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MA 101

November 12, 2020

A Place at the Table (Video Response)

The Documentary, *A Place at the Table*, is an inside look at food insecurity in The United States. It is an eye-opening movie addressing the issue of hunger in a country that should be able to feed all its people, yet many fall through the cracks. There are food deserts, a lack of public assistance, and a shortage of funding for school nutrition programs. Our most vulnerable members of society, including our children may pay a high price. Is our health as a nation something we can afford to sacrifice?

When this documentary was being produced, the statistics surrounding food insecurity include at least 50 million Americans and 17 million of those are children. Food insecurity does not necessarily mean that a person is starving. You can live without eating for one day, but would you want to? Food insecurity can arise in a household that has income from a working person or people. That household may have multiple families living under one roof. There may not be enough income to consistently feed the larger number of people in the household with money from only one or two jobs. The possibility of running out of money and missing meals becomes a real issue. A girl in the documentary describes how her stomach feels when she is hungry.

It sounds like this is an issue that has come up more than once in her life. It is heart wrenching to watch this part of the movie, and to think about all the children in the United States that face food insecurity on any given day.

Why not apply for public assistance programs that are available in the community? One of the statistics in the movie states that a household making more than twenty-four thousand dollars, may qualify for little or no public assistance at all. You would think that public assistance would be the answer to solve food insecurity in this country, but it falls far short of reaching all those in need. If you don't qualify for subsidized child care, and your income is just over the limit for food stamps, how can you work and buy food? These are questions that are raised in the mind of the viewer when watching real life stories about the struggles of working people to buy food. There is a stigma surrounding the term "low income". People do not like to be classified in those terms. Due to the past and continued stigma of this issue, it could be perceived as discriminatory. There are now church and community programs to supplement government assistance, but even they cannot reach all hungry people in the United States. We have enough food to feed everyone, but the restrictions on public assistance, and location and transportation dilemmas all get in the way of getting the food out to the people.

A food desert is an area where there are limited stores or markets to buy food, and these places may not have continued access to a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables. Many people do not have cars, and a lady named Barbie has to ride the bus over one hour to get a good variety of food. You will notice that she only has a couple bags on the bus ride home. There is only so much she can carry. It is difficult in this situation to consistently keep food on hand. The transportation, location, and financial issues all contribute to this food insecurity.

The documentary also talks about funding in school nutrition programs. Many children rely on school for a majority of their daily food during the week. That makes these programs very important. Once the overhead costs are taken into consideration, there is little money left to plan the actual meal. This can lower the quality and nutritional value of the food. Cheap food to fill the calorie requirements can be seriously lacking in nutrients.

One could argue that the biggest crises arising out of food insecurity in the United States is the possible long term health consequences on our children. Children need a variety of nutrients for their continued growth and development. Fast and cheap access to junk food like chips and soda, fills the void, but provides little nutritional value. Our future as a nation is at stake. Our government should make food insecurity a top priority now, so another child doesn't have to miss a meal or go for a whole day without food. It takes time for legislation to pass, but the argument is still this: People need to eat every day. The future of our children and our nation depends on it