

## CHAPTER 5

### Summary and Recommendations

The growing number of Calaveras County households forced to seek emergency food to meet the food needs of their families was the impetus that led to this thesis project. Emergency food providers did not have a system in place to document the increase in demand countywide, the sociodemographic data of the families, or the needs of the families. The purpose of this thesis project was to develop recommendations for a community action plan that would suggest strategies for addressing both the needs of the emergency food providers and the needs of Calaveras County residents that might be forced to seek their help. This thesis project resulted in both a user-friendly report and realistic recommendations for a community action plan to address hunger in Calaveras County.

Each phase of this thesis project contributed significantly to the final hunger report and recommendations for a community action plan. To summarize:

- The principal investigator, Anna Martin, conducted a literature review. This literature review provided the project with current definitions and concepts being used by the experts nationwide who explore food security issues as they relate to inadequate household income or resources. The results of this literature review supported the reports of emergency food providers in Calaveras County that there was an increase in demand for emergency food both locally and nationally.
- Researchers identified two surveys as models that could be used to develop the “Client Survey” for this thesis project. This “Client Survey” provided researchers

- with an assessment tool to determine the food security status and the sociodemographic characteristics of a convenience sample of households accessing agencies that served residents at or below 185% of the poverty level.
- The survey instrument was administered to 174 Calaveras County low-income residents. Data from 159 correctly completed surveys was analyzed. The survey results underscored reports from other researchers indicating that food insecurity and hunger are major problems in low-income populations despite the current economic boom (Venner, Sullivan, and Seavey, 2000, pp. 11-12). Of the 159 survey households, 95 (60%) were food insecure. Cross-tabular analysis of the 95 food insecure households revealed that food insecurity was found in all five geographic areas of Calaveras County. The majority of survey respondents from food insecure households rented their homes (65%), had children 0-17 years of age (76%), lived at or below 185% of the poverty level for family size (76%), were putting off medical/dental care due to cost (52%), and did not receive food stamps (61%). Food insecure households that did receive food stamps (39%) reported running out of food stamps within 2-3 weeks. The top three problems survey respondents cited as the reasons for seeking emergency food were: “unusual expenses this month” (27%); “ran out of food stamps” (19%); and “recent job loss” (15%). Reported barriers to accessing emergency food were: “no gas money” (19%), “no transportation” (16%), “embarrassment/pride” (14%), and “distance I had to travel” (11%).
  - The survey results, hunger-related statistics specific to Calaveras County, and input from community stakeholders were then used to develop recommendations for a

community action plan. The recommendations for a community action plan were focused in five areas:

1. strengthen and support the current emergency food system;
  2. systematically identify and address the needs of families seeking emergency food assistance;
  3. increase community awareness of hunger and food security issues;
  4. advocate at the Federal, State, and County level for policies that will lead our families out of crisis and into stability;
  5. promote nutrition programs and services that provide an adequate safety net for vulnerable families.
- The end result of this thesis project was the “Calaveras County Hunger Report 2000: Voices of the People” with the detailed recommendations for a community action plan. This hunger report can be found in Appendix A on pages 42 to 82. Many of the details of the community action plan are currently being implemented by concerned citizens in Calaveras County to develop programs for ensuring adequate, nutritional food is available to all families.

The report and the recommendations provide a wealth of information and ideas that can be used by agencies, churches, organizations, policy makers, and businesses to improve conditions for at-risk households. Representatives from these entities are currently developing strategies based on many of these recommendations. The Calaveras County Emergency Food Coalition has been formed and its members are working closely with the Community Emergency Services Programs to track the needs of food insecure

households countywide. Community Emergency Service Programs is currently collaborating with the University of California Cooperative Extension, Motherlode WIC, and Calaveras Head Start State Preschool to develop an Emergency Food Mobile Van Program that will bring emergency food bags, community resource information, and resource management education to families living in the remote areas of Calaveras County. Plans are underway to explore both the development of community/school gardens and a voucher system for providing fresh fruits and vegetables to needy families. These programs and future ideas generated by this project will make the emergency food system in Calaveras County more responsive to the needs of residents throughout the county.

As Calaveras County moves forward to implement the recommendations for a community action plan found in Appendix A (pp. 73-75), additional research needs to be conducted as stated below:

- Researchers need to survey specific sub-groups within Calaveras County to develop a more complete picture of hunger and food insecurity in the county. Specifically, the subgroups are low-income senior citizens, households where one member is disabled, and ethnic subgroups such as the growing Latino population and the Native American population.
- Researchers need to conduct focus groups with senior citizens to find the most effective method of determining their needs.
- Researchers using the Client Survey developed for this thesis project need to establish a more effective, user-friendly way to ask for a respondent's income and expenses.

- Researchers need to explore why some households are able to live at or below 185% of the poverty level without becoming food insecure while other households become food insecure to the point of being hungry.
- Future research in the area of food insecurity and hunger should include components that assess issues such as: the reasons family members are unemployed; the impact of welfare reform on low-income households; the effect of credit card debt on food security; the extent nutrition programs such as meals-on-wheels, senior lunch programs, and school breakfast/lunch programs are being utilized by food insecure households; and the frequency/prevalence of alcohol and drug abuse and its relationship to hunger.
- The programs developed that were based on the recommendations for a community action plan should be continuously evaluated as to the impact on both meeting the needs of food insecure households and ultimately reducing hunger and food insecurity in Calaveras County.

The most valuable outcome of this thesis project was the raised awareness and increased knowledge of hunger-related issues observed in all involved. Local newspapers and media spots reported regularly on the progress of the study. Concerned citizens wrote letters to the newspapers either to tell their stories or ask the community to become involved. Even those who worked with low-income families on a day-to-day basis were impacted by the final report. The head of the Calaveras Works and Human Services read the report and was unable to sleep that night thinking about the stories told by emergency food recipients on pages 65 and 66. The Community Emergency Service

Programs is collaborating with the local UC Cooperative Extension, the Amador/Tuolumne Community Action Agency, and members of the newly formed Calaveras County Emergency Food Coalition to put on the “Sierra Nevada Hunger Awareness Conference: Education & Action Plans for Rural Mountain Communities” on May 10-11, 2001. As stated in the hunger report, “This is not the end of the story; rather it is the beginning”.