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Excerpts and Summary of the Hunger Summit Nov. 21, 2002
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Summary compiled by Edie Jessup, Phoua Moua and Carey Berend

HUNGER SUMMIT

With the Food Stamp Advocates Group

November 21, 2002

Held at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Fresno

The newly released data on Hunger in Fresno and Tulare Counties, the lack of emergency housing funding, the 'falling off welfare', the EBT rollout in Fresno County, rising unemployment figures, and the curtailment of services by several food pantries lead Fresno Metro Ministry and the Community Hunger and Nutrition Forum to call for a serious discussion **at once** to find a way for us to prevent deep problems for our neighbors.

Phoua Moua: My name is Phoua, and I'm with Fresno Metro Ministry on the Hunger and Nutrition Project. Edie Jessup, Project Coordinator is ill and unable to be here. We are meeting here today to address some of the issues that we're going to be facing in the next few months with food and hunger in our Valley. Before we convene, there was an NPR report that aired a few weeks ago, and I want to play that for everybody (the transcript is included in your packet). This report was done after the CHIS/UCLA Health and Hunger data came out November 6, 2002.

NPR report was played.

Phoua Moua: This report, I think gave us a good overview of what's going on with hunger in California and more specifically here in the Central Valley with Tulare County and Fresno County. In your packet you also have a copy of the CHIS data that was done by UCLA, and I want to call your attention to the map that has a really black hole in the middle, and that's Fresno County and Tulare County with **36% to 45% food insecurity**. The CHIS data was done as an over-the-phone survey and interview, and this may not have reached many low-income and farm workers who may not have access to a phone. As you can see, we still have a lot of work that we need to do here, and the numbers are probably higher than these numbers.

What is going on with your agencies or what are you doing in your agencies to help with the hunger situation? I'm going to start with Steve Rodriguez Deputy Director of Fresno County Employment and Temporary Assistance, who has the Fresno County food stamp report; and our county update on the numbers for families that will be falling off welfare this coming year; and what is Fresno County doing with that.

Steve Rodriguez, Deputy Director of Fresno County Employment and Temporary Assistance:

I've got a handout here to give you a little bit of a briefing, an overview of what's happening in Fresno County during the last year or so. First of all, I'd like to make some clarifications. The CHIS study was done by UCLA, and I think it's a good study. It's something that we can all use as a starting point. We need to make sure that we understand the data. It's not 41 and 36 percent of a population of the adults. It's of the people surveyed, of the **population under 200 percent poverty**, which is still an important factor. That's a very important factor. We just need to keep it perspective. It's not, the radio kind of presentation, I mean it's like it's 40 percent of the population, and I don't want people going away thinking there are 41 percent of people in Tulare County going hungry. It's 41 percent of the people that they surveyed in that part of the population. And it's still a significant number, it's a very important number, and here in Fresno it's 36 percent, 35.6 percent.

What I want to do is give you an overview of some of the things that we've done as far as Food Stamp Program in Fresno County. In the past normally what I do is I give you the back part, the

back sheets of the data, and the last one I gave you, the chart, if you want to start in the very back where you have the chart, you can see what we've done over the last five years starting in 1999, and what I've done is I've included the first chart as the households. The next one, the green one are the persons in the households that receive cash aid and food stamps. So they're on CalWORKS program. They may be working. A good percentage, **over 50 percent of that population is working but they still don't make enough and they still qualify for cash aid and food stamps, and a lot of them have Medi-Cal as well.** So I'm giving you some numbers here to show how many households and what those households represent for cash aid and food stamps. Back in 1998 you've got 72,900 people receiving that, and currently you have 67,191 persons receiving food stamps in those households. Also there are people who do not receive cash aid but do receive food stamps. That's the bottom two charts. The yellow represents the households, and the orange represents the number of people in those households. So you can see there are 26,306 receiving what we call non-assistance food stamps. They're not receiving cash aid, but they do receive food stamp benefits. So if you added those together it is a little **over 93,000 people currently being served on average each month in Fresno County that are receiving some aid through the Food Stamp Program.** I think that's a tribute to the cooperation we've been getting from all of you, through the community-based organizations in helping us get the word out, through our increased outreach efforts over the last couple years. It's been a collaborative effort, and we appreciate all of your help in trying to pursue some of those efforts and get the word out and get the applications out. **We are currently issuing applications through some of the community-based organizations for food stamps, the organizations like Salvation Army had agreed to take those applications and hand them out to clients and help them in some cases assist them in filling out those applications and then they mail it in to us so that we can process them and have them come in and complete it.**

If you go over to the front page, getting back to the front page just to kind of give an overview, there are 68,269 clients on average per month that received public assistance (CalWorks) and food stamps during the last fiscal year, 2001-2002. There were an additional 25,267 on average per month that receive non-assistance food stamps (not receiving CalWorks). **We estimate 63 percent of those clients were children.** And as you can see based on our last statistics for this year we're averaging 26,306 non-assistance food stamps through September. So the program is continuing to grow. People are in need. We are continuing our outreach efforts. We have two units of staff who are continuing to go out to specific sites with the community-based organizations in some cases. In other cases we have clinics and community centers that we staff on a regular basis and then try to provide the access to the people out in the rural sites especially. That's a very important area that we've been trying to focus on. So the total of that is over 93,000 clients that are receiving food stamps monthly, and that's an average of what it was last year. An interesting fact, I thought, was that based on Fresno County, you see the high numbers in that study that we had. **Based on that 93,000, you compare that to the CHIS study which projected out 80 some thousand people that were going hungry, and it's pretty close to a similar number. You don't know whether that is in addition to this 93,000 or part of or what the overlap is, but I'm sure there's a part of that that's the same population.** There's an overlap there. But that represents **almost 12 percent of Fresno County's population that is currently receiving food stamps.** That's a significant number. Kern County, for example, has 8 percent of theirs receiving food stamps. Question?

Participant question: (Inaudible.)

Steve Rodriguez: Correct. That's what they're averaging out based on current federal and state requirements that we have to follow and what they're eligible for.

Diane Scott: I'd like to get it in dollars and cents. How much is allocated for each person?

Steve Rodriguez: There is a chart. If you're asking how much they qualify for, there is a chart of federal guidelines that we have to follow, **federal and state guidelines that establish what the amount is.** Hold on a second, because I do have some information on that. That would be actual

average that we experience per family, per household, and it may average out to what those families have, but I'm not going to say that without having statistics here. There is a chart that we use that's published for our staff, and it identifies for a single person, family of two, family of three, and so forth, what they would qualify for based on a certain gross income and a certain net income, and that then depends on what they have as far as income and assets as to how much they can actually get, and it all has to be budgeted out and calculated by the eligibility workers. But what we did with that amount is that represents based on actually working out the budgets for the average family that comes in for assistance, that's how much they on average receive.

Diane Scott: You know, adding that amount to the person's other income...

Steve Rodriguez: And I have to say that, I believe, is for the non-assistance food stamp family, not the ones receiving cash aid. **So the non-assistance food stamp families, just so you know, are those that usually have some kind of income. They're working. They in most cases do not qualify or for whatever reasons choose not to apply for cash aid.** And so then what they do is they have some income coming in from some source, whether it is work or some other area, and they still qualify and apply for food stamps, and that's what the average is that they receive. Yes?

Diane Scott: Does this amount to enough for basic nutritional need?

Steve Rodriguez: Well, you have to understand, too, **food stamps were never intended to provide a total source of food for a family.** It was not set up by either us or the state that way. The federal program was set up to provide *additional* nutritional food to a family to help them through based on certain income levels, and we have no control over that. The only thing we can do in those situations is try to advocate for federal changes to that law. We have a problem. **We're a county entity, which is an arm of the state implementing both state and federal regulations, and what we're doing is we're having to follow that, and I'm not saying whether it is or isn't enough.** I don't know. I couldn't say that it probably is, but I'm not in a position to change that unilaterally either. That's why I think we're all here together trying to work for answers.

Participant question: (Inaudible.)

Steve Rodriguez: Well, I don't know that the Food Stamp Program...what we can do is try to help in providing the services. I think what we need all of you here to do is try to coordinate with us in establishing a process that will allow us to provide those services, if that's a place to start.

Anyway, if there aren't any other questions, what I'd like you to do is look over that information that I handed out, and you can see that some of the things we've identified are the **barriers**. Looking at the length of the application, that has been addressed somewhat because we have a shorter application now, and we're working with Edie in getting those out to the community-based organizations. *We'd also like to maybe set up a training session for community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, anyone who's interested in helping us distribute those applications and assist clients in filling them out might want some training, and we have some staff that might be available to assist in helping learn how the application should be filled out so that it speeds up the process of getting information out and services to clients.* But anyway, the VFA form, the state now has shortened the application somewhat. It's down to about four pages. **The statewide finger imaging system, that's something that we're all agreeing that that needs to be eliminated, and the state agrees that they would be willing to look at a study of this and whether it is effective or not in determining whether or not they would consider elimination of the fingerprint imaging system. But that's something that we feel hinders a lot of people, especially those who may not have legal status, from coming in and asking for assistance even though we keep telling them that it's not a public charge.** Receiving Food Stamps **will not** be held against them for getting their relatives and family in through legal means later on. But they have that doubt in their mind. It's a matter of trust and building up a relationship, and as long as they have that doubt in their mind they're not willing to take a chance if they can survive without it.

Participant comment: It's not just trust in you, it's trust with anyone else.

Steve Rodriguez: It's trust with anybody that they deal with, and if they're going to accept services they don't want to be caught after the fact and it's too late to do anything about it. **And I know INS has not been willing to help us in that endeavor. They've not been willing to come out with a public statement saying that it is or isn't. We've tried to work with them, but they will not put anything in writing.** I know all of you have tried working with them as well, and we've had some efforts in trying to explain to clients what a public charge is or isn't and the benefits they can receive without being a public charge.

Another barrier is the stigma and embarrassment of using paper coupons, that's soon going to be eliminated with the issuance of the electronic benefit transfer card, the **EBT card**. It's like an ATM card, so they'll be using that. It's like an ATM once it goes into grocery stores, and that will be coming in the spring.

And then we have the **inadequate benefits** – you brought that up earlier – whether they're adequate to meet a family's needs or not. And that's an issue, that's a barrier. Property and auto rules. **We're trying to get some more flexibility in allowing some property and auto rules that allow families to be eligible that are not currently eligible because of the property or auto that they have.**

Participant question: Do you have the dollar figures for the auto requirement?

Steve Rodriguez: The auto allowance is for vehicles valued under \$4,650. If your car is worth (Blue Book) more than \$4,650, you cannot get Food Stamps.

Participant question: Is that housing or just for an automobile?

Steve Rodriguez: Automobile only, the value.

And then we have the burdens **of paperwork and monthly reporting that's required. Right now all Food Stamp recipients have to report each month their income and any changes. We will be going to a quarterly report, hopefully in July or August.** The state has included that in their legislation to pursue quarterly reporting. It was initially supposed to be implemented in July. We're hearing through the grapevine now that it may be pushed back to August, so we're anxiously waiting for that too, because it would simplify the process for us and provide services to those clients. Another barrier that we have is the Welfare to Work drop-off, and that will impact their cash aid. It's my understanding they will still qualify for food stamps, but that's the five-year limit.

Denise Carmen: Do they have to reapply for food stamps when they're discontinued from TANF (CalWorks, after 60 months)? Do they need to reapply to qualify for food stamps, or are their food stamps automatically continued?

Steve Rodriguez: No, no. They can continue. The only thing that stops is the cash aid. **They don't have to reapply.**

Denise Carmen: Will the food stamps increase if they are not receiving cash aid?

Steve Rodriguez: The food stamps will be based on the same family unit, so they will stay the same. Now the cash aid may increase. Actually it may increase. I take that back, because it depends on what income they have, and so depending on the lack of that income, if they don't have any other way of making up that income (from CalWorks) it could affect the amount of food stamps they do receive. But they don't have to reapply, and that's an important factor because we don't want the problems associated with having them come back in, the delay in food stamps and so forth.

Some of the things that we've identified at the bottom to improve accessibility to food stamps, **Fresno County supports legislation to simplify the application process and to align food stamp rules with federal, which is a TANF, rules for program simplification.** I don't know how familiar a lot of you are with the Food Stamp Program, but California has taken some authorization under federal rules to implement a state-only program. What that's done is that's created a lot of complexities for our staff. They have to jump through a lot more hoops for people who may not be federally eligible but state eligible or for people who...or if there are some state restrictions that wouldn't be applied under federal restriction or criteria. They have the California Food Assistance program, what we call the CFAP program, and that will be going away this next year, and there will be more federally eligible families under that program which is good for everybody because then there is only one program instead of multiple levels of the program.

And also, for us – it's not an issue from a consumer perspective, but for us it's an issue – **Fresno County, as you may have read in the paper, is being considered to be sanctioned by the federal government for having an error rate that was in excess of the national tolerance.** Part of the reason that that error rate was so high was because of California's specific rules that we have to comply with that caused us to make some errors that wouldn't have been made under the federal guidelines if there were just federal criteria. **So we are looking at a possible sanction of 2.3 million dollars in Fresno County because we exceeded an error rate back in 2001** that was above the tolerance established by the federal government, and we're doing everything we can in working through the state with the federal government to see what we can do to try to reduce that sanction over the next several years, **but right now they're asking for half of that up front**, and as you know, we just don't have the money in Fresno County to keep current programs going let alone trying to pay money out of our pocket for something that happened back in 2001. **We have improved to the point where we right now are about 8.3 percent error rate, which is under federal tolerance**, whatever it is, it's under federal tolerance, which is really good for Fresno County right now. Federal tolerance is close to about 9 percent, so we want to keep it there, and we're doing everything we can with our workers to try to make sure they're calculating budgets correctly and giving the right amount of food stamps to the client, because if they give it over it's counted against us just as badly as an under issuance. *It doesn't matter whether you give them \$10 over this month and \$10 under last month. It may balance out the same, but that's a \$20 error to the federal government. We erred both ways.*

So those are the things that we as a county, as a legal entity are trying to comply with as we look at how we can improve access. **Everybody is saying improve access, improve access, get the food stamps out, but then the rules and regulations are set up such that we're being penalized if we make errors and mistakes, so we have to be careful from a governmental perspective because it's still taxpayers money that's going out.** But we're doing everything we can within the parameters set up to look at some of these issues.

We're looking at the Electronic Benefits Transfer program, which I mentioned earlier, will eliminate the paper coupon system and replace it with a type of debit card similar to a bankcard. That gets rid of some of the stigma associated with coupons. If you've been in grocery stores you see people using coupons, and you can see that some of them are kind of embarrassed to be showing coupons, especially when you have the clerk yell over that they need somebody to sign off on food stamp coupons and everybody sort of hears them talk about it. It's not something that anybody would be proud of necessarily, and I think this might help people realize that they don't have to be ashamed, that it's more of a nutrition program. They need to take advantage of it if it's there and they need it.

Also we have an increase in able-bodied adults without dependents (using Food Stamps), the ABAWD waivers. A lot of adults between the ages of 18 and 50 without dependents receive food stamps for a limited period of time. **That ABAWD came into effect May of last year.** It will go through April of this coming year. It's actually a baker's dozen, 13-month program. It was supposed to be a 12-month waiver program that allows adults without dependents to qualify without having to search every three months for a job. Before they had to go through an eight-week job search, and because Fresno County had such a high unemployment rate they felt, well why are they searching for jobs that may not exist? Why are we making them jump through all these hoops? And

in essence they're looking for jobs that aren't there. And so what we've done **is we submitted a waiver on behalf of the Board of Supervisors, and it was approved, and Fresno County is one of the few counties, I understand, that has a waiver in effect right now to allow people to qualify for food stamps once they pass the initial eight weeks. It's actually being reduced down to a four-week job search but only one time during the year.**

Then we also have the food stamp outreach, increased mailings, brochures, advertising, community presentations in which we have our outreach units working with either health fairs, community fairs, any kind of community organization. We try to get in touch with them and **coordinate our outreach efforts for both Medi-Cal and food stamps** because those are so tightly knitted together. **You need nutrition, and you need healthcare too**, and so our outreach efforts are focused more towards those two programs than anything. We've increased that significantly during the last two years.

We also have a number of locations that have increased that are willing to accept food stamps and where we accept food stamp applications, and that's again with the services of the community based organizations utilizing community centers in rural sites and in metropolitan areas, and that's significantly improved the number of food stamps, and that's why it continues to grow and especially the non-assistance food stamp category. You see some significant increases in the number of people that are taking advantage of that program. And we also are looking at continued collaboration with food bank advocacy groups and local community-based organizations to address any outreach efforts we can with the resources that we have and try to maximize them, be creative, and think of new ways of providing services. Yes?

Participant question: Do you work with the school system?

Steve Rodriguez: Yes we do. Actually, some of our sites are at school sites, and we continue to work with them on any kind of school fairs, carnivals, any kind of activity where it may involve community efforts we try to get in touch with that and coordinate our outreach unit with them so that we can provide services at those school sites.

Participant question: (Inaudible.)

Steve Rodriguez: Yes we do. But we also have a couple school sites that we actually have staff visit on a regular basis. So what we're looking for is new, creative ways. What are we not doing that we can do with the resources we have? And part of that is **we're trying to ask for community-based organizations to be more active in being our arms to stretch a little farther out. We have information, we can train people, but we don't have the bodies to put out there as much as we would like to.** We need to have you be some of our extension, some of our bodies and assist us in any way we can to get more access to clients.

Sandy Beals: Steve, I have a question. Your paper here says that **Fresno County issued \$84 million in food stamps. Is that over a one-year period?**

Steve Rodriguez: Yes it is. That's over the 2001-2002 fiscal year that was ending June 30.

Sandy Beals: That's almost all, if not all, federal and state money. I would certainly think that county officials would be interested in that kind of money coming into the economy.

Steve Rodriguez: Yes, and you can see that it's greater than 16 states and territories. We did some analysis evaluating what our issuance was compared to other states. **We found that we were issuing as much if not more than 16 states and territories in Fresno County alone.** And being in Fresno County we also have to remember that we're the bread basket, but, because of the nature of farming, you're going to have a lot more lower-level paying jobs, so we are going to have a higher

percentage of people who are under that 200 percent poverty level. I'm not (**inaudible**) it, I'm just saying it's a statement of fact, but we have to deal with it.

Diane Scott: We also have a very high unemployment rate.

Steve Rodriguez: Yes, and we historically have had a high unemployment rate, unfortunately.

Holly Porter: Steve, I know you said that a lot of the error rate is due to state policies or state regulations that sort of negatively impact the counties. **Are there reasons that are specific to our county that make our error rate so high compared to other counties in the state?** Are there specific things about Fresno County, and then also what's the likelihood that they're going to give some sort of breaks on the \$2.3 million?

Steve Rodriguez: The likelihood of giving us any kind of break is probably nil at this point. On the other question is there anything specific in Fresno County for the previous error rate being so high compared to what it is now? The single factor we can point to possibly may have been the cycle conversion. **We had multiple cycles that we issued checks. We had about six cycles we issued checks, and we got rid of that down to just one cycle now,** and that has improved our ability to do the work through a one-month period without having multiple deadlines. You have one deadline, and that's probably helped us the most.

Holly Porter: So where's that money going to come from? Where is the \$2.3 million going to come from?

Steve Rodriguez: I don't have the answer. We're going to have to work with the state. First of all, we don't want to say that we're going to pay it yet, because **we feel there is a state obligation involved here. I mean, the state set up the rules, the state set up the regulations, the state then said, okay, now county you have to do it, and then when the county can't do it, oh, by the way, we're passing the bill on to you to pay,** and we had no say in how the regulations were set up or what had to be done to comply with it, but now we're being held accountable for how it was set up. So one of the things that we're looking at is trying to work with the state to the best of our ability and determine what that sharing relationship is for the paying of the funds, because we're not in the position to necessarily be able to come up with that the way the state would like us to come up with it. And I'm sure the other counties are in the same situation.

Participant question: Without getting too incredibly arcane or taking an incredibly long time, are there a couple of examples you could give about ways that the state requirements are different from the federal requirements that makes it difficult to work with?

Participant question: Isn't the basic problem that you have two sets of regulations?

Steve Rodriguez: Yes it is. You do have two sets of regulations. You've got to determine whether or not someone is federally eligible or state eligible, and depending on whether they're federally eligible they follow one set of rules, but if you think they're federally eligible and you follow that set of rules and it turns out they're not federally eligible but they were state eligible, but even if they've got the same dollar, even if they got \$150 in food stamps and that's what they should have gotten with the state but you put them under the federal instead it's counted as a \$150 error even if it was the right amount of food issuance that they're supposed to get. So it's just determining the rules and regulations for eligibility are so complicated that the state sets up parallel systems for state-only clients and we have to go through two sets of regulations in assessing not only families but individuals within that family. You may have a mother with a couple children and a father and the mother may be state eligible because they're not a citizen of the United States. The father may be a citizen and their kids may be citizens or one may be a non-citizen from Mexico, another may be born here and a citizen and they have four different sets of rules you've got to follow before you determine that family's

food stamp allocation. And it's very complex for the workers that have to go through that and follow all the guidelines for each individual before they can determine that family, and one error in one of the individuals can mess up the allocation for the whole family. So it makes it very complicated.

Participant question: So it sounds like one of the things that's different is that California may provide food stamp assistance to non-citizens where the federal government may not, or is there a different income cut-off as far as what is considered eligible between the state and (inaudible)?

Steve Rodriguez: No, we follow federal guidelines for that. I think the bigger picture we have to focus on here is looking at this coming season and seeing how we need to improve access to available services. I think that's why we're all here together, not discussing per se the regulations. We can discuss those and see where we need to set the direction and the advocacy, and we are doing that.

We had a policy meeting last month up in Sacramento where we established some platforms to pursue including some of the ones I identified here – getting rid of the finger imaging process and simplifying the application process and some of these things, the quarterly reports, getting rid of the car and asset limits so it's more flexible. Those are all things that I think everybody is agreeable that we need to work on, but I think we need to look at more the immediate need, what are we going to do in the next three to five months.

Participant question: I just have a quick question. Is there a limit on how long somebody can receive food stamps? And with the unemployment rate as high as it is, for those who aren't receiving cash aid because they've been cut off but are still eligible for food stamps and they can't get work because we have an unemployment rate as high as we do, how many people is the County allowed to waive in terms of allowing them to continue to get cash aid even though they've been continuing beyond five years?

Steve Rodriguez: There is no allowance for continuing beyond five years. First of all, let me get back to the food stamp question. **There is no time limit for food stamps.** That's not a time-limit benefit, so as long as they qualify with income they can continue to receive those food stamp benefits. **The cash aid is a federal and state-timed benefit, and once they are off cash aid because of the time limit, what we're going to in Fresno County is a vendor payment program.** *The Board has approved a vendor payment program to ensure the shelter and utilities are paid and that the children are not left out on the street. We are going to make sure that the payments are done through a vendor payment. The checks are issued directly to the landlord and to the utility company. The money will not go to the family for those services. That's after the time limit is up and the adults no longer end up eligible for cash aid. That doesn't eliminate the cash aid to the children.* The children will continue to receive that, but to ensure the shelter and utilities are paid so that the children are taken care of and have shelter the payments are going directly to the landlord and the utility companies. It will not go to the families, though, because we have families that end up in Child Protective Services because the family gets the money, misuses the money, they get evicted from their homes, and the children are out on the street, and we don't want that to happen. And so in Fresno County the Board (of Supervisors) has approved a vendor payment program once the people have timed out on it. I'm not going to give you numbers for the timed out because initially I know there were some numbers given out at a meeting, but we've been asked to re-evaluate that given that...we have to give families credit for child receiving child support payments that count towards their cash aid so that's not actually a use of cash aid because they receive child support, and we have to go back and back out the number of families who receive child support and will continue to receive benefits for a longer period than would normally have done without the child support, so it's not going to be the large number of people that dropped off that we thought initially might drop off. It's going to be a much smaller number, and **I don't want to give out any numbers right now because we're still evaluating what that will be, but it's not going to be anywhere near what the initial numbers that you may have heard were.** But that's going to be based on federal requirements and state requirements that we have to follow.

Phoua Moua: Thank you Steve. I just want all of you to know, we usually have the Food Stamp Advocates meeting on this day (last Thursday) every month, so if anybody wants to get updates on what's going on with Fresno County Food Stamps and some of the advocacy work going around it I would like to invite all of you to attend these meetings. We don't have anybody from the County of Tulare to do a quick report, but we do have **Sandy Beals** from Tulare FoodLink (Food Bank). I would like her to do a quick report on what she's seen at the FoodLink and Tulare County.

Sandy Beals: Thanks Phoua. I'm not a county official or work for food stamps, so I didn't bring you a nice statistical report. I work with FoodLink, which is a food bank, not-for-profit charity servicing Tulare County area, and I can certainly report to you what we see, and it's basically Fresno plus one. The unemployment rate – I'm looking at Fresno's – is what, 13 right now, and of course that will be going up. Ours is 19, and it will hit at its peak usually around March depending on the season. It will hit somewhere between 20 and 22 percent of people who are actively looking for work and cannot find a job. It's partly due to there just simply are not enough jobs for the people who need jobs and partly because of the nature of an agrarian economy. Jobs are seasonal. There is work when there's work, and when there's no work you don't have a job. It's just the nature of the economy. So why are people going hungry? They are not able to work enough, and when they do work they don't make enough money. I'm really glad to see the folks from Kaiser here today because you get it that this is a health issue. **Hunger is not a poverty issue, it is a health issue, and that affects every human being in the economy and in our society, and if we don't solve this problem immediately, if not sooner, it's going to become so overwhelming that we're looking at a next generation that's been malnourished as children, they're not going to have the brain and development capacity to learn in school, they can't learn in school. How are they going to get jobs even if the economy does get better? We're really investing in a pretty poor future if we don't do something about this right now.**

I want to talk very briefly about what food banks do. **FoodLink serves Tulare County, Community Food Bank serves Fresno County.** We are private nonprofit charities. We accept food donations, and both food banks have been quite successful. Each one of us will distribute about 7 million pounds of food this year. **This is nowhere near enough to meet the need.** We formed in a response to the growing rate of people going hungry, and it's at its peak right now barring disaster years. That's a different story, but... (Inaudible) **Emergency Food: the food bank, the food pantry, the food distribution centers weren't meant to be a normal permanent part of any community.** That is not healthy. We're supposed to be a stopgap emergency thing, and that is not what we've become. So this is a huge issue, and **I don't want us to think that throwing food at it is going to get it.** That's a Band-Aid. We need to do that. **We can't have people going hungry, but that's not enough.** It's a big issue. Thanks.

Phoua Moua: Thank you Sandy. I would also like to talk about what is going on with FEMA. The FEMA money is the emergency food and housing utility money that is used up until the March allocation. I would like Ken Smiley who is from Fresno Metro Ministry and sits on the local FEMA Board to talk a little about this, and also if Paula Scribner can report quickly on what is happening with Salvation Army with their FEMA money.

Ken Smiley, Fresno Metro Ministry: Well, pretty much what we are learning is that **monies for rents have already been used up and that what's happening right now is anyone who applies for money for rent, there is nothing, and until the March allocations those monies are nonexistent.**

Participant question: Does that include utilities?

Paula Scribner, Salvation Army: **Yes, the emergency food and shelter program funds for housing and for the utility payments have all been spent.** The Salvation Army is still using the

Reach Program. We have funds for that usually year-round. We try to make it year-round if we can do that. But that money is spent. We have in December the spend-or-lose date, and you know me, I spent it into the community. **What I've found is that when money becomes short the first thing people cut back on is food and then their utilities and when they don't pay their rent that means that there is a lot going on in their house.** I just want to briefly let you know that **our food pantry has just been overwhelmed this week. Yesterday in the five hours that we were open we did about 130 families, and that's probably twice what we did last year at this time, and we turned away probably another 40 to 50 families.** We just didn't have time to do it. So the demand for food this week and next are usually traditionally very high because of the holiday, but this year it is extremely high for food. People just are looking for food and PG&E assistance. We do probably 20 families a day four days a week with utility assistance.

Ken Smiley: Additionally **some of the distribution people are having to cut back on their days, to cut back on their staff,** and so some of the centers that would be open regularly are not open now because of their own financial situations.

Steve Rodriguez: (Inaudible) say that you have to use it by December or lose it?

Paula Scribner: The emergency food and shelter money, yes.

Steve Rodriguez: So even though January and February are very difficult months there's nothing left?

Paula Scribner: Right. There's no federal money at all available, emergency food and shelter money. There is nothing for January, February. Most of the time they get it late March. So **we're telling people that I won't have that money if I get it until April or May** because realistically, if I don't get it until March 30, it's going to be April before I'm ready to go.

Steve Rodriguez: Why was that set up that way when the winter months usually I think nationally would be the timing where there is the highest demand?

Paula Scribner: I don't know. That's just the way the federal program is. You know, those words, I hate is, it's always been that way, but I don't have any control over it and that's just the funding. The way it goes is the calendar year instead of the fiscal year.

Steve Rodriguez: Because like Sandy said earlier too, this is an agrarian society. **The winter months are usually the peak demand periods for all services, not just shelter or PG&E. But for us as well as for the food banks everybody is coming in through the door right and left, and we have lines out the buildings waiting to get benefits, and I think a lot of that is part of being an agrarian society, the low-income and the low-paying jobs and the non-availability of jobs. But it would seem like someone like FEMA would have the foresight to be able to anticipate timing.**

Ken Smiley: I think it's not so much that timing not taken into account as much as it is that there are so many people who are right now asking for money. I can remember last year that we were allocating all the money spent and then we gave extra money back to FEMA. You remember that, don't you?

Paula Scribner: Well, the reason there was extra money was because an agency that had been allocated could not spend it, so we had to reallocate it.

Ken Smiley: Exactly. So that it isn't, in my opinion – and this is from Ken Smiley- You can take that for whatever it's worth – there are so many more people who are now asking that we are out of money now. And I'm not sure that we are always out by November. And our meeting was much earlier than

this time right now, and so we didn't just run out now, we ran out before now. And I believe **it was the October meeting when we were told that we were out of FEMA money.**

Paula Scribner: I've been involved with this funding site for probably about 15 years, and it's always been no money in these three to four months. Our applications go in December, and then we work in January and February.

Diane Hanzlicek, PAR: We had food USDA commodity distribution in our church here today. We registered 50 more families and we had 80 more people. We were there for four hours. We had 237 people come for *a total of 749 people that will be fed, and this is just in this zip code.* We've been doing this for 10 years, and we're seeing a lot of the same people that we saw the first year that we were doing it, but *we're getting a lot more people, a lot more Asian families, a lot more Hispanic families and African-Americans, a lot of disabled people and elderly* in our zip code.

Steve Rodriguez: If I could, too, just to kind of give you a heads up. Many of you may not know, but the state budget was balanced kind of with some smoke and mirrors, and one of the ways it was balanced is the governor said that he was going to balance it with \$750 million of cuts to be determined at a later date. So we're anticipating that we might have our share of \$750 million cuts. **We just went to the board recently with some cuts in our department. We're taking some more over the next week or so to the board for additional cuts for about \$3 million** based on what the state already had in the budget, and that's not taking into consideration the \$750 million they still have to come through with. **So we're not looking optimistically towards any additional changes in the budget as being very helpful. But we anticipate it will trickle down to the counties.**

Phoua Moua: Thank you. Other situations are housing dislocation. I know that FIRM has been working on this issue. I don't know if everybody knows about it. What I know is that Kingswood Apartments are getting bought out and those people now living there are mainly low-income and are getting basically kicked out of their apartments for the renovation, and then after the renovation I know they will be upping the rent by about \$200 more. If the representative from FIRM would like to make any comments on what is going on and how FIRM is doing with it?

Andrey Kovalenko, Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Missions: FIRM is still working on that issue. As was mentioned, Kingswood Apartments are looking forward to doing the renovation, and they had to relocate people who live over there, and after renovation it's going to be increased \$200 in rent. And also they're not going to accept Section 8 applicants anymore. It's really hard right now. The same owner of Kingswood bought **another eight apartment buildings**, and I think it's going to be the same issue around Fresno. **(Inaudible.)** We are trying to work out a solution to find places where people need to go or to find a place for Section 8 for those families to go who are on Section 8. It's really, really hard issue.

Participant question: How many units do you expect to lose on Section 8 housing?

Andrey Kovalenko: In Kingswood it is about at least 50 units. **(Inaudible)** I think every unit about eight people in the family **(inaudible)** in only one apartment complex, and if you count seven others you can imagine what the number is for Section 8. And Section 8, right now it's really hard to find place for Section 8, and in January **(Inaudible)**. It's a really big issue for those families.

Phoua Moua: And we already know that here in Fresno and Madera County we have 19,000 homeless, so this is just kind of piling on, and that's what we're here for is to just talk about what we can do in the next few months and what we can do systemically for a longer period of time for these people. On the back of your packet is an unemployment narrative from the EDD - that's Employment Development Department - that came out on November 8. This is for Fresno/Madera, but as you can see it's 10.9 percent in September of this year and it's already up to 13.1. And we know that this may not count the off-season farmworkers.

Holly would you quickly report on what is going on with our Community Food Bank, what are they seeing with their food distributions.

Holly Porter, Community Food Bank: I've been out, I guess, for the past three or four weeks to one of our sites every day, and a lot of the sites are running out of food before the food distribution time ends because they had not anticipated that number of people. But I think in general it's kind of a cycle. It happens every winter, or it seems to. The numbers go up in the wintertime. So in terms of our food and our resources, **cash donations are definitely down**, and I think that's a function of the economy. Whenever there's talk of the economy slowing corporate donors and just regular old folks out there who get a solicitation from us tend to tighten their purse strings and are not giving as much. Food-wise, people always ask well, do you have enough food? **We never have enough food.** There's never enough food. There's not a time when we're going to say, oh yeah, we have enough food. There's always, of course, room to have more food, but I think the whole point of the meeting is to find out what we can do about things, what actions can we take, and just from my perspective and that of my coworkers and my bosses that **community education is the most important thing, because we can send the same people to sit in a room over and over again and talk about the problem, but until the masses of people out there know that the problem exists I think it will continue**, so I think some really aggressive strategies in terms of a media campaign, organizing in that way and getting the word out to everyone that this is such a pressing problem for so many families in our area is probably, I would think, the first step.

Phoua Moua: Now we that we've assessed what's going on here, and I want to know, does anybody here know what other resources we have available for the next few months, for a long term period?

Participant comment: Has there been an effort to do media awareness kinds of efforts in the community that relate hunger and housing issues? I mean, I know we say things like choosing whether you feed your children or pay the rent and so those kinds of choices. Those are issues that I think a lot of people don't recognize in the community at large is the **close connection between hunger and housing and the homeless and information about how the homeless survive on the streets in motels that eat up whatever income they might be able to have in a very short period of time.** And I guess I'm thinking that we need to have more awareness in the community about this connection and also the current market for rentals that's going on. Rentals are being bought up like crazy in the Fresno area because of the relatively good market price, and then they can be put back on the market for rent or for sale after some basic little renovations at a much, much higher price. I found rentals that were going for up to \$20,000 more than the asking price in not especially upscale parts of neighborhoods, and this kind of thing is also impacting. It's not just Kingswood, it's throughout the whole area, and it's not just Section 8 housing. **So even if you were able to manage last year with the rental you had, you may not be there next year because of this market change that's going on. That's a whole part of the hunger issue as far as I'm concerned.**

Phoua Moua: Thank you. When I asked the first question everybody was silent. I don't know if you do know of other resources, and this is what we're trying to figure out. What do we have here? We know that what we have is going away. I mean, it's gone. Do we have any other kind of venue?

Diane Hanzlicek: I think a big missing piece is gleaning. There are a lot of resources out there that are just not being addressed, and **I think if we could get a gleaning program here that would help with fresh food.**

Denise Carmen: But then there are policy issues with that. Sandy can explain.

Sandy Beals: I don't want to be negative, and food banks do a lot of gleaning. Maybe people don't call it that, necessarily, but we do a lot of gleaning in packinghouses and also grocery store salvage and marketables from all kinds of food manufacturers. **Gleaning brings a lot of issues, liability**

issues primarily. And most of the folks whose fields you would want to glean, wisely, I think, don't allow it because they don't want to be sued. So the laws work against gleaning. And having said that the packinghouses (inaudible), which is very generous. I think there aren't that many resources that haven't been tapped, frankly. I mean, I think they've been tapped reasonably well. It doesn't mean we couldn't...if we had more money we could all do better, but not a lot better. I don't think that's the answer. This is my opinion. I think the answer lies with our elected officials. They make the changes, and we can start local. There's only so much that our local folks can do because of the resources. I think we have got to go to the state level, start with our local state people and say we've got a problem here and you need to roundtable it yourselves and work out some solutions. I think our job is to be the voice of the problem. I'm not sure our job is to be the voice of the solution, frankly. I think we're doing a heck of a lot with what little we've got to work with. But if government doesn't make any changes this is not going to get better no matter what we do. That's the reality.

Denise Carmen: We need our voices to be louder.

Participant question: What kind of changes do you suggest?

Sandy Beals: Legislative changes. The state economy is really in the hole, but there's a reason for that. It's because they're...they have plenty of money. They're putting it in places that could be put other places. Budget shift. And I think the people who vote need to make sure that our elected officials know what our priorities are.

Carolina Simunovic: While I agree with Sandy about moving our problems onto local government officials and state officials, I also see the role of this group to be the voice of the solution because many times the solutions that are created at the local or state legislative levels (inaudible) be appropriate (inaudible) to our communities or to the problems at hand, but I think that we have an amazing group of people gathered here today, and we can work on some solutions for this emergency situation that we can then present perhaps to our local government officials, a representative of which is sitting right here at the table, and I think that that's really the role that we should be trying to pursue right now.

Steve Rodriguez: And I have to say I would agree to a certain extent because anything that we look at for legislative changes is not going to be done in time to deal with the short-term issues. Those are longer-term issues that need to be addressed through legislation, and we're more than willing to do our part for the changes that need to take place that will not only improve the program services to clients but could possibly make our job a little bit easier in providing the services to the clients. I think we need to look at what we can do here in new, innovative, creative ways that we haven't thought about yet. We need to get out of the box. We need to say okay, it's not government, I mean, it's not all...yes; we have a responsibility in government. But we need your help too. You can't just say let government do it. It's government's responsibility. It's all our responsibility. We're all here together. We're all in the same boat. We live together, and we need to work together and find different ways of doing things that address this need because we can't wait for somebody else to do it. It won't get done.

Diane Scott: I think that small efforts can only work in small ways. This is a systemic problem, and the efforts are being made to continue this kind of government which does not care about people so this, you know, there are not enough of us to (inaudible). Where is the \$20 billion dollars that is going to go to drop bombs on Iraq while our people are going hungry? That's wrong. That's very wrong. And we need to make changes.

Denise Carmen: The money that goes into government elections could feed a lot of people in and of itself.

Anne Marie Larsen: I think also, though, if I'm hearing you correctly, we do need to make changes at the government level, but the way to do it is not to give it to them and say here make these changes. **Tell them what changes and how, and I think that's kind of the idea of coming here. If we can bring something to the legislators, a direction to move exactly, more specifics, not leave it up to someone else to decide how to change, because they're obviously not moving in the direction that we would like, or slowly, so I think it's really important to try and instead of...it's real easy to focus on all the problems because there are a lot, but maybe, I don't know, you are the experts in your field, and if you guys can think of anything, that's where we need to start.**

Steve Rodriguez: I think everybody is in agreement that we can address legislative issues, we can advocate for those positions as a group and carry a little bit more weight, and **I believe our Board (of Supervisors) would support the majority of those positions that we've talked about today at a legislative level, but at the same time within the parameters we have that I've spoken about, you know, federal guidelines, state guidelines, things that we can and can't do. We need to figure out ways of doing things better and still not break any rules but improve the services to the clients.** And we're going to try to keep our outreach efforts maximized to the extent we can until and **unless the state cuts our funding and we have to reduce staff**, but in the meantime we're moving still full-bore ahead anticipating that curve to be hitting through the winter months of people coming in getting services through our delivery system. And I know the food bank has been doing a wonderful job in getting food out and in their food distribution sites. You've been doing a wonderful job in getting food out too, and we're going to need every bit of that. I'm going to ask a question, though, from the Salvation Army or whoever. **Is this year worse than previous years based on your issuance of benefits or is it same?** How would you compare this year? Because I see a lot of need here, and housing issues set aside – that's a unique situation – I'm not sure that it's that much different from previous years. **I think we have an ongoing problem that hasn't been addressed because of income, because of jobs, things like that.** Is this a worse year in your opinion than previous years? And that's a generic question. Anybody can answer it.

Leann Parry: Just from Kaiser's Community Benefit Program we receive requests from the community for support for various charitable activities, and **just in the last week or so I've gotten several requests for donations to food drives and efforts to get food out that we've never received before, and each time they are saying we have so much more need than we had last year and previous years.** Cornerstone Church estimates that they will need to be prepared to give out food to 14,000 to 15,000 people before Christmas, I mean in that time period.

Ken Smiley: And many of the people who some of us have used where we can pick up foods and then distribute them throughout the churches are already are not able. At Metro Ministry, we were on the phone this week just trying to find places where people might be able to go, because that's the question facing us is what do we do when people call us **right now and say where do I go to get food**, which is a question that many of us are concerned with who are here, and where are these places if they exist. **And if they are in existence then we need to get a list of them so that those of us who are trying to feed people are getting that.**

Steve Rodriguez: I know we do have lists of referrals that we make, and I know food bank does the same thing, and we can give it to you. I'm really glad to hear everyone speaking because I think there has been a little bit more P.R. in a sense. In past years I think we've had as big a need, we just haven't gotten the word out as well. **I think there are more people. I hear it on radio, I hear food drives through commercials by Save Mart and so forth that I have not heard in previous years, and I'm glad. I mean, there's an effort. There's more of a P.R. effort to make people aware of the issues.** I think the problem, at least from my perspective, it's always been there. Every year we deal with this, but the word is getting out to more people and so it's becoming a bigger issue within the community, which it should be. I'm glad it is, but from my perspective...**it may be worse this year**, I don't know, but I'm glad there are more people aware of it because to be honest with you, we do a survey at our intake facility every few months and our intake facility is where the applications come in.

People come in to apply for food stamps, CalWORKS, Medi-Cal, and we do a survey to try to find out where they're coming from, and from the last couple of surveys in the last year or so we're finding that **33 percent of the clients coming in our door are either from out of state or out of the county applying, the majority of them for the first time for aid.** So they're not coming from Fresno, they're coming from places where they're saying I can get a bigger bang for my buck in Fresno than I can in L.A. or than I can in another state. So I'm going to go to Fresno. And so we're not just dealing with our clientele here, we're dealing with clientele coming in from outside. Thirty-three percent are coming in to get the dollar to last longer.

Diane Scott: Well, Fresno is also (inaudible).

Steve Rodriguez: But that's part of the reality of the situation here.

Ken Smiley: That's 33 percent of the 11 percent is what you're talking about?

Steve: Thirty-three percent of the clients coming in our doors for benefits.

Ken Smiley: And that would be of the 11 percent that you told us were getting the benefits this year? That's your number.

Steve: Right. No, the **11.6 percent is the percentage of total population in Fresno County that's on benefits. What I'm saying is 33 percent of the people surveyed during the last several months coming in for benefits new are from out of county.** They're part of the 11 percent, but that 11 percent may go back several years before we did the survey, **so I can't say that it's 33 percent of the 11 percent.** No, I'm just saying the last couple surveys we did, which we hold one every three months.

Participant comment: Let's also remember those people that sell their little bitty home in the Bay Area and move out here, too, to get a bigger bang for their buck. So I don't think we should point the finger, or we should be careful that we're not pointing the finger at people who are very, very low income who are trying to do exactly the same thing as those who have higher incomes are doing.

Pat Pickford: In terms of an immediate issue, and it seems to me that that's where we want to begin, you know, granted that we need to do a lot of lobbying of legislators at all levels. It seems to me that in listening to all of you **the one place that there's still is funding available is the food stamp program. You haven't said you've run out. So it seems to me that the one tactic right now is that everybody who shows up someplace where they don't or can't respond ought to be instantly referred to the Food Stamp Program** because right now in Fresno County that's the one place that there is still funding available. So I would see that as step number one. Everybody ought to be referring to the Food Stamp Program. Granted, that it's not a total nutritional program, never has been. *It was actually enacted by the Congress in order to get more low-income people's dollars spent on food for the benefit of farmers,* and that's why for many years it was administered out of the Department of Agriculture. So it's not a total solution, but it's something we could do today or tomorrow.

Steve Rodriguez: And we need to get that word out. I mean, we're trying to do the best we can with your help.

Diane Scott: And what is the time frame from the time someone comes in to make an application...?

Steve Rodriguez: Thirty days.

Diane Scott: *Thirty days until they get anything?*

Steve Rodriguez: **Thirty days by federal law is the maximum** that they can. It can be at any time within that 30 days unless they're in an **emergency situation that's determined at the time they**

come in based on some questions they ask about, you know, if they're out of food, they don't have anything, then they can get it within three days, and usually they get it the same day.

Diane Scott: Because 30 days is a long time.

Steve Rodriguez: Right.

Phoua Moua: I think we're developing a lot of great conversations and a lot of dialogue on this solution, and I'm glad that you brought up that **Food Stamps are the most reliable resource to fight against hunger.**

One idea that is on the agenda is a **Food Hotline**. I know Alameda County Food Bank has a hotline with database of food pantries locations, times, dates that they are opened. Basically, how this line works is, people call in to the food bank. They ask them 'what do you need'? If they need something immediate, if they just needed a hot meal or box of food, the food bank refers the people to these places, the database is sorted by zip code, by whatever criteria for assistance that pantry or that site has given them. They ask if you are on Food Stamps, would you like to apply for food stamps, and then refer them directly to the county. This is an idea. I know that in Fresno County we don't have a hotline that anybody can just call in to ask about food. I know they call the Community Food Bank, they call us (Metro), and they probably call different places. All I know is that I've answered a lot of phone calls about where on Thursday they can get food. And a lot of the time I don't have the answer. I don't have a *complete* database refer people in need of food. How could we do this in Fresno County, Tulare County, or what do they have in Tulare County.

Sandy Beals: Tulare FoodLink has sort of a food hotline. **It's an information referral service that is paid for and connected by our United Way. And it actually works pretty well. On our part we just have to make sure they're informed of any changes in the food distributions so they know where to refer people.** Actually, it works pretty well.

Diane Hanzlicek.: Is it a 24-hour hotline?

Sandy Beals: Yes.

Diane Hanzlicek.: So who mans it?

Sandy Beals: United Way.

Diane Hanzlicek: So they get volunteers?

Sandy Beals: You know, I don't know exactly how they do it. I know some of it is volunteered.

Phoua Moua: I know that the one at the Alameda Food Bank uses volunteers only, and interns that they get from the universities. Can we do something here in Fresno County, and who would person it, who would be responsible, who would set up this phone line and where?

Participant comment: Well, if I understand it that the United Way already has such a thing, then what we need to do is spread the word about that.

Participant comment: But this is in Tulare County?

Phoua Moua: This line is up in Tulare County, meaning we don't have anything here in Fresno County.

Steve Rodriguez: So all **Fresno County has is an information phone number** where people can call in if they want information. We have our information contact numbers on all the brochures and any handouts we have relating to any kind of Food Stamps or Medi-Cal benefits. We always have a phone number involved where they can call for more information, **but we don't consider that a hotline. It's an information and referral process.**

Participant question: It's not 24 hours?

Steve Rodriguez: No. They would have to determine eligibility by actually providing some income information and so forth with an eligibility worker.

Diane Scott: **Could we nominate or elect someone to call United Way and explain what the situation is and see if they would be willing to begin a program here?**

Denise Carmen: Sandy, did somebody write a grant and get the money? United Way took that on? It's their responsibility? They wrote the grant?

Sandy Beals: Yes, they did.

Phoua Moua: Would anyone want to take that initiative? I think that it's needed, really needed in Fresno County, and even if we were able to get it, where would we house it? Who would person a Food Hotline? I mean, it might be United Way, but where would the hotline be?

Participant question: The one in Alameda is at the Food Bank?

Phoua Moua: Right. It's at the food bank in Alameda.

Participant question: Where is it, Sandy? In Tulare County?

Sandy Beals: United Way takes care of the hotline; I think it's at the United Way office.

Diane Scott: Why don't we contact our United Way and see if they can do this? Would anyone here want to do this? (pause) I guess it will be the one that makes the suggestion.

Phoua Moua: **Are you volunteering to contact United Way for this?**

Diane Scott: Yes.

Phoua Moua: Okay. Thank you. **Diane Scott has made a change here at the Hunger Summit.**

Pat Pickford: I just want to point out that **for older people there already is an information referral service that's run by the Area Agency on Aging. So if anybody in the family is over 50 that would be a possible way.**

Steve Rodriguez: One of the things that might happen out of this, it would be step two, is if United Way isn't going to do it they may be willing to fund it, and if a CBO or any organization – and it would usually go better with a CBO – is willing to provide a program for a referral agency that they would fund through United Way, **United Way if they're not willing to take it on themselves may be willing to fund it through a grant program if a proposal is submitted.** That's kind of like plan B if you want to consider it.

Diane Scott: Well if United Way don't want to do this, we will need a plan B.

Diane Hanzlicek: This is just a **question for Holly. On the web site for the Community Food Bank when will the locations, days, and times and food distribution be listed for providers who can refer people to those locations?**

Holly Porter: Yeah, I think that that's the goal right now. Our web site is sort of like our rough sketch right now of what it needs to be or what it's going to be, so that's something that we're working towards. **The web site has been publicized quite a bit and has received zero traffic, so it's becoming less of a priority because it's not generating much interest,** but eventually we hope to do that.

Phoua Moua: I'm going to put Holly on the spot here for moment. **Do you think the Community Food Bank will be interested in housing this hotline?**

Holly Porter: It sounds like a really great idea to me, but I'm not the president and CEO of the Food Bank. Therefore I cannot make any commitments like that.

Phoua Moua: I feel a lot better now that somebody is taking a step to do something about the Hotline. Thank you again, Diane. **The question still remains, today if somebody calls me where do I refer them to. Where and how do I get a list from Community Food Bank about where their sites are?** I know a year ago Fresno Metro Ministry did an inventory of the food pantries and commodity distribution and I know Lydia is here and she worked on that, but I know those numbers and those times have probably changed this year. This still remains a question.

Participant question: Do you have a list of churches that will be willing to donate?

Steve Rodriguez: I don't think we've got a list of churches, because some of them are in and out so much we don't get that information unless they provide it to us. We do have a list of referrals like the Food Bank, Poverello House, places like that where people can access food, and I know we have our number on Metro Ministry's Food Stamp information Forum and any brochures they send out there's **(inaudible)** so if you don't know where to send people, like what you said, and you think they might qualify or you don't know whether they'll qualify or not, but **refer them to the County for Food Stamps if they're in need of food.** That's a starting point, and then we can always determine immediate need and give them food stamps if they qualify and also refer them to the food bank or other agencies that might provide some services to them.

Holly Porter: That really surprises that you guys don't know where to refer people. **I mean, getting a list of our agencies is just as easy as calling and asking for a fax of where and when we distribute. I mean, we have a binder that we're willing to share with everybody and anybody when we distribute food.**

I think we **update that pretty much on an annual basis.** We try to, anyway, and get that information out to anybody who is willing to take it. We're pushing it onto people so that they can have that information and referral agencies that can provide some of the services. So if any of you need any, please give one of us a call. We'll get it to you.

Carolina Simunovic: It really sounds to me like we need a hotline that is also a clearinghouse kind of setup. In other words, the cost of this might be a little bit more than it might look like at the first glance. **I'm hearing a very fragmented system that we have out there, and I don't think any one of us in here can say that we point to all resources that there are in the community, and it really seems to me that a hotline should be something that can function as a clearinghouse to keep things updated, have monthly checks on whether such and such a pantry is still functioning, because they do go in and out, but if they are in they need to be utilized, and it can possibly make them more stable in terms of being there on a regular basis.** And I also think that these things that come up on not such a regular basis but maybe a seasonal basis should have a place at which they could register as a site on a particular date...**(inaudible-end of tape)**.
...as hotlines go, and we're seeing that we can better distribute the agencies and other information regarding food distribution. It surprises me that other people at this table haven't had access to that information, and I just wonder if we can continue this conversation in a manner that more of the people...I mean, I know we're all here and invested in this process, and if we can make some actual commitments.

Denise Carmen: I'm wondering if there **is any chance that the County rather than giving a referral number can actually have a list of the food bank connections in their area so when somebody comes in to apply they're given a referral directly to the site that's in their zip code.**

Holly Porter: We get calls from caseworkers and they say we have someone who needs food right now. Where can I send this person? And they tell us...

Denise Carmen: They shouldn't have to call you, though. **They should have that list.** The caseworkers are having that contact every day with people who could benefit from the Food Bank. That's what I'm saying is why can't it happen at that...take another step out of it so they're not having to call you, that they have a list, that every caseworker have a list so that way they can tell a person, go here.

Holly Porter: I guess because it's working the way that it is now, that it's working okay, so there hasn't been a reason to give each caseworker the binder. So they have probably one centralized binder at the County that tells where all the food distributions are, and it's probably easier for the caseworker to just call us real quick and say I have somebody, it's Thursday at noon, where can I send them, and we give them the answer really quick. But it seems to be working from our end.

Steve Rodriguez: Part of the issue there is they do have access to that list, but there is a lot of turnover in caseworkers, and someone comes in today and is brand new, doesn't know all the resources, and they will make calls, and others, it's just more expedient if they know there's a site in Sanger and a site in Reedley and this person lives in Del Rey, where should they go to get help and which day. It's more expedient just to do a phone call then to try to go through volumes of trying to find where that list is because they've got so many lists at their desk, and so she's right. A lot of it is just expediency in trying to help the client, and they're not sure if there's a site in Del Rey, and if there's not, what's the closest site to them. They do have access to the list, but a lot of them...it's a combination of things. There's a turnover, and some of them don't know where that list is on a regular basis, and they need to be educated and learn that. After a while they will know, but in some cases it's just more expedient to call Food Bank.

Denise Carmen: My point is that if somebody is on cash aid and food stamps then they definitely can benefit from hooking up to a Food Bank, to a food pantry, and it seems to me that that contact is happening every day. Just that line out the door, that would be a place that could...even if it were posters in the lobby that said, Food Bank. Do those exist? I'm just saying that in terms of media that's where people are coming because they're poor, they need money, they need food. That's an opportunity, that's a place, that's an access place for people that they have contact with daily.

Steve Rodriguez: Sure. I understand where you're coming from. I've worked for the Food Bank. I would be more concerned with those people who don't qualify for any cash aid or Food Stamps or for whatever reason don't pursue that, and we tend to refer more clients to the Food Bank who don't qualify for benefits because they have no other resources, and given the limited resources we try to stretch those to the best of our abilities.

Holly Porter: I was just going to add that another reason the caseworkers call is that a lot of the pantries are on an on-call, as-needed basis, and at the Food Bank we call the pantry to let them know Joe Johnson will be coming by. We received a call from the County, and Joe Johnson will be coming by at 6 o'clock to get some food, and we just want to let you know that he'll be coming. So we do that as well. A lot of calls are actually like that.

Lydia Flores: When I put that list together it was about a year, a year-and-a-half ago. There are only 19 pantries in Fresno, and when I went around to visit, they did not have enough food for the people that were coming. I asked how many meals are they getting once a month, and the most was three meals. So if you rely on a pantry to give these people food, it only gives them three meals per person. That's it. That's not very much. There are some churches that do give more than that because they have ministries within the church that go out and get bread and produce and things like that. I think one church over here at Cedar and Dakota, right in there, that they have a real neat...they give a lot of food, and Grace Lutheran, too, on Kings Canyon, but most of them

cannot have that much food, so if you're saying go to the pantry, it sounds like they're going to the supermarket, and that's not true. And this year I understand that the seniors have an increase of 40 percent. Forty percent more seniors than last year are asking for food.

Participant comment: I know that some of the grocery stores have a regular system (inaudible) either by cash or by donation (inaudible) to get food to (inaudible).

Participant question: (Inaudible.)

Phoua Moua: The grocery stores that used to donate to the Food Bank, a lot of them are selling them by the pounds to the Dollar Stores. From some of the work that we've been doing with EBT, Edie has said that the **dollar store in her neighborhood had a sign up that said they will no longer be accepting food stamps when EBT rolls out, and that's another issue** that we are trying to deal with too. **I know a lot of the low-income people go to the Dollar store to get their food.** Are there any other comments or suggestions?

Holly Porter: I was just going to give our phone number if anybody here needs a copy of our food distribution. **It's 237-3663, and my extension is 110.** So you can call, and I'm never there, but you can leave a message and leave your fax number, your phone number, and I'll get that to you. And I was just going to say, too, **the hotline, and I know a low-barrier pantry that's open six or seven days a week. These things are really, really ideal, and it all boils down to resources, and the resources to me really goes back to community education, because if people don't know it's a problem we're not going to have funding or the resources to get these sorts of things implemented.**

You know, a pantry that's open six days a week. **In Fresno County we have I think 183 different food distribution sites now, and they're all of course limited by the scope of their own resources.** Here at the Unitarian Universalist Church you're limited by how many volunteers you can get and when you can have that food delivered and how much room you have to store that food, so **each of those agencies is limited by their particular resources, so for a low-barrier pantry that's open six days a week you would need the staffing, you would need the facility, you would need the cash to buy the food or to get the donated food there, so all of those things are just things that need to be considered in addition to the hotline.** You would need people to staff it, you would need the technology to do it, **and personally I just think that the first problem is hunger and the second problem is convincing everybody else that hunger is a problem.** So a real community education initiative I think is a big, big part of the first step in all that.

Denise Carmen: Holly, was I misunderstanding? **If you were to have more sites would there still be a problem with you don't have enough food even?** I mean, if you can have more sites would you have enough food to give to those sites? I mean, if we were to outreach in the community for more sites, would there still be a problem of not having enough food, or am I misunderstanding?

Holly Porter: Well, outreach in the community in terms of new sites right now is being concentrated in the rural areas, because that's where there is a lack of service. ***It doesn't do any good to recruit five new sites in the urban center of Fresno because really there are already enough sites.*** Enough meaning there are an adequate number, so when you talk about recruiting new sites you have to consider do we have the resources to handle 50 new sites without a new warehouse or more food donors, and that's a good question too. I can't give you a number of what we would max out at, but I know that **given our current resources...we distributed 7.5 million pounds of food last year, and this year we're aiming for about 9 million, but at some point we're going to max out given our current resources.**

Participant question: Would you or someone at the Food Bank be interested in going on the radio **(inaudible)** and I think it's the **(inaudible)** on Fridays, they have an hour's worth of time that I would be glad to talk to **(inaudible)** and see if you would want to use some of that time to spread the word out **(inaudible)**.

Holly Porter: Sure.

Participant comment: And I'd like to add to that that **maybe on this radio announcement you could ask each church in Fresno to have maybe a line budget of maybe \$200 like Saint James Episcopal Church does so that they supplement what they get from food community and they buy extra food. So \$200 from each church, because we need the food now, not next year.**

Phoua Moua: Are there any more comments or suggestions. I like to invite all of you to Metro Ministry's Community Hunger and Nutrition Forums every second Wednesday of the month. The next **Forum is December 11. It's always 12 to 1:30. Lunch is provided, and it's usually always at the Trinity Lutheran Church. It will focus on Farmers Markets, what's going on with our Farmers Markets here and how they will work with EBT** (Electronic Benefits Transfer Food Stamp Cards). So I would like to invite you to come and explore those issues of food access with us. Thank you for coming. If you have any other suggestions, resources that you can help with, you can contact us at Fresno Metro Ministry, 485-1416.

Now, I'm going to conclude with this one question. **If somebody calls me for food can I safely say I will refer them to, first asking if they have food stamps and then referring them to the County and second calling the Food Bank?** Can I get an answer to that?

Holly Porter, Community Food Bank: Sure.

Steve Rodriguez, Fresno County E & TA: Certainly.

Phoua Moua: Thank you.

Attendees 21: representing the following organizations and agencies: Superintendent Juan Arambula, Kaiser Permanente; CSU Fresno; EOC; Unitarian Universalist Church Social Justice Committee; Fresno Metro Ministry; FoodLink, Tulare Co.; Community Alliance; FIRM, Inc.; Fresno Co. Employment and Temporary Assistance; Vida en el Valle; Master Gardeners/Plant a Row, Community Food Bank.