



The Hunger and Poverty Crises of Imperial County, California

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In a country as wealthy as the United States, it's difficult to think that so many families go hungry. A 2016 study by the Economic Resource Center, a division of the USDA found that 7.4% (9.4 million) of U.S households faced low food security. That doesn't seem like much in a country with a population just over 326 million, but it's still a large amount overall, nationwide. Of all of the ethnicities that make up the United States, the Hispanic population suffers the most.

According to Feeding America, "the nation's largest domestic hunger-relief organization" 1 in 5 (20%) of Latinos are food insecure compared to just 1 in 10 (9.5%) of white, non-Latino Americans. Even more staggering, 1 in 4 (24%) of Latino children go hungry compared to 1 in 8 (3%) of white children. The report also found that of the nation's 94 counties with majority Hispanic populations, 21% of these counties fall into the top "10% of counties with the highest rates of childhood food insecurity" in the nation.

One county which has a high rate of food insecurity with a large Hispanic population is Imperial County, California. With a population of 180,883, located near the border with Baja California and along the shores of the Salton Sea, Imperial County is the most food insecure county in the state with 17% of its population not having enough food and 33% of this number being children. This is due in part to the fact that 24% of the county's population live below the Federal Poverty Level. Even more disturbing is the fact that the unemployment rate grew from 22.04% in 2008 to 29.50% in 2011 and only began to drop in 2012 down to 19.60% as of 2017. However; unemployment in the county has never been less than 17.04% where it stood in 2000. These numbers reveal the hardship of those who live in the county at a time when the U.S economy overall is growing with an unemployment rate of 4.1% as of October 2017.

Imperial County's economy is mostly agricultural with ranches spotting the landscape and fields that grow various things, mostly dates, but not everybody in the county, farms. Finding

work in this remote county is difficult as the unemployment numbers tell us and the economic giants of Southern California such as Los Angeles, Palm Springs and San Diego are all nearly two hours away. Such drive times and the money spent on gas to get to such places is burdensome of those who have so little. There are also checkpoints manned by Border Patrol agents that stand between the county and the places mentioned, which may make some Latinos feel intimidated in a time of immigration crackdowns by the Federal government. The tourist economy that this region once benefited from, a result of the families who spent their days on the beaches of the Salton Sea disappeared decades ago, as the water became polluted and the salinity increased resulting in droves of dead fish to be washed up on shore. As the rich and famous and the average American abandoned the beaches, they abandoned the economy with it. Hotels, restaurants and stores all closed down leaving behind abandoned buildings and poverty. For some, it's not easy to uproot and relocate and for others, they simply can't afford to live anywhere else so they are forced to live in cheap housing or in abandoned buildings and can't afford to eat.

In a nation that has so much wealth and access to an abundance of resources as the United States, there is no reason why so many people, especially children should go hungry and be unable to afford food. No matters ones' race, ethnicity or socioeconomic standing, not a single American should go hungry and not a single place in this country should look like or have the statistics of Imperial County, California. It's time that we as a people come together to end poverty and to ensure that everybody has equal access to healthy and affordable food. And that means that the state and Federal governments must do their part.

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