



## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **National study paints picture of rural food bank use**

*HungerCount 2008* provides essential information on levels of food bank use in Canada, profiles people in need of charitable food assistance

**Toronto, December 12, 2008** – In its *HungerCount 2008* study, Food Banks Canada (formerly the Canadian Association of Food Banks) reports that Canada's rural food banks continue to assist a significant number of people every month, and that those assisted differ significantly from those helped in more populated areas.

"We see more families with children, more seniors, and more people with disabilities in rural areas," said Katharine Schmidt, Executive Director of Food Banks Canada. "We know that many are struggling to afford basic needs, and that the cost of housing in particular is a major issue in our smaller towns and on our farms."

Food bank use continues to be a persistent problem in Canada:

- 704,414 people were assisted by a community food bank during the *HungerCount* study period of March, 2008.
- After more than a decade of robust economic health, food bank use remains 6% higher than in 1997, the first year for which comparable data are available.
- The number of people turning to food banks for help in an average month has not dropped below 700,000 per month since 1997.

66,394 people – 9.4% of the Canadian total – turn to rural food banks for help each month. Those assisted by rural food banks are more likely to be children (40% versus 37.1% overall), families with at least one child (55.2% of households versus 50.3% overall), seniors (8.5% versus 5.7% overall), and people with disabilities (14.9% versus 12.7% overall).

"One of the most striking findings of the *HungerCount*," said Ms. Schmidt, "is the fact that 1 in 7 people assisted by a rural food bank live in a home they own. Food banks tell us that many of those they serve are living in overcrowded conditions, in dwellings that

are in need of major repairs. Many are relying on their community food bank just to get by, and are not able to afford adequate housing, or to properly maintain their homes.”

To address the problem of hunger in Canada, Food Banks Canada is calling on the federal government to:

1. Implement a national poverty-reduction strategy with measurable targets and timelines.
2. Increase the value of the Working Income Tax Benefit and widen eligibility to include all households with earned incomes below the most recent low income cut-off (LICO).
3. Increase the value of the Canada Child Tax Benefit to \$5,000 per child, per year.
4. Implement the recent recommendations of the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry with regard to (a) increased funding for rural housing improvement and repair, and (b) a review of rural housing programs to ensure they are effectively meeting objectives.

*HungerCount* was initiated in 1989 and is the only national survey of emergency food programs in Canada. Since 1997, data for the study have been collected every March. The information provided by the survey is invaluable, forming the basis of many Food Banks Canada activities throughout the year. For a full copy of the *HungerCount 2008* report, and for more information, please visit [www.foodbankscanada.ca](http://www.foodbankscanada.ca).

#### About Food Banks Canada

Food Banks Canada is a national charitable organization representing the food bank community across Canada. Our members and their respective agencies serve approximately 85% of people accessing emergency food programs nationwide. Our mission is to meet the short-term need for food and find long-term solutions to reduce hunger. Please visit [www.foodbankscanada.ca](http://www.foodbankscanada.ca) for more information.