Largest Report Ever Conducted On Emergency Food Distribution Reports 138 Percent Increase in Clients Served Annually in Washtenaw County

Ann Arbor, MI --- Feb. 2, 2010 --- Landmark study Hunger in America 2010, released today by Food Gatherers and Feeding America, the nation's largest domestic hunger-relief organization, reports that more than 43,900 people -- including more than 14,000 children and 6,500 seniors -- receive emergency food each year through Food Gatherers' network of emergency food pantries and meal sites. The findings represent a 138 percent increase since 2006.

Hunger in America 2010 is the first research study to capture the significant connection between the recent economic downturn and an increased need for emergency food assistance. The study only includes data from emergency providers and does not include data from many of Food Gatherers network of 150 partner programs including low income housing sites, group homes, and substance abuse treatment facilities.

In Washtenaw County more than one in three client households are experiencing very low food security—or hunger. Households with very low food security are defined as having had one or more members experience reductions in food intake or disruptions in eating patterns due to a lack of adequate resources for food.

An estimated 6,900 people receive emergency food assistance each week from a food pantry, soup kitchen, or other agency served by Food Gatherers network. This is a 73 percent increase in people served locally from 2006 and far exceeds the national average increase of 27 percent.

"Average monthly unemployment rate for Washtenaw County increased 84 percent from Jan. through June 2005 to Jan. through June 2009. People who never needed food assistance in the past are seeking help from emergency food pantries for the first time," explained Eileen Spring, President and CEO of Food Gatherers. "With the help of nearly 5,000 volunteers and generous support from local food businesses and funders, Food Gatherers distribution of food increased by 62 percent in this time period. However, we still have a lot of work to do to meet the rising demand for food assistance."

The methodology incorporated into the 2010 study includes data collected from Feb. through June, 2009. Food Gatherers conducted face-to-face interviews with 324 people seeking emergency food at food pantries, soup kitchens and other emergency feeding programs, as well as interviews with more than 73 agencies that provide food assistance.

Nationally, Feeding America collected quantitative and qualitative feedback from 61,000 face-to-face in-depth interviews with people seeking emergency food assistance and more than 37,000 agency surveys, making this study the largest, most-comprehensive study ever conducted on domestic hunger.

USDA reported in Nov. 2009 that an estimated 49 million people, including 17 million children, are at risk of hunger in this country. Hunger In America 2010 reinforces the dramatically increasing need for food assistance in the United States.
Among the key findings in the Food Gatherers report:

- The percent of households with seniors facing very low food security—or hunger, more than doubled from 2006 to 2010
- 39 percent of client households report they have to choose between paying for their rent or mortgage and food
- 26 percent of client households include at least one adult working, compared to 41 percent in 2006
- 92 percent of pantries reported that there has been an increase since 2006 in the number of clients who come to their emergency food program sites
- 88 percent of food distributed by pantries was obtained from Food Gatherers

Faced with a tremendous growth in need, Food Gatherers with funding from the United Way of Washtenaw County and the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation implemented a new Food Security Plan (FSP) in 2006. Under the plan, Food Gatherers moves beyond reliance on donated foods to lead and collaborate on initiatives that help ensure easy access for clients to food stamps, local healthier produce and proteins, and support for sustainable community garden projects. A complete copy of the FSP and a summary of the Hunger Study findings are available at Food Gatherers web site www.foodgatherers.org. The full national report is available on Feeding America’s web site at Hunger in America 2010.

About Food Gatherers
Food Gatherers is Washtenaw County's food bank and food rescue program. Food Gatherers exists to alleviate hunger and eliminate its causes in our community by reducing food waste through the rescue and distribution of perishable and non-perishable food, coordinating with other hunger relief providers, educating the public about hunger, and developing new food resources. Since its inception in 1988, Food Gatherers has distributed more than 39 million pounds of food for the community. For a list of food donors and recipient agencies or to learn how you can become involved in the fight against hunger locally, please visit the web at www.foodgatherers.org or call (734) 761-2796.

About Feeding America
Feeding America provides low-income individuals and families with the fuel to survive and even thrive. As the nation's leading domestic hunger-relief charity, our network members supply food to more than 37 million Americans each year, including 14 million children and 3 million seniors. Serving the entire United States, more than 200 member food banks support 61,068 agencies that address hunger in all of its forms. Feeding America is based in Chicago. For more information on how you can fight hunger in your community and across the country, visit http://www.feedingamerica.org. Find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/Feeding America or follow our news on Twitter at http://twitter.com/Feedingamerica.

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