

# Thousands in Isles Go Hungry Each Month

By Linda Hosek  
Star-Bulletin Writer



George Kent  
Studying hunger in Hawaii

For about two weeks of every month, thousands of state residents go hungry.

They run out of food stamps around the 25th of the month and don't get more stamps until the 10th, said Kristi Dinell, coordinator of Parish Social Ministries for the Diocese of Honolulu.

Most are infants, children and the elderly, who "have special nutritional needs and can't make their income last," she said.

During those two weeks, mothers mix flour and water into pancakes, and make trips to church pantries for canned food.

Some set aside lunch money for their school-age children, making sure they get one balanced meal a day.

And some who don't breast-feed struggle to keep their babies full after they run out of formula food.

"They are literally going hungry," Dinell said.

The problem of malnutrition surfaced today during World Food Day, designated by the United Nations to generate public commitment to end hunger. It is observed in more than 140 countries.

More than 500 million people worldwide are "chronically undernourished," said George Kent, professor of political science at the University of Hawaii.

LOCALLY, THE number runs in the "tens of thousands," but the extent of the problem has not been documented, he said.

Kent, an expert on world hunger, estimated that Hawaii's number may be half of those who fall below the poverty line.

In 1980, the number of state residents below poverty ranged from 91,618 to 133,214, with the higher figure reflecting Hawaii's cost of living, said Bob Schmitt, state statistician.

Accordingly, those undernourished may range from about 45,809 to 66,607.

"I doubt that the situation has improved since 1980," Schmitt said. "The per-capita income has increased more slowly than the national per-capita income. And, based on national trends, there is a growing divergence between the rich and the poor."

The estimate coincides with the number of people who receive public assistance.

Last month, the state Department of Social Services and Housing distributed food stamps to 40,732 people, and money to 52,548 families or single adults. Of the total, 40,892 represented aid to families with dependent children (AFDC).

IN OTHER AREAS, the Hawaii Foodbank provided food for 1.5 million meals last year to about 25,000 individuals, said John White, its director.

And WIC (Women, Infants

and Children) program currently serves about 9,300 people a month, with children under 5 representing the largest category, said Helen Matsunaka, program administrator.

The organization provides nutrition education, counseling and food coupons for specific items, such as milk, cereal, juices and formula.

The program reaches only 20 percent of those eligible for help, said Matsunaka, who estimated the needy population at 45,000. The number is based on income and nutritional risk.

"People think there is no malnutrition in Hawaii because there are fish in the sea and papayas on the trees," Kent said. "But the cost of living is very high here."

Malnutrition is a condition in which diet causes deterioration in health, he said. It includes people who eat too much or too little, and those who suffer from specific excesses or deficiencies.

PEOPLE WHO take in less

than 65 percent of the recommended daily allowance of just one essential nutrient also are considered malnourished, said Bluebell Standal, professor of food science and nutrition at the University of Hawaii. He is chairman of World Food Day celebration at UH.

"People feel that as long as they are eating anything, they are doing OK," said Marian Rauch, state coordinator of the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program within the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources. "They have no idea some food is better than others or that some may actually be bad for them."

She said most people eat twice as much protein as they need and not enough fruits and vegetables.

But the most common malnutrition is "under-nutrition" from poverty, Kent said. People simply don't get enough food because they can't afford it.