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Hunger problems grow exponentially in county

By Nisha Gutierrez Staff Writer

Every day thousands of people in Los Angeles County go to sleep hungry, and their numbers are growing, according to local and federal government statistics.

"There are 10 percent of people in the county who are experiencing food insecurity and are unsure where their next meal is going to come from," said Roberto Salazar, administrator for the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. "One-third of them go to sleep hungry."

On Tuesday, Salazar joined officials from the Los Angeles Regional Foodbank for National Hunger Awareness Day to release a report that shows domestic hunger is becoming more widespread.

"The problem of food insecurity is broad-based," said Michael Flood, president of the Los Angeles Regional Foodbank. "It cuts across all ethnic backgrounds and affects everyone from children to employed adults and college graduates."

The report, *Hunger in Los Angeles County 2006*, states that 657,000 residents who otherwise would have no food are receiving emergency food assistance from shelters, food pantries and soup kitchens.

"One million people in Los Angeles County are making a decision between if they should buy food or pay rent," Flood said. "While that number includes the homeless population of 90,000 it also includes people who have a roof over their head."

The hunger report also gave information about the shortage of food available for food-assistance programs.

"Even though food pantries and soup kitchens are serving more people than ever, these agencies are also reporting the need for more food to meet the growing demand for food assistance," Flood said. "There is a need for an additional 10.8 million pounds of food to serve everyone that needs emergency

food assistance."

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In an effort to highlight the need for more food, the Los Angeles Regional Foodbank distributed more than 300,000 pounds of produce during Tuesday's news conference at Our Savior Center in El Monte.

El Monte resident Lupita Cordero said she gets food from the center every week and is glad assistance is available.

"I come here for tomatoes and lettuce and some other things," Cordero, 47, said. "I think it's good because when money is tight I know I can

come here and still have the food I need."

Officials said people who need food should look into the USDA's 15 food assistance programs which include the School Lunch and School Breakfast Program, Women, Infants and Children Program and the Food Stamp Program, which serves more than 26 million people a year.

"There are so many resources out there, there is no reason why anyone should go hungry," said Phil Ansel, spokesman for the Los Angeles County Department of Public and Social Services. "All people need to do is look into programs and see what they can qualify for."

For information on eligibility requirements for USDA'S food assistance programs call (800) 221-5689.

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