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## Food

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anticipates further reductions in programs that are already suffering. For instance, the federal Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program has dwindled from \$300 million in 1992 to \$25 million in 1995. TEFAP currently provides Food Bank of the Southern Tier with staples such as rice, corn meal, flour, butter, cheese, canned fruits, vegetables, meats and frozen foods.

At the state level, other major suppliers of the Tier food bank are the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and the Nutrition Outreach and Education Program. Contracts are signed for SNAP and NOEP through June of 1996, according to Tony Barbaro, executive director of Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier.

Yet Barbaro said that "money is coming in slowly" and "there's a little bit of paranoia" about whether these programs will exist beyond June.

Farrer explained there is no guarantee that block-granting will continue providing the same level of assistance he currently receives from federal resources.

"I don't know what the state will do with the money, because there won't be any guidelines," said Farrer, whose food bank is a member organization of Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier.

Christopher Wilkins, parish and community development coordinator at Finger Lakes Social Ministry, is equally skeptical about the block-granting plan.

"The major shift in the landscape when you talk about block-granting is that the feds say, 'Look, state. Here's a pot of money and when it's gone, that's it - even if you're entitled,'" Wilkins said.

Giovina Caroscio, executive director of Finger Lakes Social Ministry, said she, also, has detected signs of further budget cuts. She recently received notification from the state's Nutrition Consortium saying her ministry's annual budget to



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer  
**Tony Barbaro, executive director of Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier, is concerned that government funding for Food Bank of the Southern Tier will be severely reduced by the middle of next year.**

promote the Nutritional Outreach Program will likely be reduced from \$60,000 to approximately \$50,000. The program assists people in getting on food stamps, and also helps provide meals for young children and teenagers.

The ominous winds of change have Caroscio bracing for a crisis situation, she said.

"The anticipation is that it's only going to get worse," Caroscio commented.

Similarly, Farrer felt the necessity to launch a direct-mail fundraising appeal across the Southern Tier in August. He stated in his letter, "We are in a very difficult predicament due to legislative issues beyond our control."

"The message for Catholic Charities and food pantries throughout the land is to shore up the safety nets, because they're eroding," Barbaro said.

Jack Balinsky, diocesan Catholic

Charities director, is concerned that the cuts will especially hurt people unable to work, such as children, the elderly and the mentally disabled.

"We need to retain entitlement for those groups," Balinsky said. However, he feels the federal government proposals "are basically undoing a program of entitlement in this country that we've had for the past 60 years."

Yet rather than continuing to lament, Foodlink's Ferraro suggested dropping "the sky is falling" attitudes and moving forward. For example, he said the budget cuts should signal a call for citizens with sufficient income to increase their donations of money and volunteer time for those living below the poverty line.

"I at least have enough confidence in the American society that we're not going to let people starve, regardless of the mechanics," Ferraro said.

"It's incumbent on all of us, at this point, to think creatively," agreed Joe Buttigieg, associate director for Catholic Charities in the New York State Catholic Conference.

Buttigieg feels that hunger cannot simply be wiped away by making public welfare programs available.

"Right now we're very good at mailing checks, but not very good at providing services," he said.

Other people, however, say the federal government is removing itself from its basic duties by shifting the burden of hunger to groups such as social-ministry organizations.

"Our system was not set up to be a permanent system," Farrer said. "It was meant to be an emergency service."

"The government is supposed to be a government of the people, by the and for the people. But it's a government of the powerful, by the powerful and for the powerful," Sister Miller declared. "The poor are completely left out and the government does not care. I just see our numbers increasing, people coming in with real desperation. They'll be fighting for food."

"What I see is an abdication of the government providing for the common good," Caroscio added. "They're looking for scapegoats - for people to blame because they don't want to take the responsibility."

Michael Ruggiero, director of St. Peter's Kitchen in Rochester, said that no single faction should be held accountable for such a complex dilemma.

"I think, personally, it's a shared responsibility," Ruggiero commented.

Regardless of whom the onus should fall upon, Ferraro pointed out that hunger in America is a problem nobody has yet managed to eliminate. That reality alone, he reasoned, warrants a call for alternative tactics.

"I don't feel good about what I've accomplished in all these years, because it hasn't worked," Ferraro said. "So I'm willing to try something new."

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