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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### NEW USDA STATISTICS CONFIRM ESCALATING HUNGER CRISIS IN PENNSYLVANIA

PENNSYLVANIA, Nov. 19, 2009 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service (USDA) reported today that nearly 1.4 million Pennsylvanians are “food insecure”, meaning that they lack consistent access to adequate amounts of food. Pennsylvania is one out of only fourteen states that reported a statistically significant three-year average increase. In total, 49 million Americans, including nearly 17 million children, are food insecure. The 2009 report on Household Food Insecurity in the United States paints an alarming picture of the pervasiveness of hunger in our nation. These numbers certainly present an alarming picture; however, what is even more shocking is the number of residents experiencing “very low food security,” meaning that members of the household skipped meals, cut portions, or passed on food at some point during the year because they lacked resources, has increased to over half a million in Pennsylvania.

Demand at food banks across the Commonwealth is up approximately 30 - 55 percent over this time last year, according to Sheila Christopher, Executive Director with the Pennsylvania Association of Regional Food Banks.

“These are alarming numbers. It is tragic that so many people in the Commonwealth don’t have regular access to food,” said Joe Quattrocchi, Executive Director with the Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center. “It is important to note that the USDA numbers reflect the state of Pennsylvania in 2008. Since then, the economy has significantly weakened, and there are likely many more people struggling with hunger than this report states.”

“We continue to work on the front lines feeding more than 250,000 people each year, through area food pantries, soup kitchens, and emergency feeding centers – more than 3,000 agencies in total,” said Christopher. “These establishments, many of which are grass root and faith-based centers are majority operated by volunteers. Emergency food assistance is a critical link in Pennsylvania’s response chain to help people through times of crisis.”

“National socio-economic indicators, including the escalating unemployment rate and the number of working-poor, lead us to believe that the number of people facing hunger will continue to rise significantly over the coming year,” added Quattrocchi. “Research indicates that people who fall into the grips of poverty in a time of recession often never recover. Many of those people are likely to be in need of our services now or in the future.”

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