A Portrait of Hunger, the Social Safety Net, and the Working Poor

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Millions of Americans turn to Food Stamps, soup kitchens and other hunger relief services to feed themselves and their families. Contrary to common perception, many of these families are working and yet their incomes are still insufficient to meet their basic needs. According to a recent two-year survey of over 2,000 clients at the largest food pantry in Northeast Iowa, 25 percent of people asking for food assistance were employed. What are the relationships between hunger, employment and government support programs? Why do people on government support programs or with jobs need donated food? To help answer these questions, this paper will present the comprehensive results of the Iowa survey, creating a portrait of the working population who rely regularly on non-profit food assistance.

Surprisingly, working does not seem to help a low-income person avoid chronic food insecurity. We found that neither working nor accessing government benefits has a meaningful impact on the odds that a person will need long-term food assistance – that is, a recurrent visit to the food pantry to receive bags of free food. In fact, those people who work are more likely to have sacrificed food to pay for other life necessities. For the poor, working makes it harder to put food on the table, not easier.

Government benefits do not seem to provide an adequate food safety net, and non-profits are experiencing increased pressure to fill the gap. The policy ramifications of these findings are clear. First, while this study can not be broadly generalized beyond this population, the findings suggest that policies encouraging work among the poor should recognize the standard of living for these individuals may become less stable, rather than more so, as a result of gaining employment. To more fully understand this relationship, a longitudinal analysis of employment and food assistance data should be undertaken. Second, if we wish to maintain the government
responsibility to alleviate hunger in our country, benefits for eligible citizens must be increased or food assistance non-profits need greater government support. Otherwise we should face the fact that as an undeclared public policy, our society tolerates hunger.
Introduction and Summary of Results

 Millions of Americans turn to soup kitchens and other non-profit hunger relief services to feed themselves and their families. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in 2004 more than 38 million Americans lived in food insecure households where there was not enough food for everyone living in the home (Nord, Andrews & Carlson, 2004). Contrary to common perception, many of these families are working and yet their incomes are still insufficient to meet their basic needs. We highlight two examples to illustrate this point. In Iowa, 25 percent of clients surveyed were employed. At the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina, an even higher number of clients work. More than 37 percent of all clients at this agency are employed (FBCENC, 2005).

Increasingly, non-profit organizations are asked to fill gaps that government is unable or unwilling to close. Nonprofits often operate as a low-cost alternative to big government social service programming (Alexander, 1999). Given our federally supported social safety net, why is there such a great need for non-profits to step in and feed the hungry, especially if many of those people are working? To answer this question, this paper presents the results of a detailed two-year (2004-2006) survey of all the clients at the largest food pantry in Northeast Iowa, the Cedar Valley Food Pantry (CVFP), and places them in a national context. Furthermore, the data used for this paper are rich. Gathering valid and reliable data on this population is extremely difficult. This study gives academics, practitioners, and others an opportunity to better understand the interaction of food assistance programs with other programs through survey data gathered from a full population.
In particular, we describe the working population who rely on Iowa’s CVFP for food assistance. Those who work must meet certain criteria to be classified as poor, and different organizations may use different criteria. To be eligible for food assistance at CVFP, a family’s income must be at or below 185 percent of the US Department of Health and Human Services’ poverty guidelines. Over the two-year span of this study, 185 percent of the average guideline meant an income of $35,890 a year for a family of four (US Department of Health and Human Services).

A sizable portion of clients at the pantry already work (25 percent) or are on government support (49 percent), including Social Security. Surprisingly, working does not appear to alleviate the need for regular food assistance. Job related demands, such as transportation, child care, and uncovered health care costs force choices between food and other necessities more often for working people than for the unemployed. Working individuals are just as likely to need supplemental food assistance on a regular basis as the unemployed.

In addition, this paper suggests government support programs such as Social Security and Food Stamps are an insufficient guard against hunger, and thousands of Americans turn to non-profits to fill the gap. The policy ramifications of these findings are clear. First, while this study can not be broadly generalized beyond this population, the findings suggest that policies encouraging work among the poor should recognize the standard of living for these individuals may become less stable, rather than more so, as a result of gaining employment. To more fully understand this relationship, a longitudinal analysis of employment and food assistance data should be undertaken. Second, our national social support structure is inadequate. If we wish to maintain the government responsibility to alleviate hunger in our country, benefits for eligible citizens must be increased or food assistance non-profits need greater government support.
Otherwise we should face the fact that as an undeclared public policy, our society tolerates hunger.

**Literature Review and Background**

*Food Assistance*

More and more Americans feel the effects of hunger and food insecurity each year. These conditions drive families to seek and use food assistance programs. Food insecurity, a term the USDA uses to define one type of hunger, affects a household in which family members are “at times, uncertain of having, or unable to acquire, enough food for all household members because they had insufficient money and other resources for food (Nord, Andrews & Carlson, 2004).” Researchers have used a standardized set of 18 questions to measure household food insecurity since 1995. Characteristics of households where financial constraints make meeting food related needs difficult are constructed by focusing on conditions and behaviors (Bartfield and Dunifon, 2006). From these questions three constructs are created: food secure, good insecure without hunger, and food insecure with hunger.

Food insecurity is a growing problem. The release of the annual Food Research and Action Center report in October 2005 depicts a five year upward trend ending with a large increase in 2004 of the number of households suffering from hunger and without the ability to alleviate it (FRAC, “Number of Households”, 2005).

According to the USDA, Americans living in food insecure households in 2004 included 24.3 million adults and 13.9 million children (Nord, Andrews & Carlson, 2004). This number represents an increase of nearly two million households from 2003 (FRAC, “Number of Households,” 2005). Experiencing food insecurity is difficult though some people are faced with a worse situation. Of those 38.2 million food insecure individuals, 10.7 million experienced food
insecurity with hunger, which the USDA defines as those families who “reported multiple indications of reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns due to inadequate resources for food” (Nord, Andrews & Carlson, 2004).

In Iowa alone, the three-year average number of food insecure households for the years 2002 through 2004 was 122,000 (10.2 percent of total households in Iowa) (FRAC, “Iowa,” 2006). According to FRAC, this is a statistically significant increase over the previous three-year period, from 1999 to 2001. Another 36,000 households in Iowa were food insecure with hunger (3.1 percent of total households). (FRAC, “Iowa,” 2006).

So what do people do when they need help? Several alternatives are available to people in need of food assistance, each with its own hurdles and levels of support. The two main options are government assistance and non-profit, private emergency food assistance, available through emergency food providers (EFPs). The term EFP encompasses a broad range of community organizations.

In partnership with the federal government, states offer various forms of support, including the Food Stamp Program (known as the Food Assistance Program in Iowa), the Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC), school meals programs, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, the Elderly Nutrition Program, and Food Assistance for Disaster Relief. In addition, several food distribution programs, such as the Commodity Supplemental Food Program and The Emergency Food Assistance Program, exist to distribute food to larger organizations, such as schools and food pantries. Families may choose to use resources from other financial assistance programs, such as Social Security and the Iowa Family Investment Program (FIP) – formerly known as welfare – to buy food as well.
The Food Stamp Program is one of the most common sources of government food assistance. The program gives money to be used exclusively for food to needy individuals and families. This money comes in the form of an electronic benefit transfer card, much like a debit card. The goal of the program is “to promote the general welfare of low-income families by raising their levels of nutrition to avoid hunger and malnutrition” (Iowa Department of Human Services, 2000). Following an increase in Food Stamp Program participation in 2005 due to the effects of Hurricane Katrina, the number of Food Stamp Program participants in May 2006 shows an increase of 2.4 percent over May 2005 and 50.9 percent over May 2001 (FRAC, “Food Stamp Participation 5-Year Change” and “Food Stamp Participation 1-Year Change”). FRAC suggests these increases “reflect continuing wage stagnation, state actions to improve access, and the effects of the 2002 food stamp reauthorization implementation” (FRAC, “Food Stamp Participation Overall Steady in May 2006”).

Other government programs are available if individuals apply to and qualify for them. The Family Investment Program (FIP), for example, is Iowa’s Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program. Both FIP in Iowa and TANF in other states provide cash assistance to indigent families with children for a limited number of years. WIC is a USDA program providing nutritious foods and nutrition education to low-income women, infants and children up to age five. Complete figures for three government assistance programs, Food Stamps, TANF and WIC, can be found in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Iowa</th>
<th>Percent of IA Population</th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Percent of US Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food Stamps Program</td>
<td>206,696</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25,641,656</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Average Participants per Month, 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temporary Assistance to Needy Families</th>
<th>Number of Participants in 2004</th>
<th>44,753</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>4,722,743</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women, Infants and Children</td>
<td>Average Participants per Month, 2005</td>
<td>67,823</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7,798,635</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


There is growing evidence that Food Stamp recipients are not finding government assistance sufficient to meet the needs of their households. Comparing Current Population Survey results from 2001 to 2002, Nord and Wilde found that for the most part, household food security status remained unchanged. Food Stamps did not tend to alleviate a situation of food insecurity, but rather, for households that entered the Food Stamp Program between 2001 and 2002, “food security status more commonly deteriorated (20.9%) and less commonly improved (14.4%) during that year.” (Nord & Wilde, pp. 428-429.)

As a result of this gap, Food Stamp recipients are turning to EFPs in the private, non-profit sector to supplement their needs (Eisinger, 1999; Daponte, 2000). According to America’s Second Harvest, an umbrella organization of food banks and food rescue organizations, 25 million Americans turned to charities for food assistance in 2004 (America’s Second Harvest, 2006). These organizations include food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, and food or meal delivery programs, among others. To put this in a more tangible context, a study of three counties near Kansas City found that over three years, more than 13 percent of area households visited a pantry (Mosley & Tiehen, 2004).
Food banks warehouse, sort and distribute grocery produce to a network of partners such as food pantries, soup kitchens, etc. They are able to organize large scale food drives, receive donations from private sector food producers such as local cereal or paper product factories, and use large numbers of volunteers in addition to paid staff. The food banks collect food donations and then allocate those resources to smaller organizations or member agencies, such as a local food pantry, for subsequent distribution to individuals and families. If a member agency is charged, it is at a large discount compared to the private sector, and the fee is used to cover costs such as transportation and warehousing costs.

A food pantry is a private emergency food provider (EFP) that gives bags or boxes of unprepared groceries to clients in varying amounts. The USDA reports 3.9 million households sought help from food pantries at least once during 2004, although the USDA acknowledges these figures may not be accurate because survey respondents tend to underreport use of food assistance programs (Nord, Andrews & Carlson, 2004). The pantry may distribute bags on a monthly or weekly basis, or be open certain hours to allow clients to “shop” from the pantry shelves. A food pantry differs from a soup kitchen, which is more likely to serve freshly prepared meals to clients one meal at a time.

The food going into pantry bags or soup kitchen meals comes from a variety of sources. In addition to a food bank, individuals, businesses, churches, local charities or foundations may contribute in-kind donations of food to a pantry, and financial donations to the pantry may come from these sources as well. Lastly, food pantries may apply to receive surplus commodities from the federal government through the food bank. The government distributes these commodities for purchase or for distribution through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). Through TEFAP, the USDA allocates funds to states to purchase surplus commodities. The
states then distribute TEFAP commodities to organizations such as food banks. Each state can
determine its own eligibility requirements for dispersal (FRAC, “The Emergency Food
Assistance Program,” 2006).¹

With the U.S. House of Representatives voting to cut the Food Stamp Program by $2.8
billion in FY 2006-07, food assistance in the form of pantries and soup kitchens may become
even more essential.¹ In fact, for many people, choosing between government and non-profit
food assistance is not an option. Both are needed. Mosley and Tiehen (2004) show some of the
same people accessing Food Stamps also access food pantries. They conclude, “The data
suggest that households are not substituting one form of assistance for the other but rather are
accessing multiple types of assistance when necessary” (Mosley & Tiehen, 2004, p. 267).

Using data from the 1999 Current Population Survey to get a national sample, Bhattarai,
Duffy and Raymond also found that families do not use food pantries and Food Stamps as
substitutes for each other. To the contrary their bivariate probit model showed “Participating in
one food assistance program increases the likelihood of participating in the other” (Bhattarai,
Duffy and Raymond, 2005, p. 295). This indicates that the decline in the use of Food Stamps in
the late 1990s was not due to the use of EFPs as a replacement form of food assistance.

Non-Profit Food Assistance in Northeast Iowa

Iowa is served by six food banks, which cover mutually exclusive service areas. The
Northeast Iowa Food Bank in Waterloo, Iowa, distributes TEFAP and donated food to over 190
non-profit member agencies in 16 northeastern Iowa counties². Member agencies include
daycare centers, shelters, soup kitchens, congregate meal programs and food pantries. The

¹ This refers to entitlement TEFAP. Another program, Bonus TEFAP, allows the federal government to purchase
product from industry or farmers. In this instance, states may choose whether they wish to accept the product or not.
Northeast Iowa Food Bank operates the largest of these pantries, the Cedar Valley Food Pantry (CVFP). The CVFP provides fruits, vegetables, peanut butter, pastas, soups, cereals, snack items and many other foods in food boxes. To be eligible to receive food boxes, the CVFP’s clients must have an income at or below 185 percent of federal income guidelines and provide verification of all household income, as well as photo IDs and Social Security cards for all household members.

The pantry distributes three types of food boxes: elderly food boxes, crisis food boxes (referred to as emergency here), and supplemental food boxes. Elderly food boxes are given to senior centers and housing complexes on a weekly basis. Elderly food boxes represent only a small portion of the boxes the CVFP distributes, so our focus in this study is on emergency and supplemental food boxes.

For the first three or four time an individual needs CVFP services, he or she is considered an “emergency client.” The majority of emergency clients are those who have recently experienced a crisis, such as losing a job, the death of a family member, or the loss of a home due to fire. Emergency clients may receive a food box from the pantry every week until they begin receiving Food Stamps. CVFP intake staff ask each client whether he or she is a recipient of food stamps. If not, the client is required to apply for the food stamps and can receive a food box on a weekly basis until the application is approved.

After three months, the individual becomes a “supplemental client.” According to the CVFP, supplemental clients require support on a more regular basis, usually to repeatedly augment other sources of income or types of public assistance. Together, CVFP supplemental and crisis food boxes reach an average of 1,100 households each month. In 2004, the CVFP
provided food to 23,000 individuals. Overall, approximately two-thirds of the CVFP clients are supplemental, while one-third are emergency clients.

While this is the distribution of the CVFP clients over time, our population has a different distribution. This is a “stock and flow” issue. Our survey accurately captures the population of the “flow” being more emergency than supplemental, by definition, over time, as some portion of the emergency folks transition to supplemental status, the “stock” of the food pantry clients will lean more and more toward supplemental.

Beginning in July of 2004, CVFP staff asked all clients to fill out a survey to help the pantry more accurately understand the needs of its clientele. Clients did not have to complete the survey for service, although almost everyone did. The survey, given in one form for supplemental clients and another for emergency clients, addresses clients’ reasons for requesting food boxes, their employment status, what sorts of crises led clients to seek help from the pantry, what types of additional support clients accessed while simultaneously making use of the pantry, and what other needs divided their budgets. Other than a name for tracking purposes, no demographic or other identifying information was requested. The CVFP continues to gather surveys.

**Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to use the survey information to present a tangible portrait of hunger among the working poor. Our specific research questions are:

- How would one describe a typical CVFP client?
  - How does working relate to receiving emergency or supplemental assistance?
  - What brought these individuals to the CVFP in the first place?
o How does this portrait compare to national data or those for North Carolina?

- How does receiving assistance from the government in forms such as Food Stamps, Social Security and FIP relate to receiving emergency or supplemental assistance?
- Are there other important factors that influence a client’s status as emergency or supplemental?

So far there has been little research on these particular questions. Many studies have examined the various forms of food assistance available from EFPs, including food pantries and soup kitchens. However, few research studies focus on the characteristics of individuals using EFPs. One limitation is availability of relevant data. While many of these EFPs maintain data on the number of clients served, their methods of tracking clients differ widely. Food pantries or soup kitchens may track the number of individuals coming through the door, the number of families served, or the number of meals served in a year. Each provider may or may not ask for client names and keep records of how frequently an individual returns for assistance. Because of the lack of detail and consistency, in part due to the limited research capacity of these small non-profits, there are little data to study.

One solution to the lack of detailed or consistent data is to survey recipients of food assistance. This has been done recently on the national level. The Hunger in America 2006 report presented the findings of a national study conducted for America’s Second Harvest (A2H), the largest network of EFPs in the country. The A2H network reaches EFPs in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. The 2006 study involved interviews of 52,878 agency
clients and surveys of 31,342 A2H agencies, both administered in 2005. Agencies included food pantries, soup kitchens and emergency shelters serving short-term residents. The scope of the study is therefore quite vast (Mathematica, p. 1). While the coverage of the *Hunger in America* study is impressive, we are still missing the more detailed information and analyses that could be helpful to policy-makers and practitioners working with low-income citizens. This study attempts to provide some of that information.

**Data and Methodology**

In contrast to the *Hunger in America* study, this paper focuses on one food pantry in Iowa in order to make the national information more accessible to a regional audience. In addition, the data available from the regional food pantry can confirm and extend the information included in the national study. The *Hunger in America* study asked questions regarding clients’ employment status, government support program participation status, and choices regarding paying for food versus other life necessities.

The CVFP has been asking similar questions, and more, of all its clients for several years. All clients requesting assistance from the pantry were asked to complete a voluntary, two-page survey. Clients were asked to complete a survey each time they accessed food pantry services. The survey included closed-ended questions on employment, housing, occurrence and type of crisis events, special dietary needs, and receipt of government paid benefits including Food Stamps, FIP (welfare), and Social Security. While data collection by CVFP is continuing, only surveys collected between July 2004 and April 2006 (N=2,031) are used here.

We conduct three main types of analyses: 1) descriptive statistics of the survey data to present a portrait of the working poor using CVFP services, 2) simple cross-tabulations to
explore possible relationships in the data, and 3) regression modeling to explore these relationships simultaneously.

We first present the characteristics of clients accessing the CVFP. The characteristics used to describe clients are similar to profiles created in other studies, such as an analysis of single mothers and emergency food assistance in Wisconsin conducted by Bartfield in 2002 and low-income families in Iowa studied by Jensen, Keng, and Garasky in 2000. Among the variables included in these analyses are employment status and receipt of governmental aid including welfare, Social Security, and Food Stamps (Bartfield, 2002; Jensen, Keng, and Garasky, 2000). Therefore, these studies provide the foundation on which our model is built.

The size of the CVFP dataset is one of its strengths. The large sample size – 2,031 usable surveys – allows a detailed examination of the characteristics of food pantry clients in Iowa and increases the generalizability of these findings to other populations.

After we describe the CVFP clients, we briefly move to cross tabulations to explore relationships between working, receiving government benefits, and status at the pantry. Then, to better analyze how each of a number of variables affect pantry status, we move to regression analysis. Client status as emergency or supplemental is our dependent variable. Since this variable is dichotomous, we use a logistic regression model. Our model predicts client status (emergency or supplemental) by considering the effects of independent variables including employment and the receipt of government subsidies. If these factors can be isolated and understood, perhaps government programs and non-profits can help clients avoid becoming food pantry regulars.

The equation used with logistic regression, like the one used with multiple regression, uses a linear combination of predictor variables. However, the difference is that because of the
categorical nature of the dependent variable, the logistic regression model is used to find the odds of being in one of the categories of the dependent given a particular combination of scores for the independent variables while OLS regression could not predict the likelihood of categorical membership. Logistic regression allows for a robust examination of data, including possible interaction effects among the variables in order to predict the dependent variable (Garson, 2006).

To isolate the impact of specific benefit programs, for example Food Stamps versus FIP or Social Security, these variables were treated separately. No multicollinearity was found when including variables for both receiving governmental benefits in general and receiving benefits in the specific programs in the model. Dummy variables were used as necessary for the analysis. Because item non-response was an issue with several variables, in some cases, a non-response group was created to be a third category. As a result, multi-nominal logistic regression was used with these variables.

Status is coded as 1 for supplemental and 0 for emergency. The other dummy variables created were coded 0 if a trait was not present and 1 if it was. Readers should note that in an effort to better define our model, we wanted to acknowledge the group of non-respondents for several questions. Therefore, we have included an additional dummy variable for the non-response groups for all of our variables of interest. The reference category is always the absence of a trait, characteristic, or condition.

The equation for this study is:

$$\ln \left[ \frac{Y}{1-Y} \right] = \beta_0 + \sum \beta_i X_i$$

Where

\[ Y = \text{Status (Supplemental} = 1, \text{Emergency} = 0) \]
\[\beta_1 = \text{Employed}\]
\[\beta_2 = \text{Employed non-response}\]
\[\beta_6 = \text{Receives Social Security}\]
\[\beta_7 = \text{Receives Social Security non-response}\]
\[\beta_{10} = \text{Receives Welfare}\]
\[\beta_{11} = \text{Receive Welfare non-response}\]
\[\beta_8 = \text{Receives Food Stamps}\]
\[\beta_9 = \text{Receives Food Stamps non-response}\]

In general, one might expect to find that being employed or receiving government benefits would reduce the odds of being a supplemental client, as compared to being unemployed or not being in the government “system”. That is, if you had a job or were receiving government benefits, you would be more food secure and less reliant on picking up donated food through a non-profit pantry.

We want to remind readers that since every emergency and every supplemental client was asked to fill out a survey over this period of time, and staff estimate an almost 100 percent compliance with this request the first time a client was seen, we are dealing with a population rather than a sample. All clients who visited the CVFP during the two year survey period in this geographic region were surveyed. Therefore, we do not calculate any significance tests.

Although staff asked every client to fill out a survey at each visit (a full population), there are several response issues, for the survey as a whole and individual item response, that bear discussing. Response rates had to be estimated because we did not have access to the actual client intake records to know the number of surveys distributed. To ease the administrative
burden on the food pantry staff, all clients were asked to fill out the survey at each visit. As a result, if someone visited multiple months in a short time, they were less likely to fill out the survey the second, third or fourth time they were asked. This was particularly true for supplemental clients. While response rates for the initial request were almost 100 percent, response rates to the survey request on the repeat visits of emergency clients were estimated to be around 50 percent, and for supplemental clients the response rates dropped off significantly – closer to 30 to 40 percent.

We keep these repeat client responses in our descriptive statistics, since those statistics relate to a client’s immediate situation, which may change over the course of the two years. However, to eliminate the potential problem of statistical correlation by having some clients filling out multiple surveys over the course of the two years, we have screened out the second, third or fourth responses from individuals in our logistic regression analysis. However, multiple responses were a relatively unusual occurrence. Only six percent of all surveys fell into this category. For the logistic regression analysis alone, this reduces our N from 2,031 to 1,897.

One should also note that while the CVFP estimates the population served in any month to be approximately two-thirds supplemental and one-third emergency, our survey results are much more heavily weighted to emergency clients – two-thirds of the surveys gathered are from emergency clients. Again, this stock and flow issue affects the results of our study and decreases the generalizability of the study.

Results

A Portrait of the Working Poor at CVFP

At the CVFP, the stereotypical image of poverty – the panhandler who sleeps on the park bench and is too indolent to find a real job – does not have much place in reality. Contrary to
popular belief, not everyone who goes hungry is unemployed. Despite holding steady jobs, some individuals still require help from non-profit food pantries or soup kitchens. For the purpose of this survey, questions about employment imply that the respondent is actively employed at the time the instrument was administered.

In fact, 25 percent of individuals who came to the CVFP in need of food reported having a job at the time of the survey. This number is likely to be an underestimate of working households, as there may be unreported household members who hold jobs. The breakdown of emergency to supplemental clients as well as employed to unemployed clients can be seen in Table 2:

Table 2: Breakdown of Client Status by Employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Employed</th>
<th>Unemployed</th>
<th>No Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplemental</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1448</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: authors’ calculations. Totals do not add to 100% because clients could choose more than one option. Statistical significance is not shown since results represent a full population.

The typical client of CVFP holding a job is likely to be an emergency client, meaning she or he has come to the pantry for three months or less. Of survey respondents with jobs, 71 percent were emergency clients while 29 percent were supplemental clients. Of survey respondents without jobs, 69 percent were emergency clients and 31 percent were supplemental clients. While the total number of employed clients is less than those who are unemployed, the ratio of supplemental and emergency cases is generally consistent within the categories. Being a “regular” at the food pantry is not an honor reserved for the unemployed. The literature on food insecurity and poverty supports this notion. Only 4.9 percents of households falling at or below 1.85 times the federal poverty line experience food insecurity while 35.1 percent who are more
poor than this are food insecure and food insecurity does not reach negligible levels until household income is more than five times the poverty threshold (Bartfeld and Dunifon, 2006).

On the survey, clients reported their current or immediate past employer. The type of employment varied, from being self-employed as a farmer to working for a local government. Most commonly, working clients of the CVFP are employed in the food service or healthcare industries – at hospitals and nursing homes, in restaurants or in manufacturing or food processing plants.

Yet having the paycheck is not enough. One client reported coming to the pantry because of having “not enough Food Stamps and not enough work hours.” Rather than easing financial burdens, having a job appears to increase the weight of an individual’s responsibilities. CVFP’s working clients are more likely to own their homes than are the CVFP clients who are unemployed. They are also slightly more likely to rent than to live with a friend or relative. At higher rates than those without jobs, working clients report having been unable to purchase food because of having to pay rent or mortgage, to buy clothes for themselves and their children, to pay for medical bills and prescriptions, and to pay utility bills. The typical employed CVFP client is unable to meet the demands of life that follow holding down a job – a home, power, medicine, and clothes – for themselves and loved ones. These clients, more so than those without jobs, had to choose between certain necessities and foods, as shown in Table 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Employed</th>
<th>Unemployed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescriptions</td>
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<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rent/Mortgage</td>
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<td>62</td>
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<td>Unexpected Expense</td>
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<td>32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Bills</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some clients reported additional stressors. One person reported having to “live paycheck to paycheck” – a situation in which one extra bill could be significant enough to tip families over the edge. Having to pay a combination of bills, such as one client’s “school loan repayment, car payment, insurance,” also creates difficult situations. Owning a car, often a necessity for those who need to get to work on a regular basis or interview for a new job, creates its own set of bills. Like citizens living in many North Carolina communities, central Iowans do not have access to an extensive, affordable public transportation system on which to rely. Waterloo and Cedar Fall, Iowa, the main urban area served by this food bank, does not have a significant public transportation system. Survey respondents frequently cited car repairs, car insurance, gas, car payments, and other car-related expenses as tying up their funds.

Family problems could also affect finances. Childcare, diapers, baby formula, and additional necessities related to infants often topped the list of other expenses competing with food. One woman reported having trouble paying for both bills and food because of her “ex-husband not sending in child support.” Other domestic problems reported include being in an “abusive relationship” or separating from a spouse.

Why don’t these families turn to the government for support? The truth is they do. Thirty-eight percent of survey respondents who reported having jobs also received Social Security, Food Stamps or FIP. Thirty-three percent received Food Stamps, ten percent received Social Security, and five percent received FIP. Unlike CVFP clients without jobs, employed

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kids’ School Expenses</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: authors’ calculations. Totals do not add to 100% because clients could choose more than one option. Statistical significance is not shown since results represent a full population.
clients frequently rely on only one type of government assistance. Only nine percent of working clients received more than one of these types of government support.

*How are emergency clients different from supplemental?*

As mentioned above, when clients first come to the CVFP, they are categorized as emergency clients. Fifty-one percent of respondents said they were visiting for the first time. Sixty-one percent of CVFP survey respondents reported they had recently experienced a crisis of some sort. The nature of each crisis varied and respondents could report experiencing more than one type of crisis. Nonetheless, as seen in Table 4, one type stood out more frequently than others: job loss. Twenty-nine percent of emergency clients said they had recently lost a job. Another three percent had experienced a fire at home, and three percent said a family member had recently passed away. The “other” category included another 40 percent of respondents. Commonly cited reasons in the other category were general financial hardship including loss of financial support from family or spouse (17 percent), health problems (seven percent), a change in domestic relationship, housing situation, or homelessness (seven percent), a recent move to the area (six percent), and a recent release from prison (two percent).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Crisis</th>
<th>Employed Number</th>
<th>Employed Percent</th>
<th>Unemployed Number</th>
<th>Unemployed Percent</th>
<th>No Response Number</th>
<th>No Response Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of Job</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Death</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author’s calculations. Totals do not equal 100 percent because clients could report experiencing more than one type of crisis. Supplemental clients were not asked about recent crises, as the CVFP considers them to have transitioned out of emergency status to a situation requiring long-term assistance.
Poor people in America can face the same struggles as other Americans. Client descriptions make the “other” category come alive. One individual reported the crisis was, “a year of chemotherapy for daughter.” Paying for family members’ medical bills can be a financial burden as well as emotionally stressful, but occasionally individuals have to pay for their own medical bills while losing hours at work as a result of their disease or injury. One individual reported a “second degree burn on leg, off work 4-6 weeks.” Another revealed that he or she “had shoulder surgery and will be out of work 4-6 weeks (income reduced by about 50%).” Another respondent cited being “diagnosed with lung cancer” and therefore being “unable to work.” Others reported that a family member or significant other had recently lost a job, stretching their own paycheck even further. Some clients noted an exceptionally high heating bill, while several others said they had just been released from prison and were trying to get themselves back on their feet.

Supplemental clients make use of government social services in greater percentages than emergency clients. Survey respondents were asked whether they were recipients of Social Security, FIP or Food Stamps. While 42 percent of emergency clients used at least one type of support, 66 percent of supplemental clients did. In addition, only 14 percent of emergency clients used more than one form of government support while nearly twice that number of supplemental clients did, at 27 percent. This seems to indicate that after experiencing a crisis, families access more than one form of support over time to meet all their needs. The combination of government and private assistance may help families stay afloat as a crisis becomes less temporary and begins to have lasting effects on a family’s resources.

By definition, supplemental clients visit the pantry more frequently. Only about half of supplemental clients surveyed responded to the question asking them how frequently they came
to the CVFP, suggesting some clients may not have been comfortable discussing their reliance on the pantry for food assistance. However, of those who did respond, most (69 percent) visited the CVFP one to two times a year. Another 15 percent of supplemental clients visited three to four times a year. Frequency of visits to the CVFP for all supplemental clients can be seen in Table 5 below:

Table 5: Frequency of Supplemental Clients’ Visits to the CVFP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of Visits</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 to 2 times a year</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 4 times a year</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 6 times a year</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 to 8 times a year</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 to 10 times a year</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10 times a year</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: authors’ calculations. Totals do not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

Only eight percent of emergency clients and ten percent of supplemental clients had a special food need, such as being diabetic or having a food allergy. Only nine percent of all clients required specific foods that may not have been met by other food assistance programs, such as soup kitchens or WIC.

It is interesting to note that during the two years in which the surveys were gathered, approximately ten percent of the emergency clients transitioned into supplemental status. This is probably underestimated since we are not capturing those who became supplemental just after our survey data collection period ends. The pantry director (who also is the Northeast Iowa Food Bank Executive Director) viewed this finding with optimism, stating it shows the CVFP is meeting the immediate needs of the vast majority of people walking through its doors. On the negative side, an additional number of clients are constantly being added to the supplemental group, so the base of people dependent on the pantry for a long-term supplement to their food
supply grows each year. This would only reverse if supplemental clients eventually stop needing assistance in a flow that meets or exceeds the number of “new” supplemental clients.

Similarities of the CVFP to The National Hunger in America Study

The results of the Hunger in America 2006 study are similar to those of this report in several respects. The weighted percentage of the Hunger interviews with pantry clients, as opposed to kitchen or shelter clients, is 76 percent, so the majority of the respondents came from pantries. Of the pantry interviewees, 37 percent reported that at least one member of their household was employed.

Hunger in America 2006 also asked what types of government support pantry clients received. Participation in the Food Stamp Program is the most widespread form of government support for this group. This is true for both Hunger in America 2006 and the CVFP survey. Hunger in America 2006 found that 36 percent of pantry clients used Food Stamps while 38 percent of CVFP clients reported using the program. Other government assistance programs showed similar levels of use. Hunger in America 2006 found that six percent of pantry clients receive TANF, while the survey of CVFP clients found that nine percent receive FIP (Iowa’s version of TANF). In a slight disconnect, 36 percent of all Hunger in America 2006 interviewees reported receiving Social Security compared to 21 percent of CVFP respondents.

The housing situation for Hunger in America 2006 and CVFP respondents was also similar. Of Hunger in America 2006 interviewees, three percent were homeless while four percent of CVFP respondents were homeless. Both Hunger in America 2006 and the CVFP survey asked those clients with homes whether they owned or rented the place in which they lived. While the Hunger in America 2006 study asked whether clients “Live free with someone
else,” the CVFP divided this category into two options: “Live with a relative” or “Live with someone other than a relative.” Both studies also provided an “other” category. These numbers were most similar for those who rented. Of the pantry clients participating in the *Hunger in America 2006* study, 66 percent rented their home, whereas 62 percent of CVFP respondents rented theirs. The housing situation for most clients in both *Hunger in America 2006* and the CVFP Survey can be seen in Table 6 below.

**Table 6: Housing Arrangements for Respondents across the Two Surveys**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing Arrangement</th>
<th>Hunger in America Pantry Clients</th>
<th>Emergency Clients</th>
<th>CVFP Survey Supplemental Clients</th>
<th>All Clients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live with Someone Other than a Relative</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live with a Relative</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live Free with Someone Else</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=36,877  N=827  N=508  N=1335

* These questions were not asked on this survey or were asked in a separate format. Source: authors’ calculations and *Hunger in America 2006*.

Having to pay for rent, utilities, and other necessities can sometimes cut into families’ food budgets. Both *Hunger in America 2006* and the CVFP survey addressed these problems, with similar results. Both surveys asked clients whether they had had to choose between paying for food and paying for other expenses, such as rent or mortgage, utilities and medicine. The two surveys asked these questions using different phrases; however, the results are somewhat similar. Results for these questions are summarized in Table 7 below:
Table 7: Percentage of Survey Respondents Having to Choose Between Paying for Food and Paying for Other Expenses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National Percent</th>
<th>Central and Eastern North Carolina Percent</th>
<th>CVFP (NE Iowa) Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rent/Mortgage</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>41*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*CVFP clients were asked about prescriptions and medical bills separately. This figure represents the percentage of answers for these two categories added together. Source: Hunger in America 2006, authors’ calculations.

How does receiving assistance from the government in forms such as Food Stamps, Social Security and FIP relate to receiving emergency or supplemental assistance?

After understanding the relationship between working and client status, what crises clients experienced and what other items competed with food for scarce resources, we turn to the propensity of clients to receive government benefits. Approximately half of the CVFP respondents receive governmental benefits. Of those who are receiving government benefits, most are enrolled in only one program. Only 359 of the 2,029 respondents (18 percent) report receipt of more than one type of benefit. Table 8 summarizes the distribution of clients by type of major governmental service.

Table 8: Percentage of Clients Receiving Governmental Assistance (of total respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Assistance</th>
<th>Emergency</th>
<th>Supplemental</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food Stamps</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIP</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Security</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: authors’ calculations.
When considering those receiving government benefits compared to those who do not, we see a strong difference between emergency and supplemental clients. As seen in the table below, of those receiving government benefits, 58 percent are considered emergency. Of those not receiving government benefits, almost 80 percent are considered emergency. Of course, the ratios for supplemental clients are mirrors of these numbers. Those CVFP clients receiving benefits are more likely to be supplemental than emergency (42 to 21 percent, respectively). In what might be a positive finding, this supports the idea that emergency clients are ones who have had a crisis, and are not yet “in the system” of government support. In what might be a bleak finding, a substantial portion of clients coming to the food pantry on a regular basis are “in the system” – meaning that government programs, such as Food Stamps and Social Security, are not lifting them out of a situation of food insecurity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Client</th>
<th>Does Not Receive Benefits</th>
<th>Receives Benefits</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency</td>
<td>817</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplemental</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1030</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: authors’ calculations. N=2030 because there was one non-response to this question.

Does whether clients receive assistance from the government in forms such as Food Stamps, Social Security and FIP influence a client’s status as emergency or supplemental? Are there other important factors that influence a client’s status as emergency or supplemental?

In our logistical regression model, we considered how employment status, receipt of government benefits, and veteran status influence client status as emergency or supplemental.
Food Stamps, FIP or Social Security were treated separately. The results of the final model are in Table 10 below.

**Table 10: Prediction of Client Status**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>1.066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed – no response</td>
<td>1.790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receives Social Security</td>
<td>1.801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receive Social Security – no response</td>
<td>1.149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receives welfare</td>
<td>.817</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receives welfare - no response</td>
<td>.812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receives Food Stamps</td>
<td>2.171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receives Food Stamps – no response</td>
<td>1.636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed and receives government benefits</td>
<td>.922</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that because this is a population, no statistical significant is calculated. Source: authors’ calculations

Several results jump out from this analysis. Readers should remember that we are always referencing the benchmark of not having the characteristic, and that these data refer to Northeast Iowa.

- Being employed does not lessen your odds of needing long-term non-profit food assistance. For the poor in low-wage, service, food-processing or farm work jobs, working doesn’t make it easier to put food on the table. In fact, as shown in Table 3, working in these jobs can make putting food on the table harder. Employed clients of the CVFP were more likely than the unemployed to sacrifice food for medicine, housing, utilities, and other life necessities.

- CVFP clients who are receiving social security have almost twice the odds of needing long-term non-profit food assistance than clients who don’t receive social
security. For some elderly poor, social security is not providing enough to provide food security.

- Receiving welfare slightly lessens one’s odds of needing long-term non-profit food assistance.

- Receiving food stamps more than doubles your odds of needing long-term non-profit food assistance. Food stamps are clearly not providing enough food for families to avoid chronic food insecurity. Many citizens are relying on both help from government and help from non-profits to make ends meet.

- Those who are working and receiving benefits are almost as likely to need long-term assistance as those who are not (those who receive benefits only or those who do not receive benefits and are not working).

**Limitations**

The limitations of this paper lie in the unique nature of working with an ongoing survey constructed for organizational purposes rather than research purposes. While this is an accurate portrait of the clients at the largest food pantry in NE Iowa, we cannot confidently say it represents a typical pantry or that the findings would apply to other pantries. However, the similarities between our results and those of the recent national survey suggest it is not unlikely.

There are also some methodological limitations. For example, some of the last emergency clients included in our paper will eventually become supplemental outside of our time period. Therefore, some of the observations categorized as emergency will eventually become supplemental. However, since we estimate that only about ten percent of those would make that status change, and this would only affect the emergency clients making their first or second visit at the end of our studied time period, we assume this is not enough to significantly
affect our results. In the future, however, truncating the sample or using a longer time period would eliminate this problem. We chose not to truncate the sample in order to include as much information in the analysis as possible. We would like to use a longer time period in future research.

Comparison to North Carolina

To make these data directly relevant to the University of North Carolina’s Center on Poverty, Work and Opportunity, we also present some general comparison data from North Carolina. Food insecurity and food insecurity with hunger affect an even greater percentage of households in North Carolina. The three-year average of food insecure households for North Carolina is 455,000 (13.8 percent of total households in North Carolina), the ninth highest rate of food insecurity nationally (FRAC, “North Carolina,” 2005). The three-year average for food insecure households with hunger in North Carolina is 162,000 (4.9 percent of total households). The increases in food insecurity and food insecurity with hunger in North Carolina are statistically significant over the previous three-year average (FRAC, “North Carolina,” 2006).

In North Carolina, 799,747 individuals (ten percent of the population) participated in the Food Stamps Program on average each month (FRAC, “North Carolina,” 2006). This compares to a seven percent participation rate in Iowa and 9 percent of the total US population (FRAC, “Iowa,” 2006).

Table 11: Participation in Government Assistance Programs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Food Stamps Program</strong>&lt;br&gt;Average Participants per Month, 2005</td>
<td>799,747</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25,641,656</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Temporary</strong></td>
<td>77,119</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4,722,743</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results of this report mirror those from the *Hunger in America 2006* study and are similar to the North Carolina counties served by the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina. For the 34 North Carolina counties included in this group the findings are very similar to national results at 38 percent. The weighted percentage of the *Hunger* interviews with pantry clients, as opposed to kitchen or shelter clients, is 76 percent, so the majority of the respondents came from pantries. Of the pantry interviewees, 37 percent of North Carolinians reported that at least one member of their household was employed.

Finally, the distribution of North Carolinians having to choose between paying for food and paying for other expenses is also similar to the national pattern. The patterns of choices made by clients of the Central and Eastern North Carolina Food Bank is reported in Table 12. This distribution is less than that reported by the clients surveyed at CVFP but is similar to the distribution reported in the *Hunger* study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assistance to Needy Families</th>
<th>Number of Participants in 2004</th>
<th>Women, Infants and Children</th>
<th>Average Participants per Month, 2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>225,252</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7,798,635</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Table 7: Percentage of Survey Respondents Having to Choose Between Paying for Food and Paying for Other Expenses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National Percent</th>
<th>Central and Eastern North Carolina Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rent/Mortgage</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Utilities | 40 | 45
---|---|---
Medicine | 32 | 36

*CVFP clients were asked about prescriptions and medical bills separately. This figure represents the percentage of answers for these two categories added together. Source: *Hunger in America 2006*, authors’ calculations.

Conclusions

A sizable portion of clients at the CVFP already work (25 percent) or are on government support programs (49 percent). Surprisingly, working does not appear to alleviate the need for regular food assistance. Job related demands, such as transportation, child care, and uncovered health care costs force choices between food and other necessities. In fact, working individuals are more likely to report having to make the difficult choice between basic life necessities and food than those who are unemployed. Working may make life more difficult. In addition, this paper suggests government support programs such as Social Security and Food Stamps are an insufficient guard against hunger, and thousands of Americans turn to non-profits to fill the gap.

The policy ramifications of these findings are clear. First, policies encouraging work among the poor should recognize the standard of living for these individuals may become less stable, rather than more so, as a result. Instead of making life easier, working can actually make it harder for poor people to make ends meet. Of course, this is likely due to the type of work available to this population – food service, food processing, and, in Iowa, even some farm work. Policies dealing with minimum wage levels, living wages, job-related health care, transportation and child care assistance should be reexamined in light of these results. Jobs programs focused on placing individuals in these types of jobs should recognize that to do so will not improve the worker’s situation, at least in terms of food security, and may, in fact, make it worse.
Second, our national social support structure is inadequate. If we wish to maintain the
government responsibility to alleviate hunger in our country, benefits for eligible citizens must
be increased or food assistance non-profits need greater government support. Unless we address
these two issues, we should face the fact that as an undeclared public policy, our society tolerates
hunger.

1 The USDA estimates participation in the Food Stamp Program will decrease by 1.1 million
people in the coming fiscal year because of high Disaster Food Stamp Program in 2005 due to
2 The Northeast Iowa Food Bank in Waterloo, Iowa, serves the following counties: Allamakee,
Black Hawk, Buchanan, Butler, Bremer, Chickasaw, Clayton, Delaware, Fayette, Floyd, Grundy,
Howard, Mitchell, Poweshiek, Tama and Winneshiek.
3 A copy of the survey instrument is available from the authors upon request.
4 The specific survey questions can be found in Appendix D of the Hunger in America study
(Mathematica, pp. D.3-D.9).
Bibliography


