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## Hunger Takes No Vacations, Not Even on the Vineyard

By MARIANA CHILTON

Summertime. It's easy to forget in this lovely, windblown spot that even here, even now, children go hungry. In a startling story earlier this month, the Gazette reported that food-stamp use at Cronig's Market increased by 500 per cent this year.

Reality is hard to escape. Out here in the cool Atlantic or in the most claustrophobic inner-city neighborhood, there are 36.2 million people in the United States who are hungry, 12.4 million of them are children.

Ironically, the "carefree" summertime is when hunger hits kids hardest. Throughout the year, many children count on free school breakfasts and lunches as their only meals. But when school ends, those meals evaporate. Parents are left to struggle for food. And since so many local stores across America are often lacking in fresh fruits and vegetables, families must turn to cheap fried noodles, chips and sugar water to stave off hunger pangs.

When I was growing up and shopping at Cronig's with my mother, we ate our share of cabbage. But I never wanted for food like so many on the Vineyard currently do. To help these Vineyarders, the Gazette reported, many nonprofits are relying on vacationers for summertime philanthropy.

Such fund-raising can offer a little help. But as a former Tisbury School kid, I can't help thinking that it can also serve to deepen the divide between the people of means who vacation here and those who live here and struggle year-round.

To truly battle hunger and make substantive change, we need to begin to think of hunger as a shared problem, and to take greater interest in federal nutrition policies.

Food stamps are a good place to start. Research shows that food stamps are as effective as medicine for young children, by improving health and well-being, reducing hospitalization rates, enhancing child development and strengthening

school performance. They also stimulate the economy.

This fall, congress will begin deliberations on reauthorizing the child nutrition programs — school breakfast and lunch, the child and adult care feeding programs and WIC (the nutrition and health program for pregnant women and young children). To help, all of us can write to our congressional delegations, our governors and our mayors about the importance of such programs. Doing so may be more effective and long-lasting than giving money once and forgetting about it for another year. Legislation on major bills such as child nutrition reauthorization reaches millions of people and lasts for years.

As most people on the Vineyard know, the President and his family will be vacationing here next month. One hopes that President Obama, who has vowed to end child hunger by 2015, will look beyond the Vineyard's stunning vistas to talk to people here about hunger.

It's probably a drag to have to read about hunger on your vacation. But, believe it or not, it's the best time of year to remember the suffering that goes on year-round.

Hunger is a reality that exists — visibly or not — in every community in our country.