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Unless people crave change, hunger will stay on Oregon's plate

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As Oregonians
wait on their
leaders to take
up the cause,
Rhode Island
is finding
ways to get
food to those
in need

Five years ago, a small group of Rhode Islanders began to use a new, unlikely word in connection with the future of their state: "Hunger-free." Last year, the Rhode Island Community Food Bank declared "A Plan to End Hunger by 2006." An American state — admittedly, one smaller than the acreage of an Oregon forest fire — is setting a serious goal of having no hungry people.

You can see why hunger would be a key issue in Rhode Island: After all, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Little Rhody's rate of families experiencing hunger — 2.7 percent — is nearly half the size of Oregon's — 6.2 percent. It's enough to make any state concerned. And enough to make some states declare hunger a priority. "I think there's a real acknowledgment and effort in the state," says

Kathleen Gorman, director of the Feinstein Center for a Hunger-Free America at the University of Rhode Island, "that hunger is something we can tackle and we need to tackle." To tackle it, the state, its food bank and its leaders — political and business — are moving forward in multiple directions, involving government programs, private efforts and Mr. Potato Head. Rhode Island's goal is to reduce the population experiencing hunger

from 2.7 percent to 1 percent by 2006. Oregon's goal, of course, is to hope its 6.2 percent doesn't get much worse. Rhode Island starts with the goal of getting as much help from food stamps and other federal nutrition programs as possible. The state estimates that 69 percent of Rhode Islanders eligible for food stamps receive them; its 2006 goal is to get that