

# With summer approaching, the heat's on to make ends meet

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Summer's reputation in song is one of beauty, ease, and abundance. Lazy, hazy, fish jumping, county fair in the country sun. But my work at the Food Bank of Lincoln with agencies that help feed hungry has shown me another side of the season.

Though I understand that summer comes with its share of hardships, I'm still dismayed to learn how difficult summer can be for low-income households with children.

Almost without exception, the pantries and meal sites that work with the Food Bank report higher need for their services in summer. And most are bracing for this to be the hardest summer yet.

If you have children at home, you already understand the challenges. Dur-

ing the academic year kids can get nutritious meals at school from the free and reduced-price lunch and breakfast programs. For children in low-income families, these meals may be some of their best of the week. On the weekends some families also benefit from the LPS/Food Bank backpack program that sends home supplemental food on Friday afternoons.

But when school's out these programs are suspended. If budgets are tight during the school year, they're worse in summer. Food Bank agency people have many stories of children

home without decent food in their homes during the summer. Parents do what they can to arrange activities and meals for their kids while they are at work, but it's a struggle. And some families do not find good solutions.

This picture is quite at odds with summers as I remember them not all that many decades ago.

Like most of my classmates, I was brought up by parents and grandparents who weathered the Great Depression thanks in part to exceptional gardening and cooking skills. We pickled, canned, and froze everything we could, learning my elders' magic formulas for nutritious food that cost very little. And that freed up more of the household budget for items we couldn't make or grow.

But these skills are increasingly rare as the years pass. Pantry coordinators tell of people who didn't have parents or grandparents who could teach them to

cook or budget. In addition, with higher numbers of adults working at least one job outside of the home, families have a hard time finding the time or energy for gardening and food preservation. Nor do most households have the necessary equipment for these projects – and tight budgets can make it impossible to get set up.

Nowadays, summers are all about shuttling family members to and from jobs, daycare, and other activities. Families are worried about rising prices of fuel, food, and utilities. But as we scramble to get along, more households end up purchasing expensive prepared foods that are fast and convenient. People are headed into the summer of 2008 in a bit of a panic.

One of the hopeful outcomes of this ailing economy is that we may be forced to re-examine some of the ways we've changed in the last couple of genera-

tions. Maybe we'll get back to growing and cooking food that is better for us and costs less.

But any substantial change will take time. People will have to develop skills and new patterns of thinking. We may have to pool our resources in new ways.

And in the meantime summer has arrived. Schools are letting out. It will start getting hot and the Salvation Army will begin distributing fans to families who can't keep their homes cool enough.

Requests for pantry boxes will start going up and more people, including children, will be standing in food lines. That's summer as we know it these days.

The living isn't easy for most people.

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