



# *News from the* Fiscal Policy Institute

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**New study:**

[http://www.fiscalpolicy.org/publications2007/FPI\\_FoodStampsStretchedTooThin.pdf](http://www.fiscalpolicy.org/publications2007/FPI_FoodStampsStretchedTooThin.pdf)

## Faith and Civic Leaders Try “Food Stamp Diet”—Eating on \$3.50 a Day Groups Call on Congress to Halt Shrinkage in Food Stamp Benefits

Albany, May 16, 2007—*Hunger. Food insecurity.* These are abstract terms for most of us. But some of our neighbors pledged today to opt for a taste of what it’s like to have too little food in the cupboard to make it through the week. Religious leaders and public officials gathered at the Emmanuel Baptist Church Food Pantry to promise that, for at least one day this week, they would limit their daily food spending to \$3.50, the value of food stamp benefits now offered to low-income New Yorkers.

Bishop Howard J. Hubbard of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany said, “On behalf of those who must face this dilemma on a daily basis, I accept the challenge to live on \$1.16 per meal today in solidarity with their plight and in prayerful hope that together we can bring sufficient resources to those struggling to feed their families in this, the greatest nation in the world.”

Ed Bloch, executive director of the Interfaith Alliance of New York State, said that the purpose of the pledge is to call attention to the Farm Bill reauthorization coming up in Congress. He said, “We are learning with our stomachs just how hard it is to get enough calories and nutrients using food stamps.”

“The Food Stamp Challenge is bringing much needed attention to the difficult choices low-income families are faced with and a need for change in the food stamp program,” said David A. Hansell, commissioner of the State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA). “As Congress reauthorizes this program, it is imperative that benefit

levels, eligibility and accessibility for working families who rely on this much needed nutritional assistance be addressed.”

The Fiscal Policy Institute, a research organization that focuses on the economic wellbeing of New Yorkers, released a new report at the event, *Stretched Too Thin: Food Stamp Benefits in New York State*. FPI’s senior economist, Trudi Renwick, said that since 1996, the calculation of benefits has caused the food stamp benefit to erode over time. With Congress set to debate the Farm Bill this month in Washington, the fate of the food stamp program—and whether the purchasing power of food stamps will continue to fall—will soon be decided.

“Many New Yorkers think the Farm Bill is just about farms,” said Renwick. “But the Food Stamp Program is there too, and it’s critically important to our economy.” She said that although food stamp benefits are low for each recipient, the program overall brings \$2.3 billion in federal dollars into New York. “These funds don’t just put food on the table. They also provide vital support for food distributors—including local grocery stores—and for food producers. Food stamp dollars translate into jobs.” According to the USDA, every \$5 in food stamp benefits generates \$9.20 in local economic activity.

Renwick also noted that the program serves not only families on temporary public assistance, but also hundreds of thousands of working New Yorkers. In fact, outside of New York City, working poor recipients outnumber the recipients on assistance.

Bishop Hubbard underscored the importance to New Yorkers of decisions in Washington, saying, “I call upon our elected officials in Congress to reauthorize the food-stamp program this year within the Farm Bill in a way that protects any further erosion of benefits and shores up the program so vital to 1.8 million people in our state.”

*The Fiscal Policy Institute (FPI) is a nonpartisan research and education organization that focuses on tax, budget, and economic issues that affect the quality of life and the economic well being of New York State residents. FPI reports are available at [www.fiscalpolicy.org](http://www.fiscalpolicy.org).*

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