Tracking the Recession's Impact

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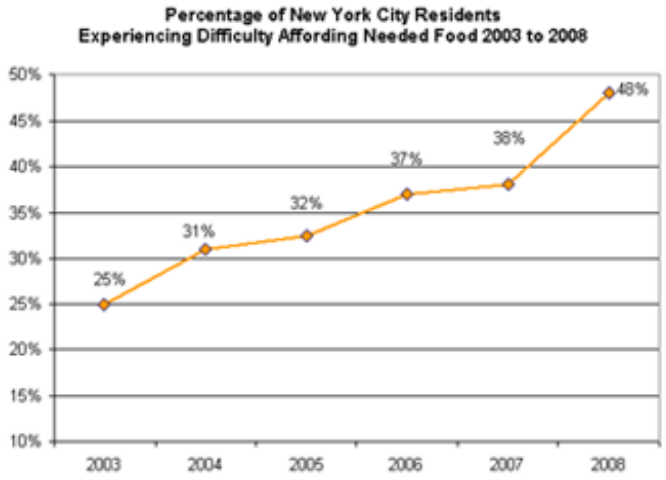
By Ashley Baughman

As the recession deepens, unemployment rises and costs continue to increase, the Food Bank's research research department is keeping track of how this crisis is impacting New Yorkers — and the results are devastating.

Our most recent report, *NYC Hunger Experience 2008 Update: Food Poverty Soars as Recession Hits Home*, shows that the number of city residents experiencing difficulty affording needed food is rising rapidly, doubling from approximately two million in 2003 to approximately four million in 2008 — representing almost half of all city residents. In the past year alone, the number jumped by almost one million — the highest increase in the history of the poll.



One of the most alarming findings in the new report is that 3.5 million city residents are concerned about needing food assistance during the next year, including 2.1 million who have never accessed food assistance before. As of 2007, 1.3 million city residents were already relying on soup kitchens and food pantries, and our network of emergency food programs was struggling to meet demand — more than half of the programs frequently ran out of food and had to turn participants away (*NYC Hunger Safety Net 2007: A Food Poverty Focus*). Since March 2007, the Bureau of Labor Statistics has shown that the number of unemployed increased by 5.3 million nationwide to an unadjusted unemployment rate of 9 percent, with half of the increase occuring in the last four months alone. An additional influx of residents in need of emergency food over the next year would be crushing.

These findings are particularly worrisome as city residents' concerns about needing food assistance are more and more likely to be realized as the unemployment rate continues to rise. Results show that 3.7 million people would not be able to afford food within three months of losing household income (1.9 million would be immediately unable to afford food). Unfortunately, things are likely to get worse before they get better — economists anticipate that the unemployment rate will reach approximately 10 percent by the end of 2009, driving more families into economic hardship and to food assistance programs.