

Alabama Coalition Against Hunger

The core mission of the Alabama Coalition Against Hunger (ACAH) is to end hunger and malnutrition in Alabama. As such, ACAH is, on behalf of those suffering from hunger, malnutrition, and other food/nutrition-related circumstances:

- 1) A clearinghouse of information about the food/nutrition-related issues of the day;
- 2) A provider of programs for addressing and eliminating negative food/nutrition-related circumstances; and
- 3) A vehicle for ensuring that those eligible for government and other food/nutrition-related assistance have an opportunity to receive them.

Food Insecurity, Food Stamps, and School Breakfast are among the key issues that ACAH addresses daily. While we have assisted many thousands of Alabama residents in these areas, there is still an awful long way to go. More precisely:

- Food insecurity affected 10 percent of Alabama households from 1997 to 1999, 11.9 percent from 1999 to 2001, and, currently, 12.5 percent. In addition, 3.2 percent of that 12.5 percent are food insecure with hunger.
- Food Stamps are the nation's leading defense against hunger, but many people who are eligible to receive them do not receive them. Latest estimates are that only about 60 percent of those eligible for Food Stamps are receiving them.
- Breakfast is essential for children to be alert and ready to learn in school. Yet, fewer than half of low-income children who receive school lunch also get school breakfast.

There is the old adage that conveys the message that it is better to teach a man to fish—because then he can feed himself for a lifetime—than to give a man a fish so that he can eat for a day. We do not agree. We say teach a man to fish so he can feed himself for a lifetime, but, while you're teaching him, give him a fish so he can eat for the day and have the mental and physical capacity to learn.

That is, don't pull funding from Food Stamps and other food and nutrition programs until you come up with another way to guarantee Alabama's impoverished consistent, 24-7 access to a sufficient quantity and quality of nutritious foods.

ACAH's County Community Garden Project is an alternative means for addressing hunger and malnutrition.

Individual county gardens operate on the same self-help, shared-labor/shared-bounty concept that the Habitat for Humanity employs in its housing programs. Each garden consists—as exclusively as possible—of donated site, resources, equipment, supplies, skills, labor, etc., from within the county in which the garden is located.

Furthermore, the goal is for as much of the labor as possible to be performed by those who will, ultimately, receive the fresh vegetables and fruits produced free of charge. The project is a natural for generating support and participation of businesses, schools, churches, social service agencies, and all other community segments.

American agriculture is the best in the world. Why are more than 36 million Americans living in food insecure households? There is a disconnect.

Rather than pay farmers not to farm, put that money into rural Alabama, where many of the state's 670,000 impoverished reside. Designate individual farmers and groups of farmers to produce the kind of nutritious foods that will eliminate the kind of diet that has placed Alabama as the nation's most obese state.

Allow them to farm wide open so that foreign markets can be recruited for lucrative export opportunities.

Be creative. Join us in our County Community Garden Project. By doing so, you can put the unemployed to work...ensure the constant availability of nutritious foods...revitalize the economies of individual communities all across the state.

In the meantime, please do not forget that Food Stamps and the other food and nutrition programs are a life-quality lifeline to low-income Alabamians.

Please...no cuts!

For more information about the Alabama Coalition Against Hunger, please call Albert Harris at 334-262-0359.