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U.S. sees surge in number of children going hungry

The 691,000 children who went hungry at some point in 2007 are the most since 716,000 in 1998.

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Some 691,000 children went hungry in America sometime in 2007, while close to one in eight Americans struggled to feed themselves adequately even before this year's sharp economic downturn, the Agricultural

Department reported Monday.

The department's annual report on food security showed that during 2007 the number of children who suffered a substantial disruption in the amount of food they typically eat rose by more than 50 percent from the 430,000 in 2006 and the largest figure since 716,000 in 1998.

Overall, the 36.2 million adults and children who struggled with hunger during the year was up slightly from 35.5 million in 2006. That was 12.2 percent of Americans who didn't have the money or assistance to get enough food to

maintain active, healthy lives.

Almost a third of those, 11.9 million adults and children, went hungry at some point. That figure has grown by more than 40 percent since 2000. The government says these people suffered a substantial disruption in their food supply at some point and classifies them as having "very low food security." Until the government rewrote its definitions two years ago, this group was described as having "food insecurity with hunger."

The findings should increase pressure to meet

President-elect Barack Obama's campaign pledge to expand food aid and end childhood hunger by 2015, said James Weill, president of the Food Research and Action Center, an anti-hunger group.

He predicted the 2008 numbers will show even more hunger because of the sharp economic downturn this year.

Weill said the figures show that economic growth during the first seven years of the Bush administration didn't reach the poorest and hungriest people.