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New Survey Finds 24 Percent of Households in Arkansas Unable to Afford Enough Food in 2009

Report Exposes Broad Hunger and Provides First-Ever Food Hardship Data for Every State, the Top 100 Large Cities and Every Congressional District

Little Rock, AR – January 27, 2010 – More than 24 percent of households in Arkansas reported in 2009 not having enough money to buy food that they needed during the prior twelve months for themselves or their family, according to a new report released by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC). These results rank Arkansas second in the nation for the highest rate of food hardship. This is an increase from the 21.6 percent and 6th place ranking in 2008.

For the first time, data on food hardship – the inability to afford enough food – is available for every state, every Congressional District and for 100 of the country's largest Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), including Little Rock and Memphis. The Memphis MSA ranks first in the nation with 26 percent reporting hardship and the Little Rock MSA ranks 18th in the nation with 20.5 percent reporting hardship.

"These new data reaffirm what we're seeing in our local communities and provides a current, on-the-ground look at how pervasive households' struggle with hunger have become in today's economy," said Rhonda Sanders, executive director of the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance. "These findings increase the drumbeat that more must be done, and quickly, to help this state's and this nation's struggling families."

The report analyzes survey data that were collected by Gallup and provided to FRAC. The ability to provide such localized data and such up-to-date data comes from Gallup's partnership with Healthways, interviewing 1,000 households per day almost every day since January 2, 2008 as part of the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index project. Through December 2009, more than 650,000 people have been asked a series of questions on a range of topics including emotional health, physical health, healthy behavior, work environment and access to basic services. Specific to this report, more than 530,000 people were asked whether there were times over the preceding year that they did not have enough money to buy food they or their family needed.

The Gallup survey question on food hardship is very similar to one posed by the Census Bureau and analyzed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in its official measure of food insecurity, but because of sample size Gallup provides us with a closer, more localized and more recent look at food hardship. Official government data on food insecurity have a nearly one-year time lag and do not go below the state level.

"The data in this report show that food hardship – running out of money to buy the food that families need – is truly a national problem. It is a national problem in the sense that the rate for the nation is so high," said Jim Weill, president of FRAC. "And it is a national problem in the sense that rates are high in virtually every state, Metropolitan Statistical Area, and Congressional District."

These new numbers are especially relevant as Congress looks at jobs legislation and other strategies to mitigate the damage of the recession, and reauthorizes child nutrition legislation this year. Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance has joined FRAC in calling for improvements in a range of federal nutrition programs, including SNAP/ Food Stamps and child nutrition programs, and for more efforts to boost the economy, create more well-paying jobs and reduce unemployment.

"President Obama has set a goal of ending childhood hunger by 2015," said Sanders. "As we can see with these new data, the struggle with hunger is a serious problem here in Arkansas for children and adults. Not a minute can be wasted between now and 2015 if we're to reach that goal. All corners of government, the private sector and nonprofits must work together in order to implement long-term strategies that will battle our nation's hunger crisis."

The full report is available at www.frac.org

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