



## ***Media Release***

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## **Food Insecurity Jeopardizes the Health of Residents in San Luis Obispo County**

16,000 Low-Income Adults Still Struggle to Put Food On the Table in San Luis Obispo County

*June 12, 2007* - A statewide study released today by UCLA's Center for Health Policy Research, *Food Security Among California's Low-Income Adults Improves, but the Most Severely Affected Do Not Share in the Improvement*, shows that the percentage of low-income adults in California living in food insecure households fell from 34 percent in 2003 to 30 percent in 2005.

However, while this shows progress in the past two years, improving economic conditions failed to bring the number of "food insecure" individuals back down to 2001 levels; the percentage of food insecure across California in 2005 remains above the 2001 level of 29 percent. Meanwhile, the data show no improvement for those that experience Very Low Food Security – a condition commonly known as hunger. Based on a survey of low-income adults, the report shows an estimated 16,000 adults in San Luis Obispo County were identified as food insecure. San Luis Obispo County ranks 12 in food insecurity (with one being the worst.)

Because food security and adequate nutrition are vital to good health, this survey also captured important information about the health status of low-income Californians. Studies also suggest a link between food insecurity and increased risk of overweight and obesity. The study's lead author, UCLA professor and researcher Dr. Gail Harrison, says, "Food insecurity is a persistent fact of life for too many poor individuals and families. The health consequences for families in San Luis Obispo County are severe."

The report recommends several actions to reduce food insecurity and improve the health of San Luis Obispo County residents. Top among its suggestions are steps to increase the use of the Food Stamp Program. Although almost one in three low-income



adults in California is food insecure, California's participation in the Food Stamp Program is among the lowest in the country. San Luis Obispo County loses out on approximately \$8,610,496 per year due to limited participation in this important nutrition assistance program.

The study's authors urge state policymakers to adopt legislation to streamline the application process by closely linking food stamps to health insurance. One of the report's co-authors, Matthew Sharp of California Food Policy Advocates notes, "No level of hunger is acceptable in the Golden State. Policymakers are debating the state budget blueprint right now. Their decisions should increase low-income Californians' income and strengthen the nutrition safety net to reduce hunger."

Local steps are underway to make sure families receive nutrition assistance. According to Sharp, "Increasing the number of people on Food Stamps should be a top priority. It would be a financial boon to grocers, growers, and workers, and put food on the plates of thousands of children and families. We encourage our Senators and Assembly Members to support measures that will reduce paperwork and increase participation in this important nutrition program."

Complete reports and the methodologies used in collecting the data, can be found at [www.cfpa.net](http://www.cfpa.net) and at [www.healthpolicy.ucla.edu](http://www.healthpolicy.ucla.edu)

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