

Food drive reminds us: Many Americans still struggle with hunger

One year after letter carriers set a food drive record of 77.1 million pounds in donations and also surpassed the 1 billion pounds benchmark in total collections over the history of the drive, NALC branches face a daunting challenge. They aim to keep up the pace, even as the thoughts and charitable giving of many Americans are focused on the residents of Japan following the historic earthquake, tsunami and nuclear crisis. Yet, the numbers of citizens facing hunger here at home continues to rise and shouldn't be overlooked while this nation struggles to rebound from a lingering economic recession.

The 19th annual NALC National Food Drive will be held again on the second Saturday in May—this year, on May 14—and more than 1,300 NALC branches from every state, involving more than 10,000 cities and towns, will help stock community food

banks, pantries and shelters for the summer months. That's especially critical because many children are at risk of hunger with special school lunch and breakfast programs usually suspended during summer vacation.

Two reports issued in March by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), a Washington-based nonprofit organization that works to eradicate hunger and undernutrition in America, underscore how prevalent the problem of hunger is in this country, even in locations that most people would not suspect. (See "The economics of hunger," below.)

Those two reports come after the U.S. Department of Agriculture released the latest statistics measuring hunger in the United States. Those figures show that the number of Americans living in homes lacking sufficient food topped 50 million in 2009, with one in three of those—17.2 million—a child. Those latest figures reflected a 30 percent increase in one year since the 2008 survey.

NALC President Fredric V. Rolando noted the size of the hunger problem in America as he urged all letter carriers to



The economics of hunger in America

Nearly one in five Americans struggled to be able to afford enough food for themselves and their families in 2010, according to a March report by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), a national nonprofit organization working to eradicate hunger and undernutrition in the United States. The report provides an up-to-date examination of how millions of American households in every part of the country continue to struggle with hunger.

The report analyzes data collected as part of the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index project, which has been interviewing almost 1,000 households daily since January 2008. FRAC examined responses

to the question: "Have there been times in the past 12 months when you did not have enough money to buy food that you or your family needed?"

A second report released a week later showed that nearly one in four Americans worry about being able to pay for food in the next year, yet many people are unaware of how serious hunger is in their own community.

The report, based on a survey by Hart Research Associates and commissioned by FRAC and Tyson Foods, Inc., also showed that 59 percent of respondents were surprised to learn that hungry children in the United States typically have at least one parent who has a full-time job.

enthusiastically join in the effort and encouraged citizens to put donations by their mailboxes on May 14.

"It's a sad reality that in 2011, millions of people in the richest country on Earth still struggle with hunger every single day," Rolando said. "Many of us see the harsh effects of poverty firsthand on the routes we walk and drive, Monday through Saturday.

"I'm asking all of our members to lend a hand and support this very important effort," he added.

Postcards on the way

More than 82 million postcards (including 2 million Spanish-language cards), sponsored by the Campbell Soup Company and the U.S. Postal Service, will be delivered just before the drive to remind residents along postal routes to leave food out by their mailboxes on May 14. These will follow more than 44 million special Valpak envelopes that will be delivered throughout April and early May to promote donations.

Campbell President and CEO Douglas R. Conant said his company would work hard to ensure that communities support the NALC food drive.

"Over the past year, we have pledged to bring greater focus than ever to fighting hunger in the communities where we operate," Conant said.

Jim Sampey, chief operating officer of Valpak/Cox Media, voiced his company's support as well. "It has been eight years since we began our support for the NALC Stamp Out Hunger food drive," he said, "and we are proud and humbled to be able to join forces and lend a hand once again by prominently featuring this great cause on the Valpak envelope, to motivate our audience and activate almost 180 franchise offices and their advertisers throughout the country."

National Rural Letter Carriers' Association President Don Cantriel told President Rolando that the NRLCA "is proud to align ourselves with such a noble and distinguished cause."

"I thank you and your members personally for championing the fight against hunger in America," Cantriel said.



Lynn Brantley, president and CEO of the Capital Area Food Bank in Washington, DC, said the survey confirms what her organization sees every day.

"Hunger affects more than the homeless," she said. "It also impacts people who are employed but simply don't make enough to consistently feed themselves or their family."

The variations in food hardship by region in 2010 were substantial. In the starkest difference, the rates in the Southeast (21.1 percent) and Southwest (20.8 percent) are one-third higher than in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions.

In 21 states, at least one in five respondents answered the food hardship question in the affirmative; in 45

states, 15 percent or more answered the question "yes."

In 177 of the 436 congressional districts (including the District of Columbia), one-fifth or more of all respondent households reported food hardship in the 2009-2010 period.

"There still are unprecedented numbers of Americans who are struggling with no wages or low wages, and we can see the impact of that struggle in the food hardship data," FRAC President Jim Weill said. "The data in this report show that food hardship—running out of money to buy the food that families need—is a substantial challenge in every corner of this country."

Additional information and the full reports can be accessed through the FRAC website, frac.org.



Joining the cause

Also joining this year to support the drive as national partners along with USPS, the NRLCA, Campbell Soup and Valpak are the AFL-CIO, United Way Worldwide and

its local United Way organizations, the national food bank network Feeding America, and Uncle Bob's Self Storage, which is providing trucking assistance for the food drive in its participating locations throughout the nation.

Many others are helping out as well. AARP, in coordination with International Paper, is supplying special paper bags for drives throughout Alabama and in five metropolitan areas in the country. In Florida, Georgia and South Carolina, Publix food stores—a longtime supporter of the drive—will again provide more than 8 million plastic bags to be delivered to postal customers courtesy of the Postal Service. In Oregon, Wells Fargo Bank is supplying plastic bags for the drive, and in northern California, International Paper has supplied paper bags.

Picking up food donations in dense urban centers has proved problematic in the past, but last year, Chicago Branch

11 gave it a try, an effort that resulted in a major increase in donations. This year, New York City Branch 36 and Brooklyn Branch 41 will employ a similar strategy.

Through the generous assistance of Feeding America and Campbell Soup, radio and television outlets across the nation will receive a recorded public service announcement featuring actor and musician Nick Cannon. Cannon also is highlighted on a public service announcement for magazines and on the food drive postcard alongside NALC Region 1 food drive coordinator Paula Miller.

Cannon, a member of Feeding America's Entertainment Council (and husband of singer Mariah Carey), said his family turned to food pantries for assistance from time to time when he was growing up. "So, I know firsthand how important this food drive is," he said.

The PSA will be available soon on both YouTube and Facebook.

As the final food drive push was underway, political and governmental officials, our corporate partners and NALC branches were making sure that every American knows that May 14 is a special day.

Campbell Soup, the drive's hallmark corporate supporter for more than 15 years, also has arranged for advertisements to be placed in numerous national magazines and in Sunday newspaper coupon fliers just before the drive. Campbell's also is providing participating NALC branches with inflatable soup cans promoting the drive, and it maintains the official Facebook and Twitter social networking sites.

Michigan carrier dies on route



Western Wayne County, MI Br.

2184 letter carrier Nancy Schafer was killed March 8 after she fell through the porch floor of a home on her regular route. A letter carrier for nearly 18 years,

Schafer was delivering mail to the Dundee residence when its porch collapsed. She fell nearly 10 feet into a cellar beneath the porch and was crushed when the porch's concrete slabs fell on her. Investigators later found that rust had caused the porch floor's steel support beams to deteriorate. Members may mail sympathy cards to Schafer's sister, Jill Bradley, at 8530 Dixon Road, Monroe, MI 48161.