



# Hunger Relief Plan Palm Beach County October 2015





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# HUNGER RELIEF PLAN

## PALM BEACH COUNTY

### Executive Summary

Hunger can — and does — exist in the midst of plenty. Nationally, more than 49 million Americans have trouble regularly putting nutritious food on the table. <sup>1</sup> Despite its wealth, more than 200,000 residents in Palm Beach County struggle with hunger. <sup>2</sup> People can't always feed themselves and their families because they have too little money, too little access both to federal nutrition programs and to sources of affordable healthy food, and too little information about how their challenges can be overcome. The result is a **preventable** human tragedy for families and communities.

Recognizing the unacceptable consequences of local hunger, United Way of Palm Beach County, the Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners, backed by a group of 183 organizations, convened the Hunger Relief Project and identified the need to create a comprehensive plan to reduce local hunger. The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) and the University of South Carolina (USC) Center for Research in Nutrition and Health Disparities were commissioned to create this Hunger Relief Plan.

The project started with a robust public engagement process that featured an online survey of 151 stakeholders, ten focus groups, ten interviews with people struggling with hunger, and 21 interviews with people engaged in anti-hunger work. Successfully implementing the plan will require a Hunger Relief Executive to lead and mobilize efforts to achieve the Hunger Relief Plan's ten goals.

#### **Goal #1: All County Residents Will Be Aware of Hunger in Palm Beach County and Solutions At Hand.**

- **Objective:** Awareness about hunger and effective solutions will increase in Palm Beach County.
- **Strategies:** 1) Launch a comprehensive campaign to raise awareness about the extent of hunger in Palm Beach County, with a compelling framework and message that keeps the topic relevant and engages community members at all levels; 2) Increase awareness of the solutions at hand; 3) Include people struggling personally with hunger and food hardship in all efforts.

#### **Goal #2: The Palm Beach County Hunger Relief Task Force, Elected Officials, and Community Members Will Advocate for the Strengthening of Public Policies at All Levels of Government to Systematically Fight Hunger and Reduce Food Hardship.**

- **Objective:** The Hunger Relief Task Force will effectively advocate for public policies to fight hunger.
- **Strategies:** 1) Ramp up the ability of the Hunger Relief Task Force to advocate for policy solutions to fight hunger and reduce food hardship; 2) Advocate for and strengthen federal policies to systematically fight hunger; 3) Advocate for and strengthen state policies to systematically fight hunger and reduce food hardship.

### **Goal #3: Hunger in the Glades Will Be Reduced Through Intensive, Focused Outreach and Attention.**

- **Objective:** Efforts to reduce hunger in Palm Beach County will prioritize the need for targeted, culturally appropriate work in the Glades.
- **Strategies:** 1) Combine nutrition education and food access into one seamless package; 2) Increase SNAP participation in the Glades; 3) Improve the coordination of resources; 4) Improve participation in child nutrition programs.

### **Goal #4: All Palm Beach County Children Will Have Access to the Nutritious Food They Need to Build Healthy Bodies and Strong Minds.**

- **Objective:** All infants, toddlers, and pre-schoolers will have access to special nutritional food every day, all year long.
- **Strategies:** 1) Maximize participation in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC); 2) Maximize participation in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).
- **Objective:** All school-age children and teenagers will have access to nutritious food in schools and through summer, afterschool, and weekend programs, every day, all year long.
- **Strategies:** 1) Maximize participation in the school-based regular day meal programs (School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program); 2) Maximize participation in Summer BreakSpot (Florida's Summer Nutrition Program); 3) Maximize participation in the Afterschool Nutrition Programs.

### **Goal #5: Low-Income Older Residents of Palm Beach County Will Have Balanced, Nutritious Diets.**

- **Objective:** All eligible Palm Beach County senior citizens at risk of hunger will receive federal benefits.
- **Strategies:** 1) Maximize senior citizen participation in SNAP; 2) Expand the Congregate Meal and Home-Delivered Meals Programs; 3) Bring the Commodity Supplemental Food Program to Palm Beach County.
- **Objective:** The nutritional needs of Palm Beach County senior citizens will be better served through private sector networks, whose efforts are integrated with, and complement, the public sector.
- **Strategies:** 1) Identify innovative models to involve volunteers in addressing senior hunger; 2) Build on and synthesize existing research to identify pockets of seniors most at risk of hunger and being under-served.

## **Goal #6: Participation in SNAP Will Increase Substantially to Benefit More Residents of Palm Beach County, and SNAP Benefits Will Be Enhanced.**

- **Objective:** SNAP participation will increase significantly in the three groups most underrepresented in the program — low-income workers, senior citizens, and eligible immigrants.
- **Strategies:** 1) Develop systemic approaches for connecting hard-to-reach populations to SNAP; 2) Increase the capacity of the network of over 200 SNAP outreach partners to connect eligible but non-participating households to SNAP; 3) Address various unnecessary barriers that prevent people from getting SNAP benefits and ensure that families — particularly those experiencing household crisis hunger — can readily access expedited benefits and the maximum benefits to which they are entitled.
- **Objective:** The damaging impact of SNAP cuts affecting able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWD) will be mitigated.
- **Strategy:** Prepare for addressing the needs of ABAWD who risk losing SNAP benefits after three months.
- **Objective:** Palm Beach County will undertake full preparations to immediately issue disaster SNAP benefits in the event of a hurricane or other catastrophe.
- **Strategy:** Ensure that Palm Beach County can support victims of a natural disaster through Disaster SNAP.

## **Goal #7: All Palm Beach County Residents Will Be Able to Access Healthy, Affordable Food In Their Community.**

- **Objective:** Palm Beach County will increase healthy food retail so that all residents can conveniently purchase or access the nutrition needed to thrive.
- **Strategies:** 1) Build on existing research to prioritize low-income areas for healthy food retail development and improve charitable access to healthy food; 2) Leverage funding to develop affordable, healthy food retail options in food deserts; 3) Establish farmers' markets and produce stands where people can purchase with SNAP EBT cards and access "bonus bucks"; 4) Support farmers and businesses to work with food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, and other sites supporting low-income families to increase their capacity to provide healthy food in food desert areas.

## **Goal #8: Food Banks, Pantries, and Other Charitable Agencies Will Partner To Connect Families to Nutritious Food and Resources.**

- **Objective:** Low-income residents will benefit from a charitable food network that works together to strategically address hunger.
- **Strategies:** 1) Coordinate efforts to better access federal and state resources; 2) Coordinate efforts in other ways — including the sharing of administrative and distribution resources — to better reduce hunger and food insecurity in Palm Beach County.

## **Goal #9: All Palm Beach County Families Will Have the Knowledge To Make the Best Possible Healthy Food Choices.**

- **Objective:** Residents will enjoy improved health from participating in nutrition education programs based on best practices.
- **Strategies:** 1) Synthesize existing and conduct new research through an environmental scan on the impact of nutrition education programs in Palm Beach County, then improve and coordinate nutrition education messages to reach all families at risk; 2) Develop partnerships that use evidence-based materials, sustainable models, and volunteers to get messages out to sites that serve low-income children and families.

## **Goal #10: Low-Income Families in Palm Beach County Will Achieve Higher Incomes to Purchase Food and Household Crisis Hunger Will Decrease.**

- **Objective:** Palm Beach County anti-hunger stakeholders will work to adopt, promote, and implement the broad and strategic recommendations of the Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) Report and additional strategies to increase household economic security.
- **Strategies:** 1) Foster public-private partnerships and join forces with groups such as United Way of Florida and ALICE stakeholders to promote solutions that move families toward increased economic security at the federal, state, and county levels; 2) Support County efforts to protect and support ALICE families from falling into deeper crisis.

The Hunger Relief Plan is bold, yet attainable, practical, and results-oriented. It combines proven lessons with innovative strategies. The outcomes are significant, measurable increases in the County's use of federal nutrition programs (such as SNAP, school meals, and senior nutrition). These are proven methods to strengthen household economic security and connect all eligible County residents with federal nutrition benefits. With all the stakeholders working together – led by a Hunger Relief Executive to implement this plan – the County will see improvements in its social fabric, health and educational outcomes, and economic vibrancy.

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*“Palm Beach County is a very collaborative community. We just need to create a strong strategic plan that can serve as a guide for how we can work strategically together to impact hunger relief.”*  
–Survey Participant



*Why should there be hunger and deprivation in any land, in any city, at any table, when man has the resources and the scientific know-how to provide all mankind with the basic necessities of life? There is no deficit in human resources. The deficit is in human will.*

— Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1964

There are two fundamental truths about hunger. First, its existence in any prosperous nation, state, county, or municipality is a disgrace. And second, hunger can be reduced significantly — and even solved — over the long run.

What does this mean for Palm Beach County?

With its pristine beaches, top end restaurants, and famously wealthy residents, Palm Beach County does not conjure up images of people struggling with hunger. Although it has the 10th highest median income among Florida's 67 counties,<sup>3</sup> 15.1 percent of the County's residents struggle to consistently feed their families three nutritious meals a day — the highest rate of food insecurity in South Florida.<sup>4</sup> It's even worse for Palm Beach County children, with 23.6 percent living in food insecure households.<sup>5</sup>

Palm Beach County's reality is very different from how it is often perceived. It is much larger and spread out, more diverse, and with substantial communities more economically challenged than its national image suggests. This presents both obstacles to overcome and opportunities to seize in reducing hunger and food insecurity in the County. Above all, it means that there are no cookie cutter solutions, though there are significant lessons from other communities' experiences from which to draw. To be successful, any plan to fight hunger in Palm Beach County must be tailored to its unique attributes.

Recognizing the challenges it faces, United Way of Palm Beach County and the Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners, backed by a group of 183 organizations, convened the Hunger Relief Project in 2014. The partners represent a broad range of key stakeholders in the County's efforts to address hunger. They include representatives from schools, foundations, nonprofits, businesses, government agencies, faith-based organizations, agricultural producers, and food retailers, along with elected officials and advocates. As a foundation of its work, the Hunger Relief Project Steering Committee identified the need to create a comprehensive countywide plan to reduce hunger in Palm Beach County that would:

- Sound the wake-up call that there is significant hunger in the County's midst.
- Explain why hunger exists in the County, who is experiencing it, how the problem can be fixed, and what people can do about it.
- Identify strengths and weaknesses in the County's capacity to reduce hunger, building on past efforts and positioning it for the future.
- Focus the community on actions to take now to respond to urgent needs and identify the longer-term strategies that must be implemented to expand access to healthy food and alleviate hunger.

The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) and the University of South Carolina (USC) Center for Research in Nutrition and Health Disparities were commissioned to create this Hunger Relief Plan. In the spring of 2015, FRAC and USC, with support from United Way of Palm Beach County and the Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners, began laying the groundwork through a robust public engagement that featured:

- An online survey completed by 151 stakeholders identified by the Hunger Relief Project Steering Committee. Their responses addressed broad themes underlying the causes of hunger and the solutions at hand, and pointed to reports and data sources specific to Palm Beach County.
- Ten focus groups attended by 61 identified stakeholders. Groups concentrated on the following areas: Children (Prenatal to Age 4), School Age Children (Out-Of-School Time), School Age Children (In-School Time), Older Adults, Systems and Infrastructure, Food Pantries, Funders, Businesses, and two groups on Household and Family Crisis.
- Ten one-on-one interviews with individuals struggling with hunger. Nonprofit and faith-based groups helped identify a diverse group of individuals who were representative of the food insecure population in Palm Beach County who shared their personal experiences of hunger.
- Twenty-one interviews with key individuals engaged in anti-hunger work. Representing a diverse variety of anti-hunger efforts, they shared their views on the causes of hunger in the County and their insights on how to address them.

To complement this public engagement process, FRAC gathered and analyzed demographic, socioeconomic, food security, nutrition program, health, and food access data at the county, state, and national levels. FRAC also reviewed existing anti-hunger and food access reports and plans developed for the County, as well as a large array of relevant state and national hunger relief reports and plans. Finally, FRAC conducted several phone conversations to draw out the ideas of state and national experts in targeted areas.

This Hunger Relief Plan for Palm Beach County results from the ideas, insights, and strategies garnered through:

- The public engagement process.
- Analysis of geographic, demographic and economic data on Palm Beach County.
- Research on innovative and best practices within Palm Beach County.
- Research on replicable local, state and national models.
- Strategic brainstorming involving local and national experts on reducing hunger.

The Hunger Relief Plan has ten goals, which are discussed in detail later in this report, focusing on three core principles:

- **Household economic security must be strengthened.** While maximizing the use of federal nutrition programs can alleviate the symptoms of hunger, helping vulnerable households achieve economic security will solve the number one cause of the problem.
- **Connecting all eligible County residents with federal nutrition benefits.** These hugely successful programs — Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), The

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), Afterschool Nutrition Programs, Summer Nutrition Programs, The Emergency Food Program Assistance Program (TEFAP), and Senior Nutrition Programs — are the most powerful tools that exist to reduce hunger. Plus, they bring money into the local economy and have tangible benefits in education, public health and many other societal priorities. However, many County residents who are eligible for these programs are not yet receiving benefits. Overcoming barriers to participation is absolutely essential.

- **All stakeholders must work together in unity if this plan is to achieve its goals. Palm Beach County brings a wealth of enthusiastic and dedicated stakeholders and resources to work to reduce hunger.** However, in order to leverage these resources, any internal divisions must be bridged and tensions must be defused.

Implementing the plan successfully will require an anti-hunger champion — a Hunger Relief Executive — to be hired whose sole focus is to lead the effort, mobilize support for it, carry out its strategies, and achieve its goals. Furthermore, focus group participants emphasized the need for a single convener, an independent advocate who can lead a group of stakeholders to advocate for strong and robust programs and policies that reduce hunger and poverty.

The Hunger Relief Plan is a practical, results-oriented formula that combines proven lessons and innovative strategies to make significant measurable reductions in the rates of food insecurity and hunger in Palm Beach County, and as a result, improvements in the County’s social fabric, health and educational outcomes, and economic vibrancy.



Many people deny the existence or downplay the incidence of hunger in America, much less in one of its wealthier counties. But hunger is not the same as starvation. There are few Americans who go for many days in a row or weeks on end without eating or eating only sporadically. But there are far more than a few — millions, in fact — who miss one or several meals on some days because they have no food at home and no money with which to purchase it. There are children who go to bed hungry and go to class on an empty stomach. There are parents who skip a meal in order to feed their children. There are senior citizens who don't eat regularly.

What these people experience certainly matches any reasonable definition of hunger. There are tens of millions of additional Americans who suffer from “food insecurity.” This term describes households who, while not suffering from outright hunger every week or month, still have trouble regularly putting nutritious food on the table. Their resources are so limited that adults in the household find themselves:

- Running out of food;
- Choosing to serve cheaper, filling foods because more nutritious food costs too much;
- Skipping meals so their children can eat;
- Cutting back on meal sizes;
- Going from food pantry to food pantry to get (at times less than healthy) food;
- Being forced to take other serious steps to adjust to the economic problems threatening the adequacy of the family's diet; and/or
- Frequently suffering from stress, depression, and lethargy because of unhealthy nutrition and the constant economic struggle.

In 2013, 14.3 percent of people in the U.S. (and 19.5 percent of children) lived in food insecure households. That totals more than 49 million Americans.<sup>7</sup>

Anyone in a “food insecure” household is at risk of being underfed and undernourished from time to time. Many suffer from the fear of going hungry, from the stress of not knowing if there will be enough food for them and their loved ones. People in food insecure households often find their energy reduced, their cognitive abilities impaired, their health harmed, their job or school performance impaired, their behavior affected, and their prospects cut short.

Even moderate levels of food insecurity can cause serious harm to both children and adults. Maternal undernutrition increases the risk of certain birth defects and contributes to low infant birthweight. Food insecurity among very young children can cause stunted growth, iron deficiency anemia, and delayed cognitive development. For preschoolers and school-aged children, food insecurity's many adverse outcomes include stunted physical growth, weakened resistance to infection, and substandard academic performance.<sup>8</sup>

Food insecurity during the adult years may mean lower productivity, higher rates of hospitalization, and poorer health.<sup>9</sup> Adult hunger also harms children even when children get enough to eat. Often low-income parents or grandparents do everything they can to protect the children in the household from hunger: they feed the children first and skip meals themselves, though the child's filling meal may not be a balanced, healthy diet.<sup>10</sup> But when the adults go hungry, the resulting adult stress and depression harm not only them but also the children's health, mental health, and schooling.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to poverty and food insecurity, low-income people struggle disproportionately with obesity.<sup>12</sup> While recent estimates suggest that overall rates of obesity have plateaued or possibly declined among some groups, obesity is far too widespread and a critical public health problem.<sup>13</sup> The latest figures released earlier this year by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that 34.9 percent of adults and 16.9 percent of children and adolescents are obese.<sup>14</sup> Low-income and food insecure people are especially vulnerable to obesity due to the additional risk factors associated with poverty, including limited resources to purchase healthy foods, lack of access to healthy and affordable foods in underserved communities, cycles of food deprivation and overeating, and high levels of stress.<sup>15</sup>

Obesity, of course, has its own set of adverse consequences for children and their parents. For instance, childhood and adolescent overweight and obesity have been linked with such physiological consequences as diabetes, dyslipidemia, high blood pressure, asthma, earlier onset of puberty, poor health-related quality of life, and premature death later in life.<sup>16</sup> The social and psychological consequences have been documented as well, such as depression, anxiety, and low-self-esteem. Children and adolescents who are overweight or obese are more likely to have poorer academic performance, to repeat a grade, and to be absent from school, in addition to struggling with a variety of behavioral and emotional challenges—all of which can have negative implications for learning. Clearly, obesity can have a detrimental impact on health and learning.

### What Causes Hunger and Food Insecurity?

Typically, there are three factors at work — a lack of income, a lack of access, and a lack of information.

The impact of low income is clear. Food insecurity strikes households with incomes below the Federal Poverty Level to a much greater degree than other households, but also strikes families living in or near poverty. For example:

**Figure 1: Prevalence of Food Insecurity in Households At or Near the Federal Poverty Level**

Household Income	Food Secure	In Households with Low Food Security	In Households with Very Low Food Security
< 100% of poverty	57.9	23.5	18.5
< 130% of poverty	61.1	22.2	16.7
<185% of poverty	65.2	20.4	14.4
185% and over	93.3	4.4	2.3

Source: Household Food Security in the United States in 2013. U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service.

There are many reasons why incomes are too low. The primary one is job-related: unemployment, underemployment, or very low wages contribute to rates of hunger. It is also a problem that income support programs for those unable to work or find work or full-time work – programs like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Unemployment Insurance, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and even Social Security for many who worked at low wages during their years of Social Security contribution — are not enough to help families meet their basic needs. And while low wages are stagnant, costs are not. Housing, food, energy, education, and health care expenses have been rising in Palm Beach County.

Access is also a problem. Many lower-income households are unable to access federal food and nutrition programs that they are eligible for because of unnecessary barriers, such as overly complicated application procedures. Beyond that, families in parts of Palm Beach County lack access to affordable healthy food even when they can afford it, due to the scarcity of supermarkets and grocery stores in neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty, including the rural areas of the Glades and census track areas near the east coast of the County, and the lack of fresh produce in too many of the stores serving these communities.

The lack of transportation — both public and private — can also prevent access to food. For seniors and persons with a disability, there are special access considerations. There may be food pantries close by, but due to mobility issues, they are not able to get to the food. Finally, for seniors and persons with disabilities, lack of access can mean that though food may be available, it is not accessible because they have physical or mental limitations which leave them unable to reach it or sometimes prepare it.

Lack of information also contributes to hunger and food insecurity. Many parents are not aware that they and their children qualify for SNAP or that their children can receive free meals at school, child care centers, and after-school and summer programs. Similarly, the operators of child care, after-school, and summer programs often do not know they can receive funds to provide meals and snacks. On another level, not all parents and caregivers receive useful information about their nutritional needs, where to obtain good quality food, and how to manage on a tight budget. Seniors may not be aware of congregate meal sites or home-delivered meal programs.

## The Federal Nutrition Programs

The federal food and nutrition programs are the cornerstone of our nation's commitment to preventing hunger and food insecurity. Taken together, they create a strong and broad web of support that empowers lower-income Americans of all ages to eat regular, healthy meals while reducing some of the burdens of poverty. That's why maximizing the use of these programs is a centerpiece of this plan to reduce hunger in Palm Beach County.

The leading programs — which are administered nationally by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) because their entitlement structure can serve all those in need who qualify — are:

- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)** (previously known as Food Stamps), the foundation of the food security safety net. It helps lower-income individuals and families buy food, it lifts people out of poverty, and it expands during hard economic times or a natural disaster to meet rising need and serve as an economic stimulus. Benefits are targeted to the most vulnerable; the average SNAP recipient household has an income of slightly less than 60 percent of the federal poverty guideline and 82 percent of all benefits go to households with a child, senior, or person with disabilities.<sup>17</sup>
- **The School Breakfast Program**, which boosts children's nutrition, health and educational achievement by reimbursing public and nonprofit private schools that provide free and reduced-price breakfasts to eligible children. The program works best when schools offer free breakfast to all students and make it part of the school day through alternative delivery models — such as Breakfast in the Classroom, Grab N' Go, and Second Chance Breakfast.

- **The National School Lunch Program**, which provides per meal cash reimbursements to schools as an entitlement to provide nutritious meals to children. This means that all eligible schools can participate and low-income children attending those schools can access meals for free or at a reduced price. Schools participating in the program also receive agricultural commodities (unprocessed or partially processed) as a supplement to the federal funds, in amounts based on the number of children they serve.
- **The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)**, which funds nutritious meals and snacks for young children in child care centers, therapeutic settings, family child care homes and Head Start programs. It also provides funding for meals for adults in adult care institutions. Eligibility is based either on the poverty status of the area or on the income of the enrolled children or adults.
- **The Afterschool Nutrition Programs**, which provide federal funding to programs operating in low-income areas after school, on weekends, and during school holidays to serve meals and snacks to children 18 and under. The free nutritious snacks and meals help draw children and teens to these programs that keep them safe, engaged, and learning.
- **The Summer Nutrition Programs**, which provide meals to children age 18 and under at sites that offer educational, enrichment, physical and recreational activities during the weeks between the end and start of the school year. This ensures that children who receive free breakfasts and lunches at school receive continued good nutrition over the summer.

Other programs administered by USDA include:

- **The Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)**, which provides nutritious foods, nutrition education, and access to health care for low-income pregnant women, new mothers, infants, and children up to the age of five years old who are at nutritional risk. Funding for this program is capped.
- **The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP)**, which provides federal funding to elementary schools to serve fruits and vegetables as snacks so as to help young students improve their diets and establish healthy eating habits. Limited federal funding is available to all 50 states.
- **The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)**, which helps supplement the diets of low-income people by providing free emergency food. States provide the food and administrative funds to local organizations — often food banks — that distribute the food to local pantries and soup kitchens that directly work with low-income populations. The amount of food and funds received by a state varies based on its low-income and unemployed populations.
- **The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)**, which provides low-income seniors, ages 60 and over, with a monthly box of commodities — containing cereal, beans, tuna, canned fruits and vegetables — to supplement their diets and improve their health. In 2015, seven new states, including Florida, received federal funding to participate in CSFP.

Nutrition programs for older residents — administered at the federal level by the United States Department of Health and Human Services — include:

- **The Congregate Meal Program**, funded by Title III of the Older Americans Act (OAA), which offers free or low-cost meals to residents age 60 or over at sites where participants can

socialize and learn about health and well-being. While there is no income test to participate, funding is not intended to reach every eligible individual. Preference is given to those with the greatest economic and social needs, with particular attention to low-income older individuals, including those that are low-income minorities, have limited English proficiency, and older individuals residing in rural areas.

- **The Home-Delivered Meal Program**, funded by Title III of the OAA, provides homebound or isolated residents age 60 or older and their spouses and any household members with a disability, a delivered meal. Funding is not available to reach every qualifying individual. Preference is given to those with the greatest economic and social needs, with particular attention to low-income older individuals, including those that are low-income minorities, have limited English proficiency, and older individuals residing in rural areas.
- **The Nutrition Services Incentive Program (NSIP)**, funded by Title III of the Older Americans Act, which provides supplemental funding — to help providers adjust meal rates, improve meal quality, and increase the number of meals provided to needy clients — for meals served under the Act.

All of these federal nutrition programs are proven, effective ways to help struggling families access needed nutrition and income support. Taken together, they are a sustainable strategy not only for reducing hunger, but also for improving academic achievement and early childhood development, encouraging healthier eating, increasing family economic security, and drawing millions of additional federal dollars into communities for groceries, schools, child care centers and homes, local program providers, and families.

The benefits of these programs — particularly for children — are immense. Here are just a few examples:

- SNAP benefits, if counted as income, lifted 10.3 million Americans above the poverty line in 2012, including 4.9 million children.<sup>18</sup>
- The school lunch and breakfast programs reduce hunger and obesity, lift children out of poverty, reduce school nurse visits, improve attendance, student behavior, and educational achievement.
- The summer food and afterschool food programs boost nutrition and attract hungry children to school-based and community-based programs that keep them safe and engaged, provide positive activities, and reduce obesity.
- CACFP improves preschoolers' nutrition, reduces obesity, strengthens the quality of early care, and helps boost and stabilize caregivers' incomes and services.
- The participation of women, infants, and young children in the WIC program improves rates of prenatal care, reduces low birth weight and infant mortality, and reduces childhood anemia and obesity.
- The senior nutrition programs help seniors improve their nutrition and health and reduce the need for more costly medical interventions.



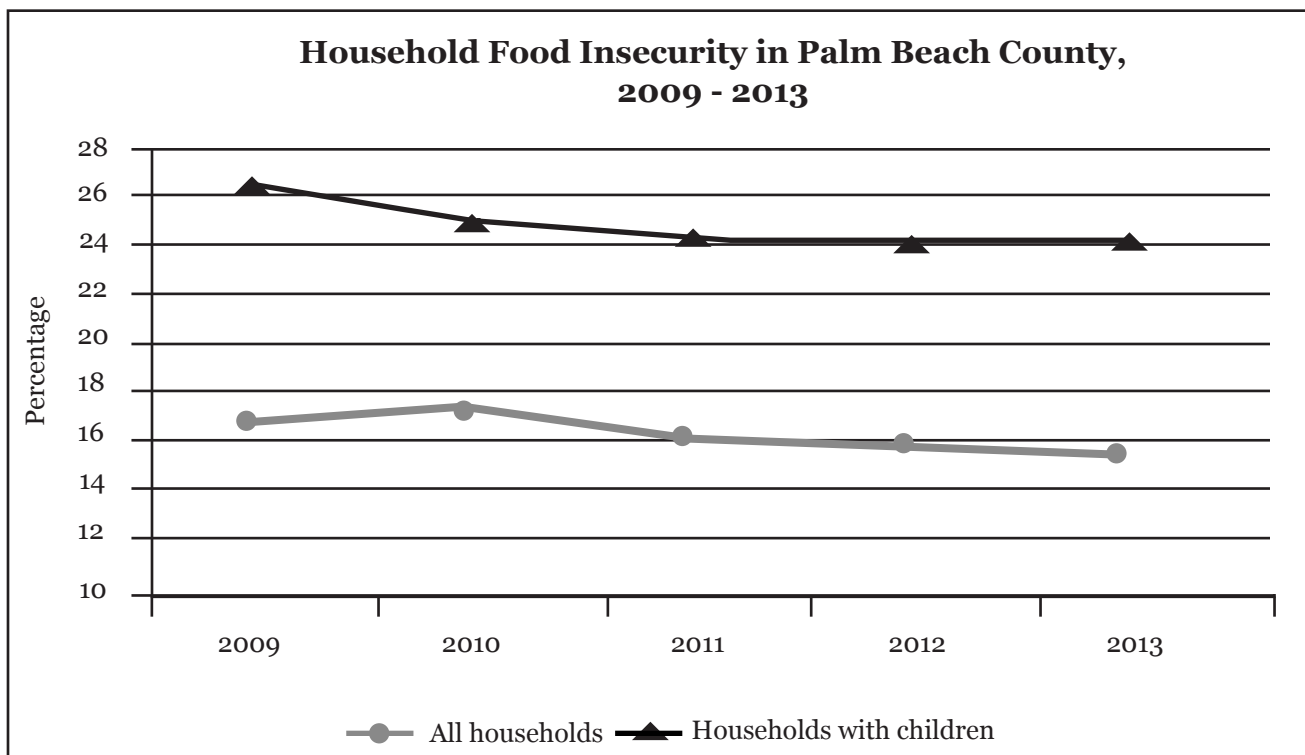
The federal food dollars available in these programs strengthen the school, public agency, and nonprofit infrastructure for children in the community. For example: a child care center serving 50 low-income young children could potentially receive up to \$70,000 per year in federal CACFP funds to serve breakfast, lunch, and a snack to each child each weekday. An afterschool enrichment program serving 100 children could potentially receive up to \$59,535 per school year in Afterschool Meal Program funds to serve supper to each child each school day. And a summer program serving 100 children could potentially receive up to \$22,500 per summer in Summer Food Service Program funds to serve lunch and breakfast to each child each weekday.

This infusion of federal funding enables private and local public funds that were previously spent on meals to be directed to improving services or growing participation.

## Palm Beach County: Hunger and Demography

In 2013, 15.1 percent of households were food insecure in Palm Beach County — compared to 17 percent of households in Florida and 15.8 percent of households in the United States.<sup>19</sup> While Palm Beach County’s food insecurity rate is lower than the state average — it is the highest in South Florida. That means approximately 200,000 County residents lived in households that struggled with hunger.

**Figure 2: Household Food Insecurity in Palm Beach County (2009-2013)**



Source: Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap, 2013.

As the chart above indicates, food insecurity rates have slightly declined over the past few years as the country recovered from the worst of the recession. This is likely attributable to the slowly improving economy, and to the growing use of SNAP benefits to help families afford food.

Why do hunger and food security exist in Palm Beach County? And how can it be reduced? A look at the County’s demographics provides some clues.

With a population of almost 1.4 million residents,<sup>20</sup> Palm Beach is the third most populous of Florida’s 67 counties.<sup>21</sup> Palm Beach is also Florida’s second largest county by area. Framed by the Atlantic Ocean on the east and the Glades’ agriculture fields of corn, and sweet bell peppers on the west, Palm Beach County is rich in natural resources. This natural beauty has made tourism a leading industry – in 2014, total visitor direct spending was \$4.8 billion.<sup>22</sup> However, because a large portion of the County’s economy is dependent on tourism, the need to highlight this natural beauty and the escape it offers often creates a disincentive for officials to discuss and the public to recognize that hunger exists amidst the beauty of Palm Beach.

## I. Race and Ethnicity

Nationally, disparities in food insecurity exist among racial and economic groups. Rates of food insecurity were higher than the national average for households headed by Black, non-Hispanics (26.1 percent) and Hispanics (23.7 percent).<sup>23</sup>

While Palm Beach County’s population is 57.9 percent white, it has a larger percentage of African Americans than Florida and the U.S.<sup>24</sup>

**Figure 3: Palm Beach County: Race and Ethnicity**

Race and Ethnicity	Palm Beach County	Florida	United States
Hispanic or Latino	20.3	23.6	17.1
White alone	57.9	56.2	62.4
Black or African American alone	17.4	15.4	12.3
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	0.1	0.2	0.7
Asian alone	2.4	2.6	5.0
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	0.0	0.0	0.2
Some other race alone	0.4	0.3	0.2
Two or more races (not Hispanic or Latino)	1.5	1.6	2.2

Source: American Community Survey 2013 estimates.

There are no recent data available for disparities in food insecurity for Palm Beach County based on race and ethnicity, but many of the trends that fuel these disparities at the national level – economic hardship, living in high-poverty neighborhoods, and having limited access to child care, healthy food retail, transportation and other social services – are replicated locally.

## II. Socioeconomic Status

### *Poverty*

In Palm Beach County, 14.9 percent of the population (nearly 202,000 individuals) lived below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).<sup>25</sup> This means families are faced with the impossible task of making ends meet on an income of less than \$19,530 for a family of three.<sup>26</sup> 6.9 percent of County residents (about 94,000 individuals) live at or below 50 percent of the poverty level.<sup>27</sup> A family of three in deep poverty has a yearly income of \$9,765 or less.

**Figure 4: Palm Beach County Residents who live near the Federal Poverty Level (FPL)**

Poverty	Palm Beach County	Florida	United States
Persons (and %) below 50% FPL	93,911 (6.9)	1,458,753 (7.6)	21,693,347 (7.0)
Persons (and %) below 100% FPL	201,663 (14.9)	3,253,333 (17.0)	48,810,868 (15.8)
Persons (and %) below 150% FPL	325,970 (24.1)	5,307,439 (27.8)	78,433,011 (25.4)
Persons (and %) below 185% FPL	431,839 (31.9)	6,752,658 (35.3)	98,795,566 (32.1)
Persons (and %) below 200% FPL	472,717 (34.9)	7,333,279 (38.3)	107,159,938 (34.8)
Children (and %) below FPL (2011-2013)	62,636 (23.3)	968,765 (24.5)	16,086,960 (22.2)
Children (and %) below 185% FPL (2011-2013)	119,305 (44.4)	1,834,779 (46.4)	30,127,826 (41.6)
Median income deficit for families	9,223	9,367	6,764

Source: American Community Survey 2013 estimates. FPL=Federal Poverty Level. Median income deficit is the number of dollars needed to reach the FPL for an average family.

It is important to recognize that even those above the poverty level may still be experiencing or be one household crisis away from hunger. Thirty-two percent of the population is below 185 percent of the FPL.

In looking at poverty, it is important to drill down below the county level and look at specific neighborhoods and communities. Palm Beach County stakeholders have performed targeted analysis that examines which zip codes are home to residents 65 and older below the federal poverty level, participating in congregate meals, or benefiting from home-delivered meals. Likewise, a zip code data look was taken of SNAP participation, free school meal participation and child poverty rates. Not surprisingly, many zip codes have much higher rates poverty. Areas with the highest rates of poverty, include one large pocket in the Glades and several pockets concentrated along and near the east coast.

### ***Income***

While Palm Beach County's median income is \$51,804 — nearly 12 percent above the statewide median income of \$46,036 — its earnings distribution is considerably more unequal.<sup>28</sup> Median earnings among the top 5 percent in Palm Beach County exceed the median earnings for the top 5 percent statewide and nationally by well over \$100,000. Looked at another way, the top 5 percent of earners in Palm Beach County take in 28 percent of all income compared to 24 percent for Florida and 23 percent for the U.S. This is reflected in the County's GINI Index — the most commonly used measure of income inequality — which is higher than the state or national GINI Index. Only three counties in Florida have higher rates of income inequality.<sup>29</sup>

**Figure 5: Household Income in Palm Beach County Compared to Florida and U.S.**

Income	Palm Beach County	Florida	United States
Median household income	\$51,804	\$46,036	\$52,250
Median household income by quintile (share of aggregate income)			
Lowest quintile	12,193 (3.0)	10,626 (3.2)	11,544 (3.1)
Second quintile	31,350 (7.8)	27,846 (8.5)	30,919 (8.4)
Third quintile	51,966 (12.9)	46,188 (14.1)	52,717 (14.3)
Fourth quintile	83,562 (20.7)	73,012 (22.2)	83,937 (22.8)
Highest quintile	224,240 (55.6)	170,967 (52.0)	189,718 (51.4)
Top 5 percent	452,606 (28.1)	315,508 (24.0)	339,950 (23.0)
GINI Index	0.52	0.48	0.48

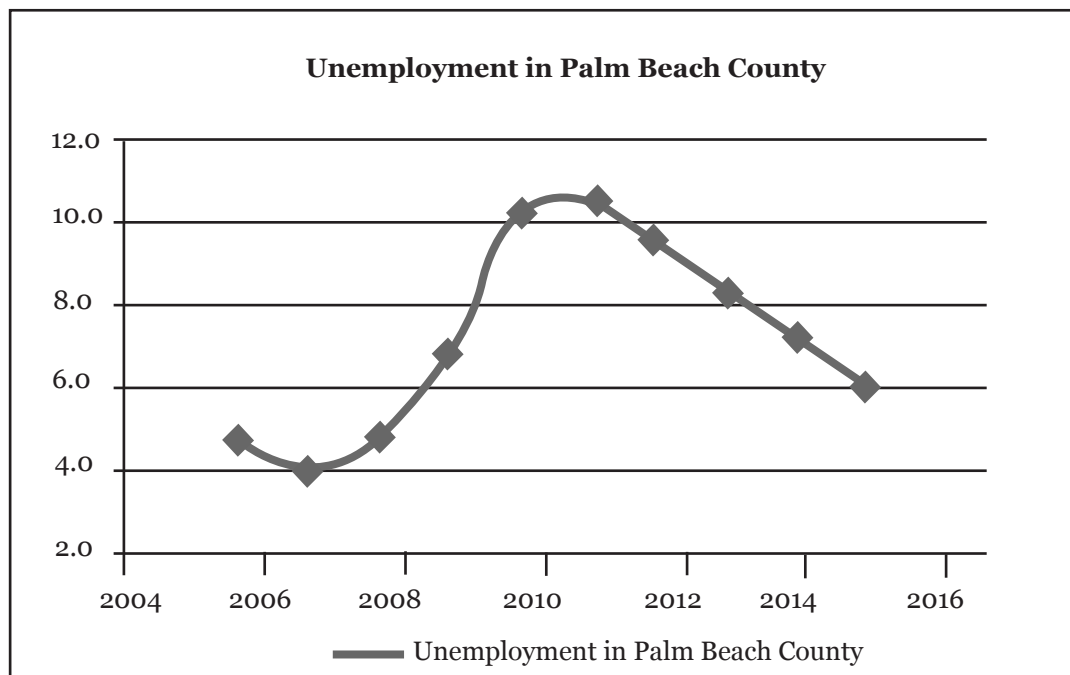
Source: American Community Survey 2013 estimates.

These income disparities become even starker when taking into account race and ethnicity. The 2012 Palm Beach County Health Assessment revealed that “the per capita income for White individuals in the County was more than double the per capita income for Black or African American individuals in the County, and was nearly 60 percent lower among Hispanic or Latino individual than ‘White alone, non-Hispanic or Latino’ individuals.”<sup>30</sup>

### ***Employment and Industry***

During the height of the Great Recession, the unemployment rate reached 11 percent in Palm Beach County.<sup>31</sup> However, by February 2015, the County’s unemployment rate dropped to 5 percent (yet areas of the Glades have much higher rates than the County average –for instance, in April 2015 the unemployment rates were 18.96 percent in Belle Glades, 21.81 percent in South Bay, and 26.09 percent in Pahokee), while the unemployment rate for Florida was slightly higher at 5.6 percent.<sup>32</sup> The rate has still not reached pre-Great Recession levels when it was as low as 3.7 percent.

**Figure 6: Unemployment in Palm Beach County**



Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Local Area Unemployment Statistics Map.

Despite the encouraging decreases in the Palm Beach County unemployment rate, the structure of the job market poses challenges to individuals who do not have the education levels to compete for the higher paying jobs. For instance, nearly 79,000 individuals work in retail trade and nearly 74,000 work in arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services. These two industries are associated with the lowest median earnings: \$22,079 and \$18,973, respectively. In addition, 8,209 people work in agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining, the first of which is also noted for its low wages.

### **Taxes**

Florida has the dubious distinction of having the second most regressive tax structure in the nation.<sup>33</sup> As a result, the bottom 20 percent of earners pay 12.9 percent of their income in taxes whereas the top 1 percent of earners, pay only 1.9 percent.<sup>34</sup> This unequal tax structure creates a vicious cycle in terms of addressing hunger: the lowest earners have less income to meet the challenges of covering their basic needs—including food—and there is less revenue available to address the needs of families struggling with hunger.

### **III. Health**

The United Health Foundation ranks Florida 32nd among the 50 states on an overall health rating.<sup>35</sup> Palm Beach County ranks 10th out of Florida's 67 counties in terms of health, according to the Robert Wood Johnson 2015 Florida Health Rankings, which uses weighted scores for health behaviors, clinical care, social and economic factors, and the physical environment to compare counties.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, overall, the County compares favorably to state averages on a number of health measures, including rates of diabetes, depression, and fruit and vegetable intake.<sup>37</sup>

However, just as with incomes, there are significant health disparities in Palm Beach County. So looking at overall measures of health can be just as misleading as looking at overall rates of income and wealth. For example:

- **Death Rates:** Palm Beach County has a lower overall death rate than the state average. However, huge disparities become evident when comparing death rates between whites and blacks in the County. In 2013, the resident age-adjusted death rate per 100,000 among whites in Palm Beach was 558. For African American residents, this number was 756.<sup>38</sup>
- **Diabetes Rates:** Eleven percent of County residents have diabetes, compared to about 11.2 percent of state residents overall. The County also has significantly lower rates of pre-diabetes diagnoses than the state: 4.5 percent versus 7.1 percent.<sup>39</sup> Yet, among households with incomes of less than \$25,000/year, the diabetes rate is nearly 17 percent, compared to 7.5 percent of households making between \$25,000 and \$49,999.<sup>40</sup> Further, the age-adjusted death rate from diabetes for whites in the County in 2013 was about 9.1 per 100,000; for blacks this rate was over 36.1 – four times higher.<sup>41</sup>
- **Overweight and Obesity:** The percent of adults who are obese in Palm Beach County is considerably lower than in the state overall: 19.9 percent versus 26.4 percent.<sup>42</sup> This difference is especially driven by women, who have obesity rates of about 16 percent in the County, compared to over 25 percent in the state. However, when looking at overweight (not obese) status by income, some county-level disparities in health status become more evident. Among Palm Beach County adults making less than \$25,000 per year, nearly 52 percent are overweight, compared to nearly 35 percent statewide. This high rate among relatively lower-income people could reflect poverty-related restrictions in diet and physical activity, as well as the impact (noted previously) of struggles with hunger.<sup>43</sup>

#### IV. Other Populations at Risk

In creating a plan to address hunger, special considerations need to be given to particular age, demographic and other groups more likely to be food insecure, posing unique challenges, and more vulnerable to damage from inadequate diets.

##### **Children**

Households with children experience food insecurity at higher rates than households without children. At some time during the year, 19.5 percent of households with children experienced food insecurity. Many parents decrease their own food intake or go hungry so as to protect their children from hunger. Thus, only adults were food insecure in about half of the food insecure households with children; in the rest, children were also food insecure.<sup>44</sup>

In Palm Beach County 23.6 percent of all children live in food insecure households, slightly lower than the Florida percentage of 26.7 and higher than the national average of 21.7.<sup>45</sup>

##### **Older Adults**

Across the United States, food insecurity among seniors is growing. In 2013, 15.5 percent of seniors nationally faced the threat of hunger. This risk varies drastically by race: 13.4 percent of white seniors face food insecurity, compared to 33 percent of black seniors.<sup>46</sup>

**“Children are not supposed to be hungry. They’re not supposed to be hungry.... they didn’t ask to come here, and they should at least be fed.”**

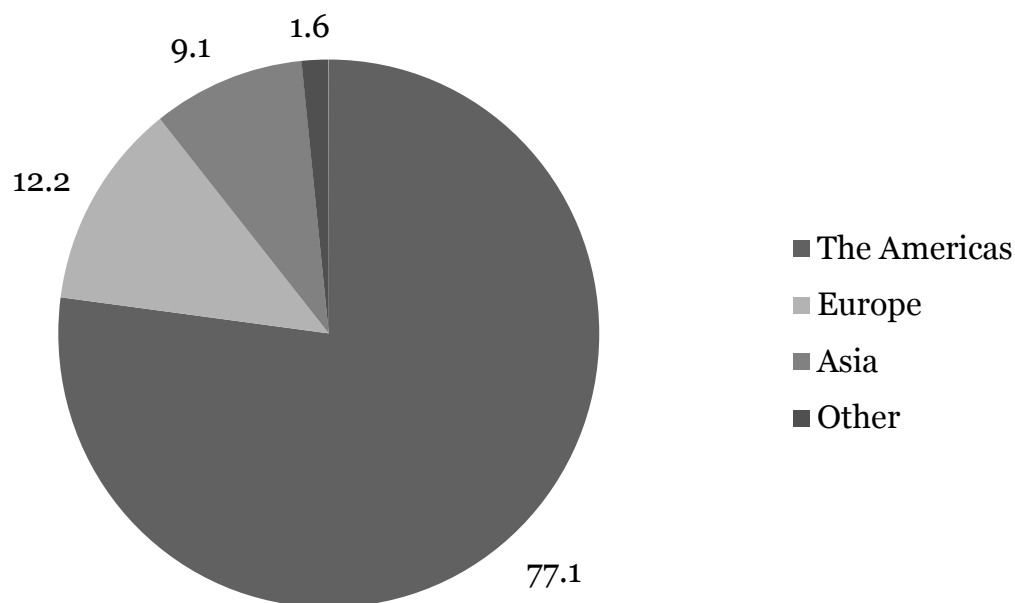
**– African American widow in her 80’s from West Palm Beach who receives Meals on Wheels**

Locally, more than 28 percent of residents who are 60 or older may not have the resources to consistently access healthy food. This includes seniors who live above the federal poverty level. More than 47,000 (12.2 percent) of Palm Beach County residents aged 60 or above fall below 125 percent of the federal poverty level.<sup>47</sup>

### ***Immigrants***

Nationally, food insecurity rates among immigrants are likely to be nearly twice as high as for non-immigrant households.<sup>48</sup> As one interviewee remarked, “Palm Beach County is a mini-United Nations,” as almost a quarter of its residents (about 327,857 individuals) are from another country of origin. This is compared to 19.4 percent of all Floridians and 13.1 percent of all U.S. residents.<sup>49</sup> Among foreign-born Palm Beach County residents, 77.1 percent came from Latin America, followed by 12.2 percent from Europe, and 9.1 percent from Asia.

**Figure 7: Country of Origin Among Foreign-Born Palm Beach County Residents**



Source: American Community Survey 2013 estimates.

Just under half — 161,000 — of foreign-born Palm Beach County residents are U.S. citizens.<sup>50</sup> The Migration Policy Institute reports that the unauthorized population of Palm Beach County is about 65,000.<sup>51</sup> This means many foreign-born residents are less likely than other populations to seek food and nutrition benefits, out of fear — often misplaced — that it could jeopardize their ability to stay in this country.

## ***Language***

Approximately 30 percent of Palm Beach County residents over age five speak a language at home other than English. Of these individuals, only 56 percent claim that they also speak English very well.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, these residents are disproportionately likely to struggle with hunger.

While the County benefits from this rich cultural context, it means that anti-hunger outreach efforts must be conducted in multiple languages and in culturally appropriate ways.

## ***Disability***

The County has significantly fewer adults who are limited due to physical, mental, or emotional problems than other jurisdictions: 16.4 percent, versus 21.2 percent in the state.<sup>53</sup> However, people with disabilities are more likely to be struggling with hunger: among those making less than \$25,000 per year, the disability rate is 23.7 percent, compared to just 9 percent among those making at least \$50,000 per year. As a result, anti-hunger efforts must make a special effort to address access and other problems facing lower-income people with disabilities.

## ***Households Crisis Hunger***

The risk of hunger and food insecurity extends beyond families in or near poverty. Too many families in Palm Beach County who live above the poverty level are nevertheless constantly struggling with low wages, limited assets, the high cost of living, vulnerability to crisis, and experience a lack of community supports. Dubbed by the United Way of Florida ALICE Report, “Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed,”<sup>54</sup> as ALICE households, they are one crisis away from experiencing hunger or food insecurity. For them, all it takes is a layoff, a major illness, a big car repair, a death in the family, foreclosure, divorce, or other setback to suffer food hardship.

Within Palm Beach County, more than 40 percent of all households are unable to pay for basic expenses.<sup>55</sup> And due to the higher costs of living in Palm Beach County, these households are particularly vulnerable to hunger driven by a household crisis. The United Way of Florida ALICE Report defines a “household survival budget” as a more accurate measure of economic stability than the federal poverty level. In Palm Beach County, this means families must earn more than twice the federal poverty level to be able to afford food and other basic necessities.

## ***Rural Communities***

The rural communities of Belle Glade, Canal Point, Pahokee, and South Bay, located more than 38 miles from the Atlantic Ocean,<sup>56</sup> are a world away from the beaches and tourist attractions of the coast. This agricultural seat of the County is responsible for leading the state in agricultural sales — \$1 billion with an economic impact of \$2 billion.<sup>57</sup>

Many of the residents of these communities work in agriculture, but despite their proximity to food, their low wages make it a struggle to put food on the table. Poverty rates are high: 36.3 percent in Belle Glade, 29.2 percent in Pahokee, and 36.1 percent in South Bay.<sup>58</sup>



**Figure 8: Demographic of the Glades**

	<b>Belle Glade City</b>	<b>Pahokee City</b>	<b>South Bay City</b>	<b>Canal Point CDP</b>	<b>Palm Beach County</b>
Population	17,650	5,859	4,876	357	1,372,171
Poverty Rate	36.3%	29.2%	36.1%	44.0%	14.9%
Median Income	30,727	27353	28750	25,500	51,804
Foreign Born Population	5,068	1,240	814	7	327,857
Percent high school graduate or higher	62.8%	55.7%	70.1%	85.4%	87.7%
Median Age	33.7	34.4	35.5	37.4	44.0

**Source: All city numbers from 2009-2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Population Estimates; County Numbers from 2013 Estimates.**

According to the Glades Initiative Strategic Plan, “the Glades community has long struggled with poverty and poor health outcomes.”<sup>59</sup> This is exacerbated by limited public transportation, inadequate access to food retail, and higher levels of under-employment due to seasonal work. According to the County Report on Health and Human Services, “Western Palm Beach County has a significantly higher rate of potential food insecurity.”<sup>60</sup> Many immigrants live in these rural areas, highlighting the need to tailor hunger relief strategies to culturally appropriate messaging and interventions.

## Public Engagement Findings

Development of this strategic plan to reduce hunger and food insecurity in Palm Beach County builds off the unique aspects of its economy, demography, geography and other factors outlined above – and by the findings of the public engagement process.

The survey results, focus groups and interviews identified many common themes about the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats involved in working to strengthen food security in the County. What follows is a summary of them.

### I. What Strengths Can Be Leveraged?

- **Broad support, wide-ranging skills:** There are a significant number of partners involved in this effort – many people and organizations working to combat hunger in the County in a wide variety of capacities. The implementation of this plan can tap into an exceptional range of skills and innovative thinking.
- **Enthusiasm and commitment:** There is great enthusiasm and energy among participants for tackling the problem of hunger. This was shared by all stakeholders, including churches, pantries, nonprofit agencies, schools, agency funders, businesses and others. Everyone agreed that the necessary players are poised to take action.
- **Hunger Relief Task Force:** 183 organizations have been identified to be involved the Hunger Relief Task Force and expressed interest in serving on committees to carry out the plan.

- **Agreement on the underlying causes of hunger:** Participants understand that poverty is the number one cause and that hunger is a symptom of lack of economic opportunity. As a result, there is agreement that, while food donations are important to alleviating crises, this is a “band-aid” approach, and that addressing issues such as underemployment, low-paying jobs, seasonal work, limited public transportation, and the high costs of food and housing are essential to a real solution.
- **Agriculture:** The remarkable productivity of agriculture grown in the County offers great potential for job creation and for gleaning as a food source for those at risk of hunger.
- **Affluence of the County:** Participants remarked that a County as wealthy as Palm Beach has the resources to address hunger.

## II. What Weaknesses Must Be Overcome?

- **Lack of community awareness about hunger:** Too many people have little awareness that there is hunger in Palm Beach County, or what solutions will work.
- **Lack of awareness among clients and service providers:** People at risk of hunger are often unaware of what food programs and services they are eligible for, while even service providers may not know the full range of resources available.
- **Lack of awareness about senior hunger:** There are growing numbers of senior citizens in the County, of whom an increasing number struggle with hunger and isolation. Senior hunger — and the unique challenges it poses — needs more attention and focus.
- **Lack of focus on the Glades:** There is a perception that not enough efforts to address hunger are targeted to this economically distressed area. Efforts to address hunger in the Glades are complicated due to the fact that many of those in need are immigrants who may not be eligible for many federal programs or may be reluctant to apply because of cultural issues or fear of consequences of obtaining assistance.
- **Lack of awareness about food, nutrition and cooking:** Too many people do not know where some food comes from, what foods provide the most nutrition, how to create a balanced diet, or how to cook.
- **Internal disagreements:** There is unhealthy competition and a lack of coordination between food banks, creating an unnecessary, polarizing distraction for funders and food pantries.
- **Lack of capacity among some pantries to better help hungry residents:** Pantries indicated they need more support for food storage and refrigeration, and staff to connect clients with benefits.
- **Need a hunger champion:** To be most effective, this strategic plan to reduce hunger will need to be spearheaded by a Hunger Executive who leads an organization which is not a service provider and is respected in the community.

### III. What Opportunities Can Be Maximized?

- **Raise awareness about hunger:** Launch a public education campaign complemented with updated data on hunger, poverty and participation trends in nutrition programs and key messages about why hunger hurts not only those affected but also the local economy, public health, education and other concerns. This can bring new partners and new funders to the table. (Goal #1)
- **Raise awareness about the solutions at hand:** The public must be made to understand that hunger is not an intractable problem; it's one that can be addressed with tools that already exist. The public education campaign should include information about how to connect people to the resources they need and focus on removing the stigma from receiving food and nutrition benefits, while being culturally attuned. It should utilize innovative marketing approaches, including social media. (Goal #1)
- **Advocate for needed policy changes:** Anti-hunger advocates in Palm Beach County can and should have a deeper presence in promoting public policies at the federal, state, and local level, not only to fight food insecurity, but to address its root causes, especially poverty. If the County had full employment and everyone was paid a living wage, very few people would have to worry about where their next meal was coming from. (Goals #2 and #10)
- **Prioritize the Glades:** As an area of concentrated poverty where hunger and food insecurity are high, this should be a top priority and it is a place where a huge positive difference can be made. (Goal #3)
- **Leverage full use of the federal nutrition programs:** Taken together and maximized to reach every eligible participant, the full range of federal nutrition programs — SNAP, WIC, school breakfast and lunch, CACFP, Afterschool Nutrition Programs, Summer Nutrition Programs, TEFAP, CSFP, and Congregate and Home Delivered Meals — can create a seamless web preventing many families from falling into hunger and reducing the hunger of others. They are the first line of defense against food insecurity. And because they are largely federally funded, full participation strengthens the local economy without burdening county government. (Goals #4, #5, and #6)
- **Explore innovative ideas to increase access to healthy, affordable food:** There are creative options available beyond the building of supermarkets in underserved areas. These include transportation, food hubs, mobile markets, a produce processing plant, and matching dollars at farmers markets. (Goal #7)
- **Promote cooperation:** Efforts should be made to get food banks to work together to avoid duplication and maximize their positive impact. There may be an opportunity to do this by sharing the distribution of TEFAP commodities in fiscal year 2016. In addition, pantries are a huge asset to the food banks, and they are seeking cooperation, too. (Goal #8)
- **Develop a creative marketing plan for nutrition education:** Palm Beach County's nutrition education program needs support to reach more residents who could benefit from practical knowledge about maximizing nutrition given limited budgets. (Goal #9)

## IV. What Threats Must Be Minimized?

- **Attacks on federal nutrition programs:** The historic bipartisan consensus in support of the federal food and nutrition programs has been a victim of the polarization that has been the defining feature of our political system in recent years. As a result, efforts have been made in Congress to erode these programs through budget cutbacks and other changes. To effectively fight hunger in Palm Beach County and elsewhere, these programs must be maintained and strengthened. That is why policy advocacy is one of this plan’s key goals. (Goal #2)
- **Gaping inequality:** The wide income gaps in Palm Beach County, while a major contributing factor in the presence of hunger, also threaten to divide the “haves” from the “have nots” in ways that could undermine the ability to achieve a consensus about the need to reduce food insecurity. (Goal #10)
- **Structural economic challenges:** For many people at risk of hunger, the combination of low wages, lack of affordable housing, expensive child care, and the high costs of the basic necessities conspire to create a financial trap that is hard to break out of. Changing all of these underlying economic conditions is a challenge, to say the least. But ultimately, doing so is the only way to remove the main cause of hunger. Fortunately, there are specific, practical steps, such as a higher minimum wage, that can be taken to start this process. (Goals #2 and #10)

## Moving Forward

### Leadership

To turn this plan to reduce hunger in Palm Beach County into action requires the hiring of a Hunger Relief Executive whose sole focus is to lead the effort, mobilize support for it, carry out its strategies and achieve its goals.

Interviewees and focus group participants prioritized the need for an advocate who can lead a group of stakeholders to advocate for strong and robust programs and policies that reduce hunger and their root cause — poverty

Thus, the individual hired should be someone who is not only capable and experienced in leading a complex, multifaceted campaign such as this, but who is also independent, respected, and non-partisan.

In particular, the Hunger Relief Executive needs to be free to advocate for needed policy changes in ways that many anti-hunger direct service organizations in Palm Beach County may not be. Of course, these organizations must play a central role, sharing their expertise and ideas and participating in stakeholder groups that focus on implementing the various goals of the plan.

Fortunately, Palm Beach County is well on its way to creating this structure thanks to the convening of the Hunger Relief Task Force. This task force already has the participation of 183 organizations — representing a broad range of interests from direct service providers and faith-based groups to funders to farmers and grocery store owners. It could serve as the logical home base for the Hunger Relief Executive.

## Core Principles

This plan is shaped by our research and the public engagement process, and built on principles that have proven successful in improving access to healthy, nutritious food among families at risk. These principles are:

- **Making the federal food and nutrition programs in Palm Beach County far stronger anti-hunger bulwarks.** These programs bring in over \$300 million dollars each year into the County to feed struggling families and could bring in millions more to address hunger if participation in these programs was maximized. As noted above, SNAP, WIC, school breakfast and lunch, CACFP, Afterschool Nutrition Programs, Summer Nutrition Programs, TEFAP, and Congregate and Home-Delivered Meals have a huge range of positive outcomes and create sustainable solutions. Collectively, they turn families struggling with hunger into food secure households. They bring money into the local economy and have tangible benefits in education, public health and a variety of other societal priorities. They do not burden state and local government. And they reduce the burden on overwhelmed food banks and pantries which should be focused on crisis, providing emergency food, and meeting the needs of County residents who are not eligible for federal programs.
- **Strengthening the economic security of vulnerable households.** While maximizing the federal nutrition programs can alleviate the symptoms of hunger and food insecurity in a sustainable way, achieving economic security will solve the number one underlying cause of the problem. Simply put, significantly reducing poverty will significantly reduce hunger. And while making these changes is a more daunting task than achieving the other goals in this plan, the goal of economic security must be pursued. Raising incomes and ensuring that families can afford the necessities of life will produce benefits beyond reducing food insecurity; moreover, they also will produce a more vibrant local economy, improve the quality of life in communities, shrink social ills and improve educational, health and other important outcomes.
- **Working together in unity if this plan is to achieve its goals.** Any internal divisions must be bridged and tensions must be defused. Stakeholders must pull in the same direction, complementing each other's efforts, supporting one another and creating synergy. The challenges that must be overcome to achieve the campaign's ambitious goals require nothing less.

## Goal #1: All County Residents Will Be Aware of Hunger in Palm Beach County and Solutions At Hand.

The idea that Palm Beach County residents are experiencing hunger challenges the County's *regional identity*, which strives to be "The Best of Everything."

Throughout every phase of public engagement in developing this plan, three strong themes emerged:

**"And I think that people do not have awareness of all the services that are out there for them. So public awareness, a campaign that would get to the folks who we're trying to get to, I think that would be huge."**

**- Stakeholder Participant**

**1) Too many people — especially higher-income earners — have little awareness that thousands of Palm Beach County children, adults, and seniors cannot always count on enough food for an active, healthy life.**

There are many obstacles to raising awareness of hunger. One is Palm Beach County's reputation as a playground for the rich. Another is the County's dependence on tourism, so the image it presents to the outside world is inconsistent with an acknowledgment of poverty and hunger. In addition, because the County is such an agricultural powerhouse, people find it hard to understand that hunger can exist in the midst of so much food.

Palm Beach County's farm production leads some to believe that if there is hunger, gleaning is the solution. While gleaning has a role to play in the response to hunger (Goal #7), it is hugely inadequate compared to the problem. That's why awareness efforts should emphasize the root causes of hunger, the extent of hunger, and the importance of federal nutrition programs, both in feeding those suffering from food hardship, and in bringing more than \$300 million into the local economy.

This lack of awareness and understanding needs to be corrected because hunger impacts everyone. It causes poor school performance, with possibly lifelong lost potential (leading to lower tax revenue and higher social spending). It harms people's health and fuels higher medical expenses. It causes workers to be less productive and more prone to illnesses and absences, hurting the bottom line of businesses. Fighting hunger is in the self-interest of all Palm Beach County residents.

**2) Too many people struggling with hunger and their providers do not know about all the resources available to address hunger.**

This is a primary reason why virtually all of the federal nutrition programs are underutilized, with high percentages of eligible people not receiving the benefits for which they qualify. Key findings from our focus groups in this area include:

- The more overall public awareness there is about the presence of hunger in Palm Beach County, the less likely it is that people struggling with food hardship will feel stigmatized about accessing services and benefits.
- Many residents and service providers are unaware of the range of public and private services which are available in the community to help alleviate hunger:

\* People struggling with hunger may not know they are eligible for SNAP (food stamps) if they are working or that their children are eligible even if a parent has not been a permanent legal resident for five years. They may not know that Summer

BreakSpots (the state name for its Summer Food Service Program) provide free meals to children and teens at more than 200 County sites, or that calling 211 can connect one to important resources (including with operators who speak Spanish). Seniors may not be aware of free congregate and home-delivered meals available through Your Aging and Disability Resource Center.

\* Providers are often experts in one area — such as connecting families to pantries or nutrition education classes — but may not know about Florida Summer BreakSpots or that Palm Beach County SNAP participation rates are far below the national and state averages. Surprisingly, many stakeholders did not even know about 211, the County’s help line to connect residents to a range of social services, including nutrition resources.

- Business stakeholders may not be aware of all the nutrition programs available to support families struggling with hunger and may not understand ways they can help beyond giving out free food or food drives.
- Immigrants often assume — not always accurately — that they and their families are ineligible for food and nutrition benefits, and they also mistakenly fear that accessing services will negatively impact their ability to obtain U.S. citizenship.

### **3) Hunger awareness and education efforts must involve people struggling with hunger.**

This is critical to addressing points #1 and #2 above. First, because the stories of neighbors suffering from hunger put faces behind the statistics and drive people toward empathy and understanding. And second, because those suffering from hunger are more receptive to messages and approaches from others who have experienced the very same hardships.

Equally important, people struggling with hunger are an untapped and invaluable source of knowledge about what they need and what solutions work from their first-hand experience.

The bottom line is that every focus group identified a public education and awareness campaign about hunger and the solutions at hand as critical to creating the momentum needed to alleviate hunger in Palm Beach County. There is no one person or entity that can solve this alone. To truly move the needle, the entire community must come together, with every stakeholder taking action to be a part of the solution.



**OBJECTIVE #1: AWARENESS ABOUT HUNGER AND EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS WILL INCREASE IN PALM BEACH COUNTY.**

**STRATEGY #1(A): Launch a comprehensive campaign to raise awareness about the extent of hunger in Palm Beach County, with a compelling framework and message that keeps the topic relevant and that engages community members at all levels.**

**TACTICS #1 (A)**

- Conduct a poll in Palm Beach County to track attitudes and support for solutions.
- Through the leadership of the Hunger Relief Task Force, create common messaging to educate and engage the community and build a social media campaign to educate and engage.
- Organize a countywide SNAP Challenge — where public officials and community leaders learn first-hand how hard it is to eat on an average SNAP budget (\$32 for one week) — and other efforts to help educate the public and opinion leaders about what it truly means to try to purchase an adequate and healthy diet on a limited budget.
- Craft messaging around the need to strengthen the federal nutrition programs and their local implementation, and weave these into the DNA of Palm Beach County’s response to hunger.

**STRATEGY #1(B): Increase awareness of the solutions at hand.**

**TACTICS #1(B)**

- Increase information-sharing among stakeholders. Build 211’s capacity to ensure that social service providers are fully able to connect their clients to all the supports available to help access food and build economic security.
  - \* Develop a mobile Food Finder app to share continuously updated information on resources and services available to low-income residents in Palm Beach County. Ensure the app includes information on the range of available food resources — food pantries, soup kitchens, Summer BreakSpots, WIC clinics, SNAP retailers, farmers markets, etc. — and is coordinated with the 211 call system.
  - \* Utilize existing communications channels to disseminate information, including ParentLink, the school district’s communication system and the Child Care Resource and Referral Network.
- Stakeholders must implement innovative outreach services in their operation to ensure clients know about these services and resources.
- Create simple, effective outreach materials, in multiple languages, to educate struggling families about the benefits available.



- Leverage media partnerships to raise awareness about the state of hunger in Palm Beach County, how residents can be a part of the solution, and how those in need can connect with the federal nutrition programs and other resources available to help access food.

**STRATEGY #1(C): Include people struggling personally with hunger and food hardship in all efforts to raise public awareness of hunger in Palm Beach County.**

**TACTICS #1 (C)**

- Provide low-income residents with venues to share their stories and advocate for change.
  - \* Expand CIRCLES Initiative Palm Beach County, a group that brings together low-income community members to advocate for change and build capacity.
- Seek feedback from families participating in SNAP and other nutrition programs regarding the impact of these programs on their lives, and their recommendations for improvements.

**RESPONSIBLE ENTITIES**

- Hunger Relief Task Force
- Service providers for low-income families
- Palm Beach County residents at risk of hunger and food hardship
- Palm Beach County officials
- School District of Palm Beach County
- Local communications, advertising, and marketing professionals
- Palm Beach County radio, television and newspaper outlets
- Palm Beach County businesses
- CIRCLES Initiative Palm Beach County

**MEASUREMENTS**

- Public awareness of hunger and food hardship in Palm Beach County.
- Awareness of hunger and food hardship solutions among Palm Beach County residents, public officials, opinion leaders, and people at risk of hunger and food hardship.
- Awareness among those at risk of hunger and food hardship about the services and benefits available to them.
- Degree to which people dealing with hunger and food hardship participate in public awareness campaigns.
- Degree to which service and benefits providers and advocates receive feedback and recommendations from those they serve.
- Number of news articles and public service announcements about hunger and responses to it in Palm Beach County.
- Number of social media hits (Twitter followers, Facebook likes and similar measures).

## OUTCOMES

- Increased number of Palm Beach County residents who are aware of the state of hunger and food hardship in the County.
- Polling will show that a majority of Palm Beach County residents support the specific solutions to food hardship put forward by the Hunger Relief Task Force.
- Increased number of low-income Palm Beach County residents who are aware that they may be eligible for SNAP and other nutrition program benefits.
- Programs and outreach efforts that are intended to ease the burdens of hunger and food hardship will be strengthened, expanded and improved.
- People dealing with hunger and food hardship will be fully integrated into all efforts to raise awareness of hunger in Palm Beach County.

**“ [The public] is not clear why they’re hungry and oftentimes they’re blamed for being hungry.”**

**- Stakeholder Participant**

## Goal #2: The Palm Beach County Hunger Relief Task Force, Elected Officials and Community Members Will Advocate for the Strengthening of Public Policies at All Levels of Government to Systematically Fight Hunger and Reduce Food Hardship.

In order to significantly reduce the pernicious and long lasting impact of hunger and its root cause — poverty — the broader Palm Beach County community must come together to seek structural policy change at the local, state and federal levels.

To do so requires coordinated advocacy efforts backed by research, data analysis, client engagement, grassroots and “grass tops” organizing, and a taskforce headed by a dedicated leader.

Why?

Because only policy solutions can have the broad reach — at every level of adoption and implementation — to catalyze system-wide, sustainable change. Only policy solutions can enable the majority of residents facing hunger to access affordable, healthy food. Policy solutions can address the underlying causes behind hunger, including poverty, low wages, high cost of living, and the existence of food deserts.

Policy change can happen at many levels of government and is not just confined to legislative action at the national, state, or county level. Changes in administrative policies and practices can have a significant impact on addressing hunger.

A typical barrier that often dissuades non-profits from engaging in advocacy is the mistaken perception that nonprofits are barred from lobbying. The Task Force will need to address this issue by providing training on how nonprofits can lobby and how advocacy is much broader than lobbying and includes working to implement existing laws and policies.

### THE POWER OF POLICY

One example of the power of policy changes to positively impact the lives of those at risk of hunger can be seen in reforms recently made to the School Breakfast Program at various levels:

- **Federal:** The 2010 Child Nutrition Reauthorization allows schools in high poverty areas to offer free breakfast and free lunch to all students by adopting the Community Eligibility Program. Schools that have done so have seen increases in breakfast participation.
- **State:** Florida law requires all schools to offer free breakfast to all students if 80 percent or more of students qualify for free or reduced-price meals. Since the law’s passage, more schools are offering free breakfast.
- **Local:** Palm Beach County Schools have implemented the PowerUp with School Breakfast Program that provides free breakfast for every student at every school.
- **Administrative:** The Florida Department of Agriculture and its Palm Beach County Division provide schools with the technical assistance to help adopt the Community Eligibility Program. Palm Beach County Schools are considering implementing this to increase participation in the school lunch and breakfast programs.

To succeed in policy advocacy, the Hunger Relief Executive of this campaign must make it a priority to:

- Create bi-partisan political will and support for effective policies and programs.
- Build and maintain relationships with all elected and appointed officials from the County and state.
- Provide training on permissible lobbying for nonprofits and the differences between advocacy and lobbying.
- Engage residents struggling with hunger in identifying needed policy changes, sharing their stories, and advocating for policy changes.
- Assure that the policies and practices of Palm Beach County agencies are designed to ease access to nutrition program by low-income families and individuals, and that the County takes advantage of options in state and federal law and policy to maximize access and benefits.
- Work in partnership with other coalitions such as Florida Impact, United Way of Florida ALICE Project, Florida Council on Aging, and AARP Florida to strengthen the safety net and promote solutions that move families and seniors toward increased economic security at the county, state, and federal level.

This goal focuses on the process needed for the Hunger Relief Task Force to ramp up its ability to advocate for policy changes at all levels of government. Key to the Task Force's success will be the development of a policy agenda. Rather than providing an exhaustive list of potential policy opportunities for the Task Force to consider as part of this agenda, this Goal looks at three critical opportunities — two at the national level related to the reauthorization of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act (i.e., Child Nutrition) and the Older Americans Act, and one at the state level related to SNAP — for the Task Force to impact policy.



Policy and advocacy actions are also included throughout the Plan. Goal #10 addresses policy opportunities related to improving household economic security at the federal, state and local levels. Policy opportunities at the county level to improve the use of the federal nutrition programs and address hunger are embedded throughout Goals #2 through #9 of the Plan.

## **OBJECTIVE #2: THE HUNGER RELIEF TASK FORCE WILL EFFECTIVELY ADVOCATE FOR PUBLIC POLICIES TO FIGHT HUNGER**

### **STRATEGY #2(A): Ramp up the ability of the Hunger Relief Task Force to advocate for policy solutions to fight hunger and reduce food hardship.**

Effective advocacy will require building stronger partnerships within Palm Beach County and ensuring a unified voice on behalf of people at risk of hunger and food hardship.

#### **TACTICS #2(A)**

- Identify members of the Hunger Relief Task Force interested in creating an advocacy agenda.
- Identify partners at all levels of government who are supporting a similar agenda (e.g., Florida Impact, United Way of Florida ALICE Project, Florida Council on Aging, and AARP Florida).
- Agree on a process for supporting the Task Force's advocacy work recognizing that some members may not want to engage in policy or may not be permitted because they are government employees.
- Provide training for Task Force members on permissible lobbying activities for nonprofits and the differences between lobbying and advocacy.
- Explore opportunities to support advocacy efforts with partners for supporting a strong Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act, OAA and other legislation impacting families and seniors struggling with hunger.

### **STRATEGY #2(B): Advocate for and strengthen federal policies to systematically fight hunger.**

The Task Force will need to prioritize its interest and ability to engage in federal advocacy including partnering with Florida Impact to support a strong Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act and senior advocacy groups to support the nutrition programs in the OAA.

#### **TACTICS #2(B)**

- Continue partnering with Florida Impact on supporting a strong Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act
- Pass a strong Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act that:

\* Increases the reach of the Summer Nutrition Programs by lowering the area eligibility test. Today, most school, municipal and nonprofit summer food sites qualify to feed children in their program by demonstrating that 50 percent of the children in the

area they serve are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals, but this keeps many neighborhoods in Palm Beach County, especially in rural areas, from participating. The test should be lowered to 40 percent, which is used in other key programs like 21st Century Community Learning Centers. Doing so, would allow more areas to qualify for the program, thus feeding more children.

- \* Streamlines the Summer Nutrition Programs' administrative requirements so Palm Beach County nonprofits and local government agencies can provide meals year-round and encourage more sites to participate.
  - \* Allows sites to serve three meals a day instead of two, which is important for summer programs that provide full day care for working parents and for sites that provide evening activities for teens to keep them engaged and safe.
  - \* Strengthens and expands the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) to reach more young children in day care by lowering the area eligibility test from 50 to 40 percent, increasing reimbursements, enhancing program sponsors' funding, and providing two-year implementation funds to state CACFP agencies.
- Ramp-up partnerships with groups such as Florida Council on Aging and AARP Florida to advocate for the long overdue reauthorization of the OAA that includes improved nutrition provisions to address the growing numbers of seniors struggling with hunger.
  - Identify opportunities to engage Task Force members and people struggling with hunger in advocacy work around both Acts such as a sign-on letter, letters to the editor, sharing stories on the importance of the programs and how they can be improved, and visits to legislators.

**"Maybe poor people have to become a political force. Wouldn't that be interesting? We, who are hungry, are going to vote."**

**-Stakeholder Participant**

## **STRATEGY #2(C): Advocate for and strengthen state policies to systematically fight hunger and reduce food hardship.**

Again, the Task Force will need to prioritize its interest and ability to engage in state advocacy, but a key opportunity is to improve the state's operation of SNAP through adoption of permissible federal policies and broader implementation of existing policies.

### **TACTICS #2(C)**

- Improve state implementation of SNAP. While federal law governs SNAP, a variety of state policies affect how the program impacts participants. For example, streamlining the application process can make the difference between someone applying for SNAP or not. Florida currently takes advantage of several positive key policies that improve access. These include a broad waiver of face-to-face interviews for applicants, broad-based categorical eligibility that eliminates an asset test, and raising the gross income test to 200 percent of the federal poverty level, and a 24-month certification period for most seniors. The state also utilizes several policy options that help ensure residents are getting their full SNAP benefit amount. However, the Florida Department of Children and Families can make

further improvements — especially in the way SNAP interacts with other social service programs — by:

- \* Choosing the federal option of providing five months of federally-funded SNAP transitional benefits for families leaving TANF.
- \* Changing the Work Requirements and Disqualification Policy so children are not penalized if one of their parents or guardians is disqualified.
- \* Applying for able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWD) temporary waivers — in areas with persistently high unemployment. For instance, there are areas in South Florida and potentially in Palm Beach County that are eligible for the waiver. The Governor can ask USDA for the continuation of the ABAWD waiver in these areas of high unemployment.
- \* Work to pass state legislation lifting the lifetime ban on SNAP benefits for individuals convicted of a drug felony.

## RESPONSIBLE ENTITIES

- Members of the U.S. House and Senate representing Palm Beach County
- Members of the State of Florida’s House and Senate representing Palm Beach County
- State agency officials
- Local elected officials
- Local program administrators
- Florida Departments of Agriculture, Children and Families, and Health
- Hunger Relief Task Force
- Florida Impact
- Senior Advocacy groups like Florida Council on Aging and AARP Florida
- Business stakeholders
- Other community partners including anti-poverty advocates

## MEASUREMENTS

- Whether the changes advocated by the Hunger Relief Task Force are enacted.
- Whether the Palm Beach County congressional delegation supports the positions of the Hunger Relief Task Force.
- Whether the Palm Beach County state legislative delegation supports the positions of the Hunger Relief Task Force.
- Whether the state adopts permissible SNAP policies.

**“Policy helps put some of those issues ... whether it’s housing, increased wages—those types of decisions can help someone who has hunger insufficiencies or insecurities. I mean, obviously if your wage goes up and you earn more, you might be able to buy the food that you need.”**

**– Stakeholder Participant**

## OUTCOMES

- The Summer Nutrition, Afterschool and Child Care Food Programs will be strengthened and barriers to participation will be lowered.
- SNAP will be strengthened.
- State SNAP policies will be improved to remove barriers and streamline access to the program.
- Local usage of the child nutrition programs, SNAP, and other anti-hunger programs will improve.



### Goal #3: Hunger in the Glades Will Be Reduced Through Intensive, Focused Outreach and Attention.

The cities of Belle Glade, Pahokee, South Bay and Canal Point — the area known as the Glades — are disproportionately impacted by rates of hunger and poverty as are pockets near the east coast. However, because the Glades is home to many immigrants who live in rural areas, solutions to address hunger here are often distinct from more densely populated areas of the County.

This is Palm Beach County’s agricultural center and one of the nation’s most productive farming areas — a nearly \$1 billion a year industry.

Needless to say, there is something fundamentally awry if there is so much hunger in the midst of a region that produces much of America’s corn and sweet bell peppers. Yet, as the Report on Health and Human Services in Palm Beach County notes, “Western Palm Beach County has a significantly higher rate of potential food insecurity.”

Stakeholders in the public engagement process shared the need to redouble efforts to address hunger in the Glades, due to several factors that exacerbate its presence and make it harder to solve, including:

- Its geographic isolation from the rest of the County, making it difficult to get resources delivered from the east coast;
- The number of seasonal workers with low and fluctuating wages; and
- The lack of access to healthy food outlets.

One major problem is an inefficient distribution system for food, especially in rural areas which lack storage and refrigerated trucks. There is a need for infrastructure improvements and better coordination. There is a perception — and an underlying reality — that the Glades’ distance from Feeding South Florida and the Palm Beach County Food Bank results in fewer resources than the community needs. Small food pantries in the Glades often must make long trips to the food banks to get the food they need to serve clients. Even food gleaned from the Glades sometimes goes to food banks on the east coast and is then trucked back to the west.

Another challenge in addressing hunger in the Glades is the high percentage of immigrants who live and work in the area. Their status may render some of them ineligible for programs like SNAP and they bring with them experiences, attitudes and cultural norms that may make it less likely they will apply for nutrition benefits. For example, some may not want to access government programs because of fears stemming from experiences with government persecution in another country. Others may fear that accessing programs will negatively affect citizenship. Some may feel stigma in receiving a helping hand outside their immediate community. And some may face language barriers that make it harder to access services.

One consequence of this is the need for larger charitable food donations, at least until rules on immigrant eligibility improve and federal nutrition program participation otherwise increases.

**“My husband works cutting cane. We are a family of humble means, but my husband is very good and we take care of our children. We may eat eggs, beans, potatoes, a watery soup, but we attend to our children.”**

**– Spanish-speaking 50 year old woman from Pahokee**

Another is the need to promote and raise awareness about the child nutrition programs. Some immigrant Glades households may not meet the eligibility requirements for SNAP, but their children still qualify for school breakfast and lunch, WIC, and the child care, afterschool care and summer food programs. Parents need to know this information.

Given the unique realities facing the Glades, it's essential to look at this part of the challenge of hunger relief in Palm Beach County through a western county prism. Stakeholders should constantly examine whether enough support is being targeted to the needs of the people of the Glades, and whether programs are fully adapted to these needs.

It's equally important to recognize that with these challenges come impressive strengths:

- While many people don't understand how food is grown and even where it comes from, most Glades residents certainly do. And nutrition programs like the Glades Initiatives Cooking Matters Program combines cooking on a budget with nutrition information and free healthy food, reaching over 100 families a year.
- The Young Farmer/Rancher Group in the Glades is a national leader in food donations.
- Through Your Aging and Disability Resource Center's partnership with PBC Division of Senior Services, 34 percent of the targeted seniors in the Glades are reached with the congregate meals program, an OAA programs designed to target low-income, rural, minority, and limited English speaking populations. The county as a whole reaches only 15 percent of seniors with meals as funding is limited.
- There are many as yet unexplored opportunities to support residents' nutritional needs through gleaning, which just got easier with the passage of the Civil Liability of Farmers Bill (SB 158). This new law promotes gleaning by expanding protections for farmers who donate produce.
- The diversity of language and culture adds to the area's vibrancy.

Perhaps most important, a road map for fighting hunger in the Glades already exists. It can be found in the Glades Food Security Strategic Plan of 2013, developed by the Glades Initiative. The plan prioritizes three strategies:

- 1) Expanded nutrition education**
- 2) Improved SNAP outreach**
- 3) Increased partnership and coordination of resources**

There is a fourth element that should be added as well: Improve access to child nutrition programs. As noted previously, most children are eligible even if their parents cannot receive SNAP benefits. No application is required to participate in many of these programs, with the exception of WIC and the school meals programs. The meals provided under these programs are served at institutions people trust, including schools, camps, child care and afterschool programs, and faith-based organizations.

**"I'm a Glades advocate. We do have the same issues in other parts of the County, but they are harder to deal with because of our isolation and there are pockets that look just like they do in Riviera and Lake Worth and some other areas. But three miles away there's a resource."**

**- Stakeholder Participant**

## **OBJECTIVE #3: EFFORTS TO REDUCE HUNGER IN PALM BEACH COUNTY WILL PRIORITIZE THE NEED FOR TARGETTED, CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE WORK IN THE GLADES**

### **STRATEGY #3(A): Combine nutrition education and food access into one seamless package.**

Taking the first strategy listed in the Glades Strategic Plan and continuing to enhance it by linking it directly to food access ensures that residents can put the information they've gained to good use.

#### **TACTICS #3(A)**

- Implement service models that combine nutrition education with supports that help people connect to federal nutrition programs (e.g., through sharing information on how to access programs) or grow their own food (e.g., through school gardens and community gardens).
- Work with Belle Glade officials to address the issues behind the city's ban on "pop-up" community gardens. Residents should be encouraged to create and join community gardens whenever and wherever possible.
- Explore using the mobile summer meal bus model as a way to bring summer meals to children, along with nutrition education.
- Develop opportunities for the community to sell produce at farm stands or farmers markets and generate private funding for programs that improve purchasing power of low-income consumers. Ensure that these produce outlets accept SNAP. Explore funding for "Bonus Bucks" would allow SNAP or WIC recipients to double their purchasing power up to certain limits at farmers' markets and produce stands. This innovative model would serve as a strong incentive for the creation of farmers markets and produce stands in the Glades.

### **STRATEGY #3(B): Increase SNAP participation in the Glades.**

**Build on the promising work of the Glades Initiative to continue connecting residents of the Glades to SNAP.**

#### **TACTICS #3(B)**

- Conduct data matching to identify households that may be eligible for SNAP but aren't participating — for example, children who are eligible for free school meals who were not directly certified or families on WIC who are not participating in SNAP.
- Use trusted channels — to overcome cultural barriers — to reach out to these and other families about the availability of SNAP.
- Conduct training for community groups to connect people to SNAP:
  - \* Ensure those conducting outreach know the most up-to-date rules (such as the fact that children born in the U.S. to undocumented parents are eligible for SNAP).
  - \* Ensure those conducting outreach understand how to account for income from seasonal employment to maximize the period of SNAP eligibility.

- Help fund more outreach partners through peer-to-peer models, and utilize “promodores” — trusted community leaders — to connect people to SNAP and other food resources.

**“What our farmers know how to do in the Glades is grow food and distribute it. How do we capitablize on that knowledge to address hunger in the Glades”**

**- Stakeholder Participant**

- Develop resources and materials that are culturally appropriate and multilingual.
- Ensure that 211 has operators on hand who can speak Spanish, Creole and other needed languages.

### **STRATEGY #3(C): Improve the coordination of resources.**

#### **TACTICS #3(C)**

- Increase the refrigerated storage facilities, refrigerated transportation, and staff or volunteers available to the Glades Initiative and Glades’ food pantries to accommodate the current volume of available gleaned food.
- Food banks and pantries need to share trucks to increase the efficiency of getting food to the Glades.
- Build on the work currently being done to improve the efficiency of getting donated food to the region. Under an enhanced model, Feeding South Florida brings food to a central hub in the Glades for pick-up by area pantries. This is a big improvement over the old program in which individual pantries had to travel to other areas of the County to pick up their food.
- Get more out of the food trucks that are already delivering meals to older adults, such as multi-tasking them to also move food from a pantry or food bank at the same time (food hubs established in senior citizen communities would have the extra benefit of food being prepared on-site).
- Convene growers — who have indicated a willingness to meet — and stakeholders to discuss ways to better serve the community. Working together, they should explore the possibility of building a produce processing and distribution plant for the Glades. This would create jobs, lead to better use of donated produce, and increase the shelf life of produce through canning, freezing and making sauces. This produce could then be distributed to local food retailers.
- Explore the viability of building a produce processing facility in the Glades to help better distribute and use gleaned fruits and vegetables as well as provide jobs (Goal #7).

### **STRATEGY #3(D): Improve participation in child nutrition programs.**

#### **TACTICS #3(D)**

- Work with the School District of Palm Beach County to ensure that all Glades schools adopt the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) to ensure all children in the Glades have access to free school meals for 180 days out of the year. In addition, ensure all Glades schools implement alternative breakfast strategies like Breakfast in the Classroom,

Grab N' Go, and Second Chance Breakfast, strategies proven to make it easier for children to access the most important meal of the day (Goal #4).

- The Glades Initiative has a food resource guide; it should be revised and expanded to go beyond emergency food resources to promote child nutrition and other programs.
- Help build the capacity building of all organizations serving Glades residents to connect them to the full range of federal food and nutrition programs (e.g., Summer BreakSpots, WIC, and school breakfast).
- Work with schools to offer Afterschool Meals for children who need care between the end of school and the time their parents come home from work. This is especially important given the long hours often required of agricultural workers.

## **RESPONSIBLE ENTITIES**

- Hunger Relief Task Force
- Food Banks and food pantries, including The Glades Initiative
- Palm Beach County officials
- Florida Department of Children and Families
- School District of Palm Beach County
- Growers
- Glades community-based organizations
- Senior centers
- Immigrant advocacy groups

## **MEASUREMENTS**

- Rates of hunger and food insecurity in the Glades.
- Whether nutrition education efforts are combined with food access.
- SNAP participation rates in the Glades.
- Whether the food distribution system is made more efficient with local storage facilities and a food processing plant built.
- The number of Glades children participating in the child nutrition programs.
- Whether schools establish breakfast in the classroom and afterschool meals programs.



## OUTCOMES

- Hunger and food insecurity in the Glades will be reduced.
- Nutrition education and food access for families at risk will be provided together.
- Participation in SNAP and the child nutrition programs will increase.
- Food distribution will be better coordinated and more efficient, with local storage facilities and the establishment of a food processing plant.
- Schools will explore innovative strategies including Breakfast in the Classroom, Grab N' Go, and Second Chance breakfast, to reach more children and increase breakfast participation and expand afterschool meals programs.

## Goal #4: All Palm Beach County Children Will Have Access to the Nutritious Food They Need to Build Healthy Bodies and Strong Minds.

“Let their children -- let them worry about being a child, not being worried about, hey, what am I going to eat tonight. What am I going to have tomorrow? Where am I going to sleep tonight? Where am I going to sleep tomorrow? Is my mama or my daddy going to be able to pay the light bill? I've got to worry about the lights being off. I got to worry about the water being off. What am I to do?”

-- African American father in his 40's from Boca who recently lost his job

It's an inescapable and irrefutable fact: children need to eat regular, nutritious meals to grow and develop properly, be healthy, and learn in school to the best of their ability. When they don't, the consequences can be tragic and last a lifetime. When they do, they gain the number-one building block behind a thriving childhood and the opportunity to become successful, productive adults.

Fortunately, this is an eminently achievable goal. The full array of federal nutrition programs can be maximized to spin a seamless web that supports child nutrition all year long. What's needed is to overcome and remove all barriers and obstacles to this objective while implementing a comprehensive, proactive plan to gain full participation in these programs.

### **OBJECTIVE #4A: ALL INFANTS, TODDLERS AND PRE-SCHOOLERS WILL HAVE ACCESS TO SPECIAL NUTRITIONAL FOOD EVERY DAY, ALL YEAR LONG**

#### **STRATEGY #4(A) 1: Maximize participation in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).**

WIC is a preventive program providing low-income pregnant women, new mothers, infants and children (up to the age of five years old) with nutritious food, nutrition education, and improved access to health care in order to prevent nutrition-related health problems in pregnancy, infancy and early childhood.

This is a great success story. Research shows that WIC is effective at reducing food insecurity, improving dietary intake, lowering rates of obesity, and improving other health outcomes. Moreover, improvements made to the WIC food packages in recent years have contributed to better diets for WIC participants and healthier food environments in low-income neighborhoods, enhancing access to fruits, vegetables, and whole grains for all consumers regardless of whether they participate in WIC.

It is estimated that 92 percent of eligible women and children are participating in WIC in Palm Beach County, serving 31,076 women and children in 2014.<sup>62</sup> While Palm Beach County has engaged in innovative outreach to those eligible, the diverse population of the County continues to pose challenges to achieving full participation.

Typically, participation in WIC drops after a participant's first birthday. As a result, the outreach strategy must include new tactics to keep children in the program between the ages of one and five years old.

Connecting families to WIC is only half the battle. Families need to have access to supermarkets, grocery stores and other retailers that accept WIC vouchers and sell WIC “prescribed foods” that are culturally appropriate throughout the County — but especially in lower-income neighborhoods.

## TACTICS #4(A)1

- Continue to have Florida Department of Health in Palm Beach County systematically promote WIC at child development centers serving lower-income families.
- Identify SNAP participant households with newborns and children under five years old, and then match the data with WIC participants — those not on WIC should be contacted directly and assisted with enrollment and vice versa.
- Ensure that all Palm Beach County agencies interacting with pregnant women and young families — both public and private — have information on WIC and proactively seek to enroll those eligible.
- Continue to encourage health care providers caring for pregnant women and young children OB-GYNs, pediatricians, health clinics, hospitals —to talk with their patients about WIC.
- Assess at what rate WIC customers are redeeming WIC vouchers, where and whether there are sufficient retail outlets that accept WIC.
- Ensure that sufficient supermarkets, grocery stores and other retailers selling fresh food accept WIC vouchers.

## STRATEGY #4(A)2: Maximize participation in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).

The CACFP provides nutritious meals and snacks for young children attending participating child care centers, family child care homes and Head Start programs. In May 2015, almost 12,000 children were served meals funded by CACFP at over 230 participating child care centers and family child care homes in the County. Eligibility is based either on the poverty status of the area (where more than 50 percent of the children are eligible for free or reduced-price meals) or on the income of the enrolled children.

The program provides many essential benefits. Studies show that children in CACFP receive meals that are nutritionally superior to those served to children in child care settings without CACFP. In fact, one study found that the nutritional difference translated into significantly higher intakes of many key nutrients, far more servings of milk and vegetables, fewer servings of fats and sweets, and fewer days of illness.

In addition, CACFP makes child care more affordable for low-income parents who rely on the program, because it provides an additional source of funding for child care providers. It also improves the overall quality of child care not only because children eat better, but also because CACFP provides training for family child care providers. Furthermore, CACFP requires three inspections annually and many times these are the only inspections made of family child care homes to ensure they are a safe, child-friendly environment.

**“If we have children who are going hungry, it means that they’re not able to concentrate in school, their ability to learn is greatly diminished because they have to... We need to meet those basic needs before we can meet the higher needs. It’s difficult for them to concentrate. It’s difficult for them to learn. They’ll be irritable.”**

**– Stakeholder Participant**



## **TACTICS #4(A)2**

- Conduct outreach to all child care centers and home care providers not participating in CACFP – with a special emphasis on family child care providers because they have the lowest participation – to ensure they are aware of the program and to assist them with enrollment.
- Bring together government agencies and the advocacy, nonprofit, faith-based and child care communities to eliminate access barriers, simplify CACFP applications for juveniles and support outreach efforts.
- Use CACFP nutrition education resources to support healthy eating and physical activity habits among pre-school children in child care.

## **RESPONSIBLE ENTITIES**

- Hunger Relief Task Force
- Florida Department of Health--Palm Beach County
- Florida Department of Children and Families
- Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County
- Other Palm Beach County agencies interacting with low-income pregnant women, families and child care providers
- Community-based organizations interacting with pregnant women and low-income families with preschool children
- Health care providers caring for pregnant women and young children
- Supermarkets, grocery stores and other food retailers
- Child care providers
- Early Learning Coalition of Palm Beach County and other community, nonprofit and faith-based groups serving low-income areas
- Sponsoring organizations including the Early Learning Coalition and Florida Department of Health

## **MEASUREMENTS**

- Percentage of eligible pregnant women and young children participating in WIC;
- Number of stores that accept WIC in targeted areas;
- Percentage of WIC coupons redeemed; and
- Number of child care programs participating in CACFP.

## **OUTCOMES**

- Increase the number of eligible women and young children participating in WIC by 10 percent by 2017.
- A sufficient number of stores accept WIC to ensure redemption of vouchers where low-income families regularly shop.
- Increase the number of child care providers in Palm Beach County participating in CACFP by 10 percent.
- Overall measures of health for pregnant women and young children will improve.

**OBJECTIVE #4B: ALL SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS WILL HAVE ACCESS TO NUTRITIOUS FOOD IN SCHOOLS AND THROUGH SUMMER, AFTERSCHOOL, AND WEEKEND PROGRAMS, EVERY DAY, ALL YEAR LONG**

**STRATEGY #4(B)1: Maximize participation in the school-based regular day meal programs (School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program).**

The School District of Palm Beach County is the eleventh largest in the nation and the fifth largest in the state of Florida with 185 schools, serving more than 183,000 students. The School Breakfast Program (SBP) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) make it possible for all school-age children in Palm Beach County and the U.S. to receive a nutritious breakfast and lunch every school day. Participation does not just reduce student hunger; it also has been linked with better diets, lower rates of overweight and obesity, fewer visits to the school nurse, and a lower incidence of tardiness, absenteeism, and disciplinary problems.

The Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 made a number of improvements to the school nutrition landscape, and the School District of Palm Beach County has worked hard to implement the law's various provisions over the past few years. In doing so, the school meals offered by the district include more fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and less fat. USDA's research indicates that children who participate in school nutrition programs have superior nutritional intakes compared to those who do not participate.

Nationwide expansion of the Community Eligibility Program (CEP) — a powerful tool in reducing hunger was one of the many improvements included in the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids of Act 2010. CEP allows high-poverty schools to offer free breakfast and lunch at no charge to all students while eliminating the traditional school meal application process. This option increases participation by children in the school meals programs, while schools reduce labor costs and increase their federal revenues, allowing for a healthier student body and healthier school meal budget. In the initial pilot states, schools that implemented the provision for two years increased breakfast participation by 25 percent and lunch participation by 13 percent.<sup>63</sup> In short, it allows for a healthier student body and a healthier school meal budget. By offering meals at no charge to all students, often called “universal,” the stigma associated with participating in the child nutrition programs is eliminated.

At the state level, efforts are underway to address some of the obstacles Florida schools are facing with implementing CEP. USDA's national and regional offices have been working closely with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to address barriers to participation among the state's larger school districts, including Palm Beach. As a focus state for USDA this year, progress will likely be made to ensure that Florida schools are able to take advantage of this popular and successful national provision. Both agencies are available to provide the technical assistance needed to implement community eligibility.

The School District of Palm Beach County is eligible to adopt CEP districtwide and should examine how to adopt CEP, particularly in schools where more than 60 percent of students are directly certified for free school meals. In these schools, virtually all meals served would be reimbursed at the highest federal reimbursement rate.

Because Palm Beach County already provides free breakfast to all students, CEP will not change this favorable policy. However, adopting CEP is still advantageous since it will allow participating schools to provide free lunch to all students, leverage more federal funding for both breakfast and lunch, and likely increase breakfast and lunch participation.

**“Many of the kids who are hungry are in schools, and sometimes the only meals that they get are the meals provided in the schools.”**

**– Stakeholder Participant**

## School Breakfast Program (SBP)

According to the latest participation data, 44,548 Palm Beach County students participated in the School Breakfast Program in the 2013-2014 school year.<sup>64</sup> While this is an increase from the previous year, only 40.83 percent of the children eligible for Free or Reduced Price meals participate, and there are still significant gains to be made to reach the national goal of 70 percent.

Maximizing participation in the School Breakfast Program will benefit not only the children affected but all of Palm Beach County by:

- Improving health and school performance among low-income children. Studies conclude that students who eat school breakfast increase their math and reading scores, and improve their speed and memory in cognitive tests. Research also shows that children who eat breakfast at school — closer to class and test-taking time — perform better on standardized tests than those who skip breakfast or eat breakfast at home.
- Bringing in over \$18 million<sup>65</sup> in additional federal funds to help provide nutritious meals for children, without imposing a burden on the County government or the private sector.

What's needed now are strategies to remove or work around the barriers that lead to low participation. These include lack of awareness, busy morning schedules of families, late buses, and stigma attached to the program. Thankfully, the School District has taken an impressive first step to address these issues by implementing the PowerUp School with Breakfast program, which has allowed all students in the School District of Palm Beach County to access school breakfast for free every day.

But the School District is missing out on other key opportunities that when leveraged with universal free meals, connects even more children to breakfast by making breakfast a part of the school day through system-wide use of alternative breakfast models which make breakfast even more convenient and accessible. There are several alternative service models that have been proven to increase participation and can be adapted and customized to fit the unique needs of each school. Proven models include Breakfast in the Classroom where students eat breakfast that was either delivered to the classroom or picked up on the way to class during the first 10-15 minutes of the school day; Grab N' Go Breakfast where students pick up breakfast from carts in the hallway on their way to class; and Second Chance Breakfast where a healthy meal is served in the hallway after first period during a morning break, allowing students who arrive late or are not hungry first thing access to breakfast. A promising step is that for the 2015-2016 school year, the School District will implement Grab N' Go breakfast in eight high schools with low breakfast participation (27 percent or below).

## National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

In addition to implementing the new nutrition standards, the School District of Palm Beach County promotes healthy eating habits through a number of initiatives including OrganWise, an interactive curricula that includes physical activity and nutrition lessons in every school to promote healthy choices (See Goal #9). The School District also has a strong wellness policy and a cafeteria reengineering program to increase participation among high school students and encourage healthier foods.

In addition, the School District has been working to expand its "Fresh from the Farm" fruits and vegetable program, which puts a locally sourced fruit or vegetable on the weekly menu of every public school student. These efforts provide a solid platform from which further improvements can be made.

While participation is much higher in NSLP than in SBP, it can still grow further, by reducing barriers for low-income students to access school meals. A winning strategy to fuel that growth would be the County's adoption of the Community Eligibility Program.

#### **TACTICS #4(B)1**

- Move to adopting the CEP districtwide.
- Build on the School District's plan to implement Grab N' Go breakfast in eight high schools by expanding it and exploring other alternative breakfast models, like Breakfast in the Classroom and Second Chance Breakfast. These proven tactics remove many of the traditional barriers to breakfast and lead to significant increases in participation.
- Assess policy opportunities to promote or require alternative breakfast service models through county legislative action or school board policy. Consider investing in local funding to help with start-up costs for programs like breakfast in the classroom.
- Continue to expand "Fresh from the Farm," OrganWise and other efforts to promote healthy eating.
- Pass a mandate requiring all schools to ensure that children have enough time to eat their lunch. Unfortunately, many schools have drastically shortened lunch periods to accommodate class time mandates and other regulations. This is causing some children to miss their meal entirely and others to wolf down their food in an unhealthy way.

#### **STRATEGY #4(B)2: Maximize participation in Summer BreakSpot (Florida's Summer Nutrition Program).**

Children's nutritional needs don't end during the summer when school is out. Fortunately, Summer BreakSpot helps fill the gap.

Funded in large part by the federal Summer Food Service Program, Summer BreakSpot provides meals to children under 18 at sites that offer educational, enrichment, physical and recreational activities during the weeks between the end of one school year and the start of the next. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services works with its public agency and nonprofit sponsors to offer a variety of nutritious meals, both hot and cold. It also encourages sponsors to take into consideration the cultural preferences of the children in the community.

In addition to reducing hunger and food insecurity, Summer BreakSpot:

- Acts as a magnet to draw children to summer care programs. As a result, working parents know their children are safe and hunger-free — even when school is out.
- Generates millions of dollars in new revenue to the county and state. For summer 2015, sponsors received \$2.04 for each breakfast served, \$3.59 per lunch or supper, and \$0.85 per snack. For every breakfast, lunch or supper that an eligible child does not receive, the state and community miss out on that funding. Sponsors located in rural areas or those that prepare their own meals on-site would receive a higher reimbursement.

- Can grow to meet any and all additional demand without burdening state or local government because the Summer Nutrition Programs are federal entitlement programs.

In 2014, 13,220 children accessed summer meals at 206 Summer BreakSpots throughout Palm Beach County.<sup>66</sup> While this was an increase from the prior year, only 12 percent of eligible children in Palm Beach County participated in the program. Nationally, 16.2 children received Summer Nutrition for every 100 low-income students who received lunch in the 2013-2014 school year.<sup>67</sup> To achieve the national goal of ensuring at least 40 children receive summer meals for every 100 low-income students who receive lunch, improvements still need to be made. There are still many neighborhoods in Palm Beach County without a convenient site for children to access summer meals. Lack of awareness of the program and transportation issues are also significant barriers. Innovative solutions and funding must be utilized to get children to summer sites. The School District will pilot a mobile bus site next summer, a positive first step.

A further problem is that the Summer Nutrition Programs only provide reimbursement for two meals a day during the summer. Due to work schedules, many children spend long hours in summer programs and need more than two meals. Local partners would like to be able to serve a snack or supper during the summer in addition to breakfast and lunch.

A tremendous asset for expanding the program is that the Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners and the School District of Palm Beach County are available to sponsor any site by assisting with paperwork, training staff, and providing the free meals. In order to capitalize on this opportunity to connect more sites to the help of a sponsor, the Palm Beach County Department of Youth Services should explore reducing paperwork requirements for the programs that are within their purview.

Anchored by the Board of County Commissioners, the Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County, and PrimeTime, the County should explore requiring those summer programs that receive county funding for their activities to participate in Summer BreakSpots either as sites or by connecting their children to nearby sites. Additionally, funders and agencies should explore opportunities for mini-grants to help smaller programs purchase refrigerators and cover staff costs to operate the program.

## **TACTICS #4(B)2**

- Build on existing outreach efforts to ensure that all eligible families know about Summer BreakSpots and can access sites:
  - \* Continue the School District of Palm Beach County's use of Parent Link to call every student's home to notify their family about the Summer Nutrition Programs.
  - \* Continue efforts by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to collaborate with the Department of Children and Families, and SNAP community partners to advertise summer meal sites to households receiving SNAP benefits.
  - \* Expand the Summer BreakSpot outreach campaign by engaging more stakeholders and coming up with more creative ways to promote the program to children and their families, as well as program providers.

- Ensure that all summer camps in summer meal eligible areas are participating in the Summer BreakSpot. For instance, explore requiring summer programs receiving local government funding and philanthropic funding to participate in Summer BreakSpots.
- Operate mobile feeding sites and collaborate with new partners to ensure those in rural areas have access to summer meals.
- Provide small start-up grants to sites to be able to serve meals.
- Explore opportunities at the local level to reduce paperwork.
- Pursue a pilot to provide meals for the parent along with the child.

### **STRATEGY #4(B)3: Maximize participation in the Afterschool Nutrition Programs.**

Children who participate in afterschool programs — tutoring, recreational, mentoring, cultural, and other programs—all need snacks to tide them over between lunch and dinner. Further, children in these programs whose parents work into the very late afternoon or evening often need to receive supper there, too.

The Afterschool Nutrition Programs fill the hunger gap that may exist after school for thousands of low-income children in Palm Beach County. These programs provide federal funding to afterschool programs operating in low-income areas to serve meals and snacks to children 18 and under not just after school, but also on weekends, and during school holidays.

Participation in the Afterschool Nutrition Programs is strong in Palm Beach County, at least after the regular school days, with most afterschool providers we interviewed reporting that they utilize the programs to provide nutritious food to participants. In November 2014, 113 afterschool programs participated in the Afterschool Meal Program. Moreover, the School District of Palm Beach County is expanding its Afterschool Meal Program to an additional 19 schools this year — for a total of 23 schools.

Nevertheless, further gains can and should be made. Thankfully, there are a number of sponsoring organizations in Palm Beach County which are willing to help afterschool programs participate in this program, by taking on the administrative tasks required. As in summer meals, stakeholders should examine whether there is enough capacity to require afterschool programs receiving county or local philanthropic funding to participate in the nutrition programs. Programs could be excused for good cause — e.g., lack of capacity, inability to connect with a sponsor. Further efforts should be made to ensure program providers utilize this program to provide meals on weekends and during holidays. Even though the meal is often referred to as supper, programs that operate on weekends and school holidays can choose to serve breakfast or lunch instead. Programs can receive funding for a maximum of one meal and one snack per day.

### **TACTICS #4(B)3**

- Explore requiring any child care provider or afterschool program receiving county and philanthropic funding to provide meals and snacks to participants afterschool.
- The School District of Palm Beach County should continue to expand the Afterschool Meal Program to all eligible schools.

- Expand efforts to ensure that children whose stay in afterschool care extends into the evening hours receive nutritious dinners.
- Reach out to all afterschool program providers who offer snacks and urge them to participate in the Afterschool Meal Program.
- Reach out to program providers that operate on weekends and holidays to ensure they know the program allows for one meal and snack to be served during these times.

## **RESPONSIBLE ENTITIES**

- Hunger Relief Task Force
- USDA
- Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
- School District of Palm Beach County
- Palm Beach County Youth Services Department
- Children’s Services Council, Early Learning Coalition, and PrimeTime Palm Beach County
- School officials, teachers, parents and Parent Teacher Associations.
- Municipal Departments of Recreation
- Summer camp and afterschool program providers
- Local farms
- Faith-based communities
- Funders

## **MEASUREMENTS**

- Percentage of students receiving school breakfast each school day.
- Percentage of students receiving free school lunches each school day.
- The percentage of children eligible for free and reduced-price school meals who participate in Summer BreakSpot.
- Statistics on the presence of hunger and food insecurity among families with children during the summer months.
- The number of afterschool care providers, including schools, participating in the Afterschool Nutrition Programs, especially the Afterschool Meal Program.

## OUTCOMES

- Number of schools providing universal free school meals by adopting the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) or other models and operating alternative breakfast models (Breakfast in the Classroom, Grab N' Go, and Second Chance).
- 70 percent of Free and Reduced-Price (FRP) students who participate in the National School Lunch Program will participate in the School Breakfast Program.
- Participation in the National School Lunch Program will grow by 10 percent for low-income students.
- The incidence of overweight and obesity among school children will be reduced.
- At least 40 percent of children receiving free or reduced price school meals will participate in Summer BreakSpot.
- The number of afterschool care program sites participating in the Afterschool Nutrition Programs will increase by 10 percent.





## Goal #5: Low-Income Older Residents of Palm Beach County Will Have Balanced, Nutritious Diets.

Palm Beach County's many amenities make it a sought-after location for many retirees. In fact, 28 percent of Palm Beach County residents are 60 or older. But this population often diverges significantly from the stereotype. While many seniors are higher-income earners living comfortably in retirement, many Palm Beach County seniors struggle to put food on the table.

Compounding the issue of senior hunger is the reality that many older residents face obstacles preparing meals or getting to the supermarket — even those located in close proximity — due to health issues that can pose significant challenges to walking, driving, taking public transportation, or cooking meals.

More than 32,500 (8.4 percent) Palm Beach County residents aged 60 or older have incomes that fall below the federal poverty level.<sup>68</sup> While hunger can impact seniors at higher income levels due to disability, poor health and access problems, this section focuses on addressing the nutrition of those below 200 percent of the poverty level. They are most at risk of needing county-wide action to address hunger because they are the most likely to lack sufficient economic resources to purchase healthy, affordable food on their own.

Addressing senior hunger is absolutely essential because its impact extends well beyond an empty stomach. Getting enough nutritious food, while important to everyone, can make the difference between life and death for people who are particularly vulnerable to disease, or when their life circumstances — such as limited mobility — make obtaining a healthy diet more difficult.

In addition, those facing hunger hardship are more prone to suffer from mental health problems including depression, decreased resistance to infection, diabetes, and limitations on activities of daily living.

### **OBJECTIVE #5(A): ALL ELIGIBLE PALM BEACH COUNTY SENIOR CITIZENS AT RISK OF HUNGER WILL RECEIVE FEDERAL BENEFITS.**

The federal nutrition programs available to seniors are proven not only to combat food insecurity and hunger, but also to improve nutrition, economic security, and overall health and well-being. There are four key nutrition programs that help senior citizens access healthy food: SNAP, Home-Delivered Meals (“Meals on Wheels”), Congregate Meals, and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program. Of the four, only SNAP is an entitlement program, and thus available to any senior who meets the eligibility criteria. Both Home-Delivered and Congregate Meals are funded through a combination of Title III of the Older Americans Act (OAA), state and local appropriations and private funds. The Commodity Supplemental Food Program was recently approved for Florida; currently the entire state can only serve 2,400 seniors in just a handful of counties.

**“[B]ut if there are federal resources that can be brought or state resources, figuring out how to get them and what needs to be done and if requires more than just completing a grant application, where are the buttons that need to be pushed.”**

**- Stakeholder Participant**

Other funding streams that can be used to provide nutrition for seniors include: the Nutrition Services Incentive Program (NSIP) and the Community Care for the Elderly Program. NSIP provides supplemental federal funding for meals served under the OAA. Meal providers can use NSIP funding to adjust meal rates, improve meal quality, and increase the number of meals provided to needy clients. Community Care for the Elderly comprehensive state funds can be used to provide home delivered meals to frail seniors.

**“And one of the issues, I think, with older adults is that their social security and other benefits were fine five or six years ago, but now the cost of homeowners’ association fee have gone up and other things have gone up ... and their social security benefits have not gone up substantially so no they’re finding themselves hungry.”**

**– Stakeholder Participant**

### **STRATEGY #5(A)1: Maximize senior citizen participation in SNAP.**

SNAP allows seniors to shop for diet-appropriate foods at a range of grocery and corner stores and farmers’ markets. It also supplements fixed incomes by providing relief from rising food costs.

According to the Department of Elder Affairs, 2014 Florida County Profile, 48 percent (or 22,651) of Palm Beach residents over 60 who are eligible for SNAP are actually receiving benefits. However, this percentage is based on seniors at 125 percent of the FPL and does not capture the tens of thousands of additional low-income seniors who could be eligible for SNAP. There is substantial room for growth.

A big reason why senior SNAP participation is so low is because many elderly people are not aware they qualify. They may never have received food stamps when they were younger but now, on a fixed income, they need assistance affording nutritious food. In addition, some people don’t like the idea of receiving federal benefits aimed at helping “the poor,” while others mistakenly think there are not enough SNAP benefits to reach everyone and they want benefits to go to those they see as more needy, like young children. Some seniors who are unable to shop for food may not be aware they can appoint an authorized representative (e.g., friend or relative) who can use their Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card at the store to buy them groceries.

Additionally, seniors may not be aware of existing policy options — like claiming medical expense deduction — that can help increase their benefit levels.

Overcoming these barriers is important because by increasing SNAP participation by 20 percent, Palm Beach County could serve over 4,530 additional seniors, reduce hunger, and bring in around \$4.8 million in federal dollars without the need for a sizeable local investment.

### **TACTICS #5(A)1**

- Analyze data to identify key types of senior or geographic areas that are being underserved and target sites based on data to conduct SNAP outreach.
- Identify key messages to help connect senior citizens to SNAP and overcome the stigma some may feel about the program. Messages that have been found to be effective elsewhere include the fact that SNAP boosts health and nutrition, stretches food dollars, serves anyone who is eligible, eases choices between paying for food and medicine, draws down federal dollars after a lifetime of paying taxes, and helps bring federal dollars to support the local economy.
- Explore opportunities to promote SNAP at local agencies and community-based senior serving agencies, such as senior congregate meal sites, Social Security Administration offices, housing complexes, and food bank programs.

- Work to encourage the Florida Department of Children and Families which administers SNAP in the state, to adopt policy options to help seniors readily access SNAP and increase benefit levels (for example, adopt a standard medical deduction, and allow voice recognition for a telephone signature).
- Work with the Florida Department of Children and Families and Your Aging and Disability Resource Center to ensure that seniors are aware of existing policy options that benefit older residents. For example, the two-year certification period, the opportunity to deduct medical expenses, and the elimination of the asset test.
- Provide assistance to seniors in filling out the application.

### **STRATEGY #5(A)2: Expand the Congregate Meal and Home-Delivered Meals Programs.**

In 2014, the OAA Congregate Meal Program served on an average weekday 2,904 residents, aged 60 and over, at 21 Palm Beach County senior citizen sites. Participants received a free daily meal from Monday through Friday. Meals were served in group settings which allowed for socialization along with other services such as transportation, counseling, and recreation opportunities. No data are currently available on how many seniors desired to eat at a congregate meal site but were unable to do so. However, the program could likely grow to reach thousands more. Your Aging and Disability Resource Center data show there are no congregate meals sites in zip codes 33433 and 33467, both of which are among the top 10 Palm Beach County zip codes for seniors below the poverty level.

The OAA Home-Delivered Meals Program is administered by Your Aging and Disability Resource Center. In early 2014, there were 1,373 persons on the waitlist for Home-Delivered Meals. In 2014, 794 were served. As of late February 2015, the waitlist had been reduced to 563 seniors; however, the true need for the program is deeper, because many seniors may not know about the program or may decide not to put their name on the waiting list when they hear how long it is. A total of \$1,800,790 was expensed in federal funds for meals for both programs in 2014 in Palm Beach County.

In Palm Beach County, 127 seniors received Home-Delivered Meals under the Community Care for the Elderly Program in 2014, a state and local program.

In addition, there are several charitable organizations that participate in Meals on Wheels, which is a program funded entirely with private dollars. For instance, the Meals on Wheels of the Palm Beaches program serves about 100 seniors on the coast and the Lighthouse Café delivers meals to 30 homebound residents in the Glades. These groups, because of funding limitations, have to turn away seniors. OAA Home-Delivered Meal providers and the charitable Meals on Wheels network could partner to identify and explore ways to better reach the homebound seniors in need of nutrition services but unserved because of budgetary limitations. Partnering with these groups can help address the gaps in the federally funded Home-Delivered Meals Program.

### **TACTICS #5(A)2**

- Use targeted data to quantify and prioritize the need for expanding congregate meal and home-delivered meal service.
- Identify the amount of local funding needed to leverage services and the capacity of local community-based organizations to support these efforts.
- Identify if Palm Beach County is getting its fair share of federal and state dollars for senior nutrition programs.

- Work to secure government or foundation funding to expand congregate meal and home-delivered meal service to more seniors facing hunger.
- Increase participation in the OAA nutrition counseling program for seniors with high nutritional risk scores.

**STRATEGY #5(A)3: Bring the Commodity Supplemental Food Program to Palm Beach County.**

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program provides low-income seniors with a bag of groceries filled with federal commodities like rice, beans, canned fruits and vegetables, and cereal each month.

Having just been approved for Florida, the program is being implemented for the state by the Harry Chapin Food Bank in Lee County and currently serves 2,400 senior citizens. Efforts should be made to bring the program to Palm Beach County.

**TACTICS #5(A)3**

- County stakeholders should seek to participate in the Commodity Supplemental Food Program if it is expanded at the state level.

**RESPONSIBLE ENTITIES**

- Florida Department of Children and Families
- Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners
- Your Aging and Disability Resource Center
- Senior citizen centers
- Senior housing complexes
- Senior citizen advocacy organizations, such as AARP
- Meal sites, food banks, and pantry programs
- Other community-based organizations serving seniors
- Local senior citizen service providers
- Hunger Relief Task Force

**MEASUREMENTS**

- The number of seniors that become aware of SNAP through outreach efforts.
- Attitudes among senior citizens toward SNAP participation.
- The percentage of Palm Beach County residents over age 60 eligible for SNAP who are receiving benefits.
- The number of Palm Beach County senior citizens participating in the Congregate Meals Program.
- The number of Palm Beach County senior citizens participating in the Home-Delivered Meals Program.
- Whether the Commodity Supplemental Food Program comes to Palm Beach County and how many senior citizens are served by the program.

- Awareness among Palm Beach County senior citizens about the Congregate Meals Program and the Home-Delivered Meals Program.

## **OUTCOMES**

- Senior SNAP participation in Palm Beach County will increase 20 percent by 2017.
- The County provides funding to expand the participation in Congregate Meals and Home-Delivered Meals Programs.
- The Congregate Meals Program will serve 10 percent more Palm Beach County senior citizens by 2017.
- All low-income people on the Home-Delivered Meals Program wait list will join the program or be referred to Meals on Wheels for assistance.
- The Home-Delivered Meals Program will increase its capacity by 10 percent to serve more Palm Beach County senior citizens by 2017.
- The Commodity Supplemental Food Program starts operating in Palm Beach County.

## **OBJECTIVE #5(B): THE NUTRITIONAL NEEDS OF PALM BEACH COUNTY SENIOR CITIZENS WILL BE BETTER SERVED THROUGH PRIVATE SECTOR NETWORKS, WHOSE EFFORTS ARE INTEGRATED WITH, AND COMPLEMENT, THE PUBLIC SECTOR.**

### **STRATEGY #5(B)1: Identify innovative models to involve volunteers in addressing senior hunger.**

Non-governmental Meals on Wheels Programs, food banks, and food pantries have an especially important role to play in providing supplemental food to seniors because the federal nutrition programs – mostly not entitlements for seniors – need more gap-filling than do the programs for children. This is also an opportunity for nonprofits to identify model methods to reach seniors unable to travel to pick up or shop for food. Creating mobile markets for seniors is one promising innovation.

### **TACTICS #5(B)1**

- Assess and promote the work of nonprofits and faith-based organizations in addressing senior hunger.
- Ensure that information is shared with 211 and Your Aging and Disability Resource Center Helpline operators.
- Identify gaps in service and explore innovative sustainable models.
- Recruit and mobilize volunteers to serve as senior citizen helpers, navigators and shoppers.

## **STRATEGY #5(B)2: Build on and synthesize existing research to identify pockets of seniors most at-risk of hunger and under-served.**

There is important remaining information to be gathered about which senior citizens in Palm Beach County face hunger hardship — how many of them there are, who they are, where they live, why they are at risk of hunger, and how their needs can be fully met. Conducting this research is essential to maximize the effectiveness of efforts to end senior hunger.

### **TACTICS #5(B)2**

- Update research by Your Aging and Disability Resource Center that explores the relationship between use of home-delivered meals, congregate meals, and poverty based on zip code data.
- Add zip code data for seniors participating in SNAP to the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) model.
- Add zip code data for food pantries and organizations that provide food or meals to seniors.
- Assess locations of the 21 congregate meal sites and analyze whether there are sufficient sites to meet the needs of seniors.
- Identify ideas to target for SNAP outreach, location of congregate meal sites, local home-delivered meal funding or referrals to Meals on Wheels, North County Churches, Morse Life or Ruth Rales private partners, and mobile vans.
- Work to draw down federal funding and secure local funding to meet these identified needs.

### **RESPONSIBLE ENTITIES**

- Your Aging and Disability Resource Center
- Food banks and food pantries
- Other organizations serving senior citizens
- Volunteer organizations
- Faith-based community
- Local academic institutions with research capabilities
- AARP
- Hunger Relief Task Force

### **MEASUREMENTS**

- The number of senior citizens facing hunger hardship who receive food from food banks and food pantries through SNAP, congregate, and home-delivered meals.
- The development and deployment of innovative programs to reach senior citizens who are homebound or have limited mobility.
- The number of volunteers engaged in senior outreach.
- Knowledge about which senior citizens face hunger hardship, the causes of senior hunger hardship, and the solutions to senior hunger hardship.

## OUTCOMES

- Food banks and food pantries will coordinate their efforts with public sector agencies involved in providing food and nutrition benefits and services to senior citizens.
- Seniors with mobility issues will receive support with transportation to access food through home delivery or transportation assistance to sites.
- Special messaging and resources will be developed to target seniors struggling with hunger.
- Innovative programs to end senior hunger will be developed.



## Goal #6: Participation in SNAP Will Increase Substantially to Benefit More Residents of Palm Beach County, and SNAP Benefits Will Be Enhanced.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as Food Stamps) is widely considered our nation's number one defense against hunger — and for good reason. By allowing individuals and families of all ages and types to shop for diet-appropriate foods at a range of grocery and corner stores and farmers' markets, SNAP is one of the most successful government programs ever enacted. Florida's monthly SNAP benefits average \$129 per person.<sup>69</sup> In 2013, over one million households in Florida received SNAP benefits.<sup>70</sup>

Another aspect of the program — Disaster SNAP — provides replacement benefits for regular SNAP recipients who lose food in a disaster and extends benefits to many households which would not ordinarily be eligible but suddenly need food assistance in such disasters. The benefits are delivered via Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards, which can expedite and mainstream the relief process for victims. SNAP works. Those who receive benefits are better able to feed their families and are put on a less precarious financial footing.

But SNAP does not reach all eligible people, its benefits are too small, and has other challenges on national, state, and local levels which can be addressed. These include:

- Thirty-three percent of Palm Beach County residents who are eligible for SNAP benefits are not receiving them.
- SNAP benefits very often do not last throughout the month because benefit amounts are based on an outdated food plan that do not adequately reflect the full scope of housing and other costs facing recipients.
- Most SNAP policy changes for Florida are made at the state level so Palm Beach County cannot unilaterally make broad changes just for the County.
- Generally, non-citizen adults must be permanent legal residents for at least five years to apply for SNAP, so gaps in coverage for people legally in the country pose major problems, particularly in the Glades area.
- Beginning in 2016, nearly 23,000 Palm Beach County residents who are able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWD) may lose SNAP benefits after three months because of upcoming federal and Florida actions.

With the economic upheaval of the Great Recession, Palm Beach County's SNAP participation grew from 15,906 households in 2007 to 54,147 households in 2013, an increase of 241 percent. As County residents saw reduced paychecks or were laid off, many either had to endure extended unemployment or to find new jobs at lower pay or decreased hours. Many of these residents became eligible for SNAP, which helped ease the burden of those tough times.

Still, many more Palm Beach County residents need — and are eligible for — SNAP. That's because Palm Beach County's estimated SNAP participation rate of 67.3 percent lags far behind the average for Florida (83.7 percent) and the nation (83 percent).



**Figure 9: SNAP Participation in Palm Beach County (2013)**

<b>Food Stamps/SNAP</b>	<b>Palm Beach</b>	<b>Florida</b>	<b>U.S.</b>
Total households receiving SNAP	54,147	1,089,783	15,684,115
Percent of SNAP households with a senior (60+)	33.9	34.3	27.5
Percent of SNAP households with a child less than age 18	51.7	48.8	54
Percent of SNAP households with a person with a disability	33.1	40.1	43.7
Percent of SNAP families with 1 worker in past 12 months	41.9	45.7	48.1
Percent of SNAP families with 2 or more workers in past 12 months	38.8	32.1	29.5
Estimate of SNAP participation rate	67.3	83.7	83
Dollar amount of SNAP benefits	\$267,645,000	\$5,148,715,738	\$71,810,924,022

Source: American Community Survey, 2014.

### **Why is this the case?**

There are multiple reasons. Often, low-wage workers assume that SNAP is only for people without jobs, so they don't know they're eligible. Senior citizens who never received food stamps before but now live solely on meager Social Security or SSI benefits might not even think about SNAP, the application process may not seem worth the effort to those who stand to gain only a small amount of assistance. Some seniors may think they are only eligible for \$16 in benefits each month and don't feel it worth the effort to apply. Others, perceiving a stigma, don't like to think of themselves as recipients of federal benefits, even when they need SNAP to feed their families. For immigrants, even if eligible, language and cultural barriers often get in the way (Goal #1 goes into more detail about how to overcome lack of awareness and misconceptions about SNAP).

There are numerous bureaucratic barriers to participation. Palm Beach County uses Florida's ACCESS system, an on-line application for SNAP. While this process can improve access for individuals who are computer savvy, many residents depend on the two County service centers and 200 community partners to learn about, and apply for, SNAP.

These community partners play a vital role in connecting residents to SNAP — providing a trusted space for families struggling with hunger. Partners can also provide culturally competent services, reduce the stigma of applying for SNAP, and address concerns people may have about divulging confidential information, since they know the families. However, the reach of these partners — especially in terms of helping residents complete their applications — is limited. Many only have the capacity to educate people about the program by handing out materials and do not receive training on SNAP.

One model that is showing great promise in overcoming barriers to participation is the Palm Beach County Food Bank demonstration project, which deputizes a food bank employee to submit applications and interview SNAP applicants on behalf of the state. Unfortunately, this is only one of three such models in the United States and does not appear likely to be expanded across Florida.

However, if the Palm Beach County Food Bank was able to fund additional SNAP staff, this model likely could be expanded at the Food Bank and more employees could be deputized. Other promising models are the One-e app tool and work by the Glades Initiative.

Hurdling the obstacles to SNAP participation and increasing the percentage of eligible households receiving SNAP to meet the national average of 83 percent within five years should be top priorities for many reasons:

- SNAP reduces food insecurity and improves health.
- Palm Beach County would bring in additional millions of dollars in federal funding to help put food on the table for low-income people.
- SNAP benefits are wholly federally funded, so the program can grow to meet the need for it without imposing a burden on County government or the private sector.
- Every \$1 spent in SNAP benefits generates \$1.79 in local economic activity –helping to create jobs and expand markets for Florida Agriculture.
- The more than 200 community groups that partner with the Palm Beach County, Department of Children and Families are primed to improve their capacity.
- Connecting more children to SNAP will allow more children to benefit from free meals and increase school meal reimbursements for the County through direct certification or the adoption of the Community Eligibility Program.

**OBJECTIVE #6(A): SNAP PARTICIPATION WILL INCREASE SIGNIFICANTLY IN THE THREE GROUPS MOST UNDERREPRESENTED IN THE PROGRAM — LOW-INCOME WORKERS, SENIOR CITIZENS AND ELIGIBLE IMMIGRANTS**

Connecting each of these three groups to SNAP will require different outreach approaches, different messages — in multiple languages — and attention to cultural sensitivities.

**STRATEGY #6(A)1: Develop systemic approaches for connecting hard-to-reach populations to SNAP.**

**TACTICS #6(A)1**

- Engage in data matching to target eligible but non-participating residents (for example, identifying individuals on Medicaid/Medicare but not SNAP, those on WIC but not on SNAP, those receiving utility assistance but not SNAP, those receiving unemployment but not SNAP, and children receiving free school meals but not SNAP).

NOTE: U.S. citizen children or documented children whose parents are not eligible for SNAP are themselves eligible for SNAP but have very low participation rates — for obvious reasons. School meal data for free meals — which do not have any immigrant status rules — are excellent places to find children who are eligible for SNAP.

- Investigate conducting SNAP application assistance in conjunction with Medicaid enrollment at hospitals, community health centers, subsidized child care centers, and senior centers.
- Develop strategies to connect individuals who do not have access to computers to SNAP community partners or to state SNAP outreach centers who can help them apply for SNAP and other federal and state programs through the One-e app.

**STRATEGY #6(A)2: Increase the capacity of the network of over 200 SNAP outreach partners to connect eligible but non-participating households to SNAP.**

This will be done through training, technical assistance, the distribution of compelling SNAP outreach materials geared separately to eligible immigrants, seniors and low-income wage earners, the use of multi-benefit strategies, and funding.

**TACTICS #6(A)2**

- Survey community-based partners to identify strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for improving their capacity to connect residents to SNAP.
- Partner with the Florida Department of Children and Families, SNAP Community Partner Division, to prioritize capacity-building opportunities for community-based organizations.
- Investigate opportunities to bring Palm Beach County’s SNAP community-based partners into the state SNAP outreach plan and leverage federal funding. (For every \$1 in local funding — either from the government or private funders — state plan partners can leverage \$1 in federal SNAP matching outreach funding.)
- Make case to funders that outreach partners need funding to improve capacity to connect low-income residents to SNAP, and prioritize funding for the Palm Beach County Food Bank’s model where staff can be deputized to conduct interviews.
- Host an annual county training for outreach partners to share best practices, materials, and data on areas to target such as high poverty zip codes and outreach at UWPBC VITA program’s partner sites and grocery stores.

**STRATEGY #6(A)3: Address various unnecessary barriers that prevent people from getting SNAP benefits and ensure that families — particularly those experiencing household crisis hunger — can readily access expedited benefits and the maximum benefits to which they are entitled.**

**TACTICS #6(A)3**

- Promote and monitor the use of existing options that can help families maximize or access SNAP benefits, such as the elimination of the asset test, claiming all out-of-pocket dependent care costs, high shelter expenses, and medical expenses for older adults or people with disabilities.
- Share information on expedited benefits so that locations serving families in crisis can help connect families to SNAP.
- Ensure that the public awareness campaign addresses the need to de-stigmatize SNAP (Goal #1).
- Advocate for policy changes (Goal #2, Strategy 2c).

**“Yes, you can go to a library but unless you’re really fast, your time is going to be up before you get through the application.”**

**– Stakeholder Participant when talking about how people need to access a computer to apply for benefits**

## **RESPONSIBLE ENTITIES**

- Hunger Relief Task Force
- Florida Department of Children and Families
- Palm Beach County Department of Children and Families
- School District of Palm Beach County
- Community partners
- Immigrant advocacy groups
- Senior citizen advocacy groups
- Unions and employers
- Food stores
- Business Development Board and Economic Council

## **MEASUREMENTS**

- Whether data matching is conducted.
- Whether SNAP application assistance is conducted in conjunction with Medicaid enrollment at hospitals, community health centers, senior centers.
- Whether community-based partners gain the capacity to conduct proactive, targeted SNAP outreach.
- Whether more immigrants, senior citizens and low-income workers receive the SNAP benefits for which they are eligible.
- Whether families receive assistance in maximizing their SNAP benefits.

## **OUTCOMES**

- SNAP participation will increase in Palm Beach County by 5 percentage points a year until the County reaches the national average.
- Palm Beach County residents receiving social service benefits other than SNAP will apply for SNAP and receive it if they qualify.
- Help provide support so Palm Beach County residents can apply SNAP and other benefits including Medicaid at the same time.
- Community-based partners will gain the capacity to conduct proactive, targeted SNAP outreach.
- More immigrants, senior citizens and low-income working families will receive the SNAP benefits for which they are eligible, making the largest contribution to reaching increased enrollment goal.

## **OBJECTIVE #6(B): THE DAMAGING IMPACT OF SNAP CUTS AFFECTING ABLE-BODIED ADULTS WITHOUT DEPENDENTS WILL BE MITIGATED**

Beginning in 2016, Palm Beach County food banks, pantries, social service, and faith-based organizations will be hit hard by a national change in SNAP policies: The loss of SNAP, which averages approximately \$150 to \$200 per person per month, for able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWD) between the ages of 18 and 50. These individuals will lose SNAP after three months unless they can find a 20-hour-a-week job or an employment training opportunity.<sup>71</sup> This loss of SNAP benefits for potentially 23,000 County residents will flood the social service networks, especially the food banks, pantries, and soup kitchens. Plans must be solidified to address this issue.

### **STRATEGY #6(B)1: Prepare for addressing the needs of able bodied adults without dependents (ABAWD) who risk losing SNAP benefits after three months.**

#### **TACTICS #6(B)1**

- Petition governor to ask USDA for permissible waivers to reinstate of ABAWD in Florida and the County (See Goal #2).
- Engage stakeholders to be prepared to reinstate this complex rule properly and humanely.
- Prepare for the consequences of substantial numbers of individuals in their communities losing SNAP, resulting in more clients going to food pantries and a spike in potential homelessness.
- Develop a plan for the state in partnership with nonprofits to provide half-time job or training opportunities to unemployed ABAWD SNAP recipients. That is because the only way these individuals will be able to maintain SNAP eligibility during normal (non-recessionary) economic times is to find 20 hours a week of job training, workfare, or another work program.

#### **RESPONSIBLE ENTITIES**

- Florida Department of Children and Families
- Palm Beach County delegation to the Florida legislature
- Community partners
- Food banks, food pantries, and soup kitchens
- CareerSource Palm Beach County

#### **MEASUREMENTS**

- The number of ABAWD SNAP recipients able to maintain their benefits.
- The capacity of food banks, pantries, and other social service providers to meet a spike in demand.
- Whether a plan is developed to provide half-time job or training opportunities to unemployed ABAWD SNAP recipients.

**“There needs to be a way to . . . eliminate stigma around how people access/use supplemental or public sources, especially for the working poor. . .”**

**–Survey Participant**

## OUTCOMES

- Many unemployed ABAWD SNAP recipients will be able to find 20 hours a week of job training, workfare, or another work program and maintain their benefits
- Those individuals losing their benefits will find additional social services to avoid homelessness and will receive assistance in finding employment.

## **OBJECTIVE #6(C): PALM BEACH COUNTY WILL UNDERTAKE FULL PREPARATIONS TO IMMEDIATELY ISSUE DISASTER SNAP BENEFITS IN THE EVENT OF A HURRICANE OR OTHER CATASTROPHE**

### **STRATEGY #6(C)1: Ensure that Palm Beach County can support victims of a natural disaster through Disaster SNAP.**

Needless to say, natural disasters can strike Palm Beach County. Disaster SNAP is a program intended to ease the burden for those who lose jobs or property in the chaotic aftermath of a tragedy and ensure they do not go hungry. Benefits can reach both existing SNAP beneficiaries who lose food and those not normally receiving SNAP. Swift and seamless implementation of Disaster SNAP must be at the core of the Comprehensive Emergency Plan.

### **TACTICS #6(C)1**

- Review the Palm Beach County disaster preparation plan and modify it as needed to promote the best possible use of Disaster SNAP benefits.
- Educate critical stakeholders about the urgency of Disaster SNAP response in a time of crisis and how they can work to assist families to access Disaster SNAP during emergencies.

### **RESPONSIBLE ENTITIES**

- Hunger Relief Task Force
- Palm Beach County Department of Children and Families
- Palm Beach County Division of Emergency Management
- Palm Beach County elected officials
- Disaster relief organizations
- Community partners

### **MEASUREMENTS**

- The presence of Disaster SNAP in the County's disaster preparation plan.
- The development of materials and a communications strategy to alert people about Disaster SNAP.
- The speed with which Disaster SNAP benefits are issued in the wake of a natural disaster.

## OUTCOMES

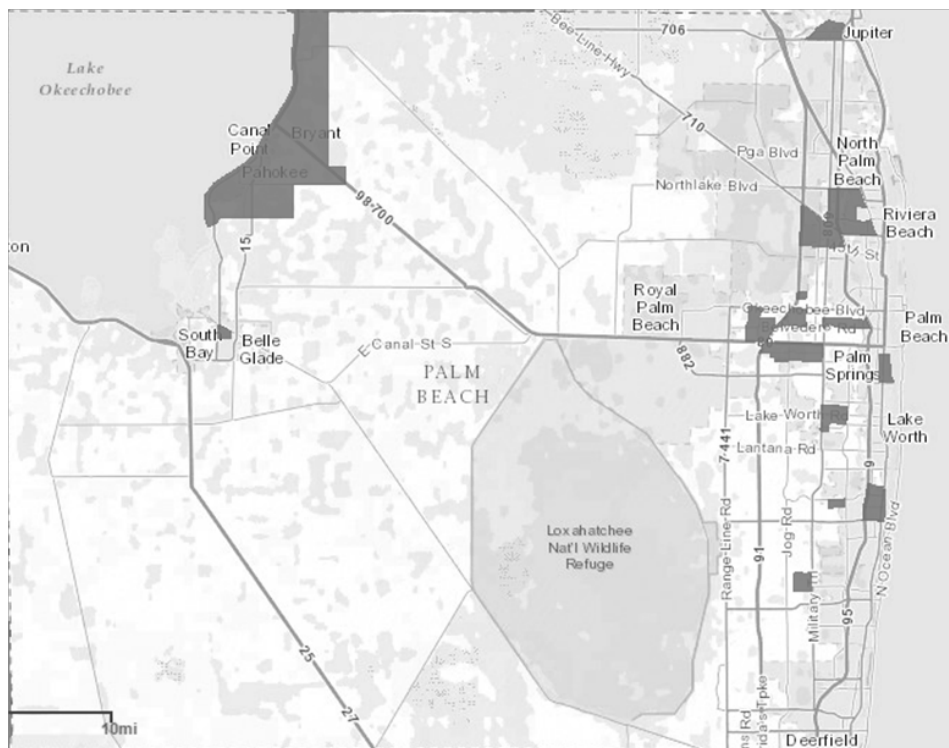
- Disaster SNAP benefits will be issued as soon as the need is identified and verified and readily available to all eligible victims in a natural disaster.

## Goal #7: All Palm Beach County Residents Will Be Able to Access Healthy, Affordable Food In Their Community.

Many low-income families in Palm Beach County face a double-edged problem when it comes to accessing nutritious food: They don't live near a full-service grocery store or supermarket; and even if they do, they may not be able to afford a healthy diet.

Those areas in Palm Beach County that lack access to a supermarket or large grocery store are often called "food deserts," which USDA defines as a low-income census tract where residents live more than one mile from a supermarket or large grocery store (10 miles, in the case of non-metropolitan census tracts).<sup>72</sup>

**Figure 10: Palm Beach County Food Deserts**



**Source: Palm Beach Food Deserts. Digital image. USDA, 11 Mar. 2015. Web. 22 July 2015**

By this definition, 22 census tracts out of 337 in Palm Beach County are food deserts, with 7.9 percent of the population (approximately 104,000 people) living in these areas. Low-income families living in the Glades and the 19 census tracts near the east coast of the County — who are less likely to have a car or money to pay for the limited public transportation options that exist — often find it nearly impossible to access fresh, affordable produce and healthy food.

Without supermarkets or large grocery stores, the only place to shop may be a convenience store that carries little in the way of produce and may charge more for its limited healthier offerings than a full-service store. The result is, paradoxically, that people at risk of hunger and food hardship are also more likely to suffer from obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. Too many Palm Beach County

residents — a disproportionate number of whom are African American or Latino — already have Type II diabetes, which is largely preventable with proper diet and activity.

The lack of access to produce in the Glades is especially ironic given the fact that Palm Beach County is Florida's leading producer of corn, rice, bell peppers, lettuce, radishes, Chinese vegetables, specialty leaf and celery<sup>73</sup> — and the fact that many residents work in agriculture. The harsh reality of this situation is that most farm workers earn low wages, while most of the crops are shipped to other areas around the country. In fact, there are only 11 farmers markets in Palm Beach County<sup>74</sup> — mostly located in the coastal region.

There are several keys to addressing this issue:

- Cost of food and cost and availability of transportation are both major burdens for lower-income households that need to be addressed.
- People need the food retailers where prices of nutritious foods are affordable. Those struggling to get by, who do have the means of transportation, will have to travel farther to a supermarket with cheaper food than shop at a local higher-end store.
- Most large food retailers operate at very small profit margins of one to two percent, so there may not be enough population and/or buying power to support one in some food desert areas — at least until more people receive SNAP and other benefits. This not only requires exploring — as well as increasing— SNAP participation, but also researching alternate strategies such as food hubs, produce stands/farmers markets and food co-ops.
- There is a strong synergy between this goal and the others in this plan. As more Palm Beach County residents receive SNAP and WIC benefits, they will have additional funds to spend on groceries, making the opening of large food retailers and the launching of farmers' markets in food deserts a more profitable proposition.
- Growers in the Glades are interested in exploring opportunities for cooperation, including the building of a distribution facility — a move that could make a positive impact (Goal #3).
- The charitable entities can play a role in increasing access to healthy food, for example, through gleaning and donated food from restaurants, pantries that prioritize fresh produce and the operation of mobile pantries. But there are barriers to overcome. For instance, restaurants and farmers may not be aware of federal and state laws designed to minimize liability for donated and gleaned be foods (as well as opportunities to use donations to lower their tax burden) have been enacted into legislation, so fewer participate in food rescue efforts.

**“Because it is looking at market-based solutions because in the end, they’re not going to be able to subsidize their way out of this... So what are preventing grocery stores from going [into a community] and oftentimes... they don’t have accurate number about what the spending power is.”**

**– Stakeholder Participant**



**OBJECTIVE #7: PALM BEACH COUNTY WILL INCREASE HEALTHY FOOD RETAIL SO THAT ALL RESIDENTS CAN CONVENIENTLY PURCHASE OR ACCESS THE NUTRITION NEEDED TO THRIVE**

**STRATEGY #7(A): Build on existing research to prioritize low-income areas for healthy food retail development and improved charitable access to healthy food.**

**TACTICS #7(A)**

- Combine mapping with existing market research to determine what areas would be most likely to support a produce-processing facility, supermarket, farmers' market, and/or other healthy food retail.
- Conduct a transportation study to determine how residents in the Glades —especially in areas where there is not enough population density and income to support supermarkets — can access a supermarket or have food delivered to them.
- Organize farmers, businesses, and nonprofits to explore opportunities to bring local produce into food desert areas and expand job opportunities for residents. Options could include supermarkets, the building of a facility to aid in the distribution and processing of produce, the creation of farm stands or farmers' markets, food hubs, or a cooperative to distribute healthy food to convenience stores.
- Ensure that all County businesses know about the Good Samaritan Food Donation Act, a federal law that generally protects them from criminal and civil liability when donating food, and SB 158, a Florida law that generally exempts farmers from being held liable when people glean crops.

**STRATEGY #7(B): Leverage funding for the development of affordable, healthy food retail options in food deserts.**

**TACTICS #7(B)**

- Seek federal Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) funding — this would require a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) to apply and be ready to help the project, and it could also be used down the road for a production kitchen, food hub or other solution.
- Explore what capital, new market tax credits, and local funding are available through the Florida Community Loan Fund.
- Seek USDA value-added producer grants.
- If the Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners and the local electorate approve the addition of a local discretionary sales tax, direct a portion of the new revenues to fund the development of a production facility that could glean produce, and then can, freeze, or otherwise use it for meals in the Glades.
- Identify opportunities for the County to provide start-up funding for food retail businesses or projects in low-income areas.

**STRATEGY #7(C): Establish farmers markets and produce stands in food desert areas where people can purchase fruits and vegetables using SNAP EBT cards and access “bonus bucks.”**

**TACTICS #7(C)**

- Identify areas where a farmers market or produce stand could be established and recruit farmers to commit to sell their produce there.
- Ensure that Palm Beach County farmers’ markets and produce stands are equipped with EBT technology to accept SNAP.
- Generate local funding to create incentives — like “bonus bucks” for low-income residents to shop there. This is a proven approach which has succeeded elsewhere to fund a match. For example, if a customer spends \$10 in SNAP benefits, he or she will automatically receive an additional \$10 to spend on produce.

**STRATEGY #7(D): Support farmers and businesses to work with food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, and other sites supporting low-income families to increase their capacity to provide healthy food in food desert areas.**

**TACTICS #7(D)**

- Bring stakeholders together to develop a plan for helping charitable networks provide healthier, fresh food through gleaning and donated food sources.
- Promote the Good Samaritan and Gleaning laws.
- Explore funding for infrastructure needs (such as refrigeration) to safely store produce and other perishable food.
- Work with business, farmers, and charitable sectors to connect families to SNAP, WIC and the child nutrition programs.

**RESPONSIBLE ENTITIES**

- Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners
- Florida Department of Health--Palm Beach County
- Florida Department of Children and Families
- Palm Beach County Department of Economic Sustainability
- Market and transportation experts
- Farmers
- Grocery chains and other businesses
- Community-based nonprofits
- The Food Trust, Policy Link, Florida Community Loan Fund
- Hunger Relief Task Force

## MEASUREMENTS

- Is the research conducted and do its findings pinpoint areas of opportunity?
- Is financing generated to make affordable healthy food more accessible to people living in food deserts?
- Are farmers' markets and produce stands established in food deserts, do they handle EBT transactions and are there incentives for SNAP participants to stretch their dollars further?
- Are food banks, food pantries and soup kitchens helping to fill healthy food gaps in food deserts?

**"We have a large number of food deserts in the County ... When you look at like in the western communities, you know, many of them, what they have is the little convenience store."**

**- Stakeholder Participant**

## OUTCOMES

- The research is conducted and its findings lead to action in shrinking or eliminating food deserts.
- People living in food deserts are able to access affordable, healthy food.
- Financing is generated, resulting in the establishment of supermarkets, production kitchens, food hubs and produce processing facilities in food deserts.
- Farmers markets and produce stands are established in food deserts that handle EBT transactions.
- Local funding is generated to create matching incentives making it possible for SNAP participants to afford more healthy food.
- Food banks, food pantries and soup kitchens provide more healthy food to families living in food deserts.
- More families living in food deserts are connected with SNAP, WIC and the child nutrition programs.

## Goal #8: Food Banks, Pantries, and Other Charitable Agencies Will Partner To Connect Families to Nutritious Food and Resources.

As a place known for its vast wealth and agricultural resources, Palm Beach County, appropriately, has a robust charitable network committed to helping residents through hard times. With two large food banks — Feeding South Florida and Palm Beach County Food Bank — plus the Glades Initiative, a smaller food bank, more than 200 pantries and soup kitchens, and dedicated and involved funders, the problem is not lack of interest, but lack of coordination.

The public engagement conducted in the development of this plan made clear that most, if not all, food pantries, soup kitchens and food providers feel they could serve their clients more efficiently and effectively if there was greater cooperation between partners. They also cited storage and transportation limitations, fluctuating donations (food and funds), and unpredictable client volume as notable issues.

Focus Group and one-on-one interview participants were unclear as to whether having two large and one small food banks is viewed as a strength or weakness for the County. However, there is universal agreement that “unhealthy competition” exists between the food banks that causes an unwelcome distraction from the challenges of feeding the hungry. In particular, community partners indicated they feel pressure to “choose sides,” and funders noted that the perception of infighting between organizations is harmful to the cause of alleviating hunger. Businesses shared their frustration about receiving multiple “asks” and the lack of communication among organizations.

This rivalry — whether real or imagined — is counterproductive. More importantly, the lack of cooperation between the two main food banks leads to duplication of effort, which is perhaps the greatest threat to developing and maintaining a strong food system/infrastructure. Such duplication wastes money, resources, and time, as well as threatens the ability of partner organizations to best serve their clients and prioritize services for those hungry residents who may not be eligible for the federal nutrition programs, or who are in crisis and need immediate access to emergency food.

Building cooperation is all the more urgent given the likelihood that already overstretched food banks, pantries, soup kitchens, and other social service organizations will see an influx of potentially 23,000 Palm Beach County residents who are able-bodied without dependents (ABAWDs), beginning in 2016 when the ABAWD waivers expire nationally. These individuals will lose SNAP—which averages \$150-\$200 per month— after three months unless they can find a 20-hour-a-week job or an employment training opportunity.<sup>75</sup> The network of social services community, led by the food banks, needs to prepare now for this wave of hungry residents not only by strategically assessing how much more emergency food will be needed, but also by supporting the fulfillment of training opportunities through volunteer placement at targeted organizations so that ABAWD individuals can continue receiving SNAP.

These are serious concerns that should be addressed. At the same time, it is important to recognize that Palm Beach County’s network of food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, and other agencies also possesses important strengths that must be sustained and expanded. These include:

- Food banks and many other agencies engage in consistent outreach to ensure that clients are enrolled in SNAP and other federal benefits, if eligible.

- Feeding South Florida hosts a HOPE (Helping Our Partners Excel) conference every year to train partner agencies and discuss best practices, as well as regular webinars to go over standard procedures and best practices from around the area.
- Palm Beach County Food Bank’s has a “deputized” SNAP staffer who has unique capacity to not only help residents apply for SNAP, but also to conduct the SNAP interviews so that people can more readily access the program (Goal #6). The Food Bank also partners with the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agriculture Sciences on a mobile food program, Nutrition Driven: a school bus-sized food truck that distributes food and offers nutrition education in low-income areas (Goal #9).
- Glades Initiative’s Community Resource Educators assist low-income Glades residents become more aware of the various health and human services available and works directly with clients to help them apply for federal, state and county benefits, including SNAP, Medicaid and Medicare through the use of the One-e-app tool. Last year, Community Resource Educators assisted over 2,400 residents. Approximately 1,920 of those residents were eligible and received services.
- A dedicated network of funders provide monetary and food donations.

Another priority identified through the public engagement process was the need to target resources to serve the Glades, which is the rural part of the County that is at greatest risk of hunger. While the Glades Initiative has been increasing the capacity of agencies to meet the needs of lower-income residents, the area still needs a more comprehensive infrastructure to ensure sufficient, consistent distribution of nutritious food. (Goal #3, strategy #3(C) in particular, addresses this in detail).

While a primary objective of this Plan is to maximize participation in the federal nutrition programs — which will relieve the stress on food banks, pantries, and soup kitchens — there will always be an essential role for these vital institutions to play in alleviating crisis hunger and serving any and all individuals who might fall through the cracks of public support programs.

**OBJECTIVE #8: LOW-INCOME RESIDENTS WILL BENEFIT FROM A CHARITABLE FOOD NETWORK THAT WORKS TOGETHER TO STRATEGICALLY ADDRESS HUNGER.**

**STRATEGY #8(A): Coordinate efforts to better access federal and state resources.**

The federal Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) provides commodities to food banks for distribution to agencies. This federal program is administered locally by the Florida State Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. In Florida, TEFAP is distributed throughout the state based on the number of unemployed persons and the number of people with incomes below the poverty level. For Fiscal Year 2014,<sup>76</sup> the entire state of Florida received \$4.4 million in TEFAP administrative funds and was allocated approximately \$12.7 million to purchase USDA Foods for recipient agencies. In addition, USDA further allocated \$14.06 million to Florida in “bonus” USDA Food for TEFAP.

Palm Beach County and Broward County comprise TEFAP Region 8. In the past, Feeding South Florida has received the TEFAP contract for Region 8 which includes both Broward County and Palm Beach County.

For Fiscal Year 2016, it is anticipated that Region 8 will receive approximately \$2.6 million to

purchase food through USDA for the TEFAP program. The portion of that allocation that may go to Palm Beach County is approximately \$1.25 million to purchase food.

As for administrative funds, based on the initial allocation, Region 8 will receive \$440,000 in administrative funds. Of that, \$212,250 would be estimated to be expended for serving the Palm Beach County area. (Note: this figure may increase over the course of Fiscal Year 2015 if

USDA allocates additional funds to the state which could be passed down to the agencies).

In addition, USDA further allocated about \$14 million to Florida in “bonus” USDA Food for TEFAP in Fiscal Year 2014. It is uncertain how much will be available for Fiscal Year 2016. There is wide variability from year to year in what commodities are available, depending on weather, harvest, supply, and other factors. A challenge for agencies better using these commodities is that agencies must be able to act on a moment’s notice to decide if they have the capacity to pick up and distribute the commodities, which can be perishable items like oranges. For instance, the state may get notice on a Monday during the first week of August that 500 crates of oranges will be available in December for agencies usage and be required to select agencies by the following Monday. A further potential drawback to being able to accept commodities is that there is no administrative funding for this “bonus” program.

## TACTICS #8(A)

- Build on the Florida Department of Agriculture’s idea to work with both Feeding South Florida and the Palm Beach County Food Bank to help distribute TEFAP-purchased foods. Even though TEFAP only accounts for around \$1.25 million in federal dollars to purchase food, and \$212,250 in administrative funding for the County each year — a small percentage of the approximate \$300 million in federal funding available to address hunger in the County — control of TEFAP has been a big source of contention in the County. Some pantries and agencies do not feel they get enough commodities, while others feel the Palm Beach County Food Bank should receive this funding. This upcoming year (Fiscal Year 2016) could provide an opportunity for both of the bigger food banks to better coordinate their services. In fact, the Florida State Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services has indicated it would like to work with both. It has proposed that a portion of the commodities provided to Feeding South Florida be allocated to the Palm Beach County Food Bank for distribution to county pantries. This would be a good first step in building a positive working relationship between food banks. And it will help create efficiencies.
- Encourage interested agencies to be primed for participation in the “bonus” USDA Food for TEFAP. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services are currently restructuring the distribution process. This creates an opportunity for agencies like Feeding South Florida, the Palm Beach County Food Bank, and the Glades Initiative to apply to hold a no-cost contract with the state — a mechanism that allows them to be able to accept commodities when they become available. By coordinating their efforts in this way, the foodbanks can maximize the benefits for County residents who are at risk of hunger.

“I would like to see how we can have the pantry systems working together more. ... I don’t think it’s going to be easy, but I think that’s maybe doable. And then, long-term, I would like to see us having a really significant food distribution warehouse and a place to cook food that could be ... stored for other times of the year.”

– Stakeholder Participant

**STRATEGY #8(B): Coordinate efforts in other ways — including the sharing of administrative and distribution resources — to better reduce hunger and food insecurity in Palm Beach County.**

**TACTICS #8(B)**

- The food banks should consider creating a shared statement of principles — and consider engaging an outside third party like a mediator to assist — to guide their work. The statement could specify the areas of greatest needs; explore the expectations of the community; identify the strengths of each food bank and what data and information will be shared among the organizations; prioritize areas where each food bank plans to distribute food resources; and identify opportunities to work cooperatively, such as addressing the needs of ABAWDs or distributing TEFAP.
- The food banks should consider restructuring their operations to improve cooperation among them and more important, better serve the community. To do so, the food banks should leverage each other’s existing strengths to avoid duplication and to the extent possible, share information about operations. After the launching of the Strategic Plan, it would be beneficial to publicly highlight the newfound, positive partnership among the food banks.
- The food banks should work together to ensure that agencies and food pantries have the capacity to conduct outreach to connect people to SNAP and the child nutrition programs. Each food bank could carve out specific program areas to take the lead on as one way to decrease duplication. For instance, Feeding South Florida could be in charge of Kids Café (at afterschool and summer program sites), while the Palm Beach County Food Bank could focus on SNAP training and organize nutrition-driven programs and work to get produce and bonus bucks to the Glades. The Glades Initiative could build on its capacity to provide culturally relevant program outreach and distribute and store gleaned produce. All food banks could work together to promote Summer BreakSpots and help recruit sites.
- Both of the large food banks should share resources, first and foremost in the area of transportation. Refrigerated trucks are essential to the safe distribution of food. The food banks could improve efficiency by working with partners to flex the available trucks and by multitasking (for example, using home-delivered meal vehicles to transport additional food). Hubbing, a process where partners utilize other partners’ resources when not being used, in particular, will help streamline food distribution.
- Technology should be maximized to improve coordination of services on two fronts:
  - \* Help clients and service providers locate food: Technology can be used to help clients access food. A “FindFood” app could be developed to indicate the location of food pantries and soup kitchens, along with specifics on available services and hours of operation. Food banks should partner with County stakeholders to create a Food App that includes pantry and soup kitchen resources, but also includes information on where to apply for WIC and SNAP, access a Summer BreakSpot or an afterschool meal site, and farmers markets that accept SNAP. The App could be coordinated with the 211 system (Goal #1).

\* Helping to improve services: A virtual community can be launched to enable service providers to communicate and share best practices. With testing targeted for the fall, the Quantum Foundation is supporting the creation of an app/web portal through which restaurants can notify service providers and coordinate with delivery services when they have food available for recovery. Technology can help food pantries and soup kitchens select what they actually need in order to reduce waste, be culturally sensitive, and increase donations of food. Feeding South Florida currently has an online market through which partners can select what to order.

## RESPONSIBLE ENTITIES

- Hunger Relief Task Force
- Feeding South Florida
- Palm Beach County Food Bank
- Glades Initiative
- Food pantries and agencies in Palm Beach County
- Florida Department of Agriculture
- Funders

**“And then I would wish we would have a way of having the food pantries be more cooperative together and sharing information, maybe even client lists . . . but somehow be able to help people with more than just food.**

**-Stakeholder Participant**

## MEASUREMENTS

- Written statement of principles.
- Degree of efficiency in meeting the food needs of hungry and food insecure families in Palm Beach County.

## OUTCOMES

- Instead of competing, Feeding South Florida, the Palm Beach County Food Bank and Glades Initiative will cooperate with one another to maximize the use of federal and state resources, to avoid duplication, and to maximize their effectiveness.
- Food pantries and other agencies will be better able to meet the needs of hungry and food insecure families in Palm Beach County.
- Food Banks, food pantries and other agencies will increase outreach efforts to connect clients with the federal nutrition programs and other benefits.



## Goal #9: All Palm Beach County Families Will Have the Knowledge To Make the Best Possible Healthy Food Choices.

The more informed people are about nutrition and healthy eating, the more they will be able to make the best possible decisions for themselves and their families, within the limits of their resources.

Indeed, equipping children and adults with the interest, skills and knowledge to make healthier food choices, to prepare and cook nutritious food, and to access healthy, affordable food are essential strategies of any plan to reduce hunger. At the same time, it is essential to recognize the limitations of this strategy. So long as families don't have adequate resources (e.g., with cash and SNAP) to purchase sufficient food, there is a ceiling on how much of the hunger problem can be solved or ameliorated by nutrition education.

But nutrition education can help. Fortunately, as the top producer in Florida of rice, lettuce, radishes, Chinese vegetables, specialty leaf, and celery,<sup>77</sup> and the top producer in America of sweet bell peppers and sweet corn,<sup>78</sup> Palm Beach County is primed to be a leader in providing quality nutrition education to the community.

In Palm Beach County, children and adults are already benefitting from a range of nutrition education programs. Based on conversations with stakeholders and a review of Palm Beach County nutrition related reports, several promising nutrition education programs and practices emerged:

- **Palm Beach County:** Florida Health provides families participating in WIC with nutrition counseling as well as WIC vouchers for prescribed foods. In addition, Florida Health distributes the 5-2-1-0 Program materials to people receiving services, thereby, reinforcing key public health messages (5 or more servings of fruits or vegetables, 2 hours or less of screen time, 1 hour or more of physical activity, and 0 servings of sugary drinks).
- **School District of Palm Beach County:** As the 11th largest school district in the country educating 183,000 students, the School District of Palm Beach County is a prime access point for developing sustainable nutrition education programs — both as integral components of standard curricula such as math, science and reading, and as stand-alone programs or events. Through nutrition education programs at schools, students not only gain important knowledge and skills; they also have abundant opportunities to put healthy food choices into action by eating nutritious school breakfasts, lunches and afterschool snacks or suppers, and sampling produce grown from school gardens. In addition, the School Food Service Division hosts a nutrition website ([www.palmbeachschools.org/sfs/nutrition-education.asp](http://www.palmbeachschools.org/sfs/nutrition-education.asp)) that features nutrition education programs, resources for teachers and parents, and grant opportunities. These include OrganWise, an interactive, evidence-based curriculum that teaches elementary students about the negative impact of poor nutrition and lack of physical activity on each individual organ. It also includes assemblies, classroom lessons, cooking demonstrations, taste testing, and participating in health fairs.

**“I would buy the most simple, basic foods because the money would run out. I tried to keep things the same so children wouldn't feel it. We ate rice, beans, vegetables; we weren't able to eat meat every day. We would vary things, maybe meat one day per week, eggs, and milk for the children. “**

**-Guatemalan immigrant mother/wife in her 30's from Riviera Beach, reflecting on what she did differently when they didn't have enough money for food**

In addition, funding is available for school garden projects.

- **University of Florida/Palm Beach County Extension:** The Cooperative Extension Division provides nutrition education across the County to residents. The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program works with limited-resource families who prepare meals for children. In addition, Nutrition Driven, a partnership between the Palm Beach County Food Bank and the University of Florida/Palm Beach County Extension, is an innovative model that combines nutrition education and access to free fresh foods for residents struggling with hunger. By bringing a mobile food pantry into food insecure areas of Palm Beach County, educators teach “core nutritional values, food safety and preparation, simple recipes, and smart shopping tips” reinforcing the lessons learned by distributing free food that participants then cook at home.<sup>79</sup>
- **Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation Department:** Through grants from the U.S. Department Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, National Parks and Recreation Association, and Walmart, Palm Beach County recreation centers conduct nutrition education, promote community gardens, and assess opportunities for a community kitchen for a culinary program.
- **Community-Based Programs:** Palm Beach County’s community-based partners are implementing evidence-based nutrition education programs, such as Share Our Strength’s Cooking Matters. This provides nutrition education and guidance for cooking meals on a budget to food insecure residents, in collaboration with FLIPANY (Florida Introduces Physical Activity and Nutrition to Youth). It is a centerpiece of the Glades Initiative’s Strategic Plan for Food Security.

Experience with these local programs and others in different parts of the country makes clear that to be successful, nutrition education programs geared to low-income residents should:

- Be grounded in evidence-based practices that draw on existing materials, resources, and research.
- Be culturally sensitive.
- Be sensitive to limits on resources.
- Utilize partnerships to leverage areas of expertise, draw on volunteers and potentially reduce costs.
- Integrate nutrition education and messages into existing structures that work with low-income families.
- Provide access to free or low-cost healthy food sources for participants, often by conducting nutrition education at a community garden, school garden or supermarkets.
- Promote the use of the federal nutrition program resources to obtain food.

Moving forward, Palm Beach County should leverage opportunities to build on the innovative nutrition education efforts already underway. One promising development is that the University of Florida/Palm Beach County Extension is applying to receive SNAP Nutrition Education Funding for nutrition education programs to work with children at 84 child care centers in high poverty areas across the County as a start. The Extension Program also plans to create or enhance 40 gardens and teach parents the HomeStyle nutrition education program. Palm Beach County received this funding from 1996 until 2011, when it was reduced at the federal level and Florida took a hard hit. Bringing it back would be a very positive step.

**OBJECTIVE #9: RESIDENTS WILL ENJOY IMPROVED HEALTH FROM PARTICIPATING IN NUTRITION EDUCATION PROGRAMS BASED ON BEST PRACTICES.**

**STRATEGY #9(A): Synthesize existing research and conduct new research through an environmental scan on the impact of nutrition education programs in Palm Beach County. Use the findings to improve and coordinate nutrition education messages so all families at risk of hunger and food hardship receive information proven to be effective in their circumstances.**

**TACTICS #9(A)**

- Convene a group of key stakeholders to identify the scope of research and develop a guide for best practices in nutrition education, covering both service delivery and messaging.
- Identify stakeholders — ideally drawing from local universities and colleges — who can conduct new research to examine what nutrition education programs are offered, their reach, whether they target low-income families, and whether they conform to best practices.
- Conduct research, create a report to summarize the findings, and share the findings and use them to shape future efforts.
- Synthesize research findings about message effectiveness.
- Bring together all providers of nutrition education and forge a partnership to coordinate and unify messaging.

**STRATEGY #9(B): Partnerships are developed that use evidence-based materials, sustainable models, and volunteers to get messages out to sites that serve low-income children and families.**

**TACTICS #9(B)**

- Bring together all providers of nutrition education and forge a partnership to implement best practices.
- Recruit volunteers. Consider working with students who need to complete community service hours to graduate from high school.

## RESPONSIBLE ENTITIES

- Hunger Relief Task Force and other community-based organizations
- Florida Department of Health – Palm Beach County
- University of Florida/Palm Beach County Extension
- School District of Palm Beach County
- Community-based organizations
- Existing nutrition educators
- Local colleges and universities
- Providers of nutrition education

**“One [of] my favorite quotations is... ‘you can give a person a pepper, but if you don’t teach them what to do with that pepper, it really doesn’t do any good.’ So there has to be an educational component, and that needs to start with our children.”**

**-Stakeholder Participant**

## MEASUREMENTS

- Research conducted.
- Research findings used to make nutrition education more effective.
- Polling and focus groups measure whether information provided is having the desired impact on behavior.
- The number of people receiving quality nutrition education.

## OUTCOMES

- Report created based on research.
- The findings strengthen and improve the quality of nutrition education provided to families at risk of hunger and food hardship.
- Increases in the number of low-income residents reached through nutrition education.
- Families at risk of hunger and food hardship are better informed and more likely to make sound nutrition choices.
- Children and adults are equipped with the motivation, skills and knowledge to make healthy food choices, to prepare and cook nutritious food, and to access healthy, affordable food.

## Goal #10: Low-Income Families in Palm Beach County Will Achieve Higher Incomes to Purchase Food and Household Crisis Hunger Will Decrease.

Many people are shocked to learn that hunger is not confined to people who are chronically unemployed, unable to work because of a disability, or experiencing homelessness. In fact, about three of every five families facing food insecurity are headed by an adult working full time.<sup>80</sup> This is, in part, a result of the growth of low-wage jobs and the wage stagnation facing most American workers.

The problems of low-income wage earners extend beyond worrying about finding enough money to purchase healthy food. According to the United Way of Florida: Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed Report (aka ALICE Report),<sup>81</sup> “across Florida 45 percent of households struggle to afford the basic necessities of housing, child care, food, health care, and transportation.” That is why so many families are prone to household crisis hunger.

**“In Florida, 69 percent of jobs pay less than \$20 per hour, with the majority paying between \$10 and \$15 per hour.”**

**- United Way of Florida ALICE Report**

The ALICE report provides ample research on the causes and complications that exacerbate the economic struggles in Florida of low-income workers and people unable to work because of a health problem, a disability, or the need to care for young children. Some of the primary causes include:

- **The escalating costs of basic needs:** The costs of housing, child care, transportation, food and health care increased by 13 percent between 2007 and 2012.<sup>82</sup>
- **Educational inequities:** Those unable to access higher education, whether due to its skyrocketing costs or lack of proper preparation in high school, face diminishing prospects for higher paying jobs.<sup>83</sup>
- **Inability to build assets:** People working low-wage jobs are rarely able to save money. The lack of savings gives them little or no margin for addressing unexpected emergencies (such as paying for a car repair essential for the commute to work, missing work and losing pay to care for a sick child, or the closure of a job due to a hurricane) or planning for future expenditures, such as a down payment for a house or college savings.
- **Unfavorable Banking Services:** Lack of access to banking services results in reliance on costly services such as non-bank check cashing, payday lending and pawn shops.<sup>84</sup>
- **Gender Disparities in Pay:** Women earn 27 percent less than men across all education levels in Florida.<sup>85</sup>
- **Unfavorable Job Growth:** A disproportionate number of new jobs in Florida are in low-wage industries, such as large-scale commercial agriculture, retail and the service sector.
- **Limited Public Transportation:** Most workers cannot rely on public transportation systems in Florida to get to and from work. Even the county that leads Florida in the use of public transportation (Miami Dade) gets only 6 percent of workers to and from their jobs via public transportation.<sup>86</sup>
- **Lack of health care or high out-of-pocket costs and poor health:** Florida is one of the states

that have made no efforts to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act. As a result, one million state residents who would otherwise be eligible are barred from Medicaid coverage. More than 800,000 Floridians — mostly adults below poverty with no children, and families moderately above the poverty line — fall into a “coverage gap” and cannot access health care through the marketplace.<sup>87</sup>

Within Palm Beach County, 41 percent of all households meet the ALICE criteria as unable to afford basic necessities.<sup>88</sup> And due to the higher costs of living in the County, these households are particularly vulnerable to crisis hunger.

The ALICE Report defines a “household survival budget” as a more accurate measure of economic stability than the federal poverty level. In Palm Beach County, this means families must earn more than twice the federal poverty level to be able to afford food and other basic necessities. For example, the federal poverty level for a family of four (two adults and two children under age five) is \$23,050. The “household survival budget” for such a family in Florida overall is \$47,484, according to the ALICE Report. And in Palm Beach County, it’s significantly more: \$52,379. This points out the special hunger risks that exist for low-income residents in more affluent areas; costs are higher so each dollar buys less. In addition, compared to other Florida counties, Palm Beach County ranks:<sup>89</sup>

- Poor in housing affordability;
- Fair in job opportunities; and
- Fair in community support.

As echoed through every phase of the public engagement process of this plan: addressing economic struggles that make it an ongoing challenge for families to support themselves must be an essential component of any plan to address hunger.

That’s because hunger — at its root — is caused and perpetuated when families do not have sufficient economic resources. And when families do not earn enough or are unable to access adequate income support programs to cover the basic costs of living, everyone suffers.

Families suffer from:

- Poor health, including elevated stress and anxiety;
- Inadequate and unsafe housing, often located in neighborhoods with higher costs for services like banking and groceries;
- Tough choices such as whether to pay rent, food or transportation costs, or put a child in a risky child care situation so a parent can work; and
- Consequences of food insecurity.

The community suffers from:

- Increased burdens on schools when children arrive undernourished and less prepared;
- Health care burdens when families cannot access preventive health services; and
- Charities are stretched too thin from asked to do too much to close the gaps in covering basic needs.

Fortunately, the ALICE Report provides an excellent road map for how to increase economic security and reduce crisis hunger in low-income households.

**OBJECTIVE #10: PALM BEACH COUNTY ANTI-HUNGER STAKEHOLDERS WILL WORK TO ADOPT, PROMOTE, AND IMPLEMENT THE BROAD AND STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ALICE REPORT AND ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES TO INCREASE HOUSEHOLD ECONOMIC SECURITY.**

The ALICE Report’s recommendations require changes at the federal, state, and local levels.

Over the short-term, the report prescribes interventions to solve crises and prevent downward spirals into homelessness. The interventions include access to “food pantries, TANF, utility assistance, emergency housing repairs, and child care subsidies.”<sup>90</sup> But even these critical and effective programs are underfunded and need to be further strengthened to better support families. For instance, TANF benefits for a family of three in Florida are only \$303 per month, a decrease of 34 percent adjusted for inflation from 1996-2014.<sup>91</sup>

Over the long-term, the ALICE Report recommends interventions that promote “broader and more strategic action,” such as:

- Structural changes in the housing markets and the health care delivery system;
- Investments in transportation infrastructure, affordable quality child care, and healthy living;
- Improvements in job opportunities through wage increases and higher-paying jobs;
- Improvement in job security, the predictability of work schedules, and opportunities for advancement; and
- More cost-effective banking resources that can lower the costs of banking and increase access to “savings, auto-loans, and sound microloans.”

For changes such as these to be made, anti-hunger stakeholders must forge and join broader coalitions working to increase economic security among lower-income families and provide nutritional leadership within these alliances (Goal #2). This will ensure that the goals of getting adequate healthy food to people facing food hardship and that connecting families to SNAP, federal nutrition programs and emergency food sources are at the top of the agenda, as essential strategies to shield families from spiraling into homelessness and other destabilizing situations.

**“Sometimes I pull in overtime so I can make more money, . . . they told me the reason why I’m not eligible for food stamps is because I have 10 cents more -- 10 cents -- 10 cents. Yeah, what can I buy with 10 cents because I have 10 cents. But because they say, oh, because you’ve got 10 cents, I don’t qualify for food stamps because I make more money.”**

**- African American woman in her 50’s from West Palm Beach**

**STRATEGY #10(A)1: Foster public-private partnerships and join forces with groups such as United Way of Florida and ALICE stakeholders to promote solutions that move families toward increased economic security at the federal, state and county level.**

**TACTICS #10(A)1**

- Research what groups and coalitions are working on related to family household security issues.
- Select interested Palm Beach County Hunger Relief stakeholder group members to participate.
- Contribute to Palm Beach County efforts to implement short-term and long-term strategies that can improve economic security for ALICE households.

**STRATEGY #10(A)2: Support County efforts to protect ALICE families from falling into deeper crisis by enforcing and promoting existing rules and programs.**

**TACTICS #10(A)2**

- Assure maximum use of the nutrition programs (e.g., connecting eligible families to expedited SNAP benefits, the range of available nutrition programs, food pantries, and emergency food sources.) (Goals #3, #4, #6, and #8).
- Assure maximum use of the other income support programs by exploring actions at the county level to connect residents to Medicaid, TANF, child support enforcement agencies, unemployment insurance, social security insurance (SSI), and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).
- Ensure that families have immediate and sufficient access to these programs and resources.
- Educate families and providers (such as faith-based organizations, food pantries, social service agencies, 211 operators, Your Aging and Disability Resource Center Helpline and schools) on the range of programs and resources that can provide immediate support, including TANF, EITC, utility assistance, emergency housing repairs, child care subsidies and SNAP.

**STRATEGY #10(A)3: Use County dollars to fill the holes in current programs in order to better support ALICE households.**

**TACTICS #10(A)3**

- Providing local funding for more child care subsidies and quality child care.
- Advocating for local funding for a SNAP-like benefit to boost the ability of families to purchase food and stimulate the economy (e.g., Washington, DC, provides local funding for any household receiving less than \$30 in federal SNAP benefits).



- Supporting households with a member who is disabled by providing local funds for people who are awaiting a Social Security Income (SSI)/Social Security Disability (SDIB) determination.

**“We need more jobs so that people can make enough to support themselves.”**

**-Survey Participant**

- Increase the supply of affordable housing and community investments by:
  - \* Continuing to implement the housing development components of the Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Palm Beach County.
  - \* Exploring strategies that use local dollars to bring healthy, affordable food, low-cost banking services, and transportation into low-income communities.
- Fund summer youth employment opportunities, advanced placement classes in areas with Title I schools, pathways to college through tuition assistance programs, and job apprentice programs and trainings.

**STRATEGY #10(A)4: Use County policy to boost well-being of ALICE households.**

**TACTICS #10(A)4**

- Develop policies to systematically study whether Palm Beach County is getting its fair share of housing subsidies, child care subsidies, EITC benefits, etc.
- Continue the coordination of Homeless Prevention Services through the Palm Beach County Continuum of Care Homeless and Housing Alliance.
- Invest and strengthen income supports by:
  - \* Exploring the feasibility of implementing policies to create more jobs with improved wages;
  - \* Increasing the tipped minimum wage;
  - \* Ensuring that all eligible workers access the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) benefits and available child tax credits;
  - \* Enforcing fair labor standards and promoting fair labor policies such as paid sick leave and paid family leave; and
  - \* Developing strategies to fill the health coverage gap left especially gaping due to Florida’s decision not to expand Medicaid coverage.
- Help residents compete for higher-wage jobs by assessing how the County is utilizing programs such as Early Head Start and Head Start, Pre-K for all, summer youth employment opportunities, advanced placement classes in areas with Title I schools, pathways to college through tuition assistance programs, and job apprentice programs and trainings.
- Pursue advocacy efforts based on which policy or program opportunities are most likely to succeed.

**STRATEGY #10(A)5: Work with employers to improve jobs and earnings of ALICE households.**

**TACTICS #10(A)5**

- Engage employers in discussions on how to partner to better support ALICE families.
- Investigate opportunities for employers to improve:
  - \* Work schedules
  - \* Wages
  - \* Child care
  - \* Career advancement
  - \* Banking services for employees

**RESPONSIBLE ENTITIES**

- Florida Departments of Children and Families, Agriculture, Health
- Palm Beach County Departments of Children and Families, Health
- Palm Beach County public officials and staff
- United Way of Florida
- Low-income advocacy groups
- Employers
- Unions
- Food banks and food pantries
- Hunger Relief Task Force
- Community-based organizations
- Business Development Board

## MEASUREMENTS

- The degree to which stakeholders work together toward the solutions identified in the ALICE Report.
- Incidence of crisis hunger.
- Incidence of homelessness.
- Percentage of needy families receiving services and benefits for which they are eligible.
- Whether economic security increases for lower-income families.

## OUTCOMES

- Many long-term ALICE recommendations are enacted and implemented in the public and private sectors.
- All families facing crisis situations will be identified and connected with the services and benefits available before they fall through the cracks.
- Crisis hunger will decline by five percent.
- Families once suffering from food hardship and financial crises achieve economic security.
- Palm Beach County will have better jobs and less demand for services.

**The minimum wage needs to be raised so it is commensurate with the cost of living in Palm Beach County. Free day care needs to be provided to mothers . . so that they can provide for their families . . . Let's break the cycle of poverty so giving to a food bank is not the norm."**

**-Survey Participant**

## Conclusion

This is an ambitious plan, but it is attainable. Palm Beach County is already a great place to live, work, and retire. Achieving these goals will make Palm Beach County an even better, more vibrant, inclusive, thriving, and hunger-free community.

Stakeholders in Palm Beach County understand the practical imperative of ensuring that all residents have access to affordable, healthy food each and every day. They are deeply dedicated to achieving that goal. This plan provides a clear path for moving forward.

It starts with the selection of an anti-hunger champion, or Hunger Relief Executive, to lead the task force and spearhead the effort. It requires bringing together all those who have a stake in ending hunger: elected officials, education leaders, agency leads, advocates, and more. Working together, they can achieve the goals of this comprehensive plan, which include:

- Addressing the needs of families in crisis and strengthening the food bank and pantry system of emergency aid.
- Identifying and focusing efforts on populations most at risk of hunger, including children, senior citizens, immigrants, and residents of the Glades.
- Extending the broad web of federal nutrition programs to all eligible families by removing barriers and filling gaps in coverage.
- Educating the public about hunger and nutrition, targeting food deserts, and ensuring that all County residents can access affordable, healthy food.
- Changing policies so that federal, state and local anti-hunger efforts are more effective.
- Raising families up out of poverty and into economic security; in other words: removing the prime underlying cause of hunger.

With this plan, Palm Beach County can lead the nation and become the national model for transforming the lives of those who once struggled to put food on the table for the better. We can prioritize hunger in Palm Beach County, and we can start today.

### One-on-One Stakeholder Interview Participants

**Dr. Alina Alonso**, Director, Palm Beach County Department of Health  
**Jon Van Arnam**, Assistant County Administrator, Palm Beach County  
**Todd Bonlarron**, Director of Legislative Affairs, Palm Beach County  
**Perry Borman**, Executive Director, Palm Beach County Food Bank  
**Rev. Pam Cahoon**, Former Executive Director, CROS Ministries  
**Genevieve Cousminer**, Executive Director, Coalition for Independent Living Options  
**Congressman Ted Deutch (D-FL)**  
**Karis Engle**, Executive Director, Glades Initiative  
**Lars Gilberts**, Statewide ALICE Director, United Way of Broward County  
**Teresa Janeczek**, Community Partner Liaison, Florida Department of Children and Families  
**Don Kiselewski**, Board Chair, United Way of Palm Beach County; Director of External Affairs, Florida Power and Light  
**Jeff Koons**, Former Commissioner, Palm Beach County Board of Commissioners  
**Melissa McKinlay**, Commissioner, Palm Beach County Board of Commissioners  
**Allison Monbleau**, Director of School Food Service, School District of Palm Beach County  
**Tina Phillips**, CEO, Palm Beach Habilitation Center  
**Maisie Ross**, Certified Family Life Educator and Program Leader, Family and Consumer Science, Palm Beach County Cooperative Extension Service  
**Dan Shorter**, Director, Feed the Hungry at Village Baptist Church  
**Sari Vatske**, Vice President of Community Relations, Feeding South Florida  
**Paco Velez**, Executive Director, Feeding South Florida  
**Dr. Ronald Wiewora**, CEO, Health Care District of Palm Beach County  
**Erica Whitfield**, Board Member, School District of Palm Beach County

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### Focus Group Participants

#### Businesses

**David Fine**, Senior VP Sales and Marketing, PGA National Members Club  
**James Gelfand**, General Manager, PGA National Members Club  
**Glenn Jergensen**, Executive Director, Palm Beach County Tourist Development Council  
**Caroline Villanueva**, External Affairs Manager, Florida Crystals  
**Eva Webb**, Field Representative, Florida Farm Bureau

#### Children (Prenatal to Age 4)

**Belci Encinosa**, Director of Community Engagement, Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies  
**Warren Eldridge**, CEO, Early Learning Coalition of Palm Beach County  
**Susan Grammond**, Clinical Nutrition Coordinator, Florida Department of Health- Palm Beach County  
**Teresa Janeczek**, ACCESS Florida Community Partner Liaison, Florida Department of Children and Families  
**Jamie McCarthy**, Specialist, Nutrition Services Team, School Food Service, Palm Beach County School District  
**Tyna Webb**, Child Care Licensing Coordinator, Florida Department of Health-Palm Beach County

## Food Pantries

**Cynthia Becton**, Executive Director, St. George's Center

**Jaime Lee-Brown**, Vice-President of Community Services, Community Partners

**Ruth Mageria**, Executive Director, CROS Ministries

**Sergio Palacio**, Executive Director, Farmworker Coordinating Council of Palm Beach County

**Cynthia Ryan**, St. George's Center

**Dan Shorter**, Director, Feed the Hungry at Village Baptist Church

**James Tuscano**, Co-Director, Holy Name of Jesus Food Pantry

**John York**, Pantry Manager, Glades Area Pantry

**Enrique Zuanetto**, Executive Director, The Soup Kitchen

## Funders

**Nate Cousineau**, Program Officer, The Quantum Foundation

**Laurie George**, President and CEO, United Way of Palm Beach County

**Nikki Morley**, Project Manager, Bank of America

**Tom Sheehan**, General Counsel, Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County

## Household/Family Crisis

**Kemberly Bush**, CEO, Pathways to Prosperity

**Norman Cushon**, Senior Director of Operations, CareerSource Palm Beach County

**Keisha Henry**, Casework Supervisor, Palm Beach County Division of Human Services

**Sharon L'Herrou**, Director of Programs and Services, 211 Palm Beach and Treasure Coast

**Joan Kieffer**, Manager, Adopt A Family

**Vivian Pazmino**, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program Manager, United Way of Palm Beach County

**Daniel Ramos**, Vice President of Homeless Programs and Community Engagement, Center for Family Services

**Jocelyn Skolnik**, CEO, El Sol

**Diana Stanley**, CEO, The Lord's Place

**Sheila Thomas**, Senior Community Action Specialist, Palm Beach County Community Action Program

**Susan Warmington**, Executive Director, Oasis Compassion Agency

## Older Adults

**Yinka Adeshina**, Program Administrator, Adult Protective Services, Florida Department of Children and Families

**Katherine Langemack**, Care Management Supervisor, The Volen Center

**Susan Koester**, Nutrition Programs Coordinator, Palm Beach County Division of Senior Service

**Charles Ring**, Executive Director, Meals on Wheels of the Palm Beaches

**Alex Stevens**, Program Administrator, Catholic Charities Diocese of Palm Beach

**Shari Waknin**, Vice President of Financial Services and Food Programs, Ruth and Norman Rales Jewish Family Services

**Nancy Yarnall**, Director of Consumer Care and Planning, Area Agency on Aging

## School Age Children (Out-of-School Time)

**Dustin Bagdasarian**, Grant and Compliance Coordinator, Boys and Girls Clubs of Palm Beach County

**Chris Carrera**, Director of School Based Programs, Achievement Centers for Children and Families

**Reed Daniel**, Director, West Palm Beach Youth Empowerment Center

**Reginale Durandisse**, CEO, For the Children

**Mandi Grunwald**, Program Specialist, Palm Beach County Children and Youth Services Department

**Tara Holcomb**, Director of Development and Public Relations, The Salvation Army

**Dorothy McKinon**, Director, Do Right Church

**Alex Stevens**, Program Administrator, Diocese of Palm Beach Catholic Charities

**Pete Wood**, Field Manager, School District of Palm Beach County

### [School Age Children \(In-School Time\)](#)

**Perry Borman**, Executive Director, Palm Beach County Food Bank

**Tammy Fields**, Director, Palm Beach County Youth Services Department

**Juanita Goode**, Director of Engagement, CROS Ministries

**Allison Monbleau**, Director of School Food Service, Palm Beach County School District

**Paco Velez**, CEO, Feeding South Florida

### [Systems/Infrastructure](#)

**Perry Borman**, Executive Director, Palm Beach County Food Bank

**Karis Engle**, CEO, The Glades Initiative

**Dan Shorter**, Director, Feed the Hungry at Village Baptist Church

**Paco Velez**, CEO, Feeding South Florida

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**Debbie Emerick**, Director of Volunteer Services, Meals on Wheels of Palm Beaches

**Jeri Flora**, Director of Economic Self-Sufficiency, Florida Department of Children and Families

**Cindy Huddleston**, Staff Attorney, Florida Legal Services, Inc.

**Julie Kreadle**, South Florida Program Coordinator, Florida Impact

**Elizabeth R. Massey**, SER OESS Regional Director, Florida Department of Children and Families

**Christie Meresse**, Chief of Food Distribution, Division of Food, Nutrition and Wellness, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

**Gabriella Mora**, Senior Associate, The Food Trust

**Anthony Olivieri**, Founder, FHEED LLC

**Robin C. Safley**, Director, Division of Food, Nutrition and Wellness, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

**Melanie Schrowang**, Administrative Assistant and Personnel Liaison, Division of Food, Nutrition and Wellness, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

**Debra Susie**, President and CEO, Florida Impact

**Toni Thomas**, Food and Nutrition Programs Coordinator, Florida Impact

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