

## ADMINISTRATION'S GUIDE FOR ENDING CHILD HUNGER OMITTS MENTION OF CHILD POVERTY

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently made public the Administration's "Stakeholder Guide"<sup>1</sup> for redeeming President Obama's campaign pledge<sup>2</sup> to end childhood hunger by 2015. The guide principally urges voluntary action by stakeholders -- identified as the government, elected officials, community groups, funders, the public, youth, parents, schools, volunteers -- to increase the rate at which eligible children actually participate in Food Stamps and other child nutrition programs.

While increased participation by eligible children is an important and praiseworthy goal, nutrition programs can not by themselves eliminate childhood hunger. The children who are hungry or threatened with hunger are the children in what the federal government calls "food insecure" families. Most food insecure families are already participating in Food Stamps and/or another nutrition assistance program.<sup>3</sup> They remain food insecure despite their nutrition program participation primarily because their incomes are too low. Four fifths of food insecure families have an income that is less than 185% of the poverty level and two fifths have an income that is less than the poverty level.<sup>4</sup> Half of food insecure families are single mother families and over half are Black or Hispanic.

President Obama's anti-hunger campaign document recognized poverty as the "the primary cause of hunger" and called for comprehensive measures to reduce poverty. USDA reiterated these sentiments when it solicited suggestions on how to implement the President's pledge to end childhood hunger.<sup>5</sup> However, the Administration's Stakeholder Guide makes no mention of child poverty.

The recent federal reports showing increases in child poverty and child hunger in 2009 to record or near record levels underscore the urgent need for new policies to reduce child poverty. In 2009, 20.7% of children were poor,<sup>6</sup> the highest child poverty rate since 1995, and 23.2% of children were in food insecure families, the highest rate since the federal government began measuring food insecurity in the 1990's.<sup>7</sup> Absent new policies, high rates of childhood poverty and food insecurity will persist indefinitely.

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<sup>1</sup> The guide is available at [http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/ech/stakeholder\\_guide.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/ech/stakeholder_guide.htm)

<sup>2</sup> President Obama made this pledge in his campaign position paper *Tackling Domestic Hunger*, available at [http://obama.3cdn.net/c4b14802fd5e66ee67\\_xum6bn6nu.pdf](http://obama.3cdn.net/c4b14802fd5e66ee67_xum6bn6nu.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Nord, Mark (2009). *Food Insecurity in Households with Children*, at 21-23 (reporting that 80% of low income food insecure families with children were participating in at least one food program, including the 37% participating in Food Stamps). USDA. Available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/EIB56/EIB56.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Id. at 14.

<sup>5</sup> See USDA statements at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/ech/admin.htm>

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census Bureau (2010). *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2009*, at Table B-2. Available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/p60-238.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Nord, Mark, et al (2010). *Household Food Security in the United States, 2009*, at 7. USDA. Available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR108/ERR108.pdf>.