

10/22/01

**KEYNOTE SPEECH – DOUG O'BRIEN**

**PARTNERSHIP TO END HUNGER**

The keynote address was presented by Doug O'Brien, Director of Public Policy and Research at America's Second Harvest, the nation's largest charitable hunger relief organization in the United States. His principal duties include directing the public policy advocacy, government relations, and hunger related research of the network of food banks and food recovery organizations. He has been with America's Second Harvest since 1995. Prior to coming to American's Second Harvest, Doug served as professional legislative staff on the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee, chaired by Senator Patrick Leahy. His legislative work includes food stamp program expansions, commodity program expansions, child nutrition reauthorization and others. He brings both the political insider and advocate perspective to the upcoming reauthorization of the program.

He began his address by expressing his deep heartfelt thanks to AAFSD for its kind donation that allowed Second Harvest to provide additional relief efforts for the September 11 disaster victims. He stressed a coalition between advocates, program and charities to address the problems of hunger in America.

He indicated Food Stamp Program rolls are declining and demand on local charities is increasing. So why are people turning to charity for food aid, at the same time that they are leaving the food stamp program while still eligible? As he stated, "They turn to us because they are hungry, truly in need."

The face of hunger in America has changed. Many Americans are just one paycheck away from hunger. The typical profile of those seeking charitable services is a single mother with children and not a homeless man. Currently 1 out of 5 people in a soup kitchen line is a child. Doug believes that the challenge for policy makers and charities is to be aware of and react to the changing face of hunger in America if we want our programs to work.

Why are over 20 million people in this country food insecure? Studies indicate program complexity and low benefit levels contribute to potential recipients not applying for benefits.

Second Harvest shares the same belief as the Food Stamp Program that the program must be simplified and benefits to participants increased. He encouraged partnerships to accomplish these goals. Mr. O'Brien stated, " We are strongly and unequivocally committed to working with you all on making food stamps work better". He also added, " Of all the relationships that will make a difference, however, it is the partnership of advocates, administrators, and charities working together".