



**April 11, 2008**

**BILL MOYERS:** Welcome to THE JOURNAL.

Food is the big story this week. We're paying a lot more for it, a lot of people don't have enough of it, and Washington may be about to make a bad situation worse.

First, the price of food. Rice alone has shot up by more than half in just two weeks — double its price a year ago. But corn, wheat, and other grains are sky-high, too, creating a crisis for poor people around the world.

Here at home milk prices have soared over the past year by 26%, eggs by 24%, bread by 13%. Add rising grocery prices to the higher cost of gas and electricity, throw in disappearing jobs and home foreclosures, and you can understand why people are struggling to keep food on the table. Our government figures 28 million Americans will be using food stamps this year —the highest level since the program began in the 1960s.

So what do you do if you are working every day but don't earn enough to keep up with the rising cost of living? Or you're retired and living on social security? Or you've lost your job, your home, or you get sick, your bank account is as bare as your cupboard? You turn to food banks and food pantries. But the world-wide demand for food is squeezing them, too, as we learned when we visited some of the food assistance centers here in the New York area. I'll wager that what we heard can be heard where you live, too.

**ROSABELLE WALKER:** I was a very independent woman. You couldn't get me to come stand in line to get no food free from nobody. Because I was always used to working and taking care of myself.

The first job I had was 16, I was the section hand on the railroad during the second world war. I worked in the steel mills in Pennsylvania. When I came to New York, I did housework 'cause that's all women got in New York was domestic day work.

I worked in the laundry. Then I managed the Laundromat. I'd work right now, even though I'm over 80, I'd go take care of somebody that's 75 or 80. And stay with them in their home, and get paid for it. I don't like lazy. But then I got to the place where I was retired. No money.

**VOLUNTEER:** Hi, Rosabelle!

**ROSABELLE WALKER:** No income coming in.

**ROSABELLE WALKER:** Thank you.

**VOLUNTEER:** Here you go.

**ROSABELLE WALKER:** And finally in desperation, I said, "Well, if everybody else can go get it, I will, too."

**ROSABELLE WALKER:** Come on, Matilda.

**ROSABELLE WALKER:** And that's what started me to coming to the pantry.

**TOM MCGARRY:** Good morning, sir. How are you?

**VOLUNTEER:** Yup. Gotcha.

**TOM MCGARRY:** Client: I lost my job because of defense cutbacks.

**TOM MCGARRY:** Thank you very much.

**VOLUNTEER:** You have a good day.

**TOM MCGARRY:** You too. Thank you.

**TOM MCGARRY:** And I've been lookin' around here for jobs. I want to work. I want, I want to provide for myself. I always did.

**TOM MCGARRY:** Is she coming back?

**TOM MCGARRY:** I've been doing that since I was 18. And, I don't like this. Not at all.

**VOLUNTEER:** Here you go.

**KATIE BROCCONE:** Thanks.

**VOLUNTEER:** Have a good day.

**KATIE BROCCONE:** You too.

**KATIE BROCCONE:** I was once told by a man that if he ever got in my position that he hopes somebody would shoot him. And I said, "That's pretty extreme." Because it's not that I'm just laying back and I'm lazy. I worked my whole life. I supported my four children and then I had gotten sick. And these are the positions that people don't realize.

**REVEREND MELONY SAMUELS:** When you think of food pantries, you think of the homeless. You think of shelters. You think of substance abuse. You think of just outright people who are down and out. But now the faces have changed.

**REVEREND MELONY SAMUELS:** We're short on fresh vegetables. There is — we have onions.

**BILL MOYERS:** Reverend Melony Samuels directs the Bed-Stuy Campaign Against Hunger.

**REVEREND MELONY SAMUELS:** You want some canned vegetables?

**REVEREND MELONY SAMUELS:** Now, we are seeing more families, mothers with children, working families coming in. We're seeing people that have graduated from high school, people who are making a fairly good income, but they have told us over and over again that the cost of food is unbelievable. The cost of living, finding housing, that has pushed them into food pantries and they don't only come to this food pantry, but they go to several food pantries, trying to see if they accumulate enough food for a week.

**BILL MOYERS:** She can't provide as much food as she once did — food donations to her pantry have dropped by half, even as the number of people needing food has increased 70 percent in one year.

**REVEREND MELONY SAMUELS:** One cereal, bread.

**REVEREND MELONY SAMUELS:** The food bank is not delivering as they used to. We still get a weekly delivery and sometimes it is so sparingly. It's unbelievable, when you see exactly what comes off the truck. You're disappointed. People are disappointed, because once the truck drives up, then the neighborhood knows, and they start coming. They are coming because they figure food is here.

A child told me a story recently, and she said, "Well, when my mother prepares food, we get such a small amount. But then there is some left and I would ask for more, and she would tell me. 'You cannot have anymore, because what is left is for tomorrow, and if you eat it today, you will go hungry tomorrow.'"

**BILL MOYERS:** Just a short drive away, another pantry is struggling to keep its shelves full.

**REVEREND MELONY SAMUELS:** We just simply do not have enough food to go around.

**BILL MOYERS:** Tamar Auber heads the Hanson Place Campaign Against Hunger in Brooklyn.

**REVEREND MELONY SAMUELS:** So, the amount that we're offering to each client has

decreased. The quality of food has decreased. We're offering more carbohydrates, less protein. If you look at it right now you'll notice that everything is canned, which means that everything is high in sodium. We don't have a lot of fresh vegetables coming through. We have a complete absence of dairy products which means that we have cereal, but we don't have any milk to put on the cereal.

**BILL MOYERS:** The city's food pantries and soup kitchens rely on the food bank for New York City to supply much of the food they give out. But now this resource is drying up.

**TYRONE HARRYSINGH:** We used to have a lot of vegetables, a lot of protein, a lot of beans, pasta. Those items have basically disappeared.

**BILL MOYERS:** Tyrone Harrysingh is the food bank's chief operating officer.

**TYRONE HARRYSINGH:** I have never seen this in all the time that I've been here. This year is essentially the worst in terms of the food shortage that we have seen. There used to be aisles and aisles of food.

**BILL MOYERS:** Like many American jobs, food is also heading overseas. Much of what was once donated to food banks is now sold to consumers abroad.

**TYRONE HARRYSINGH:** It's, you know, it's a trend that we hope is not gonna continue. But, you know, we don't know where this is gonna take us.

**BILL MOYERS:** Up the Hudson River from Manhattan is Westchester County, one of the ten wealthiest counties in the U.S. But just a few blocks away from the opulence food is running short. The volunteers of New Rochelle's Hope Community Services have less every week to pack up for their clients.

**JIM MCGEE:** We offer the folks bread, beans, rice, cold cereal, tea, pasta, tuna fish, meal in a can, tomato sauce, fruit and vegetables but sometimes we run short of bread. Vegetables can get tight. Sometimes— we can only offer one of something instead of three of something. You know it's the volume that's significantly decreased.

**ANNE AVENIUS:** When I started here we were stuffing between 200 and 300 bags. Now we're making 450 bags. The need is just becoming so tremendous.

**KATIE BROCCONE:** We used to get— fruits and vegetables. We used to get eggs. We used to get butter. We used to get cheese. Not all the time, but we haven't gotten something like that in a very, very long time.

I'm on disability right now. I've been on it for a long time. And, the money is just not there for the food. It's just not there.

I mean there might be a few days out of the month that I'm eating okay, and then the other days I just have to, you know, I do what I have to do.

**ROBERT TENNYSON:** I was working as a super and they sold the building and new owners — I lost that job. And, you can have a full-time job and still just come up short. Money comes and goes, you know. You could spend \$200 a week on groceries and depending on how many people you're feeding, it's sometimes just not enough.

Whatever I get, whether how big it is, you know, I'm blessed to get that, you know? And I just thank God for that. And then when you get home you just got to cut the portions smaller, when you get home, you know? Sometimes I don't even eat, you know. I'll just give the food to the kids

**ROSABELLE WALKER:** I am on a fixed income. And I have to live on my social security check alone. I have no other income. When I have to go to my primary doctor, I have a co-pay. When I get my medicine every month, I have a co-pay. Plus my living expenses and with all of it combined, when I get my check on the third of the month, by the seventh, I have nothing.

**TOM MCGARRY:** I used to be able to buy anything I wanted. I had every credit card known to man. And I had a plenty of money every week. And I'd buy the best meats, the best vegetables, the best this and that. Now, they give me hotdogs or something. I cook them. I get peanut butter, crackers, and things. And sometimes I'll get a can of beef stew or something like that. And some or maybe a can of soup and I use those things. And I

eat but the foods I'm eating are simple foods. A lot of them are poor man's food. I was used to that when I was a kid. And I've gotten back to that. But it's a struggle and some days I'll really go hungry.

**ANNE CAREY-COLORADO:** Tonight we're having hot dogs and scalloped potatoes and vegetables because that's what we had available today.

**BILL MOYERS:** Anne Carey-Colorado directs the Hope Community Services food pantry and soup kitchen.

**ANNE CAREY-COLORADO:** If a parent can't put food on the table to feed their children, and their children go to school hungry, the parent feels worthless. And that impacts on you— your ability to function on a daily basis. It impacts on your children's ability to perform at school. Or, if you can't feed yourself, and take care of yourself, it's very hard to feel good about yourself.

**ANNE CAREY-COLORADO:** And we're glad to see you back. You haven't been here in awhile.

**WOMAN:** A long time, yeah.

**ANNE CAREY-COLORADO:** A couple of months?

**ANNE CAREY-COLORADO:** A year ago in the kitchen, on a nightly basis, we'd have anywhere from 50 to 75 people. Now, we're averaging anywhere from 85 to 120 a night. Last Thanksgiving, in the kitchen, a year ago we had 150 people in for dinner. This year, we had 225. We now have more families using the kitchen than in previous years. Previously it was primarily singles, whether its seniors or adults. Now the number of families has increased.

**ROBERT TENNYSON:** I see more and more people coming in here. Even people with jobs, that I know from out on the street, with jobs, with 9 to 5s, that still come here to eat.

**TOM MCGARRY:** For a while, I was very cynical. And I looked down my nose at a lot of people. But now I'm one of those people that I looked down on. And so I don't look down on anybody anymore.

**ROSABELLE WALKER:** I went to the supermarket and I left the supermarket and didn't buy anything because they had hamburger, there wasn't a package of hamburger in the whole meat thing that was less than four dollars. None of it! And every week you go to the market to buy food, they up the price, up the price, up the price, but nobody's upping nobody's salary. Right now at home in my house, my check is coming tomorrow to go marketing with. I got two halves of a green pepper in my freezer. Period. No food — I got some canned goods on the shelf — no food in the house. No money to go buy it. That's the condition. And if there was no pantries, you would find a lot of us wouldn't even have a green pepper in the freezer.

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