They work hard, but can’t protect their families from hunger. They are up early brewing your first cup of coffee. They are serving up fast food, ringing up your purchases at a big box store, cleaning office buildings at night, caring for the elderly. They work and live just out of our sight. Different people, different jobs, different stories, but all with a shared anxiety: with what they earn, will they be able to feed their families?

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4
The food insecurity rate in Massachusetts has increased by 71%, and it’s stayed there.

In Massachusetts in 2012:

- 35% of children in low-income families have **at least one parent who is employed full-time, year-round.** That’s **144,546** children.
- 38% of children in low-income families have **at least one parent who is employed either part-year or part-time.** That’s **154,478** children.
- 27% of children in low-income families **do not have an employed parent.** That’s **108,910** children.

**Massachusetts food insecurity has increased**

- 2003: 6.2%
- 2013: 10.6%

The food insecurity rate has increased by 71%, and it’s stayed there.

**Parental employment status maps to food insecurity of children**

- Low-wage earnings: 1.2% increase
- High-wage earnings: 34.5% increase

Source:

http://www.massbudget.org/reports/swma/wages.php

National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health, Department of Health Policy & Management. 

Source:

Dear friends,

Working hard at low wages is like running up the down escalator. The best you can do is stay in place, and you’re always on the edge of slipping back.

Today, post recession, more Massachusetts residents than ever—including many households with a least one working adult—are trying to balance in this precarious spot. Every day, at Project Bread, we talk with people who struggle to put food on the table. Our FoodSource Hotline counselors field a staggering 46,000 requests for help every year.

More and more, we hear from working people—young and middle aged—who are earning an hourly wage that just doesn’t stretch across a month. They have some money, but they don’t have enough money. They’re not constantly facing hunger, but they can’t reliably predict when they won’t have enough money to feed their families.

Most of us never hear about their daily struggles. But we heard their voices loud and clear last spring when fast food workers across the state walked off the job to highlight their low pay—pay so low that many are eligible for food stamps. In a passionate call for justice, one worker wrote:

“As hard as we work, we can’t make a living. We are sick of making poverty wages and living on food stamps, in shelters, on family’s couches, and not being able to provide for our children.”

How can we work together to make hunger history for low-wage workers?

A full-time worker should earn enough money to put food on the table. Public policies that promote a living wage for working people are a no-risk investment in the health and economic wellbeing for all of us in Massachusetts. But changing policies takes time—and people need practical help right now.

Here is what Project Bread has learned—and put into practice.

Dignity matters
Help that is paired with respect is the most effective. So at Project Bread we craft programs that don’t stigmatize; programs that provide an opportunity to give back. One of my favorite examples is a neighborhood-based dinner program where all the diners can contribute. A small envelope at each place setting sends a clear signal: pay what you can because we’re in this together. This weekly (and healthy) affordable meal with neighborhood friends has become so popular that there is now a second seating!

Skills and resilience matter
Having the right skills makes us more resilient. For example, in our innovative HeadStart program, chef educator, Chef Vanessa teaches young mothers menu planning and how to cook healthy family meals that are quick to prepare and don’t break the budget—skills that have long-term value.

Time matters
For low-wage workers who are paid by the hour, help that takes too much time comes as a cost to them. Healthy no-cost or low-cost breakfast and lunch served to children at school help enormously. They’re a boost to the family food budget and an easy and reliable way for parents to ensure their children get the nutrition they need to learn and grow. That’s why healthy school meals have been a top priority for Project Bread for decades.

The safety net matters
Emergencies happen and when a family needs it, an emergency food program can be a lifesaver—and Project Bread has been a long-term supporter of food pantries across the state. But emergency programs are a stopgap measure and not a long-term solution for a busy working parent.

Looking forward
There is no single path to eradicate hunger in our state. But if we stand up for paying low-wage workers enough to live on—and simultaneously support programs that meet a diverse range of needs—we can shorten the lines at food pantries and work toward sustainable solutions.

With thanks for your continuing support,

Ellen Parker
Executive Director

You can help ensure that families across Massachusetts don’t go hungry: support our innovative programs at www.projectbread.org
In 2003, almost everybody who was working forty hours a week in Massachusetts could expect to earn enough to cover the basics: food on the table and a roof overhead. Only those who were not working, the elderly, and those with chronic disabilities were the faces of hunger in our state.

But the Great Recession—and the attendant increase in income inequality—changed that. By 2014, a second and distinct population—low-wage workers—significantly added to the ranks of households that struggle to put food on the table. Today, the rate of household food insecurity is 71% higher than it was a decade ago, with no sign of improvement.

For too many working families, the economic uncertainty of the recent past continues to shape their present. No matter how hard they work, thousands of families in Massachusetts cannot reliably protect themselves from hunger.

This report highlights their situation—and what Project Bread is doing to help.

How can we help families who play by the rules, but can’t consistently protect their households from hunger?

The long-term answer is simple: people need to earn a living wage. When the head of a household works full time, he or she should earn enough money to pay the rent and put food on the table. Achieving that outcome requires broad collaboration among wage earners and political, civic, religious, and business leaders.

Interestingly, anti-hunger advocates across the country are willing to speak up for charity, but when challenged to speak out for a living wage, those same leaders are conspicuous by their silence.

Wages in Massachussets have stagnated at the bottom but risen at the top

“The poverty rate in Massachusetts is the highest it’s been since 1960. The inflation-adjusted wages of the lowest-paid workers haven’t budged in decades. Income inequality in the state has become greater than in the nation as a whole.”

The Boston Globe, November 2014
What Project Bread is investing in to support struggling families in Massachusetts

→ A working mother can significantly boost her food budget when her children are automatically enrolled in universal school breakfast and lunch programs. And she will be confident that Project Bread is her ally in demanding healthy food at school—so that her children can grow, concentrate on their studies, and be free from the anxiety and stress that hungry kids are forced to deal with. These programs, along with others such as Summer Meals, reach hungry people where they live, learn, and work.

→ A low income dad can stretch his dollars through double coupon programs, like Bounty Bucks to give him twice the purchasing power for local, fresh food at farmers’ markets. Project Bread is working to extend and promote this kind of opportunity. We need more programs that ensure broad access to fresh and healthy food.

→ Subsidized CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) programs bring fresh, local food to low-income households, and help families learn how to find, store, and prepare healthy food. Connecting people with farms in their communities promotes both healthy eating and local employment. We need to develop and implement more solutions that invest in the growth of our New England food system.

→ Project Bread trains clinicians who work in pediatric services at community health centers so that they can identify and assist hungry families. We need more such convenient programs that meet the needs of busy parents.

It’s time for all of us to offer support and opportunity to working families struggling at the bottom of the economic ladder. Our innovative, high-impact approach puts people at the center—and with your help, we can help even more hard-working parents to protect their families from hunger.

MEETING PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE: DIFFERENT LIVES, DIFFERENT WAYS WE HELP

→ João serves up hundreds of burgers a day…and almost that many shakes. A single parent with fulltime care of two young girls, he receives no child support or other benefits. His constantly shifting shifts and varying paychecks make it hard for him to reliably get food on the table. And he was always a little fearful of cooking, in any case.

But his family’s life definitely took a turn for the better when he signed up for classes that Project Bread’s Chef Vanessa was giving in his younger girl’s HeadStart program. Vanessa taught him how plan, shop for, and prepare healthy meals that wouldn’t break the bank—and that could be worked into his schedule. He’s also extremely grateful that his kids get healthy breakfasts and lunches at school—a program promoted by Project Bread.

→ Antonia works in a downtown hotel, making sure all is ship-shape for guests. But she didn’t always. Once an aspiring hospitality manager, her job was eliminated in the last recession and she’s working in the hotel to get by. Lacking seniority, her shift starts pre-dawn, and, of course, there aren’t any tips.

As she struggled to make ends meet, her anxiety climbed as her bank account declined. A co-worker pointed her to Project Bread’s FoodSource Hotline where she learned that she was eligible for SNAP. The Hotline counselors also suggested a weekly low-cost community meal that Project Bread funds. While not any richer, she’s less anxious about where her next meal is coming from, and has met some new friends breaking bread together.

→ Laura is a cashier in a big box store in the western part of the state. And while she rings up thousands of dollars a day, her hours have just been cut and she’s on the verge of losing her benefits. Her changeable hours and now-smaller paycheck make it hard for her to line up consistent childcare, so the twins bounce around after school from family to friend and back again.

She worries a lot, but she doesn’t worry about what her kids are eating at school. Project Bread, in partnership with Massachusetts Farm to School, connects local farmers to her kids’ school, ensuring that they get fresh fruits and vegetables at lunch—healthy food that often is slightly beyond her budget. It’s a double win—a boost to her kids’ health and an investment in a healthy rural economy.
Mark Winne writes, speaks, and consults extensively on community food system topics, including hunger and food insecurity, local and regional agriculture, community food assessment, and food policy. He is the author of Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty (Beacon Press 2008) and Food Rebels, Guerilla Gardeners, and Smart Cookin’ Mamas: Fighting Back in an Age of Industrial Agriculture (Beacon Press, 2010). Mark is a co-founder of a number of food and agriculture policy groups including the City of Hartford Food Policy Commission, the Connecticut Food Policy Council, End Hunger Connecticut!, and the Community Food Security Coalition.

What can we do to get people to pay attention to the problem of hunger?
Stop talking about it; broaden the conversation. When we talk about hunger what we focus on is the usual menu of anti-hunger solutions, like food banks and food stamps. When we talk about poverty—the cause of hunger—we end up working toward real solutions to hunger.

Why is it hard to get people to support those efforts?
We have a hard time making meaningful change until we are affected by it in a visceral way. Hunger, particularly childhood hunger, evokes strong feelings of empathy and even revulsion. Trying to get a wage of $15 an hour for fast food workers doesn’t push those same emotional buttons, and even evokes some lingering antipathy toward labor movements.

We’ve done a ton of data crunching to show how ridiculous our current minimum wage is—but we don’t seem to be able to translate that into a message that will turn the tide of public opinion.

So what can we do to create real change and improve lives?
We can influence the anti-hunger movement. We can make everyone who works with hunger issues and food programs aware of the reality of income inequality—and how outrageous it is.

We need a uniform message, and we have to stop making claims that we are going to end hunger by simply feeding people… unless we’re also going to attack the underlying causes of hunger.

We have to stop making claims that we are going to end hunger by simply feeding people… unless we’re also going to attack the underlying causes of hunger.”

We have to stop making claims that we are going to end hunger by simply feeding people… unless we’re also going to attack the underlying causes of hunger.

We have to stop making claims that we are going to end hunger by simply feeding people… unless we’re also going to attack the underlying causes of hunger.

We have to stop making claims that we are going to end hunger by simply feeding people… unless we’re also going to attack the underlying causes of hunger.

We have to stop making claims that we are going to end hunger by simply feeding people… unless we’re also going to attack the underlying causes of hunger.

We have to stop making claims that we are going to end hunger by simply feeding people… unless we’re also going to attack the underlying causes of hunger.

We have to stop making claims that we are going to end hunger by simply feeding people… unless we’re also going to attack the underlying causes of hunger.

We have to stop making claims that we are going to end hunger by simply feeding people… unless we’re also going to attack the underlying causes of hunger.

We have to stop making claims that we are going to end hunger by simply feeding people… unless we’re also going to attack the underlying causes of hunger.
Programs

DON’T FORGET TO ADD THE KEY INGREDIENT: FUN!
Project Bread gets cooking with teens and kids

Despite working full-time hours or more, families across the state are finding there’s simply not enough to go around. The children in these families face higher rates of food insecurity as a result.

Teens see what their parents are struggling with—but they’re deeply sensitive about receiving help. That’s why Project Bread works to develop programs that focus on fun as much as they focus on food.

Earlier this year, Chef Guy Koppe led a series of cooking classes for teens at Dorchester Academy to introduce students to a range of healthy, fresh food, and to teach them how to prepare simple, nutritious meals.

Classes like these empower teens with knowledge that lasts a lifetime—while also acknowledging that these young adults often have to assume the responsibility of providing meals for themselves and their siblings while their parents are at work.

For teens, these programs don’t feel like charity or a handout. They’re an opportunity to have fun with friends, to eat great food, and to develop skills they’ll be able to use after the classes are over—maybe even at a future job of their own.

And in a nod to teenage palates everywhere, students learn just how much fat there actually is in fast food—along with some healthy alternatives to their favorite fast foods, like baked-instead-of-fried chicken tenders.

Students also learn how to balance their meals with lean protein, vegetables, legumes, low-fat dairy, and whole grains. They sample Chinese dumplings, Asian cucumber salad, smoky collard greens with garlic, steamed broccoli with garlic and parmesan, sweet potato fries, hummus, sweet corn and black bean salad, black bean and vegetable quesadillas with Greek yogurt, and much more.

“If you combine better recipes with fresh ingredients, the meals become more appealing,” said Chef Guy. “Making the cooking process fun is an important step in getting kids involved, and getting them to try new things.”

Chef Nick Speros teaches afterschool cooking classes to 2nd-5th graders in Lawrence. Here, students are encouraged to test, smell and handle all of the ingredients used in the recipes, making the learning experience both exploratory and exciting.

Because children can be resistant to ingredients they don’t recognize, getting them familiarized with vegetables is an important first step. They learn that vegetables prepared in new ways can taste very different. Kids have the opportunity to try everything they make, exploring the difference between roasted vegetables versus raw ones, and how they can be made into items such as vegetarian chili and fresh spring rolls.

“Our students tell me they have changed their lifestyles and food culture since being a part of our classes,” says Chef Nick. “These grassroots classes can have a great impact.”

For families struggling to make ends meet, meal times can often be more stressful than comforting. The challenge of making healthy meals on a tapped-out budget is an overwhelming one—and when you combine that hurdle with limited time and lack of access to fresh food, it’s daunting to even get started.

At our preschool Head Start programs in Lynn and in the Blackstone Valley, Project Bread’s Chef Vanessa LeBranche is making it possible for more families to put the joy back in eating together. Each month, Chef Vanessa runs a workshop for parents from low-income families. In a friendly, fun environment, they learn how to prepare healthy meals on a tight budget—and then take home the right ingredients or a grocery voucher so they can make the meals at home with their kids.

Healthy snacks are part of the menu, too, along with pasta jambalaya, black bean chili, kale pesto with whole-wheat pasta, tomato barley soup, and corn cakes with pico de gallo.

But Chef Vanessa’s efforts go beyond the kitchen into the supermarket. She talks to parents about shopping for healthy ingredients and how much they cost, getting them comfortable with the shopping experience before they even enter the store. She helps them introduce new foods, offers short cuts for preparing healthy meals, and suggests simple ways to save money.

EMPOWERING WORKING FAMILIES WITH PRACTICAL RESOURCES, TOOLS, AND SUPPORT
Chefs in Head Start: stretching budgets, building skills… increasing the possibilities

Changing the food insecurity rate is going to take time and effort—and requires more than a “one-size-fits-all” solution. Project Bread programs provide people with the tools they need to improve their own lives.

“IT STARTS WITH THE PARENTS,” explains Chef Vanessa. “The way they feed their kids is one of the first lessons parents pass on to their children. Our goal is to engage parents, teachers, and kids in a process that shows them what to eat, how to prepare healthy meals—and how their lives will improve with healthier choices.”

www.projectbread.org | 7
Please help us meet the needs of the increasing number of hungry families by giving the most generous gift you can today.

Every dollar counts.

You make our vital work possible—and you play a critical role in our mission to alleviate, prevent, and ultimately end hunger in Massachusetts.

DONATE NOW AT www.projectbread.org