious food in low income neighborhoods.

### **Community Food Security Initiatives**

The following section highlights some of the key organizations involved in food security and nutrition education in Oakland. This is not an exhaustive list of organizations and programs currently contributing to food security in the City. For a more comprehensive list of organizations that contribute to food security in Oakland and their primary interest areas, please see Appendix 1.

### *Community Food Security Initiatives in West Oakland*

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<sup>139</sup> Personal communication with Suzan Bateson, Executive Director, Alameda County Community Food Bank. 4 November 2005.

Several community food security initiatives have grown out of West Oakland neighborhoods that are serving as models both for the Bay Area and for the nation. This is a neighborhood composed of primarily African American and Latino residents, a large percentage of whom live in poverty. It is also a neighborhood where in the areas with the highest concentration of poverty, there are no centrally-located grocery stores, but numerous liquor stores and fast food restaurants that do not offer healthy and fresh food. This inequality in food access has led to many grassroots initiatives that present the community with inexpensive, nutritious, and ethnically appropriate foods as well as job skills training, nutrition education, and neighborhood community-building and place-making.

**People's Grocery** is known for operating a mobile food store that drives through West Oakland neighborhoods three days a week selling affordable, local and regionally grown foods and other nutritious products. However, as a community-based, nonprofit organization, People's Grocery has a holistic approach to food security. Their mission is "to uphold the human right to healthy and affordable food and to build community self-reliance by increasing neighborhood access to locally-produced fruits and vegetables and by promoting social enterprise, youth entrepreneurship, sustainable agriculture and grassroots organizing." They use a "cross-sectoral strategy" of bringing grassroots organizing and street-level marketing together with socially responsible business and agricultural practices to positively impact problems facing West Oakland. People's Grocery serves a neighborhood of about 25,000 people whose food shopping options include only one grocery store and 36 convenience and liquor stores, only three of which sell fresh produce. The Mobile Market tries to alleviate the issue of access by distributing food throughout the neighborhood. It is currently serving approximately 160 families and receives discounts from regional farmers and a national organic food distributor, so they are able to sell their goods at wholesale prices. In addition to the Mobile Market, People's Grocery manages urban gardens. Their staff, volunteers, and school groups maintain urban gardens at Ralph Bunch Middle School, Hoover Elementary School, the West Oakland YMCA, the North Oakland Land Trust and Spiral Gardens. Food produced at these gardens is foraged by neighbors and school children and is harvested for sale in the Mobile Market. People's Grocery has also been popular with its youth education programs that include farm visits, cooking, business management, and on-the-job skills training. While food distribution and education are the primary activities of People's Grocery, they are currently exploring opportunities for a next phase of operations which would include intensive urban food production, and a stationary retail food cooperative.<sup>140</sup> (See the "Food Retail" section of this chapter for more information.)

**The Environmental Justice Institute (EJI)** works in West Oakland to improve the availability of fresh and nutritious foods in retail stores. One of their most recognized efforts was the formation of the West Oakland Food Collaborative that brought together interested citizens and neighborhood organizations to develop a three-year strategic plan to create a better infrastructure for food security in West Oakland.

**Mandela Farmers' Market** was one of the first major efforts and cornerstone outcomes of the West Oakland Food Collaborative. With guidance from Mo Better Food, and the African American Farmers of California--who had been selling sustainably farmed produce in West Oakland, educating community members about the importance of eating fresh

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<sup>140</sup> Personal communication with Brahm Amadi and Malaika Edwards, Co-Executive Directors, People's Grocery. 9 December 2005.

foods, and honoring the rich culture and heritage of African American farmers--the Collaborative pooled resources to develop Mandela Farmers' Market. The West Oakland Food Collaborative fostered a community-based approach to organizing the market that not only includes the promotion of ethnic foods and cultures, but provides a venue for local arts and crafts, hosts fresh produce and flowers from neighborhood urban gardens, offers cooking and science classes for youth, and serves as a platform for building networks and relationships among community members that are interested in improving the health of the community at large. The market is currently in its third year and operates once a week just east of the West Oakland BART station on Mandela Parkway. Recently the market community had intentions to open a more pedestrian accessible, second market at the West Oakland Library, but have not been able to get a permit from the City.

Another project of EJI is the Community Health Initiative. The Community Health Initiative is an ecological approach to place-making that links the conversion of empty and underutilized lots with the conversion of corner liquor stores. This ecological approach means that the green spaces would be designed by community members, serving the unique needs identified by the community, like playgrounds, community gardens, flower and herb gardens, or small neighborhood parks. Likewise the corner store conversions would increase the amount of fresh, nutritious, and ethnically appropriate foods and would provide improved facades for storefronts. The idea is that improving the esthetics of the physical community by making use of underutilized and blighted space, and improving the quality of and access to health foods, will in turn improve the value of existing corner stores and improve the overall quality of life for community residents.<sup>141</sup>

EJI has already piloted one corner store conversion. Though minimal funds were available from the City and other sources, EJI was able to help Neighbor's Market on 9<sup>th</sup> Street and Peralta in West Oakland to stock fresh produce and install a food deli to replace liquor sales with prepared foods. EJI is currently working with the Alameda County Health Department and East Bay Conservation Corps and together they are seeking funding from various foundations to support the Community Health Initiative.

Another important and timely item on the plate for West Oakland is the possible opening of the Mandela Foods Cooperative health store. (See the "Food Retail" section of this chapter for more information.)

In addition, Oakland Based Urban Gardens (OBUGs), City Slicker Farms, SOL, and Oakland Food Connection, which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, have also been critical collaborators in West Oakland's food security initiatives and have greatly contributed to nutrition education, food access, community-building, and place-making in the neighborhood.

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<sup>141</sup> Personal communication with Dana Harvey, Founder, Environmental Justice Institute. 9 December 2005.

## City Initiatives

### *Department of Human Services*

In addition to the work of the Hunger Program and Emergency Food Providers Advisory Committee, through its various initiatives, services and commissions, Oakland's Department of Human Services has a number of initiatives that support food security in Oakland.

**The Community Action Partnership (CAP)** is a DHS initiative that provides funding to nonprofits to carry out programs that help alleviate poverty. One of the eight program priorities is hunger and homelessness. CAP has assisted with various hunger- and nutrition-related programs. It granted funding to ACCFB to carry out the Immigrant Food Stamp Outreach program; the West Oakland Senior Center Nutrition Program to provide healthy breakfasts and nutrition information to seniors; and the Hunger Program for its brown bag food distribution, Thanksgiving Dinner, and Spring Egg Hunt.

**The Lower San Antonio Initiative** is another DHS initiative which involves a collaboration of Oakland organizations, led by Urban Strategies Council, to address the social, economic, environmental and educational factors that impact the health and well-being of San Antonio residents. Though still in the planning stages, the Health Work Group committee has included "Increasing Access to Resources for Healthy Eating and Exercise" as one of their three primary goals. To address this goal, the group is looking at different ways to increase food stamp enrollment.

**Oakland's Head Start** program offers educational and child development services, social services and assistance with community resources. In addition, Head Start Centers serve breakfast, snack and lunch and provides health and nutrition education to children and their families. The City administers the program as a grantee and the Unity Council acts as a delegate organization. Together they serve 1608 three to five year olds at 21 different Head Start Centers. Unity Council also administers Early Head Start which serves 200 children up to the age of three.<sup>142</sup>

**The Oakland Fund for Children and Youth**, another DHS program, provides funding to community organizations whose programs support education, health and wellness, and youth empowerment. For its 2005-2006 funding round, it provided \$75,000 to OBUGS for their "Planting a Future Program." This program also oversees the **Federal Summer Lunch Program**, also known as Oakland's Summer Lunch Program. The program delivers free meals to children in Oakland neighborhoods. Some of the City's partners for the Oakland Summer Lunch Program include: City of Oakland Recreation Centers, various non-profit organizations serving children, churches, and ACCFB. There are a total of 57 sites in Oakland that serve summer lunches through this program.

**Oakland's senior centers** are a service provided by the DHS. These six centers provide both nutritional educational as well as free and low-cost meals. **The Commission on Aging** works in partnership with the Department of Human Services and is responsible for

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<sup>142</sup> Personal Communication with Germaine Davis, Enrollment Coordinator, City of Oakland Head Start Program. 22 December 2005.

developing and evaluating programs that address the needs of seniors. The Commission has been active in securing emergency food for Oakland's seniors.

### **Oakland Unified School District Initiatives**

In addition to the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and National School Breakfast Program (SBP), Oakland Unified School District has several other programs that help to feed children when they are away from home. Their Early Childhood Education centers which serve two to five year olds, serve breakfast, lunch, and snack at no charge. Last year, approximately 3000 children participated in this program. After school programs are offered at half of OUSD schools and provide snacks to students. During the summer months, OUSD offers the "Summer Seamless Feeding Program" which offer children of 18 years and younger breakfast and lunch at no charge. However, the program only exists at schools that offer summer school classes, so even though all OUSD students are eligible to receive these meals, most do not participate in the program if they are not enrolled in summer school classes.

Though there are no indicators that show improvement in health and increases nutrition education for Oakland youth, OUSD has been on a mission to improving students' nutrition for several years. In 2001, OUSD became one of the first school districts in the United States to pass a nutrition policy banning all carbonated, caffeinated, and high-sugar content drinks and candy from all school premises. The following goals were put forth in the adoption of the nutrition policy:

- Insure that no Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) student goes hungry.
- Improve nutritional quality of all food services to OUSD students.
- Serve enjoyable foods from diverse cultures
- Improve the quality of food service jobs.
- Integrate nutrition into the District's Education Program
- Establish a Nutrition Advisory Board.

Implementation of the policy has allowed OUSD food services division to remove of all deep fryers at middle and high schools; require that all snack chips be baked and reduced fat; and require all dairy to be one percent or no fat. The policy also helped the District to be awarded a \$100,000 grant from Kraft to open two salad bars.

To supplement the nutrition policy, the school district has convened a working group to expand the policy to include requirements of the new federal law passed in 2004 that requires all school districts that participate in federally funded school meal programs to establish a Local Wellness Policy through a process that involves parents, students, school representatives, and the public. The law mandates that these school districts set goals for nutrition education, physical activity, campus food provision, and other school-based activities designed to promote student wellness. The law requires that the Local Wellness Policy be adopted by the start of the 2006-07 school year. Some of the working group's

discussion items have included further improving vending machine contents, increasing fresh produce in school lunches, reducing the sugar contents of breakfast cereals, reducing food packing, using non-genetically engineered foods, developing a gardening program to be linked to food services, and adopting a farm-to-school program.<sup>143</sup> While these all present a great opportunity to focus community attention on fighting hunger and preventing obesity in Oakland's school children, funding many these ideas will not be easy given the budget of the district's food services division.

In addition to Federal legislation, in September 2005, Governor Schwarzenegger signed landmark legislation banning soda from high schools and establishing limits on fat and sugar content, and portion sizes for all food sold outside the school meal program in public schools. Set to take effect in 2007, the delayed implementation is meant to give schools time to find replacement foods and end or change existing contracts with soda companies.

Though this legislation represents one of the most rigorous nutrition standards in the country for foods and beverages sold on public school campuses, the primary challenges to providing nutritious foods to children at school still remain. As is, the District's food services division has a limiting budget. With a \$5.6 million budget for food and only \$.015-.018 is allotted for each serving of vegetable or fruit, many of the ideas coming out of the working group's discussion will be challenging to implement. Even though Governor Schwarzenegger's signed additional legislation earmarking \$18.2 million to reimburse schools for buying fruits and vegetables for school snacks and breakfasts (lunches not included), obtaining higher quality produce, and especially organic produce, is still not feasible for OUSD according to the district's food service director. However, the food services director said that their main goal is to at least procure produce from California growers.<sup>144</sup>

In addition to budget limitations, one of the largest challenges remains changing the eating behavior of children. The some resources are available to teachers, the fact that the nutrition education is not a required by the California Department of Education in school curriculum discourages teachers to engage in the topic, especially when teacher and student performance is based on other teaching requirements. To make up for this void and OUSD's limited resources, if a school wants a nutrition education program, it is likely to collaborate with Alameda County Health Department, the Alameda County Cooperative extension, The Watershed Project, the Healthy Kids Resource Center, or Oakland Based Urban Gardeners (OBUGs) who work with OUSD schools on a variety of after school programs that provide nutrition education. Even with these additional resources, only a portion of OUSD schools are able to provide sufficient nutrition education, with about 10 schools participating or interested in participating in a garden program and about 25 participating in nutrition education programs.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Personal communication with Mary Schriener, OUSD kindergarten teacher and participant in Wellness Policy Working Group, Oakland Unified School District. 23 November 2005.

<sup>144</sup> Personal communication with Jennifer le Barre, Food Services Director, Oakland Unified School District. 13 December 2005.

<sup>145</sup> Personal communication with Justin Watkins, Alameda County Cooperative Extension, Child Nutrition and Community Development. 14 October 2005. Personal communication with Aysha Massell, Oakland Based Urban Gardens. 13 December 2005. Personal communication with Pam Aziz, Alameda County Health Department. 14 December 2005.

## Summary of Key Findings and Barriers

As in most cases of food insecurity, the prevailing causes in Oakland appear to be the lack of physical access to and affordability of food. With 20 percent of the population at 100 percent poverty level, and with 29 percent of Oakland families earning below what the California Budget Project determined as necessary to meet basic need of a family of three, poverty is one of Oakland's greatest problems in facing hunger. In addition, the lack of easily accessible grocery stores in neighborhoods where poverty is highest and car ownership lowest, is of great relevance to the East and West Oakland neighborhoods. It is clear that there is recognition of this problem and that federal food assistance, emergency food, and community food security programs and initiatives are responding in different ways to intervene with the problems associated with food insecurity.

The traditional strategies to alleviate food insecurity, federal food assistance and emergency food programs, are well established in Oakland. However, there is an extraordinarily high percentage of eligible Oakland residents who are not enrolled in the Food Stamp program (78 percent of those eligible are not enrolled), resulting in \$54 million in unclaimed benefits in 2003. An ample number of food retailers accept food stamps in the form of Electronic Benefits Transfer, but a large portion of those retailers are convenience stores that may not provide healthy foods options to food stamp users. Convenience stores represent the fourth largest spending category for food stamp users. Farmers' markets are nearly last. On the other hand, WIC has 90 percent enrollment rate and the value of WIC coupons spent at farmers markets is almost 60 times higher than the value of food stamps spent at farmers' markets in an average month. Still, increasing outreach to promote farmers' markets and other retail that sells healthy foods among people receiving federal food assistance is needed.

Other Federal food assistance programs in Oakland such as the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs, the Summer Food Service Program, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program directly provide meals to Oakland residents. In addition, the City's Hunger Program and the Alameda County Community Food Bank (ACCFB), the two major emergency food programs, and Head Start and Oakland's senior center all provide food directly to those who are most vulnerable to food insecurity. We highlight these programs not only to assess whether they are maximizing participation from those who need them, but given that they provide food to thousands of Oakland residents, they have strong potential to improve the nutritional intake and health of many of Oakland's poorest residents. With child obesity and adult diet-related disease on the rise in Oakland, focusing on nutrition (and exercise) is paramount. To demonstrate their commitment to health and nutrition, these programs could be the first in line to serve at least 30 percent locally sourced foods. A farm-to-institution program that allows these programs to procure food at a reasonable rate through direct distribution from the region's farmers could make this happen. See Chapter 6, "Recommendations for Food Security."

Community food security initiatives in Oakland are gaining traction throughout the City. More than 70 organizations (see Appendix 1 for a comprehensive list) are focusing some or all of their programs on availability, affordability, and education around food and diet. All of the community-based food security initiatives that were involved in this study, as well as the several academic studies cited in this study, communicated that **nutrition education as well as the availability of healthy food, meaning grocery stores that carry affordable and nutritious products, farmers' markets, produce stands, and community gardens, are**

**of critical importance to ensuring that people are able to access and afford food and understand the importance of maintaining a healthy diet.** Most of the community-based food security initiatives discussed in this study are focused on providing retail access to local, organic, and affordable foods, while providing nutrition education, job-skills training or other economic opportunity to the community. All of the organizations highlighted in this section are currently in the process of planning for growth, expansion, and improvement of their programs—a new farmers’ market in West Oakland, the opening of two new worker-owned food cooperatives, and the continuation of efforts to help corner stores convert large portions of their inventory to profitable fresh produce.

While many of the organizations studied in this report have incorporated nutrition education into their activities, the organization that could have one of the broadest effects in carry out this goal, the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), severely lacks resources and incentives to provide it. While OUSD is working on establishing a meaningful wellness policy, both the lack of funding and strict requirements from the California Department of Education that do not include nutrition education as a mandatory element of school curriculum, are restricting the capacity of the city’s schools to provide adequate nutrition education in the classroom and after school. Instead, most public schools have relied on partnerships with community organizations to provide nutrition education either as a part of an onsite after school program or as an offsite independent initiative. These organizations, however, do not always have the capacity to deliver services in the long term and to all schools.

An additional barrier that many stakeholders have voiced is the strong presence of fast food restaurants and convenience stores in Oakland’s low-income neighborhoods. The relative ease of accessing food from these establishments is reinforced by the ubiquitous use of advertising the products that they sell. While nutrition education throughout many spheres of the community is essential, it is becoming exceedingly difficult to compete with large advertising budgets and the conspicuous presence of advertizing in schools, entertainment media, and civic life.<sup>146</sup>

Our research revealed that most organizations that focus on food security share common principles and interests. For example, many believe that hands-on experience with local food whether it is growing food, frequenting farmers’ markets, or being involved in the food economy, are important ways to help people understand the role that nutritious food plays in diet, health, and well-being. Though each of these organizations are following similar paths in their work, it appears that these organizations are not always communicating and collaborating with each other in ways that could help strengthen their efforts and further their goals. It is also clear that most these initiatives have yet to maximize relationships with the City. There appears to be a need for more communication with City staff and legislators to discuss ways in which the City can provide an infrastructure that supports and helps to catalyze key initiatives such as corner store conversions, the development and opening of food retail establishments, and more space for urban gardening.

Chapter 6 provides more ideas on how these relationships might be strengthened as well as a detailed list of ideas that might address the barriers discussed here.

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<sup>146</sup> “Frequently Asked Questions.” *Center for Informed Food Choices*. 27 March 2006.  
<<http://www.informedeating.org>>.