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**New Data Shows 17.7 Percent of Arkansas Residents in Households Struggling with Hunger
Nutrition Safety Net Must Stay Strong, Urges the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance**

Little Rock, AR – November 16, 2010 – Arkansas had 17.7 percent of its people living in households that struggled with hunger during the 2007-2009 period, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) annual report released today. Nationally, more than 50 million people lived in households that were food insecure in 2009 – up from 49.1 million in 2008 and 36.2 million in 2007.

In Arkansas the 2007-2009 rate of 17.7 percent compared to 14.3 percent in the 2004-2006 period, was an increase of 3.4 percentage points. This percentage ranks Arkansas as number one in food insecurity.

Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance noted, however, that the state numbers are averages of years from both before and after the start of the recession. The numbers therefore almost certainly understate the extent of food insecurity in Arkansas in 2009 and, in all likelihood, today. To report food insecurity in each state, USDA uses three-year averages to compensate for limited sample sizes and give a better estimate of the number of households experiencing hunger – thus the state data are an average for 2007-2009. 2008 was the first year of the recession, and unemployment did not rise sharply until the second half of that year.

For a current snapshot of hunger during the recession, Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance points to data on food hardship in 2009 released by the Food Research and Action Center earlier this year, which show 24 percent of people in Arkansas reported an inability to afford enough food in 2009. The data were gathered by the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index project, which has been interviewing almost 1,000 households daily since January 2008. People were asked, "Have there been times in the past twelve months when you did not have enough money to buy food that you or your family needed?"

An additional analysis of the data by Feeding America shows that 24.4 percent of Arkansas children deal with the effects of food insecurity. This number ranks Arkansas first in the nation for food insecure children.

"Whether we look at the USDA three-year data, the FRAC analysis of the 2009 Gallup poll, or the Feeding America Childhood Food Insecurity report, far too many people in our state are struggling to put food on the table," said Rhonda Sanders, executive director of the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance. "These reports reaffirm what we're seeing in our local communities and show the impact of the recession on people in our state. Our food banks and food pantries across the state reported serving over 433,000 individuals in 2009. This was a nearly 50 percent increase from 2005."

The Gallup survey question on food hardship is very similar to one posed by the Census Bureau and analyzed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in its official measure of food insecurity, but because of sample size Gallup provides a closer, more localized and more recent look at food hardship.

Congress returns for its lame duck session this week, and reauthorizing the child nutrition programs remains on its to-do list. The bill, passed by the Senate and being considered by the House, would invest an additional \$4.5 billion in child nutrition programs but is partially financed by cuts to future SNAP benefits. The Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance is urging Congress to pass a strong child nutrition bill and to fix the SNAP cuts.

"We want to see a child nutrition bill move forward in the lame duck session, and we still are urging Congress to address the SNAP cuts." noted Rhonda Sanders. "The lame duck session affords an opportunity to accomplish both of these goals."

Each year, the Census Bureau measures food insecurity through a series of household survey questions about the ability to obtain enough food for an active, healthy life for all members. Among the 17.7 percent of people in Arkansas households considered to be food insecure during the 2007-2009 period, 6.4 percent were living in households that were considered to have "very low food security." People that fall into this USDA category had more severe problems experiencing hunger and cutting back or skipping meals on a more frequent basis for both adults and children.

About the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance

The Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance (AHRA) is a non-profit collaborative network of hunger relief organizations throughout Arkansas. We work with local, state and federal organizations to keep food on the tables of our fellow Arkansans who need it most. The Alliance and its members provided more than 25 million pounds of food to hungry Arkansans in 2009. The Alliance was formed in 2004 with 6 founding members. The organization includes over 100 different members including food bank members, local hunger relief agencies, state level hunger programs and hunger advocates from around the state that work daily to reduce hunger in Arkansas.

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