

## Hunger and Food Insecurity Remain High

While the need for food assistance remains urgent across Pennsylvania, Hunger Action's latest pantry study suggests there may be a glimmer of hope for charitable food providers hit with sharp increases over the past couple of years. Based on a survey of nearly 500 food pantries, Hunger Action found that the number of households receiving food assistance during October declined slightly to 141 households per pantry. While still more than in 2003 or 2002, this is five fewer households per pantry than during October 2004, a decline of 3 percent.

This bit of good news from October is part of a larger picture that remains bleak. The USDA's latest report, *Household Food Security in the United States – 2004*, confirmed that last year was a tough one for low-income Pennsylvania households. According to the report, food insecurity in Pennsylvania affected 10.2 percent of households. This was the worst result for the state in the 10 years that the USDA has been collecting and reporting food security data, pushing the Commonwealth down from its 9<sup>th</sup> place ranking to 19<sup>th</sup> in the country. Hunger reached 2.9 percent of households in 2004, also a 10-year record high. Pennsylvania is one of the 11 states that experienced an increase in food insecurity of over 20 percent during the past three years. This suggests a link between rising food insecurity and the loss of family-sustaining jobs, a trend most pronounced in states that formerly had many industrial jobs.

The USDA study also documented an increase in food insecurity and hunger across the United States with the national food insecurity rate increasing to 11.9 percent of American households from 11.2 percent in 2003. This means that 38 million individuals lived in households that were uncertain of having and unable to acquire adequate food to meet basic needs during at least part of the prior year. In 3.9 percent of American households, members faced hunger; typically this more severe condition occurred during eight or more months out of the year. To read the full USDA study, go to [www.ers.usda.gov](http://www.ers.usda.gov).

Hunger Action's analysis of the USDA data shows that the steepest and most consistent decline in food security occurred among households with incomes between 130 and 185 percent of poverty. From 2000 to 2004 the rate of food insecurity among these households increased from 15 to 22 percent. The rate of hunger among these households nearly doubled, from 3.7 to 7.0 percent. This is a clear indication that hunger is becoming a problem for a growing number of households in which a member has a job and is earning wages. The following graphs illustrate these trends across the United States.