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Food Bank faces major shortages; charitable donations fall to a low

AUSTIN (AP) — The Capital Area Food Bank's warehouse is as close to empty as it's ever been, and the director says corporate takeovers — and a resulting reduction in charitable donations — are to blame.

"The crisis is that this seems to be trend without an ending," food bank executive director Judy Carter said. "There doesn't seem to be a time when it's going to get better."

Food bank employees say the shortages — blamed on an unprecedented reduction in donations on a national level — could not have come at a worse time.

The percentage of Travis County residents living in poverty has increased from 14.1 percent in 1980 to 19.7 percent in 1989. In addition, the number of social service agencies receiving supplies from the food bank has increased from 110 last year to 128.

The Central Texas agencies pay the food bank a handling charge of 10 cents per pound for food and cleaning supplies, then distribute the items to their clients.

The problem facing food banks across the nation is that corporate food donations to the Second Harvest — a Chicago-based national network that allocates food to 200 food banks — have been hurt by mergers, buyouts and drought.

Takeovers hurt because a corporation may go into debt to buy another company, then institute penny-saving measures such as selling surplus food to salvage operations instead of making donations to food banks, Carter said.

Carter said Second Harvest officials also must cultivate new executives when a company is purchased. "We have to start all over convincing them that it is good for the company as well as the community to donate."

The Capital Area Food Bank, which distributed 3.1 million pounds of food in 1988, receives 42 percent of its donated food from Second Harvest, Carter said. As of the end of August, Second Harvest shipments to the local food bank were down 39 percent, she said.

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