It had always confounded me that hunger persisted anywhere, but it was (and still is) particularly concerning to me that food insecurity was so pervasive in the United States and Israel. That’s why I joined the Board of Directors of MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger. My goal was to learn everything I could about the issue and its potential solutions and use that information to educate influential people to make it their priority to end hunger.

With and on behalf of MAZON, I have educated policymakers on both sides of the aisle, and know my efforts will eventually inspire them to take action on behalf of hungry people. With and on behalf of MAZON, I have toured schools with elected officials so they can witness the power and importance of school breakfast and lunch programs. With and on behalf of MAZON, I have encouraged companies with whom I do business to commit to being part of the solution. With and on behalf of MAZON, I helped to build a coalition of policymakers in Israel that is now making some of the most significant changes to improve food insecurity the country has seen in its history.

In April, my term as Board Chair of MAZON will come to a close. I am forever grateful for having the opportunity to serve in this capacity and to join the extended MAZON family in working for a more just and food secure world. I am proud of everything we’ve accomplished, but there is much more left to do. Despite stepping down from my leadership position, I am dedicating myself to my current level of commitment to MAZON, including fostering the relationships I have now and continuing to build new ones. In the days, weeks, months and years to come, how will you dedicate yourself to ending hunger?

B’shalom,

[Signature]
FROM MAZON'S PRESIDENT & CEO

Every Pesach we hold up the matzo and proclaim, “this is the bread of affliction, let all who are hungry come and eat!” We say it with vigor. We may even say it with passion. But for far too many of us, we simply utter the words, without stopping to consider them. So this year, let’s not do that.

When we issue this invitation, we typically do not expect a knock at the door that brings a parade of needy and vulnerable people seeking seats at our Seder table. But we issue the invitation nonetheless – it is a symbolic statement, one that we’ve said over and over again for generations. Just who are these hungry people we exhort to come and eat?

In every community across America, there are growing numbers of unemployed or underemployed people who struggle with food insecurity. Some are young and single, just desperate to find a job and get a good start in life. Many are families with children – hard working parents who find themselves forced to make impossible choices between buying food and paying the rent.

But these are not the only people among us who are hungry. It’s also former middle and even upper-middle class households devastated by a sudden or chronic illness, who become impoverished trying to pay unforeseen medical bills.

It’s senior citizens who expected to rely on social security to support themselves in retirement only to find inflation has made that impossible.

It’s a neighbor down the street who lost his job, can’t find another one and is now facing foreclosure, homelessness and hunger for the first time in his life.

Our Seders are an opportunity to recount our history and remember as Jews that we were once hungry. We were once strangers. We were once slaves, but now we are free. What will we do with our freedom? Will you share a warm and satisfying festival meal with family and friends, but overlook those who are hungry? Or this year, will you remember all those for whom no meal can be taken for granted; those for whom the invitation to come and eat is a lifeline. This year, remember it is within your power to extend help and hope to all those who are hungry, if only you stop to consider them.

L’shalom,

Amy Goldstein
Despite its name, the Farm Bill affects more than farmers. It is no understatement to say that the Farm Bill more or less controls what we eat. It helps regulate what crops are planted, prioritized and subsidized, which impacts the fate of agribusiness and family farmers alike. It establishes whether sustainable farming and conservation practices will be implemented. It influences whether our food is healthy and affordable, and governs the kinds and levels of assistance we provide to hungry people. Each and every one of us has a stake in the Farm Bill.

The bill is comprised of 15 “titles,” which represent a broad range of interests, and thus attracts the attention of diverse stakeholders, including agribusiness, conservationists, anti-hunger activists, public health advocates as well as groups concerned with sustainable agriculture and international trade. In years past, the task of getting the Farm Bill approved by both Congressional houses has required alliances between seemingly conflicting political allies. It has also inspired fierce competition for limited funds.

Discussions about the next Farm Bill in the House and Senate Agriculture committees are underway. However, there is a fair amount of uncertainty as to whether a new Farm Bill will be enacted before the current one expires.

The most recent version of the Farm Bill, which passed in 2008 and expires in September 2012, authorized nearly $300 billion in mandatory spending over five years. Although the Farm Bill represents less than one percent of the federal budget, the tremendous pressure to balance the national budget may lead deficit hawks to see it as a good target for cuts. And if the current partisan paralysis afflicting Washington continues through the rest of this year because of the upcoming Presidential election, it seems unlikely that either party will make the kind of concessions required to get this omnibus legislation passed. If Congress is unable to pass a Farm Bill this year, a short-term extension of the current Bill will be required, and a new Congress will take up the Bill in 2013.

(continued on next page)
As in years past, MAZON will be using this critical piece of legislation as a key vehicle for advancing our anti-hunger advocacy agenda. We believe the next Farm Bill can — and should — reflect Jewish values, and in so doing, ensure equitable access to healthy nutritious food for all Americans.

For the next Farm Bill, MAZON has challenged our policymakers to:

- Protect and increase funding for SNAP;
- Improve the nutritional quality of the food distributed through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (often known as the “surplus” food program); and
- Create incentives for family farmers, especially those growing fruits and vegetables, to help make their products more accessible for all Americans.

We believe these three changes and safeguards will have a profound impact on the lives of countless people across the country.

We urge you to join our effort to promote a Jewish response to the Farm Bill. Call our office at 800.813.0557 or email us at mazonmail@mazon.org to find out how you can get involved in this important work.

FIRST-HAND ACCOUNT

The realities of life on food stamps

by Laura Mizes, Youth Outreach Coordinator

I grew up in the suburbs of San Francisco, where I was fortunate enough to start and end each day by sharing a meal with my family. Tzedakah and tikkun olam were integral parts of my upbringing, and I participated regularly in service projects with my family and youth groups. I even started a philanthropic event to help fight local hunger in college. I believed in what I was doing, but I was always doing the work for “them,” not realizing that someday it would impact me personally.

After earning my degree from the University of Missouri, I accepted an AmeriCorps position with College Bound, a non-profit in St. Louis that helps highly motivated, under-served high school students prepare for college.

The AmeriCorps position provided a monthly living allowance of about $800, a meager stipend that the program suggested could adequately sustain me. Unfortunately, it really wasn’t enough. So on August 2, 2010, at the age of 22, I went to the Missouri Family Support office to publicly admit that I could not afford to feed myself and needed assistance from SNAP (food stamps). My AmeriCorps stipend of $800 was considered a “living allowance” rather than income, so I qualified for the maximum benefit. My monthly $200 would be provided through an Electronic Bank Transfer (EBT) card, which would be automatically recharged with my SNAP benefit at 12:01 am on the 6th of each month.
I remembered having seen “EBT” as a payment option on pin pads at grocery stores, which I had always thought was interchangeable terminology with “Debit.” I quickly learned that the two were quite different.

I was self-conscious about needing help, so I became far more attuned to others around me who were using EBT cards too. I limited myself to grocery stores where I knew that my EBT card would be one of hundreds swiped that day. More often than not, I opted to use a self-checkout lane to avoid the discomfort of having to hand my EBT card to a cashier. I ruled out the thought of shopping at an upscale grocery store like Whole Foods with my SNAP benefits. Not only would it have been far too expensive, but I was sure that no one else there would be using an EBT card like me, and surely I would stand out. But my embarrassment was only one of the things I experienced during my year on SNAP.

Having only $200 a month – $50 a week or $7 a day – was definitely challenging. No longer could I browse the grocery store with a list and also pick up extra things that caught my eye. On SNAP, my list had to be strategically planned, and there was no room for items that I hadn’t planned on purchasing. The simple act of grocery shopping itself was indeed profoundly different.

The quality of the food I consumed that year changed too. I did my best to include nutritious foods in all my meals, but fresh foods like fruit, vegetables, meat and dairy are expensive. Who would ever think a package of strawberries would be a luxurious treat that I could rarely afford? By the end of the month, my budget was often so tight that a $0.79 box of mac and cheese was my only option. My commitment to living a healthy lifestyle could no longer be a top priority.

At my regular grocery store, a string of cabs would line up at the curb outside the door, just like you would see at an airport. Why? Because many of the families shopping there did not have their own cars, so the cabs expected that they would need a ride home with their grocery bags. Of course, the cost of a cab left these families with even less money for their basic necessities. I had never before considered that the sheer act of getting to and from the grocery store could be an obstacle.

For a year, I was one of the 50 million people in America struggling to make ends meet, and I am humbled by the experience. I never could have imagined that I would ever struggle to put food on the table. I can guarantee that most of my friends and family never would have guessed I would need federal nutrition assistance, either. But I did, and I am grateful that SNAP was there to help sustain me when I truly needed it. I’d be willing to bet, whether you know it or not, right now there are people in your life who are grateful for that too.
This year, as I faced down another birthday, I decided to try a small experiment with a Facebook app called Causes, asking friends to contribute to charity in lieu of a birthday gift. I chose MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger because it represents everything I love in a charitable organization: It is a Jewish movement, but helps people regardless of faith and background. It provides grants to those who directly feed hungry people as well as to those who advocate on behalf of responsible government policies. It is progressive, proactive, and creative.

Setting up my "birthday wish" took about 3 minutes – I wrote a brief pitch, set a goal, recorded a little video – click, click, click…done. I set myself what seemed like an achievable objective: $250. Then I tweeted about my wish and posted it on Facebook.

To my astonishment, donations started pouring in immediately, much of it from people I’ve never met. Largely in increments of 10 bucks, we quickly shot past my initial goal. With delight, I watched all morning as the money kept flowing in. As an actor I have a good number of followers on FB and Twitter, but since I use those two outlets largely for dumb jokes and self-promotion, I wasn’t sure an appeal for money would be very effective. Turns out people love to give to a good cause, and they will. As I write this, we have raised well over four thousand dollars for MAZON!

In addition to the money collected, all the tweeting and posting raised awareness about MAZON, and that is a very good thing. Because of my birthday appeal, I met some of the great people who run the organization, and I will now be getting involved as an advocate for the organization and the cause.

They say every journey begins with a single step. Choosing to use my birthday to raise money for MAZON was an extremely easy first step. I urge you to consider doing the same for your birthday.

We are so gratified that these acclaimed Los Angeles restaurants are including MAZON in their Seders this year:
WHY DO YOU GIVE TO MAZON?

Inspirational stories from donors

by Cari Uslan, Director of Development

As the Director of Development for MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, I enjoy getting to know our donors. MAZON is blessed to have a family of benefactors whose passion for giving is equally matched by the inspirational stories that accompany their gifts. As often as I can, I ask them what inspires them to give so generously to MAZON. Every reason is unique. Just as every single one of MAZON’s generous supporters is unique and special.

I want to know what inspires your generosity. Whether you support MAZON because it is a Jewish organization, or you simply want to help hungry families, or you like that MAZON has a four star rating on Charity Navigator, please share your story with me at: cuslan@mazon.org.

“It is simply outrageous that in this country so many people are without enough food. I don’t understand why the political rhetoric does not address the fact that feeding hungry people and providing them security is essential to everyone’s life, now and in the future. So I am very happy that we are able to give, and that organizations like MAZON are around.” (Phoenix, AZ)

“My parents were Holocaust survivors and their stories of starvation will be with me always.” (Marlboro, NJ)

“I first made a gift to MAZON after my Bar Mitzvah. My wife and I continue to give because supporting MAZON is a way to express the deeply Jewish origin of our charitable impulse.” (New York, NY)

“MAZON is doing the right things to end hunger. MAZON advocates for federal policies that combat the problem of hunger, in addition to funding various food programs. I also like that MAZON funds programs that help non-Jews as well as Jews.” (Wilmette, IL)

“It’s simple: we like to eat. Each year we calculate how much we’ve spent eating out and buying groceries, and then we donate a percentage to organizations fighting hunger. That way we know that when we eat, others do too.” (Arlington, VA)

“The Jews in the news these days very often seem to me to be reinforcing the old stereotypes of Jews as greedy and dishonest. And then there is MAZON, putting a Jewish face on efforts to help needy people of all backgrounds in a way that is consistent with the idea of Jewish values that I was brought up to believe in.” (Hopewell, NJ)

YOUR STORY HERE?
send it to cuslan@mazon.org
EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY IN ACTION

Empowering synagogues to create change

by Samuel Chu, National Synagogue Organizing

Hunger persists in America not because of mathematics or logistics, but because of economics and politics. Thus a meaningful response to hunger must address both the economics and the politics.

That’s why MAZON requires our partner grantees to engage in education and advocacy – to work in concrete ways to change the policies, practices and bureaucracies that allow hunger to endure.

But we also recognize that, if we are going to change the system, our grantees cannot be the lone voice against the injustice of hunger. And so we are developing MAZON Advocacy Initiatives that extend this same priority to our partner synagogues and their communities.

We want MAZON’s extended family of supporters to become a powerful constituency that can effectively advance the interests and dignity of those who are hungry, while also saying to our grantees and allies, “We’ve got your back.”

Congregations and other Jewish groups play a unique role in their communities. With their rich history, broad membership, diverse network and public standing, they are an optimal catalyst to affect specific, timely, and winnable changes at every level of public policy.

THE FIFTH QUESTION

WHY on this night are millions of people still going hungry?

BECAUSE on this night, as on every other night, millions of people living in poverty have no other choice.
Over the last year, MAZON has begun laying the groundwork to engage synagogues and other community leaders in more direct education and advocacy:

- In Texas, congregations successfully supported a bill that expands the Summer Food Program in schools.
- In California, congregations joined MAZON grantees and partners in successfully eliminating the requirement that hungry people submit to fingerprinting to receive SNAP benefits.

Building on the success of these early efforts, MAZON is launching a series of coordinated pilot campaigns.

Adath Jeshurun is a conservative synagogue in Minnetonka, Minnesota, led by senior Rabbi and MAZON Board Member, Harold Kravitz. With MAZON’s support, congregants researched and debated locally-relevant issues and identified an initial campaign: to ensure that no disadvantaged child is ever turned away from lunch in a public school. The congregational team is now working to develop and help enact statewide and district-specific legislative and administrative reforms to turn its vision into reality. This pilot not only models a communal and meaningful response to hunger, but also a concrete way to grow capacity and revitalize interests in social justice within the synagogue.

In Maine and other targeted areas across the country, MAZON is identifying and training congregations to educate and secure commitments from their congressional representatives on legislation supporting local farm production and jobs as a priority in the next farm bill.

We are also trying to leverage our success in California in New York City, one of only two places (Arizona is the other) that still requires fingerprinting for hungry people to get the assistance they need to obtain food.

The issues may vary, but the unifying element is that a MAZON partner synagogue is leading the effort. We hope each of our partners – from synagogues to JCCs to other community groups – will actively engage in our effort to affect change. Imagine our collective power if MAZON’s extended family of supporters and more than 900 partner synagogues grew into a collective force and outspoken voice in the fight to end hunger!

USE
The Fifth Question table tent (see tear-out, center) on your Seder table to remind your guests of those who are still enslaved by hunger.

ASK
The Fifth Question at your Seder to spark conversation about the injustice of hunger and what we can do to help.

FIND
The Fifth Question resources at mazon.org/go/FifthQuestion.
STRATEGIC INITIATIVES AT MAZON

It’s all led to this

by Marla Feldman, Project Director

As Healthy Options, Healthy Meals enters its second year, it’s so gratifying to see how much progress the 12 food banks we’re mentoring have made – how far they’ve come in such short time. What’s even more gratifying is to appreciate how long MAZON has been doing this kind of work, how far we’ve come, and how far we have helped the emergency food network to go.

MAZON has been helping increase capacity within the emergency food network for almost 15 years. Initially, we focused on helping our partner grantees become more engaged in public policy and better equipped to advocate for increased access to federal nutrition programs, such as SNAP (food stamps) and school meals. From 1999 to 2010, we hosted annual conferences for the anti-hunger community in California to help them learn about and understand current hunger-related budget and policy priorities. These conferences were also designed to provide a forum for participating organizations to network and share their experiences with one another, with the goal

CHANGES IN THE OFFICE

New faces, new roles

Samuel Chu has joined MAZON to lead our National Synagogue Organizing effort. Samuel has dedicated his career to harnessing the power of congregations and nonprofits for political change. He serves as president of OneLA-Industrial Areas Foundation, one of the nation’s largest broad-based organizing efforts, and was the founding executive director of California Faith for Equality. Samuel is also currently a fellow at the Center for Religion and Civic Culture at the University of Southern California.

Marcy Kaplan has joined MAZON as Program Officer. Marcy brings substantial program experience to her new role, having been Program Director of the California Participation Project, and from working at California Common Cause and OMB Watch. Marcy has a Masters in Public Policy from the University of California, Los Angeles.

Laurel Crosby has joined MAZON as Development Assistant. Laurel comes to us after five years as the NYC-based Membership Coordinator for the Poetry Society of America. Laurel holds a B.A. in English and Creative Writing from Hollins University, and a Masters of Fine Arts in Writing from Columbia University.

Laura Mizes has transitioned to be MAZON’s Youth Outreach Coordinator. Laura is now responsible for developing and coordinating classroom curriculum, summer camp programming, B’nei Mitzvah tzedakah projects, and social justice activities for people ages 2-30. Laura has a Bachelor of Journalism from the University of Missouri.

Nicole Tenret has joined MAZON as Administrative Assistant. Nicole provides general support to the entire office and serves as Executive Assistant to Abby Leibman and Barb Green. Prior to joining MAZON, she was an Executive Assistant at NOI Capital Partners. Nicole has a B.A. in Sociology from the University of California, Los Angeles.
of fostering strong regional and statewide alliances and coalitions. Commonplace as such an approach may seem today, we were the ONLY anti-hunger organization to be doing such a thing at the time.

By 2003, our conference included workshops that explored ways the anti-hunger community could play a role in preventing obesity and diet-related illnesses. Those preliminary conversations led to the 2007 launch of our efforts to promote healthier eating in low-income neighborhoods. With the help of a team of leaders from the anti-hunger community, we identified a set of best practices that would enable food banks to increase access to healthy food in the communities they serve.

Food banks and other emergency food providers in California began implementing these effective strategies with positive results, attracting the interest of Kaiser Permanente, which had long acknowledged the important role nutrition plays in preventative health. Thus MAZON began its relationship with Kaiser Permanente, and Healthy Options, Healthy Meals was born.

It is tremendously rewarding to work so closely with the twelve food banks that are participating in Healthy Options, Healthy Meals. Although each one begins this process at a different point on the road to providing more nutritious food, they are all making the organizational changes that are necessary to their success. Each one has made a powerful promise to its community that it will prioritize the nutritional quality of its food. Each one is developing a formal written nutrition policy – something that only a select number of food banks across the country currently have. And each one will offer us vital insights into best practices, trends and strategies that we will compile and share with the rest of the emergency food network.

It is also enormously rewarding to know that our prior initiatives live on in our current ones – that each of those initiatives helped build a strong foundation for the work we’re leading today. We’ve got another year before we’ll wrap up Healthy Options, Healthy Meals, and only time will tell how it will influence our next trailblazing effort. Stay tuned.

“In recent years, Maui Food Bank had taken steps to increase the amount of fresh produce we provide. Institutionally, though, it wasn’t part of our mission to take an active role in promoting nutrition. But after only a year in Healthy Options, Healthy Meals, we’re already approaching things differently.

The word “nutritious” now regularly appears in reports from our Executive Director and is included in all our marketing materials, too. We’re actively trying to influence what our donors give us, like encouraging lean proteins like tuna instead of spam. Most importantly, we’re also formalizing our commitment by drafting a written nutrition policy to guide how we do business moving forward.

We began with baby steps, but with each one we’re building momentum. I’m not sure we would have been able to traverse this path as successfully were it not for MAZON and Healthy Options, Healthy Meals.”

Lynn Curtis
Maui Food Bank