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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CITY SOUP KITCHENS AND FOOD PANTRIES SEE 25% AVERAGE INCREASE IN DEMAND FOR FOOD SINCE 2008

City Harvest Pledges to Rescue Over 8.5 Million Pounds of Food This Holiday Season

New York, NY – November 7, 2011 – A greater number of families will struggle to put food on the table for the holidays if the current trend continues. According to new data from City Harvest, the world’s first food rescue organization, hunger relief agencies they serve across New York City have reported, on average, a 25% increase in demand for food since the recession began.

City Harvest collected data for 48 months from 221 partner food agencies and compared two 12-month periods: the last fiscal year of City Harvest prior to the recession (July 2007 through June 2008) and its most recent fiscal year (July 2010 through June 2011). Agencies that consistently reported every month from July 2007 through June 2011 were included in the data set. City Harvest has reported the following:

- Out of the 221 agencies that reported for all 48 months, 77% saw an increase in visits from 2008 to 2011.
- Hunger relief agencies have seen a 35% increase in visits made by children.
- Agencies report a 26% rise in visits made by seniors.
- All boroughs report a surge in visits, but the Bronx had the biggest hike, at 53%. Queens and Brooklyn follow with a 29% increase, Staten Island at 25%, and Manhattan at 12%.

“Unfortunately it has not been a surprise to see a significant and prolonged surge in the need for food in New York City,” said Jilly Stephens, executive director of City Harvest. “The brunt of the recession was born by these communities, as some of the first people to be impacted and the last to recover. Soup kitchens and food pantries are an even more important safety net for many more New Yorkers than they were four years ago.”

Reverend Martha Overall at St. Ann’s Food Pantry and Soup Kitchen, located in Mott Haven in the Bronx, has noticed the rising need. “We’ve been having trouble replenishing our stocks lately because the food goes so fast,” she reports. “Mostly it’s new faces. Some people have lost jobs, and some are working but can’t make ends meet. Others have been cut off Medicaid or food stamps so they’re coming here.”

She also dismisses the idea that people who visit food pantries are only those on welfare. “There was a time where we could say that about 90% of the people who came here were on welfare. Now, I would say that is minimal.”

In Brooklyn, Reaching Out Community Services has experienced overwhelming growth in demand for food. Based in Bensonhurst, the food pantry has experienced a 94% rise in visits since 2008, nearly doubling its services. “There are people here who would’ve never seen themselves at a food pantry,” executive director Tom Neve says of the crowd he sees nowadays. “Layoffs have caused great disappointment. ‘I’ve worked all my life’ is something I’ve heard from some of the new people. Truthfully, we’ve been struggling to keep up with the new demand.”

Food agencies throughout the city depend on different sources for food donations, including government programs now threatened by potential cuts in Congress. City Harvest, the world’s first food rescue organization, is trying to meet the higher need by pledging to rescue at least 8.5 million pounds of food through January. City Harvest distributes excess food from a variety of private sources, stocking the shelves of 600 food pantries and soup kitchens throughout the five boroughs of New York City.

To find out more about City Harvest’s efforts to meet the increased demand for food, please visit www.cityharvest.org.

About City Harvest

Now serving New York City for more than 25 years, City Harvest (www.CityHarvest.org) is the world's first food rescue organization, dedicated to feeding the city's hungry men, women, and children. This year, City Harvest will collect 30 million pounds of excess food from all segments of the food industry, including restaurants, grocers, corporate cafeterias, manufacturers, and farms. This food is then delivered free of charge to nearly 600 community food programs throughout New York City using a fleet of trucks and bikes as well as volunteers on foot. Each week, City Harvest helps over 300,000 hungry New Yorkers find their next meal.

City Harvest also addresses issues that surround hunger in New York City by supporting affordable access to nutritious food in low-income communities, educating individuals, families, and communities in the prevention of diet-related diseases, channeling a greater amount of fresh produce into high-need areas, and enhancing the ability of agency partners to feed hungry men, women, and children.

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