

# JournalStar.com

---

## Hunger just as painful by any name

*Sunday, Dec 03, 2006 - 03:35:28 pm CST*

There's no more hunger in America. Officially. The government agency in charge of it says so. Huzzah.

Recently, the U.S. Department of Agriculture removed the terms "hunger" and "food insecure" from their classifications for describing Americans' ability to obtain enough, safe, nutritious and affordable food.

USDA had asked the National Academy of Sciences to evaluate its methods for estimating "food insecurity" and hunger in the United States. The academy brought together experts who worked for two years on these issues. In October, the panel released its report: "Food Insecurity and Hunger in the United States: An Assessment of the Measures" ([www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/FoodSecurity/](http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/FoodSecurity/)).

The report said current data collection methods cannot accurately measure the individual experience of hunger.

Before this report, households were categorized as "food secure," "food insecure without hunger" and "food insecure with hunger."

After the report, the USDA substituted "low food security" and "very low food security" for the two "food insecure" categories.

We agree with those who say the effects of this new terminology on public perceptions and potentially, on government policies, is destructive.

Scott Young, executive director of the Food Bank of Lincoln, was among those who criticized the new terminology.

"Hunger advocates and the USDA have long used 'food insecurity' in terms of trying to describe the problem, but hunger has always been a part of it," Young said. "This is kind of a bureaucrat-speak that sugarcoats the problem. We get a lot of that from a lot of quarters."

"It affects us all adversely. When I speak to groups about hunger issues, which is what I call them, we talk about food insecurity. Some people have more money than money. The range of hunger is from a homeless man who is hungry and doesn't know where he's going to score a meal, to working poor who have food in the house but are food insecure, and everything in between.

"There's a place for calling hunger hunger," Young concluded.

One of those places is Lancaster County, where there are 27,000 people living below the poverty line — 8,600 younger than 18 and a lot of them, as Young said, at risk for hunger.

Lincoln Public Schools reports that 9,800 kids this school year getting free or reduced-price lunches.

So whatever USDA wants to call it, it's here.

"We probably get a little too much sugar coating from all corners," Young said. "It happens a lot from government offices. All's well, or all's better than it seems.

"If we're going to talk like grownups, we probably ought to do some plain speaking."

Thank Scott Young for clarifying what the government does and doesn't do with words.

---

**Copyright © 2002-2008 Lincoln Journal Star. All rights reserved.**