



# SECOND HARVEST HEARTLAND

*Joining forces to end hunger*

## **Missing Meals:**

A Report on Unmet Food Needs in Minnesota and Western Wisconsin

September 2008

### **Project Background:**

#### ***Why the data gathering was conducted:***

We know that hunger exists in the Midwest because data from the USDA Food Security Report identifies it and because individuals and families turn to food shelves, meal programs, food banks and the federal nutrition programs for help. However, until now, it has been unclear how many more meals are needed to address the problem of food insecurity and hunger and ensure that all low income people have access to three meals a day, 365 days a year.

Second Harvest Heartland embarked on the Missing Meals data gathering project to provide a baseline of information and begin quantifying this need so that we, along with our partners in the hunger relief community, can understand the scope of the problem and provide leadership for solutions.

### **Methodology:**

The Missing Meals project was conducted using secondary data from a variety of sources. Sources include: including U.S. Census Bureau and its America Community Survey population and demographic estimate information; the Minnesota Department of Human Services and Wisconsin Department of Health Services for Food Stamp program data; Minnesota Department of Education - Food and Nutrition and University of Wisconsin - Extension and the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services for school meal information. Local charitable sources of food were also included.

#### **The guiding formula for calculating the “missing meal” or gap data is as follows:**

Total Meals Needed for All Low Income people for One Year  
<MINUS>  
Number of Meals Low Income People Can Provide for Their Families  
<MINUS>  
Number of Meals Provided by Public Sector (Federal and State) Nutrition Programs  
<MINUS>  
Number of Meals Provided by Nonprofit Hunger-Relief Programs  
= EQUALS

**Total Number of Meals Remaining to End Hunger in Minnesota & Wisconsin**

**The formula used to calculate how many meals low income people and families could be expected to provide for themselves is:**

Total population (the estimated number of people living in households with incomes below 185% of the federal poverty level)

x MULTIPLIED BY

\$35.89 per person per week x 52 weeks per year (\$1,866 per year)

= EQUALS

***The number of meals that low income people provide for themselves from cash resources***

### **Results:**

- Second Harvest Heartland’s “Missing Meals” Report shows that more than 165 million more meals are still needed each year in Minnesota and western Wisconsin to ensure that all low income families and individuals have three nutritious meals a day.
- This means that even after low-income families utilize resources such as federal nutrition programs and nonprofit food banks and meal programs, as well as their own ability to purchase food, 15% of the food they need is still missing. (12% in Minnesota and 18% in western Wisconsin.) This is the equivalent of all low-income families missing 14 meals a month – maybe missing dinner every night for two weeks each month!
- The data shows that less than 25% of the meals needed to end hunger in Minnesota & western Wisconsin are currently being provided through public nutrition programs and hunger relief organizations. Perhaps surprisingly, people provide 63% of meals for themselves and their families from their own cash resources.

### **Moving Forward:**

- In order to end hunger in Minnesota and Wisconsin, the buying power of low income people must be increased, access to and participation in the federal nutrition programs must be improved, and more food must be made available through food banks, food shelves and meal programs.
- The MN Food Support program currently provides 12% of the meals needed to feed low income people in Minnesota. The WI Food Share program currently provides 8% of the meals needed in western Wisconsin. A variety of outreach, education, and application assistance is needed to increase participation in this primary nutrition program. Millions of dollars of local economic activity are lost each year because eligible low-income people do not participate in this federal nutrition program.

**Detailed Results, by Area:**

