

## **COPING WITH FOOD STAMP CUT IMMIGRANTS: MOST WHO HAD BENEFITS REDUCED AREN'T USING FOOD BANKS, SURVEY SAYS.**

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### **Body**

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Nearly half of Santa Clara County's legal immigrants affected by federal food stamp cuts say they don't have enough to eat, but only a tiny minority are turning to local food banks for help, according to a new survey.

The survey results were announced at a Friday news conference at which county officials and representatives of religious and immigrant rights groups called on Congress to restore food stamps for non-citizens.

"This is an immoral deprivation of people," said the Rev. Eugene Boyle, chairman of the Interfaith Council on Religion, Race, Economic and Social Justice.

The telephone survey was completed by the Santa Clara Valley Employment Support Initiative, launched last year by schools, churches and social service agencies in response to welfare reform. More than 400 food stamp clients or ex-clients were reached by phone; 376 participated. The county estimates that benefits to roughly 8,000 adults in more than 5,000 households were cut.

The report said that "almost half of the participants in the survey indicated not having enough food," although no percentage was given.

Clients were asked their main strategy for making up for the loss of food stamp benefits.

Only 4 percent of respondents said they used local food programs. Forty-five percent said they were working more hours. Thirty-two percent said they were buying cheaper food. Fourteen percent said they received help from relatives.

After President Clinton signed the welfare reform bill into law in August 1996, local social service officials had predicted that food banks would be swamped with hungry immigrants. But that hasn't happened, food bank officials said Friday.

One big reason: Food stamp cuts have been less severe in California because the state created its own food-stamp program to provide relief to thousands of immigrants. The program, however, provides aid only to the elderly and children.

Other explanations are the strength of the local economy and that many immigrants are moving more relatives into their homes to save money, said officials of the Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties.

"The other reason may be cultural," said Dave Sandretto, the food bank's executive director. "They don't feel comfortable going to a service organization for food."

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**Food stamps** to **most** legal **immigrants** were **cut** off last September under the landmark 1996 welfare reform act, which axed welfare **benefits** to **most** non-citizens.

Congress last summer restored Supplemental Security Income **benefits** for the disabled elderly. But it didn't restore **food stamps**.

Nationwide, more than 1.5 million people -- legal **immigrants** and U.S. citizens -- live in households affected by the **immigrant food stamp cut**.

Clinton has proposed spending \$2.43 billion over five years to restore **food stamps** to **immigrants** -- but Congress has not acted on the request.

Bich Chi of San Jose, 26, a single mother of two, **said** her monthly **food stamp** allotment was slashed from \$242 under the federal program to \$122 under the state program.

Chi, who emigrated from Vietnam four years ago, held a paper plate at the news conference that read, "I need **food** -- more rice."

She **said** that her 6-year-old boy and 4-year-old girl have lost weight because she can't afford enough meat -- or even bananas.

Chi, laid off from her job as a seamstress, has tried **food banks**. But, she **said**, her family doesn't like the **food** because it isn't Vietnamese.

County Supervisor Blanca Alvarado **said** the county has done two things to alleviate **immigrants'** hunger: It has started a citizenship program that has naturalized some 7,000 people, many of whom would have lost **food stamps**. And it has given \$1 million to Second Harvest **Food Bank** and the United Way to compensate for welfare reform.

CHART: MERCURY NEWS

Who is losing **benefits**

Adult **immigrants** whose **food stamps** aid is being **cut**, by ethnicity

## Notes

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Marina Hinestrosa, a staff writer for Nuevo Mundo, the Spanish-language weekly of the Mercury News, contributed to this report.

## Graphic

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Chart

## Classification

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