



# **Strength in Numbers: Opportunities to Improve Food Security Data & to Assess the Needs of Oregonians of Color**

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## Summary

The Oregon Hunger Task Force has been charged with the responsibility to conduct research regarding the dimensions of hunger<sup>i</sup>, advocate for all hungry Oregonians, improve access to services and to recommend policies that contribute to the ultimate goal of eradicating hunger.<sup>ii</sup> That duty extends to all populations and communities, regardless of size, location or the challenges associated with meeting that need.

In 2009, the Oregon Hunger Task Force set out to create *Ending Hunger Before it Begins: Oregon's Call to Action*, a plan to inspire people of diverse backgrounds, from across the state, to take action to end food insecurity and hunger. The integrity of that intention was preserved through collection of information via a statewide survey, community forums, interviews, a statewide summit and analyses of data sets. The Task Force aims to ensure that the needs of all underserved and underrepresented populations are reflected in its public policy agenda. It is with this objective in mind that the Task Force set out to intentionally incorporate the voices and input of Oregonians of color.<sup>iii</sup>

Before the Task Force began to engage community members, advocates and service providers from specific populations, the project team made attempts to examine state-level food insecurity data to improve internal knowledge. Preliminary research and inquiry indicated that there are insufficient data sources to make conclusive statements about current populations in Oregon. That information void represents the untold experiences of thousands of Oregonians. This report examines the need for better measures of food insecurity amongst Oregonians of color, provides a basic historical context for some challenges faced by those communities and proposes a variety of recommendations to improve that data and its applications.

## Background

Food insecurity is defined as the condition in which one lacks enough income and resources to gain consistent access to enough food to maintain an active, healthy lifestyle. A number of factors contribute to the likelihood that a household will experience hunger, including, unemployment, renting a home (as opposed to owning) or having a noncitizen household head.<sup>iv</sup> More often than not, individuals who experience food insecurity are struggling to make their ends meet financially.

As of 2009, Oregon has the second-highest percentage of people experiencing very low food insecurity in the nation.<sup>v</sup> As a result of the

economic strain caused by the recent recession, high unemployment rates and high cost of living, approximately 235,000<sup>vi</sup> Oregonians had very low food security. These numbers remained high, despite the fact that 897,000 households received emergency food boxes and 520,649 individuals received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits<sup>vii</sup>. The most current USDA numbers only reflect American hunger rates through 2008. It is likely that food insecurity rates increased in 2009 as Oregon's economic situation worsened.

In the United States, food insecurity is often linked to various socioeconomic, household and individual factors. Race and ethnicity are two salient characteristics associated with food insecurity. For the past ten years, the Household Food Security Reports published by the United States Department of Agriculture have shown that people of color, across the nation, are more likely to experience food insecurity and hunger, than whites.<sup>viii</sup> It is the consistency of this fact that makes the information void in Oregon significant.

The following table<sup>ix</sup> illustrates Oregon's population breakdown, by race, for 2008:

African American or Black	2.0%
American Indian and Alaska Native	1.4%
Asian	3.6%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.3%
Multi-Racial	2.5%
Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin	11.0%
White persons not Hispanic	80.0%

The latest Race and Ethnicity report published by the Oregon Progress Board shows that the Oregon is becoming an increasingly diverse state.<sup>x</sup> As the demographic composition of a state transforms, research should evolve to reflect that change. Oregon is a state where racial and ethnic diversity *and* food insecurity have increased. It is the intersection of these two circumstances that demands attention. Examination of determinants linked to hunger amongst

Oregonians of color provides insights into what food insecurity might look like.

## What Do We Know?

The Oregon Progress Board designed the Oregon Benchmarks to measure the state's social, economic and social wellbeing.<sup>xi</sup> The Oregon Benchmarks provide evidence of some disparities faced by Latinos, African Americans and Native American populations in Oregon. These indicators are not proof of the fact that these communities experience levels of food insecurity at higher levels than their white counterparts. However, research shows that correlations between race and negative education and financial status lead to compounded disadvantage in the long run.<sup>xii</sup> Some measures include:

### Financial Stability

As a whole, with the exception of Asians and Pacific Islanders, Oregonians of color tend to be less financially stable than their white counterparts.<sup>xiii</sup> This means that Oregonians of color are more likely to experience poverty and lower homeownership rates. While financial stability is not the only determinant of food insecurity, studies show that when household income rises, hunger levels fall.<sup>xiv</sup>

### Health Insurance

As a whole, with the exception of Asians and Pacific Islanders, Oregonians of color are more likely to be uninsured than their white counterparts.<sup>xv</sup> Rising healthcare costs coupled with lack of coverage can prove to be financially debilitating. The healthcare costs of the uninsured are an unpredictable burden that can quickly leave less money for groceries.

### Education Level

As a whole, with the exception of Asians and Pacific Islanders, Oregonians of color have lower college completion rates than their white counterparts. All Oregonians of color have lower high school completion than their white counterparts.<sup>xvi</sup> Educational achievement is strongly correlated with income since individuals with higher education levels often earn more money in the workforce.

The Benchmarks provide some indications that more work needs to be done to better understand the connection between race, ethnicity and food insecurity. Contemporary scholarship relies upon a blend of statistical analyses and social science research to define those relationships. Social outcomes

associated with race and/or ethnicities are the result of intervening practices and policies that impacted communities in very specific ways.<sup>xvii</sup> Race is not a causal variable, and without precise measurements of food insecurity, analysts do not have a definitive understanding of the full impact for certain groups.

## Historical Context: Themes Relevant to Oregon

In 2006, the Community Affairs Officers of the Federal Reserve and the Brookings Institute sponsored a study designed to profile communities with concentrated poverty, across the country, to better understand the factors that led to their existence.<sup>xviii</sup> The findings show that despite nuances and variety amongst communities, some themes do emerge. Below are patterns particularly relevant to Oregon, accompanied by thoughts expressed by sentiments expressed by Oregonians:

### Displacement of Native Populations

*“Under the Western Oregon Termination Act (1954) and the Klamath Termination Act (1954) a large number of Oregon Tribes had their governments abolished, lands taken and social services revoked”*

*- NAYA, Making the Invisible Visible*

*“Even with our large population and the strong evidence of need, resources have not been equitably distributed to our community. There are false perceptions that we no longer exist and chronic undercounts, inaccurate data and stereotypes about what we look like perpetuate this misconception. These misunderstandings lead to policies and decisions that limit our access to social services and other community resources in the city where we live.”*

*- NAYA, Making the Invisible Visible<sup>xix</sup>*

The history of the United States is riddled with complicated, contentious disputes regarding land rights for Native Americans. Many communities continue to face institutional barriers, associated with land rights. Federal legislation forcibly displaced Tribes to lands of poorer quality and subsequently limited their opportunity for economic development and access to services.<sup>xx</sup>

## Gentrification of Urban Communities

*“When I first moved here, you could still find affordable housing in this area. There was easy access to the MAX, and neighbors were great. I feel like I’ve put down some roots here...I began to realize that I don’t see the old neighbors anymore. A lot of them have moved to Gresham or farther out to where rents are cheaper. Once you get pushed out of your neighborhood, there’s no place to come together. I don’t know my neighbors and the community is not as connected as it once was”*

*- State of Black Oregon<sup>xxi</sup>*

Discriminatory policies led to the establishment of communities characterized by segregation and high poverty. Exclusionary zoning created racially distinct neighborhoods characterized by strong social support networks. Eventually, members of those communities often found themselves displaced and disconnected as a result of urban renewal policies that gentrified those neighborhoods.<sup>xxii</sup>

## Barriers to Access for Foreign-Born Residents

*“We’re looking to lead...For us, the worst thing we can do is to create a culture of assistance, a culture of co-dependency. We have to break out of this pattern. We have to be able to take leadership roles and act upon them... If you look at refugees — refugees get eight months of federal assistance — so they have an eight-month window to create an American way of life. Most of the low-income jobs that would normally be available to immigrant or refugee families no longer exist with the economy. Folks want to work. They will work three jobs. It’s not that the jobs don’t pay enough. They just aren’t there.”*

*- Street Roots, West Meets East<sup>xxiii</sup>*

The nation’s foreign-born population has more than tripled to more than 35 million people. Many immigrants and refugees arrive with low levels of education and/or employment opportunities.<sup>xxiv</sup> As a result, foreign-born residents constitute a disproportionately large share of the poor.

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The historical complexities of race, ethnicity and citizenship in Oregon are far too great to be examined in this report. The topographic, cultural and industrial diversity of a state dramatically impact its demography over time. A

more in-depth study of the interaction of historical factors would further inform the issue as it relates to development of communities in Oregon, past and present.

## Current Research Gaps

Oregon policy analysts use data sets from a variety of surveys to study food insecurity. Two of the most commonly used sets are the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System and the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement. Both allow for state-level and household level analyses of food insecurity. While the sample sizes are large enough to draw statistically significant information about the general or majority population, they cannot be used to conclusively study race and food insecurity in Oregon. The number of Oregonians of color who are surveyed is too small to make any inferences as to the entire population.

Before its hiatus, the Oregon Progress Board published four Race and Ethnicity Reports that provided limited profiles of the status of some populations. Even that information is limited because, in some cases, there were not enough respondents to certify the results as being representative of groups in the entire state.

Oregon Food Bank monitors food distribution levels but does not collect information regarding race or ethnicity of recipients. The Oregon Department of Human Services carefully monitors Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participation rates and does have some information regarding race and ethnicity of monthly SNAP clients. However, SNAP is designed to help individuals who experience food insecurity, for a specific period of time. It does not measure the extent of household food insecurity.

It should also be noted that Oregon does not have sufficient information regarding food insecurity of immigrants and refugees. Those populations are unique because they are not comprised entirely of non-whites. They too represent a group of Oregonians that merits significant attention.

## Opportunities to Improve

### Modify Current Data Collection Practices

- **Incorporate Methods of oversampling into existing surveys.** To ascertain larger, more representative sample sizes, survey administrators

can collect information from self-identified members of communities of color. Data sets with sample sizes that reflect the current population have smaller margins of error, meaning they are more representative of that population.

- **Conduct a meta-analysis of data collection methods in other states to identify best practices.** An assessment of best practices allows researchers to compare methods of collection and provides insight into national food security rates.

### Expand Research Methods

- **Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR).** Members of the community, organization representatives and researchers collaborate to enhance understanding of food insecurity and to identify courses of action.<sup>xxv</sup> CBPR establishes a sense of ownership amongst all stakeholders and draws from various perspectives.
- **Conduct Case Studies in Target Communities.** Case studies and personal narratives provide information that cannot be reflected numerically.

### Allocate Resources

- **Establish a forum for scholars, stakeholders and service providers to share and analyze data on a regular basis.** Regular, methodical study of food insecurity in a state, across discipline and occupation creates more opportunities to identify trends and new developments.
- **Provide research funding.** Expansion of data collection requires funding to support distribution, analyses and implementation of new initiatives.

## **Moving Forward**

Oregonians of color do not constitute a homogenous population within the state, and it is imperative that majority populations, policymakers, advocates and service providers understand this. Some individuals do not choose to self-identify as people of color or as belonging to racial or ethnic group. The uniqueness of communities will also reflect the variety found across Oregon, regionally. The concerns and needs expressed by an immigrant community in Western Oregon may not be experienced by an immigrant neighborhood in Central Oregon, for example.

As policymakers gather information, connections with individuals, community-based organizations, and leaders who are established will prove to be extremely helpful. Partnership and collaboration are necessary to gather information, analyze findings and implement meaningful policy. Relationship building is essential to developing approaches built and sustained at all levels of participation.

There is no singular solution to ending food insecurity, because it is the manifestation of a series of different challenges faced by many people. The collection of food insecurity data amongst Oregonians of color is a central piece to conversations concerning hunger in Oregon, because it aims to identify a section of that uniqueness. Every data source that becomes available represents immeasurable new opportunities for reducing food insecurity in Oregon.

## Making Connections

The following organizations and offices are doing work relevant to the issues mentioned in this report (this list is not exhaustive):

- **Adelante Mujeres**  
[www.adelantemujeres.org](http://www.adelantemujeres.org)
- **Black United Fund of Oregon**  
[www.bufor.org](http://www.bufor.org)
- **Center for Intercultural Organizing**  
[www.interculturalorganizing.org](http://www.interculturalorganizing.org)
- **Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon**  
[www.emoregon.org](http://www.emoregon.org)
- **Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization**  
[www.irco.org](http://www.irco.org)
- **Mano a Mano Family Center**  
[www.manomanofamily.com](http://www.manomanofamily.com)
- **Native American Youth & Family Center**  
[www.nayapdx.org](http://www.nayapdx.org)
- **Oregon Action**  
[www.oregonaction.org](http://www.oregonaction.org)
- **Oregon Advocacy Commissions Office**  
[www.oregon.gov/OAC/](http://www.oregon.gov/OAC/)
- **Oregon Center for Public Policy**  
[www.ocpp.org](http://www.ocpp.org)
- **Oregon League of Minority Voters**  
[www.Oregonlmv.org](http://www.Oregonlmv.org)
- **Oregon State University Extension Service**  
[www.extension.oregonstate.edu](http://www.extension.oregonstate.edu)
- **Portland State University Population Research Center**  
[www.pdx.edu/prc/](http://www.pdx.edu/prc/)
- **Urban League of Portland**  
[www.ulpdx.org](http://www.ulpdx.org)

# Notes

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<sup>i</sup> The United States Department of Agriculture uses specific language to describe ranges of food insecurity:

- “Low food security” is defined as ‘reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet with little or no indication of reduced food intake’
- “Very low food security” is defined as ‘multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake’

<sup>ii</sup> Oregon Hunger Relief Act, *Oregon Revised Statutes 2009*, ORS 458.545 [Formerly 411.851; 2005 c.22 §330]

<sup>iii</sup> In this paper, the term “people of color” refers to individuals who are of non-white Hispanic or Latino, African America or black, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian or mixed-race descent.

<sup>iv</sup> Bartfeld, J, Dunifon, R, Nord, M, Carlson, S. *What Factors Account for State-to-State Differences in Food Security?* EIB-20, US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. November 2006. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/EIB20/eib20.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> Nord, Mark, Margaret Andrews, and Steven Carlson. "Household Food Security in the United States, 2008." *USDA Economic Research Service - Home Page*. United States Department of Agriculture, n.d. Web. 10 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err83/>>.

<sup>vi</sup> Edwards, Mark. "Understand Food Insecurity and "Hunger" in Oregon." *Rural Studies Program - Fact Sheets*. Version 10-01. Oregon State University, n.d. Web. 02 Jan. 2010. <<http://ruralstudies.oregonstate.edu/sites/default/files/pub/pdf/OregonHunger2010.pdf>>.

<sup>vii</sup> Oregon Hunger Task Force. *Act to End Hunger*. (2004).

<sup>viii</sup> "ERS/USDA Briefing Room - Food Security in the United States: Recommended Readings." *USDA Economic Research Service - Home Page*. Version 1998-2008. United States Department of Agriculture, n.d. Web. 02 Jan. 2010. <<http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/FoodSecurity/readings.htm#statistical>>.

<sup>ix</sup> United States Census Bureau . "Oregon QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau." State and County QuickFacts. <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/41000.html> (accessed January 12, 2010).

<sup>x</sup> Oregon Progress Board. "2008 Race and Ethnicity Report." Oregon Progress Board Oregon Benchmark Biennial Publications. [http://www.oregon.gov/DAS/OPB/obm\\_pubs.shtml#2008\\_Race\\_\\_Ethnicity\\_Report](http://www.oregon.gov/DAS/OPB/obm_pubs.shtml#2008_Race__Ethnicity_Report) (accessed December 15, 2009).

<sup>xi</sup> [http://www.oregon.gov/DAS/OPB/obm.shtml#2006\\_OBM\\_Update\\_Process](http://www.oregon.gov/DAS/OPB/obm.shtml#2006_OBM_Update_Process)

<sup>xii</sup> Lin, Ann Chih, and David R. Harris. "The Colors of Poverty: Why Racial & Ethnic Disparities Persist." National Poverty Center Policy Briefs. [http://www.npc.umich.edu/publications/policy\\_briefs/brief16/index.php](http://www.npc.umich.edu/publications/policy_briefs/brief16/index.php) (accessed February 01, 2010).

<sup>xiii</sup> 2008 Oregon Benchmark Race & Ethnicity Report

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<sup>xiv</sup> Nord, Mark, and Margaret Andrews. "Putting Food on the Table: Household Food Security in the United States." USDA Economic Research Service - Home Page. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Amberwaves/Feb03/Features/PuttingFood.htm> (accessed December 3, 2009).

<sup>xv</sup> 2008 Oregon Benchmark Race & Ethnicity Report

<sup>xvi</sup> 2008 Oregon Benchmark Race & Ethnicity Report

<sup>xvii</sup> Holland, P.(2001).The false linking of race and causality :Lessons from standardized testing. *Race & Society*, 4, 219–233.

<sup>xviii</sup> Community Affairs Offices of the Federal Reserve System and Brookings Institution. "The Enduring Challenge of Concentrated Poverty in America: Case Studies from Communities Across the U.S.." The Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco: Economic Research, Educational Resources, Community Development, Consumer. <http://www.frbsf.org/cpreport/> (accessed January 3, 2010).

<sup>xix</sup> Native American Youth and Family Center. "Making the Invisible Visible: Portland's Native American Community." Native American Youth and Family Center- Homepage. [www.nayapdx.org/images/making%20the%20invisible%20document/VisibleCampaign-%28proof%29.pdf](http://www.nayapdx.org/images/making%20the%20invisible%20document/VisibleCampaign-%28proof%29.pdf) (accessed February 5, 2010).

<sup>xx</sup> The Enduring Challenge of Concentrated Poverty in America: Case Studies from Communities Across the U.S.

<sup>xxi</sup> Urban League of Portland. "StateofBlackOregon." Urban League of Portland. <http://www.ulpdx.org/StateofBlackOregon.html> (accessed December 16, 2010).

<sup>xxii</sup> The Enduring Challenge of Concentrated Poverty in America: Case Studies from Communities Across the U.S.

<sup>xxiii</sup> For Those Who Can't Afford Free Speech. <http://streetroots.wordpress.com/2009/08/05/west-meets-east-interview-with-ronault-polo-catalani/> (accessed January 17, 2010).

<sup>xxiv</sup> The Enduring Challenge of Concentrated Poverty in America: Case Studies from Communities Across the U.S.

<sup>xxv</sup> Israel, Dr.P.H., M.P.H., Barbara. "Community-Based Participatory Research: Conference Summary." *Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) Home Page*. Department of Human Services, n.d. Web. 3 Feb. 2010. <http://www.ahrq.gov/about/cpcr/cbpr/cbpr1.htm#keynote>.[www.ahrq.gov/about/cpcr/cbpr/cbpr1.htm#keynote](http://www.ahrq.gov/about/cpcr/cbpr/cbpr1.htm#keynote)