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ONE IN FIVE CHILDREN LIVE AT RISK OF HUNGER IN MISSOURI ACCORDING TO NEW FEEDING AMERICA REPORT

80,000 children under the age of five are food insecure.

CAPE GIRARDEAU (MAY. 15) – One in five children lives on the brink of hunger in Missouri, according to a new report issued on May 7 by Feeding America. Missouri ranked number eight on the top ten list of states with the highest rate of food insecurity among children. More than 280,000 children in Missouri are food insecure—unable to consistently access adequate amounts of nutritious food that is necessary for a healthy life.

Child Food Insecurity in the United States: 2005 – 2007, also states that 3.5 million American children, ages five and under, are food insecure. The analysis includes the first ever state-by-state analysis of early childhood hunger, using data collected by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

“The first three years of life are the most critical period of brain growth and development. Child hunger causes physical and mental impairment that may never be reversed,” said researcher John Cook, Ph.D., of the Boston Medical Center and Boston University School of Medicine, a nationally-recognized expert on child hunger, who conducted the analysis. “Child hunger also creates tremendous costs that are completely unavoidable. There is no better investment in a prosperous future than investing in ending childhood hunger.”

“These numbers reflect the hunger problem that existed prior to the economic recession, so the figures have undoubtedly increased with rising state-wide unemployment and the longer lines being reported at food pantries within our hunger relief network,” stated Karen Green, Executive Director of Southeast Missouri Food Bank.

To help address the problem, Southeast Missouri Food Bank is planning a child feeding pilot program to begin with the next school year 2009-2010. The program has proven successful throughout the Feeding America network and is a partnership between Southeast Missouri Food Bank, the public school system and community sponsors who provide funding and volunteer support. Nutritious food is sent home with hungry kids on weekends during the school year through the use of a backpack or special packaging.

“We are currently in discussion with interested groups in Cape Girardeau and Sikeston to implement a pilot program,” Green said. “After we learn how to manage and sustain the feeding program, we want to make it available to Southeast Missouri Food Bank’s entire sixteen-county service area.”

Child Food Insecurity in the United States: 2005 – 2007, analyzes data collected by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Research Service (ERS) over a three-year period. The USDA has collected data on domestic food insecurity since 1995, but has not analyzed it to determine the specific number of children living in food insecure households by state.

The state-by-state study was sponsored by the ConAgra Foods Foundation, as part of its “Nourish Today, Flourish Tomorrow” program, which focused on child hunger and nutrition education. ConAgra Foods is a major donor to Feeding America, whose network of food banks, including Southeast Missouri Food Bank, and food-rescue organizations serves 25 million Americans every year.

The report is available at <http://feedingamerica.org/our-network/the-studies/child-food-insecurity.aspx>.

If you would like to help sponsor a child feeding program or your family needs food assistance, please call Southeast Missouri Food Bank at 573-651-0400.

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