FOOD BANK FOR NEW YORK CITY
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KEY FINDINGS
NYC Hunger Experience 2011: Sacrifice and Support

In 2011, more than one in three New York City residents (35 percent), or 2.9 million people, experienced difficulty affording needed food. Although the percentage of New York City residents having difficulty affording food has dropped since the height of the recession in 2008, when it stood at 48 percent, it has increased by 40 percent since the start of the poll in 2003 (25 percent), indicating an entrenched hunger and food poverty problem. The decline in the percentage of residents reporting difficulty affording food can be attributed, in part, to cutbacks to the quantity and quality of food being consumed and increased participation in the food stamp program (also known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP). For example, almost two in five New York City residents (38 percent) purchased less food to stretch food resources or money; more than one in three residents (35 percent) reported buying less meat, poultry, or fish; more than one in four residents (27 percent) reported buying less dairy; and more than one in four residents (27 percent) reported buying less fresh fruits and vegetables.

Among middle-income New Yorkers, a troubling new trend has emerged showing that an increasing percentage are having difficulty affording food and concerned about needing food assistance in the future. These residents are most likely ineligible for food stamps (SNAP) and other nutrition assistance programs that help offset increases in the cost of food.

- While the percentage of New York City residents at lower income levels reporting difficulty affording food declined, the percentage of New York City residents at higher income levels increased. Between 2010 and 2011, the percentage of New York City residents with annual household incomes between $50,000 to $74,999, and annual household incomes of $75,000 or more, who reported difficulty affording food increased from 26 percent to 32 percent, and from 13 percent to 16 percent, respectively.
- While the percentage of New York City residents at lower income levels expressing concern about needing food assistance, including food stamps (SNAP) or emergency food (soup kitchens and food pantries), in the next 12 months remained stable or declined , the percentage of New York City residents with an annual household incomes between $50,000 to $74,999, and annual household incomes of $75,000 or more, who expressed concern increased from 24 percent to 27 percent, and from 9 percent to 11 percent, respectively.

New findings indicate that a growing percentage of college-educated residents are having difficulty affording food and concerned about needing food assistance in the future, indicating that higher levels of educational attainment may no longer provide a safety net against hunger and food poverty.

- While the percentage of New York City residents with lower levels of educational attainment (high school or below, or some college or Associate's degree) reporting difficulty affording food declined, the percentage of New York City residents at higher educational levels (college degree or graduate/professional degree) increased. Between 2010 and 2011, the percentage of residents with a college degree reporting difficulty increased from 24 percent to 30 percent; and for those with a graduate/professional degree, from 19 percent to 21 percent.
- While the percentage of New York City residents with lower levels of educational attainment (high school or below, or some college or Associate's degree) expressing concern about needing food assistance, including food stamps (SNAP) or emergency food (soup kitchens and food pantries), in the next 12 months remained stable or declined, the percentage of New York City residents with a college degree expressing concern increased from 23 percent to 30 percent.

Consistent with previous findings from the poll, the data indicate that low-income residents, households with children, unemployed residents, women, and New Yorkers without a college degree are more likely to experience difficulty affording needed food than other groups.

- Half of New York City residents (50 percent) with annual household incomes of less than $25,000 had difficulty affording needed food.
- More than two in five New York City households with children (43 percent) had difficulty affording needed food.
- More than two in five unemployed New York City residents (41 percent) had difficulty affording needed food.
- Almost two in five female New York City residents (38 percent) had difficulty affording needed food.
- More than two in five New York City residents with a high school degree or below (43 percent) had difficulty affording needed food.

As Congress continues to wrestle with the challenge of reducing the nation's deficit, and embarks on setting funding and policy frontiers for the hunger safety net in the 2012 Farm Bill reauthorization, any suggestions that food stamps or other anti-hunger programs be cut are insupportable, both in the face of the rising need that increased use of food stamps among New Yorkers indicates and the evidence presented here that New Yorkers are continuing to make sacrifices to afford food. Cuts to food stamps or other anti-hunger programs could result in a substantial increase in the percentage of New York City residents reporting difficulty affording food. They could also increase pressure on the emergency food programs that are doing their own part to help households struggling with food affordability problems.