

A LOOK AT FOOD INSECURITY IN AMERICA

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

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A LOOK AT FOOD INSECURITY IN AMERICA

THURSDAY, MARCH 11, 2021

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
Washington, D.C.

The Committee met, pursuant to call, at 9:00 a.m., via Webex, Hon. David Scott of Georgia [Chairman of the Committee] presiding.

Members present: Representatives David Scott of Georgia, Costa, McGovern, Adams, Spanberger, Hayes, Delgado, Rush, Pingree, Kuster, Bustos, O'Halleran, Carbajal, Khanna, Lawson, Craig, Harder, Axne, Schrier, Panetta, Kirkpatrick, Bishop, Thompson, Austin Scott of Georgia, Crawford, DesJarlais, Hartzler, LaMalfa, Davis, Allen, Rouzer, Kelly, Bacon, Johnson, Baird, Hagedorn, Cloud, Mann, Feenstra, Miller, Moore, Cammack, and Fischbach.

Staff present: Lyron Blum-Evitts, Ross Hettervig, Prescott Martin III, Anne Simmons, Ashley Smith, Caleb Crosswhite, Ricki Schroeder, Jennifer Tiller, Erin Wilson, John Konya, and Dana Sandman.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. DAVID SCOTT, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM GEORGIA

The CHAIRMAN. This hearing of the Committee on Agriculture entitled, *A Look at Food Insecurity in America*, will now come to order.

I want to welcome, and I want to thank, everyone for joining us today at this hearing. This is a momentous hearing. It is a much-needed hearing. We have, ladies and gentlemen, an extraordinary crisis on our hands confronting our nation, and that is a hunger crisis. And it is very important because there is no Committee up here that is more highly regarded to deal with the issue of hunger and food security than our House Agriculture Committee. And this goes for both Democrats and Republicans. We come to this hearing jointly to get the information, to get the facts, to get some understanding as to why, right now, we have 12 million of our children in this country going to bed hungry and malnourished every night. We are, indeed, the greatest country in the world. We are the most powerful country in the world, and now, today, we are going to show truly how great we are and how powerful we are as a nation, because we are going to solve this hunger crisis. And we start today.

And now, Members will be recognized in order of seniority, alternating between Majority and Minority Members, and in order of arrival for those Members who have joined us after the hearing was

called to order. Now, when you are recognized, please unmute your microphone and you will have 5 minutes to ask your questions and make a comment. I am going to be somewhat more strict than I have been in terms of the 5 minutes, because we want to make sure that every Member has the time to get their questions answered and to make their contribution. Each of our distinguished guests will have their time to do likewise.

And so, in order to get in as many questions as possible, the timer will stay consistently visible on your screens, and we also have somewhat of a busy morning schedule on the Floor. But this hearing is too important. We must continue and carry it on. And so, I am asking Members to work with the staff, communicate with the staff. These votes are staggered. Some can go while others stay. And when I am gone and I will vote, I have asked the distinguished gentlelady from Connecticut, Mrs. Jahana Hayes, who is also the Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations, to substitute for me while I go vote.

So, with that, I want to thank all of you on this Committee for sharing your comments with me, some of you, on how important this hearing is, and that we want to solve the hunger situation in our nation, and food insecurity.

We all know from our own experience how disruptive this COVID-19 pandemic has been to each of our daily lives, our families' lives, and of course, trying to conduct our business here in Washington. We can well imagine these hassles have magnified multiple times.

And you know, I was thinking, just imagine being without a paycheck when we have literally millions of our citizens that had a paycheck don't have it now, and that is why we see lines, miles long, of our citizens trying to get food from our community food banks, and these lines are miles long, and imagine trying to feed your kids adequately, plus teach them at home because of COVID, and pay the bills, and keep looking for a job, all while worried that you may not even make next month's rent or the mortgage.

These are some of the special difficulties that many of our families have been facing for the past year. Fortunately, Congress has responded with critical COVID-19 legislation like Families First, CARES, provisions in the omnibus that we passed in December, and yesterday's historic passage of the American Rescue Plan. And I am certain some of the modifications and increases that were included in those bills are making a difference to families in need in my district, as well as each of your districts as members.

We know that we have saved lives, although we have also lost lives. But where are we now? We continue to see lines, waiting hours to pick up a box of food. We see video footage of children saying they are just plain hungry. I was very moved by the report on CNN where they showed this young lady, in tears. "What is wrong," they said. She said, "I am starving, and my family is." And even if we are now seeing a light at the end of the tunnel as vaccination rates increase, we know that SNAP enrollments are way up, and food banks continue to be flooded with people who have never before had to seek help.

Let's look at the numbers very briefly. Prior to the pandemic in February of 2020, there were 36.8 million people in our country on

SNAP. By April of 2020, SNAP rolls were up to 40 million people, and that increased to nearly 43 million by September of last year. What can we anticipate in the future? The Congressional Budget Office in February released their baseline projections for the next 10 years for SNAP. They predict that the negative effects of the pandemic will continue through most of 2022, with an average total of 44 million of our precious Americans on SNAP next year, before it begins to decrease in 2023, hopefully and prayerfully. Even if this virus disappears, we are going to be living with its aftermath for some time. This is why I have said over and over that this hearing is perhaps our most critical, because folks, as you well know, we can do without a lot of things, but we cannot survive without food.

So, we need to be realistic about this and continue to work to shore up the people who are counting on us to help them, and just like a hurricane or tornado or flood, or an earthquake, we are dealing with a natural disaster that demands we come together, Republicans and Democrats, working together. If we work together as Democrats and Republicans, we will find the real solution to hunger in our great nation. This, ladies and gentlemen, is our responsibility. This is our charge this morning, and we are going to need help and also, we are going to need the almighty hand of God to help lead us together as Democrats and Republicans to solve this hunger crisis in our nation.

[The prepared statement of Mr. David Scott follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. DAVID SCOTT, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM
GEORGIA

Good morning, and thank you to everyone for coming a little early today so we have ample time to discuss today's very important topic, which is hunger, and food insecurity.

We all know from our own experience how disruptive the pandemic has been to our daily lives. We'll imagine these hassles magnified multiple times.

Imagine being without a paycheck, without a car and fearful of public transportation. Imagine trying to feed your kids adequately, plus teach them at home and pay the bills, and keep looking for a job, all while worried that you may not make next month's rent.

These are some of the special difficulties low-income families have been facing this past year.

Fortunately, Congress has responded with critical COVID legislation like Families First, CARES, provisions in the Omnibus we passed in December and yesterday's historic passage of the American Rescue Plan.

I am certain some of the modifications and increases that were included in those bills made a difference to families in need. In my district, I know it saved some lives even as many other lives were lost to COVID-19.

But where are we now? We continue to see lines of cars waiting hours to pick up a box of food. We see video footage of children saying they are just plain hungry. And, even if we see a light at the end of the tunnel as vaccination rates increase, we know SNAP enrollments are way up, and food banks continue to be flooded with people who have never before had to seek help.

Let's look at the numbers:

- Prior to the pandemic, in February of 2020, there were 36.8 million people on SNAP.
- By April of 2020, SNAP rolls were up to 40 million people and that increased to nearly 43 by September of last year.

What can we anticipate in the future? The Congressional Budget Office in February released their Baseline Projections for the next 10 years for SNAP. They predict that the negative effects of the pandemic will continue through most of 2022,

with an average total of 44 million on SNAP next year, before it begins to decrease in 2023.

So, even if this virus disappears, we are going to be living with its aftermath for some time. We need to be realistic about this and continue to work to shore up the people who are counting on us to help them through this crisis.

Just like a hurricane, a tornado, a flood or an earthquake, we are dealing with a natural disaster that demands we come together for a real solution to hunger. This is our responsibility and we are going to need help.

And today, we have help in form of these fine witnesses all of whom are experts in some aspect of feeding people.

We thank each of you for your time and expertise in joining us today and look forward to hearing your experiences with what you are seeing in your communities that will assist us as we look at another year of increased food insecurity due to the pandemic.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. I didn't mean to carry that so long, but this hearing is so important.

And now, I would like to welcome our distinguished Ranking Member, my good friend, the gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. Thompson, for his opening remarks.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. GLENN THOMPSON, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM PENNSYLVANIA**

Mr. THOMPSON. Well, thank you, Chairman. Good morning, everyone.

First of all, let me thank our witnesses for their time and their attention. Your participation on what is this Committee's first, or at least, more fulsome attempt at publicly reviewing the pandemic and Congress's response is much appreciated.

I think we have a lot to celebrate, actually, with what we have accomplished in the nutrition space, and it actually started with our 2018 Farm Bill. What the Administration was able to very adequately and appropriately utilize to make sure that neighbors in need had access to nutrition, that authorization came through our hard work, specifically in the 2018 Farm Bill, the most recent edition, obviously, the 2018 Farm Bill. But also, as Members, in 2020 I think it is—the Members in this committee room, Members of our Committee, Republicans and Democrats, who worked in a bipartisan way on five CARES bills, the most—last one in 2020 being—that we passed on December 21 signed by President Trump December 27. Those really took advantage of the authorization we provided in the farm bill, and we were able to appropriate in order to meet the needs of our neighbors in need, under the conditions of this specific—I know we call it a pandemic. Quite frankly, it was a plague that plagued our families, our businesses, our communities.

So, this pandemic has infiltrated our lives in every sense possible. Unfortunately, the brunt of it was borne on our communities, and in particular, families already living paycheck to paycheck. In too many instances, arrogant career politicians issued statewide indiscriminate edicts forcing businesses and schools to shut their doors, plummeting our communities into a deep recession. As the end of the pandemic nears, I hope we can use today to discuss what worked, what needs improvement, and ways to provide these families with more holistic services, particularly as they engage in a post-pandemic economy that will look somewhat wildly different.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistant Program, or SNAP, currently provides nutrition assistance to 43 million individuals, with an average individual benefit of \$183. Total SNAP-related spending in Fiscal Year 2020 was \$78.9 billion, which includes benefits, administration, nutrition education, employment and training, and program integrity. And of the \$78.9 billion, \$74.2 billion was solely for benefits. By way of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security Act, and Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, more than \$37.8 billion has been appropriated to respond to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance needs of our communities. This monumental response is in addition to the more than \$7.7 billion per month in standard SNAP benefits.

Now, beyond direct funding from Congress, the former and the current Administrations have issued more than 4,000 administrative waivers to states. These waivers impact operations related to the program eligibility, distribution of benefits, employment and training, and more.

These facts are startling. Combined with the myriad of social service policies, including those found in the short-sided, outrageously naïve American Rescue Plan, we are in the midst of our nation's second largest expansion of entitlements. Now, unsurprisingly, leading economists and Wall Street analysts have said key parts of the bill are poorly targeted to the specific needs of the crisis. While my colleagues would like nothing more than for me to focus on their charade, I am going to leave that conversation for another hearing. Today, it is about the response. The witnesses before us are everyday heroes. These are the folks who responded without hesitation to the needs of their communities infested by a pandemic that took the lives of hundreds of thousands of our friends, neighbors, and family members. Whether it be the farmer who chose to donate their crop or the food bank who opened additional sites to be more accommodating, the witnesses before us and every single person who helps keep these entities operational deserve our thanks and our sincere appreciation, Mr. Chairman. We are so appreciative of them.

And while the Department is not represented in today's hearing, I must give them my accolades as well, particularly the former Administration—like it or lump it—the bulk of the response originated in the last Congress under President Trump. Quick-thinking folks implemented pandemic EBT, and the Farmers to Families Food Box Program, two projects that remain remarkably beneficial to families in need. The latter continues to fall victim to inconceivable criticism, and there is always room for more solutions to the needs of our nation. The Farmers to Families Food Box Program has opened eligibility, making certain anyone and everyone in need, regardless of status, income, or household size, has supplementary access to nutritious foods that run the gamut from fruits and vegetables, to meat, and to dairy. I would say, some of the most nutritional foods that we could ever provide through our nutrition programs. This program has provided more than 143 million boxes to households across the United States, and with this program, farmers were able to redirect their products, and American workers were able to sustain employment or join new ventures, all

to ensure fresh foods found their way into the homes of millions. Now, regardless of the cherry-picked hiccups this Committee has heard about over the summer, the program has worked exactly as intended.

And with that, my thanks to the witnesses once again for their participation, and I trust that Chairman Scott will continue to host additional oversight hearings across all programs and constituencies germane to this pandemic response.

With that, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Ranking Member, and your comments were, as usual, excellent and well-prepared and well-delivered.

Mr. THOMPSON. You are very kind.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

As Chairman, I would request that other Members submit their opening statements for the record so witnesses may begin their testimony and to ensure that there is ample time for questions.

Once again, I would like to welcome all of our witnesses, and thank you for being here. I echo the Ranking Member's comments about our witnesses this morning, and I hope that people all across this country who are watching this hearing, tuning in, to please call a friend or neighbor and let them hear, because the only way we are going to be able to respond to this hunger crisis is to listen, to learn from the people who are out there dealing with it every day.

Our first witness is certainly exemplary of that. Our first witness—and I am so pleased to welcome—is Mr. Kyle Waide. Please, let me tell you of my own personal relationship with Mr. Waide. When we had a crisis in terms of helping to get food out, as well as the pandemic testing, he joined with me as a partner and we were able to get food at Mundy's Mill High School in Clayton County, where we fed over 6,000 people and tested them, saved their lives, and delivered food to them. And Ranking Member Thompson, I might say, our good friend, yours and mine, Sonny Perdue, who was Agriculture Secretary there, he was out there with me and Kyle Waide delivering baskets of food, and that is why I say this is truly a bipartisan venture.

And so, let me tell you just a little bit about Kyle Waide. He has been and is the President and the CEO of the Atlanta Community Food Bank, and he has served in that capacity for the last 5 years, going into his sixth year. He has served as CEO and President ever since 2015. And he also serves as the Chairman of the Southeast Regional Cooperative and he is also the Vice Chair of the Georgia Food Bank Association. Prior to his role as CEO and President, Mr. Waide served as the food bank's Vice President of Partner Operations, and he has truly been my partner in what we are doing, and going into the communities, bringing the food, bringing the vaccine so we can get this behind us.

Our second witness who I am pleased to be able to invite to join us today is another great and good friend, Zippy Duvall. I just love that name. I love to say it, as probably you can tell from the way I am saying it. Zippy Duvall. Zippy is President of the American Farm Bureau Federation, and Mr. Duvall has served as President of the Farm Bureau since 2016. And he is a third-generation farm-

er from Georgia. He owns a beef cow herd. He raises broiler chickens, and he grows hay. What a farmer. Prior to serving as the AFBF President, Zippy Duvall was President of the Georgia Farm Bureau and served on the Farm Bureau's Board of Directors. We are so delighted to have you with us, Zippy.

Our third witness is Mr. Max McBrayer, and Mr. McBrayer has been with RaceTrac Petroleum for 29 years, and he has served as the CEO since 2019. Prior to his current role, he served as the Chief Financial Officer and Chief Supply Officer. He was born and raised in Georgia, and he owns and is the Chief Executive Officer of over 500 RaceTrac convenience store operations. It is great to have you with us.

Next, we will hear from Mr. Ron Edenfield, another great friend, who has been an exemplary leader as a leader on the grocery store ownership side of our agriculture and food industry. Mr. Edenfield is the President and CEO of Wayfield Foods, Inc. He co-founded Wayfield Foods in 1982, and now owns nine locations across the metro Atlanta area. Mr. Edenfield also serves on the Food Industry Association's Board of Directors, and previously served on the Board of Directors for the Georgia Food Industry Association.

As I said, what a stellar panel we have to deal with this emergency issue.

I want to introduce our next witness—let me see. Thank you. Thank you.

And now, to introduce our fifth witness, I am pleased to yield to our colleague, the distinguished gentleman from Illinois, Congressman Rodney Davis.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to Ranking Member Thompson.

Just like you had great pride in introducing our mutual friend, Zippy Duvall from your home state, I am very excited to be able to introduce this guest, our next guest who has come here to talk about this important issue today. Eric Hodel is our witness here today from the Midwest Food Bank, which began in Bloomington, Illinois. The Midwest Food Bank operations are able to serve over 500 agency partners across 50 counties in central and eastern Illinois, and many people in my district. I visited the Midwest Food Bank numerous times over my career, and I am excited to have Mr. Hodel here, grateful for the opportunity to hear from him, and all of our witnesses today.

Mr. Chairman, I will yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, thank you very much, Congressman.

And now, without delay, we are going to get started. Our first panelist will be Mr. Kyle Waide, CEO of the Atlanta Community Food Bank, and a great leader in this area. Mr. Waide, you will be recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF KYLE WAIDE, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, ATLANTA COMMUNITY FOOD BANK, ATLANTA, GA

Mr. WAIDE. Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Thompson, and distinguished Members of the Committee, I want to thank you for your invitation to testify today.

The Atlanta Community Food Bank, which I am privileged to serve as CEO, is one of the largest members of Feeding America, the national network of food banks. Feeding America's 200 member food banks serve kids, families, and seniors in every county in the United States, distributing 7½ billion pounds of food through a grassroots network of community-based feeding programs. In north Georgia, my food bank serves close to 900,000 neighbors, and we distributed 105 million pounds of food in the past year across 29 urban, suburban, and rural counties.

The past 12 months have been the most challenging and the most inspiring year of our network that we have ever experienced. In March of 2020, food insecurity rates reached their lowest levels in 20 years. Twelve months later, these numbers have grown by as much as 30 percent and as many as 50 million people face food insecurity, including 17 million children. The crisis is touching people in communities of all backgrounds, with 35 percent of the people that we are serving today experiencing food insecurity for the first time in their lives. Communities of color and many rural communities are facing more severe increases in food insecurity. These communities were more vulnerable before the pandemic, and the crisis has intensified those vulnerabilities.

Food banks across the country have responded creatively and aggressively to increased demand. In 2020, our network, as I mentioned, distributed 7½ billion pounds of food, an increase of 43 percent. Half of that food came from fresh produce, milk, dairy, and animal proteins from our partners in the agricultural community. Food banks are doing this by dramatically increasing food purchasing and transportation capacity. We are providing financial support for our network of community-based feeding programs, many of whom operate out of churches and depend entirely on the commitment of volunteers. We are working with new partners, schools, business groups, local government, to distribute food in places and to communities where our existing partners could not meet the full demand.

As Chairman Scott mentioned, we worked with him and other partners last year to operate large scale drive-thru sites where families could access testing and also receive food assistance. These pop-up partnerships are even more critical in rural communities where we have seen larger numbers of our existing partners forced to close.

We couldn't have done this work, of course, without the support from our donors, and we are deeply grateful for the incredible support of the National Guard, which has deployed members to support food banks in many states around the country, including Georgia.

Federal nutrition programs have been critical to helping food banks do our work. Food supplied by two Federal programs, The Emergency Food Assistance Program, TEFAP, and the Farmers to Families Food Box Program have provided food banks with substantial volumes of food, 50 percent of our total inventory in the Atlanta Community Food Bank since June. Sustaining our response will be impossible without ongoing support from USDA at similar levels. This is even more important for rural food banks, which faced higher levels of food insecurity, fewer private sources

of food, and as a result, depend on Federal programs for 60 to even 80 percent of their total food inventory. We also believe a successful food box program can become more equitable and accountable by leveraging well-established distribution channels and high-capacity partners for moving this food.

Support for food assistance through other nutrition programs has also played a critical role. SNAP is the most important of these programs, and it provides nine times the amount of food that we provide through Feeding America food banks. We strongly support expanding access to SNAP, which will reduce the burden on food banks, reduce food insecurity, and stimulate local economies, especially in more rural areas.

Looking forward, food bankers are preparing for a marathon. While we hope for a robust recovery, we expect to face historically high levels of food insecurity well beyond 2021. We are prepared to work with you to meet this challenge. We have the infrastructure, the partnerships, and the resources to do more. But to do more, we will need your help, especially in the form of additional funding for food. If the volume of Federal commodities flowing to my food bank were cut in half, we would need to double our budget to replace it, and we simply don't have enough resources to make up that kind of difference over the long haul. I urge the Committee, Congress, and the Administration to keep your foot on the gas, purchase more food through TEFAP and other USDA programs, leverage high capacity partners like the nation's food banks to move this food safely, efficiently, and equitably to the people and communities who need it, sustain the expansion of SNAP benefits, use waivers and other nutrition program flexibilities to make it easier for food-insecure families to access food, and doing so will help our country recover faster.

I want to again thank Chairman Scott for inviting me to testify. We celebrate the Committee's interest in ensuring all of our neighbors have the food they need, and I look forward to working with you on that important goal and to answering your questions.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Waide follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF KYLE WAIDE, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
ATLANTA COMMUNITY FOOD BANK, ATLANTA, GA

Dear Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Thompson and distinguished Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the invitation to testify at today's hearing on *A Look at Food Insecurity in America*. My name is Kyle Waide and I am the President and CEO of the Atlanta Community Food Bank, one of the largest food banks in the country. I am excited to share my perspective today on the food insecurity crisis and the work we're doing to confront it.

My food bank is part of Feeding America, the national network of food banks. Like our sister food banks across the country, the Atlanta Community Food Bank works to fight hunger by engaging, educating and empowering our community. We work with a wide variety of retailers, farmers, manufacturers, distributors, and Federal programs to secure donated and purchased essential groceries. We distribute this food through a large, decentralized grassroots network of more than 600 community-based feeding programs across twenty-nine urban, suburban and rural counties in north Georgia. In 2020, we served close to 900,000 of our Georgia neighbors, distributing more than 100 million pounds of food through a network of partners.

Our work depends on broad community support. Feeding America food banks are supported by millions of volunteers, who help us pack food boxes, organize and man-

age food distributions, and address other client needs. In addition to managing a food supply chain that moves 7.5 billion pounds of food in 2020, our network of food banks also provides a variety of additional programs and services, ranging from food pharmacies and nutrition education to job training and assistance with applying for benefit programs. Collectively, we serve kids, families and seniors in every county in the United States, including each of the 159 counties in Georgia.

The Feeding America network is uniquely capable of working to reduce food insecurity. Through forty years of growing our capacity, building public-private partnerships, responding to crises and driving innovation, we've seen it all. And yet the past twelve months have been the most challenging and most inspiring year our network of food bankers has ever experienced.

Impact of the Pandemic on Food Insecurity

Prior to the pandemic, national food insecurity rates had reached their lowest levels in 20 years. After reaching a peak following the Great Recession, the food insecurity rate fell steadily as the economic recovery accelerated and we reached historically low levels of unemployment. Despite that progress, some 35 million individuals, including nearly 11 million children, still lived in food-insecure households. In Georgia, one in eight of our neighbors didn't always know where their next meal would come from, including more than 400,000 children.

Based on an analysis conducted by Feeding America, we estimate that the economic effects of COVID-19 have caused an additional 350,000 Georgians to experience food insecurity, an increase of close to 30%. Nationally, the food-insecure population could be as high as 50 million, including nearly 17 million children. These increases suggest that there are likely more food-insecure kids and families today than there were at the peak of the Great Recession. Many of the people who have fallen into food insecurity are experiencing it for the first time in their lives, as our food pantry partners across the country report that 35% or more of the people they're serving today had never received charitable food prior to the pandemic.

While the pandemic has increased food insecurity far and wide, touching people and communities of all backgrounds, we also know that the impact has been even greater on those communities that were already experiencing higher rates of food insecurity prior to the pandemic. Black, Latino, and Native American/Alaskan communities were twice as likely to face food insecurity before the pandemic and were less likely to have health insurance. During the pandemic, these communities have experienced higher rates of COVID-19 infection and mortality, while also experiencing more significant increases in unemployment due to the economic downturn. Alongside our peer food banks across the country, the Atlanta Community Food Bank is working to enhance our core practices in communities of color to ensure we are serving people equitably.

Similarly, many rural communities experienced higher levels of hunger before the pandemic, a challenge that has only intensified in the current environment. Food insecurity rates exceed 20% in a number of large, rural census tracts across Georgia for a variety of reasons. With the nearest grocery store, food pantry, or food bank potentially hours away, food deserts are more common. Job opportunities are more concentrated in low-wage industries. Higher fixed costs to operate impact profit margins for smaller grocery retailers, who pass on those increased costs to their customer base. Many of these communities face higher rates of unemployment and underemployment. The pandemic has intensified these challenges.

Food Bank Response to the Food Insecurity Crisis

In the initial weeks and months of the pandemic, food banks faced three significant challenges as we sought to respond to the crisis. First, as noted above, demand for charitable food assistance grew dramatically and suddenly. The extent of this increase has been captured repeatedly in media images from around the country of lines of cars stretching for miles, waiting to receive boxes and bags of charitable food. Second, stress on the larger food supply chain reduced our access to several key sources of food at the very moment when we needed more food than we ever have. Third, like so many other businesses and nonprofits, we had to quickly adapt all of our core processes for storing, handling and distributing food in order to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19 for our staff, partners, volunteers and clients.

Food banks, our partners and our volunteers have responded creatively and courageously to these challenges. At the Atlanta Community Food Bank, we have grown our weekly distribution of food by 65% and now provide close to 2.5 million pounds of food a week. Nearly 60% of the food we are distributing is perishable. Similarly, in 2020, Feeding America food banks collectively distributed 7.5 billion pounds of food, an increase of 43% compared to 2019. This included 3.8 billion pounds of fresh

produce, milk, dairy and animal proteins, more than half of all the food we distributed. We are providing more food to more people more often than we ever have, significantly reducing the impact of hunger created by the pandemic.

Fueling this growth are a variety of approaches for increasing our capacity in light of the crisis. Food banks have dramatically increased our food purchasing activity. In Atlanta, we are spending more than \$1 million every month to buy food, and we expect to increase this number significantly in the coming months to keep up with such high levels of demand. Food banks have also increased our trucking capacity to support more large mobile food distributions. In Atlanta, we are supporting 60 mobile “pop-up” distribution deliveries each week, in addition to the regular orders we process, an increase of more than 50% compared to our volume prior to the pandemic. Food banks have increased operational staff to support higher volumes of activity. In Atlanta, our payroll expenses are 25% higher than they were a year ago, in addition to the increases in other operational costs related to supplies, transportation and so forth.

Central to our effort has been the resiliency of our extraordinary network of community-based feeding programs, many of whom depend entirely on the commitment of volunteers to continue operating. Despite the obvious risks to the safety of these volunteers and staff, many of whom are seniors, the majority of these programs have continued to serve hungry families on the front lines. Food banks across the country have worked to support our partners financially with grants and other support to help them stay open and grow their capacity. At the same time, food banks have also worked closely with new partners during this pandemic to distribute food in places and to communities where our existing partners could not meet the full demand. My food bank has worked closely with schools, with local government leaders, with business groups, and with other nonprofits to host a variety of food distributions. For example, we helped support food distribution events with Chairman Scott and a variety of community partners last year, where families could access food assistance and COVID testing in a single, large-scale drive-thru site. These stand-up partnerships have been even more critical in rural communities, where we’ve seen larger numbers of our existing partners forced to close.

Food banks could not sustain this effort without the support and partnership of the broader community. Many food banks have been unable to utilize onsite volunteers during the pandemic. In Atlanta, we engaged more than 600 volunteers in a typical week prior to COVID, an addition to our workforce that has been missing since last March. Like many food banks in multiple states, we were able to replace this volunteer capacity with support from our Georgia National Guard, as Governor Brian Kemp deployed more than 150 guard members to missions at food bank locations across the state throughout the past year. And of course our food bank network has been supported very generously by all types of donors, giving us the resources and confidence we need to respond aggressively to the crisis.

Role of Federal Support in Addressing Food Insecurity

The support provided by and through a variety of Federal nutrition programs has been critical to helping food banks do our work, starting with two programs that are providing us with large volumes of food. The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) is a means tested Federal program that provides nutritious food to low income individuals through food banks and other charitable organizations nationwide, while supporting U.S. grown commodities. The program provides critical support, helping us ensure a nutritious balance of food is distributed to families in need by allowing us to combine TEFAP with our other sources of food. As the Committee already knows, Congress authorized more than \$1 billion in additional TEFAP spending through a number of stimulus bills over the past 12 months, dramatically increasing our access to food resources during the crisis.

Another critical source of federally funded food has been the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP), commonly known as the Farmers to Families Food Box Program. This program was launched by USDA in April of 2020, as an effort to leverage surplus produce, dairy and proteins to support farmers, food service distributors and families impacted by the pandemic. Distributors are awarded contracts to purchase the surplus food items, package them in easy to distribute boxes (~20 lbs each), and distribute them to people in need through a network of nonprofits, including food banks. Almost \$5 billion has been spent on this program since its inception.

CFAP food boxes have provided a critical source of food inventory for the Atlanta Community Food Bank and many food banks around the country. Combined, **TEFAP and CFAP have provided our food bank with 50% of our total inventory during the crisis**, an influx of food we simply couldn’t replace from any other source. Sustaining our response will be nearly impossible without ongoing support

from USDA at similar levels. This is even more important for food banks serving more rural areas of the country, where private sources of food are more scarce. For these food banks, which are often serving areas with even higher levels of food insecurity, Federal food commodities are accounting for 60% to 80% of their total food inventory.

That said, food banks and communities have not had equitable access to CFAP product. The food boxes have not been available in many parts of the country, a reflection of the capacity and capabilities of the food service distributors to whom contracts were awarded and the nonprofits with which they chose to work. This has been particularly true in smaller and more rural parts of the country. For example, the distribution of food boxes in Georgia has been highly concentrated in the metro Atlanta area, with a smaller percentage of this product reaching other parts of the state. To remedy this imbalance, we encourage USDA to rely more heavily on the well established distribution methods and capabilities evident in the TEFAP program, where food banks and other social service organizations have already developed the relationships and capacity to move large volumes of food safely and efficiently into the highest need areas of the country. In contrast, with each round of contracts awarded through the CFAP model, we are reinventing the supply chain for these products, a less efficient, equitable and sustainable operating model. To the extent that USDA renews the CFAP program, we recommend that USDA examine whether more state and regional contracting with growers and producers would better support our agricultural community most impacted by the pandemic.

In addition to the food provided to food banks and other nonprofits by USDA, support for food assistance through other nutrition programs has played a critical role in response to this crisis. Our food-insecure neighbors rely heavily on an array of Federal programs—SNAP, school lunches, Pandemic—EBT, WIC, senior meals—to meet their families’ needs. Millions of Americans would not have the food they need to survive without the continued strong support of Federal nutrition programs.

SNAP is the most important of these programs and stands as the nation’s first line of defense against hunger. Feeding America food banks will distribute between six and seven billion meals this year. SNAP provides nine times that amount of food. **Increasing, or decreasing, SNAP benefits by 10% is equivalent to doubling, or eliminating, access to all of the food provided through our nation’s food banks.** My food bank strongly supports expanding access to SNAP. Continuing to invest in SNAP will reduce food insecurity, improve the health and well-being of millions of families, reduce the burden on food banks, and continue to stimulate local economies. Alongside investing in SNAP, we also encourage USDA to continue to grant waivers providing flexibility to a number of nutrition programs (SFSP, NSLP, CACFP, P—EBT) as we continue to operate in a challenging environment.

Forward-Looking Outlook

As we look forward to the rest of 2021 and beyond, food bank leaders across the country are preparing our organizations for a marathon. While we all hope for a robust economic recovery and a dramatic improvement in levels of food insecurity, our experience tells us that the families and communities impacted by the current economic crisis face a long, uphill struggle. We expect we will need to respond to historically high levels of food insecurity well beyond 2021.

Food banks are well positioned to meet this challenge. Our network has made systematic, strategic investments over time to grow our capacity and capabilities to serve more food-insecure neighbors. We have expanded our distribution centers, especially in growing our freezer and cooler capacity for handling more fresh and frozen food. We have invested in trucking capacity, enabling us to move food more efficiently across the regions we serve. We have invested in technology systems, applying the best practices of the private sector to improve the efficiency of our operations. We have invested in the capacity of the community partners we supply with food, helping them add freezers and coolers, purchase trucks, engage more volunteers, operate more efficiently and serve more people. We have grown our fundraising, helping us sustain our growth for the long haul. As an example of these kinds of investments, my food bank now operates out of a 345,000²’ distribution center with 35 dock doors and 80,000²’ of freezer cooler space. We manage a fleet of 25 refrigerated trucks. We have invested millions of dollars in our partner network. Because of these investments, **we are now distributing eight times the volume of food we distributed in 2008**, prior to the Great Recession.

We have the capacity to do more. Given our expectation for the next 12 to 24 months, we will need to do more. I urge USDA to consider working even more intensively with our national network of food banks to safely and efficiently distribute food to the hardest to serve communities across the country. I also urge USDA and

Congress to consider additional funding for providing food and growing the capacity of our food bank network. Even with all of the growth in our capabilities and resources, we cannot sustain our current distribution efforts without Federal support. As an example, if the volume of Federal commodities flowing to my food bank were cut in half, we would need to spend more than \$20 million to replace it. Food banks simply don't have enough resources to make up that kind of difference.

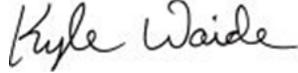
Conclusion

Increasing levels of food insecurity is one of the many challenges resulting from the pandemic. Families across our country are in crisis. For many of these families, this crisis is new. For others, this crisis is a deeper and darker chapter of the struggle they've been facing as long as they can remember. Without support, these families will struggle to survive today and will be less able to recover tomorrow. We are compelled to help them.

Recovering from this crisis, as a community, will be an ongoing challenge for all of us. Ongoing Federal investment and support will be necessary to accelerate and sustain our recovery. This is even more true for food-insecure families, whose recovery will be disproportionately harder. I urge the Committee, Congress, and the Administration to keep doing what you're doing. Keep your foot on the gas. Sustain the expansion of SNAP benefits. Use waivers and other nutrition program flexibilities to make it easier for food-insecure families to access food. Purchase more food through TEFAP and other USDA programs. Leverage high capacity partners like the nation's food banks to move this food safely, efficiently and equitably to the people and communities who need it. Flood the zone with access to food. Doing so will help our families, communities and our country recover faster.

I want to again thank Chairman Scott for inviting me to testify. We celebrate the Committee's interest in ensuring all of our neighbors have the food they need. I look forward to working with you on that important goal and to answering your questions.

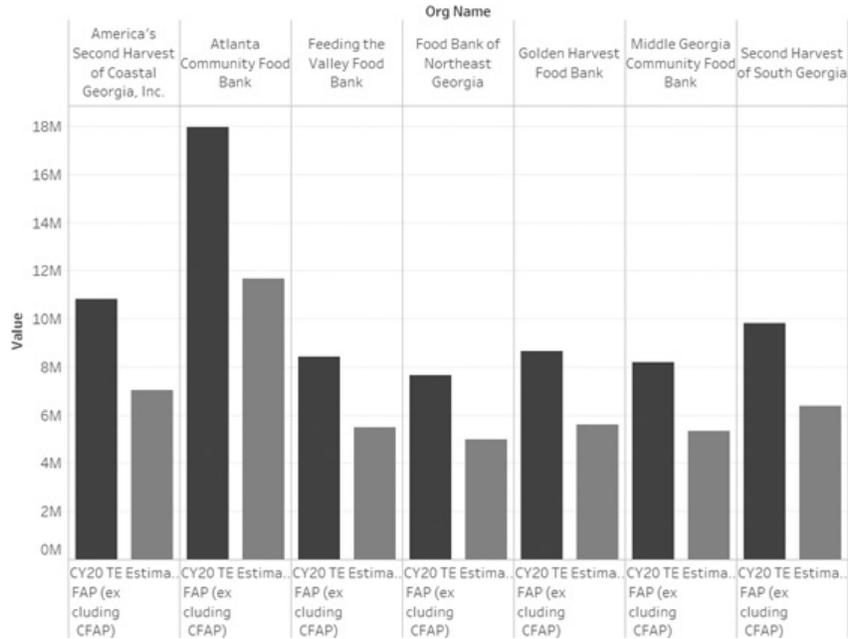
In gratitude for your ongoing support,



KYLE WAIDE,
President and CEO,
Atlanta Community Food Bank.

ATTACHMENT

Georgia Food Banks



The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Waide, and your testimony was certainly very revealing and very well-received.

And now, our second panelist, Mr. Zippy Duvall, President of the American Farm Bureau Federation. You are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF ZIPPY DUVAL, PRESIDENT, AMERICAN FARM BUREAU FEDERATION, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Mr. DUVAL. Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. My name is Zippy Duvall, and I am President of the American Farm Bureau, but I am a third-generation farmer in Georgia. I am pleased to be here to offer testimony on behalf of the Farm Bureau members across the country.

When COVID-19 hit, it presented extreme hardships to America. The farmers were left with nowhere to go with their crops, the dairy, and the livestock due to supply chain disruptions. We found lines at our food banks over a mile long in some cases. Our nation's food insecurity was becoming more apparent every day, and it was imperative that something be done. As farmers, our mission is to feed our communities and our country. We were heartbroken that the produce, milk, and meat that we worked our heart and souls out to produce wasn't reaching Americans that desperately needed it. Farmers across the country took it into their own hands to address hunger. Our county and State Farm Bureaus worked with churches and community centers to help meet the need, and help we did.

In the year of 2020, I am proud to share with you that our network of state and county Farm Bureaus across the country donated \$5.4 million, 1.4 million pounds of food, and 20,000 gallons of milk to local food banks and food pantries. But we didn't do it all alone. At the pandemic's onset, the American Farm Bureau immediately reached out to our friends at Feeding America to join together to call on USDA to help address the break down in the supply chain. Some farmers had no outlet to sell directly to consumers, and many Americans had no access to our local farmers. And some didn't have the financial means to purchase the food. USDA quickly answered the call by standing up the Farmers to Families Food Box Program, which played a critical role in addressing hunger by delivering more than 140 million food boxes across the country.

Even in times outside of a pandemic, a strong farm policy, the work that this Committee does, is critically important to addressing the fight against food insecurity. The United States is known as the bread basket of the world. As a Georgia farmer, there is no greater honor in my book than to claim that title. Yet food insecurity has crept into the rural communities, into our schools, and into our neighborhoods.

To further address this need, benefits under the USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program have increased to more than \$7 billion per month, 60 percent higher than pre-pandemic levels, helping millions of Americans each day access food.

I must tip my hat to you in Congress for making the USDA focus on this need by including the funding in the last COVID relief package. As those who produce the food, we feel a duty to make sure that everyone in America is fed. The greatest joy a farmer has is being able to share his bountiful harvest with someone else. Across the country, we have found creative ways to do that. In Montana, Park County Farm Bureau member Matt Pierson started Producers Partnership in April of 2020 to donate beef to local food banks and food pantries. What started as one rancher's idea has now resulted in 17,500 pounds of beef, and they have raised \$65,000 to process that beef. In Arizona, Friends of the Farm used a statewide emergency food relief network to purchase fresh Arizona grown produce, dairy products, and protein to distribute to Arizonians who were struggling with hunger. Nearly 25,000 pounds of produce has been purchased from small farms.

Mr. Chairman, I commend you on holding this hearing on such an important topic. We look forward to the bipartisan solutions this Committee will accomplish in fighting against food insecurity. America's farmers and ranchers have played an intricate role in combating food insecurity, and we will continue to do so, pandemic or no pandemic.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. I look forward to answering the questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Duvall follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ZIPPY DUVAL, PRESIDENT, AMERICAN FARM BUREAU
FEDERATION, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, my name is Zippy Duvall. I am a third-generation farmer and President of the American Farm Bureau Federation. I am pleased to offer this testimony on behalf of Farm Bureau members across the country.

When COVID-19 hit, it presented extreme hardship for America—farmers were left with nowhere to go with their products due to supply chain disruptions, and we found the lines to food banks over a mile long in some instances.

Our nation's food insecurity was becoming more apparent by the day, and it was imperative that something be done. As farmers, we were heartbroken that the produce, milk and meat we put our heart and soul into producing wasn't reaching Americans who so desperately needed it.

Farmers across the country took it into their own hands to address hunger. County and state Farm Bureaus worked with churches and community centers to help those in need.

And help, we did! As of today, I am proud to share that through our network of state and county Farm Bureaus across the country, we have given \$5.4 million, 1.4 million pounds of food and over 20,000 gallons of milk to local food banks, food pantries and pandemic relief programs.

But we did not do this alone. At the pandemic's onset, the American Farm Bureau immediately reached out to our friends at Feeding America to join together in calling on USDA to help address the breakdown in our supply chain.

Some farmers had no outlet to sell directly to customers, and many Americans had no access to local farms or financial means to purchase food. USDA quickly answered the call by standing up the Farmers to Families Food Box program, which played a critical role in addressing hunger by delivering more than 140 million food boxes across the country. Even in times outside of a pandemic, strong farm policy, the work of this Committee, is important to assisting in the fight against food insecurity.

The United States is known as the breadbasket of the world, and as a Georgia farmer, there is no greater honor in my book than to claim that title. Yet food insecurity has crept into our rural communities, schools and neighborhoods.

To further address this need, benefits under USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program have increased to more than \$7 billion per month, 60% higher than pre-pandemic levels, and helping millions more Americans each day access food. I must tip my hat to you for including funding in the COVID relief packages.

As those who produce this food, we feel a duty to make sure everyone in America is fed. The greatest joy for a farmer is being able to share with others an abundant harvest. Across the country, we found creative ways to do it.

In Montana, Park County Farm Bureau member Matt Pierson started Producers Partnership in April of 2020 to donate beef to local food banks and food pantries. What started as one rancher's idea has now resulted in 17,500 pounds of beef and \$65,000 raised for processing costs.

In Maryland, our young farmers packed 5,000 meals for families in need as part of their Outreach Program and donated them to Maryland Food Bank community partners.

Members of Oneida County Farm Bureau in New York joined with other groups to pass out 4,000 gallons of milk and 43,000 pounds of food to those affected by the pandemic.

In Minnesota, 68 county Farm Bureaus held events resulting in donations of 12,200 pounds of food, 43,000 meals and \$33,700 to local food shelves, reaching 52,250 people.

In Central California, Farm Bureau members and local organizations came together to donate more than 400,000 meals and 1,000 volunteer hours. And in Arizona, "Friends of the Farm" uses the statewide emergency food relief network to purchase fresh, Arizona-grown produce, dairy, and protein and distribute it to Arizonans struggling with hunger. Nearly 250,000 pounds of produce has been purchased from small farms.

Utah Farm Bureau also stepped up in a powerful way through their charitable foundation's Farmers Feeding Utah campaign. In 2020, they raised more than \$400,000 in donations from individuals and businesses, and provided more than 500,000 pounds of food to Utah residents in the Navajo Nation, northern Utah, West Salt Lake, Ogden and to smaller community pantries throughout the Wasatch Front.

In Texas, they do everything big and their charity work is no exception. County Farm Bureaus in the Lone Star State donated \$379,000 directly to food-relief and community organizations in 2020. Matching funds from the state Farm Bureau of another \$174,500 increased the positive impact and the state Farm Bureau also donated \$25,000 to Meals on Wheels Waco. Altogether, county and state Farm Bureaus in Texas donated more than a half million dollars to charities in 2020 to help address food insecurity and keep communities strong.

I could go on and on with impressive stories of generous giving by hundreds of county and state Farm Bureaus nationwide. I could not be prouder to lead this orga-

nization. We are having a very real impact on food insecurity and we're helping to meet the need within our communities all across this great country. We are stronger together.

Mr. Chairman, I commend you for holding this hearing on such an important topic. We look forward to the bipartisan solutions this Committee will accomplish in the fight against food insecurity. America's farmers and ranchers have played an integral role in combating hunger and we will continue to do so, pandemic or not. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before this Committee.

Mrs. HAYES [presiding.] Thank you, Mr. Duvall.

I now recognize Mr. McBrayer. Please begin when you are ready.

Okay. We will go on to the next witness to give Mr. McBrayer an opportunity to figure out what is going on. Mr. Edenfield, please begin when you are ready. Mr. Edenfield?

Okay. I recognize Mr. Hodel. Mr. Hodel, if you are ready to proceed, we will hear from you.

**STATEMENT OF ERIC HODEL, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER
AND CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER, MIDWEST FOOD BANK,
NORMAL, IL**

Mr. HODEL. Thank you and good morning. Thank you for the invitation to participate in today's hearing. My name is Eric Hodel, and I serve Midwest Food Bank as the Chief Operating Officer and Chief Financial Officer. I am honored to have a seat at the table today.

Midwest Food Bank was founded by a farmer 18 years ago. I, too, was raised on a farm and continue to manage a 1,000 acre grain and livestock farm, in addition to my responsibilities at Midwest Food Bank. I come today understanding the impacts of agriculture policy as both a producer and a servant to the food-insecure.

Midwest Food Bank started in 2003 when our founder, David Kieser, and his two brothers responded to a request to help in the local newspaper. The Kieser brothers saw a community in need and quickly turned a barn on their family farm into a distribution site for ten local food pantries. They soon realized that their need in the community was greater than they anticipated. Our values and mission remain steadfast after nearly 2 decades of growth via locations, food distributed, and quality of service to our over 2,000 agencies.

In 2020, Midwest Food Bank distributed \$383 million in food, including three million meals via disaster relief boxes. We have ten locations across the U.S.: Florida, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Indiana, Illinois, Texas, and Arizona, and two internationally: Kenya and Haiti. We have less than 50 full-time employees, and 99¢ of every dollar is spent for program services.

Our business model is simple. We receive donations of food, financial support, and volunteer efforts. With these three inputs, we deliver four programs: number one, distributing food to nonprofit agencies; number two, providing family food boxes as disaster relief; number three, producing Tender Mercies, a high nutrition rice and beans meal; and number four, distributing Hope Packs, our weekend feeding program for school-aged children.

Our faith-based mission calls us to serve each of our 2,000 nonprofit agencies with dignity and respect. We have just two simple requirements for our agency partners. First, that they are registered nonprofits, and second, that they distribute the Midwest

food at no charge to their clients. Midwest Food Bank does not receive payment for food distributed, and therefore does not create a business model that relies on compensation from our nonprofits.

Midwest Food Bank bridges the gap between poverty and prosperity for the people we serve. Said differently, our hope is to serve our food recipients for a season, not for a lifetime.

We celebrated the downward trend in rates of food insecurity across our nation in the decade leading up to 2020, and then last year, all aspects of the emergency food system were disrupted due to the pandemic. Without question, the pandemic catapulted more families into a state of food insecurity. Our combination of food distribution to nonprofits, and our disaster relief equipped us to serve during this challenging season. The USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program was a valuable resource for Midwest Food Bank. Midwest Food Bank shifted our resources to be nimble and ensure each of our locations had access to the high-quality product. We distributed over one million boxes in 2020, and we applaud the USDA for the quick program execution from concept to delivered box. The program injected nutrition directly into the emergency food system while supporting farmers and producers.

This past year, 2020, was the first year we consistently received food funded by government programs via the USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program. As we grow, USDA, The Emergency Food Assistance Program, commonly known as TEFAP, is a viable option and we recently applied to participate in select areas.

Moving forward, Midwest Food Bank will continue to pursue three opportunities. Number one, mission focus: serving our agencies with focus on efficiency and excellence. Number two, nutrition: increasing the nutrition of the food distributed. And number three, partnerships: strengthening our partnerships with community leaders and agencies to advance holistic programming for those we serve.

In closing, we ask the Committee on Agriculture to commit to equitable policies that channel government resources to independent food banks able to meet program requirements. Alleviating hunger and malnutrition is a complex challenge requiring a multi-faceted solution. We ask that you continue to bring efficient, community-centric programs to the table for collaboration. Together, we will sustainably bridge the gap between poverty and prosperity for American families.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hodel follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ERIC HODEL, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER AND CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER, MIDWEST FOOD BANK, NORMAL, IL

Good morning and thank you for the invitation to participate in today's hearing. My name is Eric Hodel, and I serve Midwest Food Bank as the Chief Operating Officer and Chief Financial Officer. I am honored to have a seat at the table today.

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distribution site for ten local food pantries. They soon realized that the need in their community was greater than they anticipated.

Our values and mission remain steadfast after nearly 2 decades of growth, via locations, food distributed, and quality of service to our 2,000+ agencies. In 2020, Midwest Food Bank distributed \$383M in food, including three million meals via family food disaster relief boxes. We have ten locations across the U.S. (FL, GA, PA, CT, IN, IL, TX, AZ) and two internationally (Kenya and Haiti). We have less than 50 full-time employees, and 99 cents of every dollar spent is for program services.

Our business model is simple: We receive donations of food, financial support, and volunteer efforts. With these three inputs, we deliver four programs: (1) Distributing food to nonprofit agencies, (2) providing Family Food Boxes as Disaster Relief, (3) producing Tender Mercies, a high nutrition rice & beans meal[;] and (4) distributing Hope Packs, our weekend feeding program for school aged children.

Our faith-based mission calls us to serve each of our 2,000+ nonprofit agencies with dignity and respect. We have just two simple requirements for our agency partners: First, that they are registered nonprofits. Second, that they distribute the Midwest Food Bank food at no charge to their clients.

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We celebrated the downward trend in rates of food insecurity across our nation in the decade leading up to 2020. And then, last year, all aspects of the emergency food system were disrupted due to the pandemic. Without question, the pandemic catapulted more families into a state of food insecurity. Our combination of food distribution to nonprofits and Disaster Relief equipped us to serve during this challenging season. The USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program was a valuable resource for Midwest Food Bank. Midwest Food Bank shifted resources to be nimble and ensure each of our locations had access to the high-quality product. We distributed 1.1 million of the boxes in 2020. We applaud the USDA for the quick program execution from concept to delivered boxes. The program injected nutrition directly into the emergency food system—while supporting farmers and producers.

This past year, 2020, was the first year we consistently receive food funded by government programs—via the USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program. As we are growing, USDA's The Emergency Food Assistance Program, commonly known as TEFAP, is an option we are exploring, and we recently applied to participate in Florida.

Moving forward, Midwest Food Bank will continue to pursue three opportunities:

1. Mission Focus—Serving our agencies with focus on efficiency and excellence.
2. Nutrition—Increasing the nutrition of the food distributed.
3. Partnerships—Strengthening our partnerships with community leaders and agencies to advance holistic programing for those we serve.

In closing, we ask the Committee on Agriculture to commit to equitable policies that channel government resources to independent food banks able to meet program requirements. Alleviating hunger and malnutrition is a complex challenge requiring a multi-faceted solution. We ask that you continue to bring efficient, community-centric programs to the table for collaboration. Together we will sustainably bridge the gap between poverty and prosperity for more American families. Thank You.



2020 Annual Report



**Bridging the Gap Between Poverty and Prosperity
Keep Moving Forward**

A message from Co-Founder, President, and CEO, David Kieser



No one could have predicted the events of 2020. The global COVID-19 pandemic created a dynamic year. With the help of volunteers, donors, staff, and most importantly, the blessings of God, Midwest Food Bank responded nimbly to the changing landscape.

All MFB locations remained open and responsive to the need of our nonprofit partners. We enacted safety protocols and reduced volunteer numbers to maintain social distancing guidelines. To allow partner agencies to receive food from MFB safely, we altered our distribution model. Community, business, and donor support funded operations and helped with food purchases. More details on our response to the pandemic are on page 14.

Noteworthy in 2020:

- MFB distributed a record amount of food, 37% more than in 2019.

- In 2020, we sent a record number of family food boxes in Disaster Relief semi loads, nearly six times more than the previous year.
- We received record levels of support from both financial and food donors.
- While maintaining and growing our roots and existing locations, MFB launched two new domestic divisions, Pennsylvania and New England.

We are humbled and thankful. Moving forward, we continue to follow the leading of the Lord as we live out our mission.

In His service,

DAVID KIESER.

The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble; He cares for those who trust in him.

NAHUM 1:7.



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Produced and designed by Midwest Food Bank. Photos represent all of 2020, including pre-pandemic protocols. Printing courtesy of GROWMARK



Our Mission

As a faith based organization, it is the mission of Midwest Food Bank to share the love of Christ by alleviating hunger and malnutrition locally and throughout the world and providing disaster relief, all without discrimination.

Our Values

Midwest Food Bank's values are built on the Biblical base of the 'fruit of the spirit'—Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-control. Our values give us a roadmap to "Sharing the Blessings."



Serving Those In Need

We recognize and adapt to our agencies (food pantries, schools, soup kitchens, shelters) needs, providing them resources to help them best solve food insecurity for individuals and families.



Empowering Volunteers

Our volunteers find purpose in their efforts shared with MFB. Opportunities are made available for any age and array of abilities. The countless hours and expertise of our volunteers is a unique and blessed differentiator.



Embracing Our Communities

We warmly welcome community members and partners, engage with them to serve those in need, and sincerely appreciate the joint partnerships we have.



Working With Integrity

Our communications and actions are always done with honesty and transparency.



Executing Through Teamwork

We work across all our divisions and within our locations. We place a high priority on collaboration, leveraging best practices for continuous improvement of an already efficient organization.



Our Vision

Provide industry-leading food relief to those in need while feeding them spiritually.

Food Insecurity

Noun

the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food

Food-insecure households have difficulty at some time during the year providing enough food for all their members due to a lack of resources. In 2020, 16 percent (50.4 million households) of U.S. households were food-insecure (projected numbers). One in five Americans have turned to a food pantry or community food distribution at some point since the beginning of the pandemic.

These numbers include 17 million, or one in four children. As of July 2020, an estimated 370 million children were missing school meals.

U.S. Food Insecurity Rate



U.S. Food Insecurity Rate (Children Only)



Sources: USDA (200–2019); Feeding America (2020).

How Many People in the World Are Hungry?

Globally, about 38% of the world’s population goes to bed on an empty stomach. This number is the highest in Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia, estimated at 57% of the population.

Source: The State of Food Insecurity and Nutrition in the World 2020.

*“But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his **brother in need**, yet closes his heart against him, how does **God’s love** abide in him?”*

1 John 3:17.

Food Recipients



Ashley

Years ago, the I-58 Mission helped Ashley when her husband was out of work with health issues. When COVID hit, she returned for help. She relies on them each week for food. The I-58 Mission is a nonprofit partner served by MFB Georgia.



Wendy

Wendy’s husband lost his job. With a mortgage, bills, and children to feed, Wendy says they wouldn’t have made it without help. She gives back by volunteering at MFB and other pantries. Wendy receives food from The Hope Chest, a pantry served by MFB Morton.



Bo

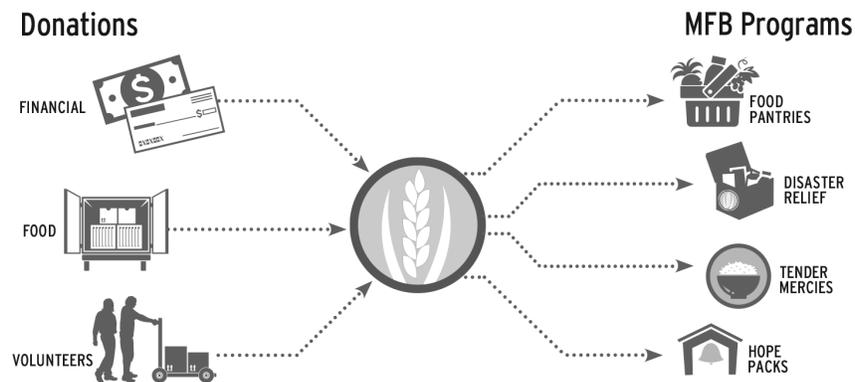
A former line worker from Charleston, WV, Bo has been retired since 2005. He’s thankful for the help he receives from the Second Avenue Community Center served by MFB Bloomington-Normal through their remote distribution in Belle, WV.



Berlinda

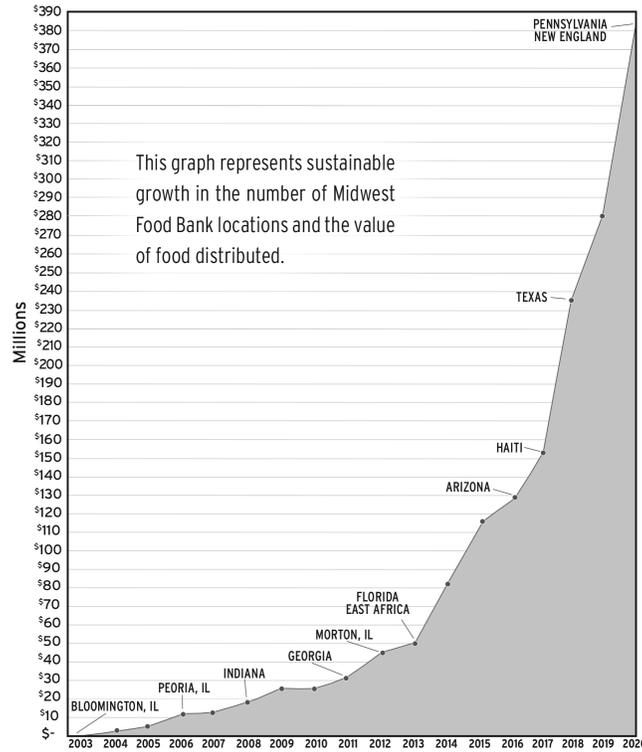
Berlinda was left at an orphanage in Haiti. In her childhood she struggled with a speech disorder as a result of a long convulsion. Now she speaks without problems and is very athletic. Berlinda was helped by Matthew 25, a nonprofit partner served by MFB Haiti.

Our Midwest Food Bank Model



Midwest Food Bank Growth

Value of food distributed (millions)



Financials

Years Ending December 31, 2018, 2019 and 2020

	2018	2019	2020 *
Public Support and Revenue:			
Donated food, vehicles, equipment and services	\$229,928,875	\$270,649,371	\$397,204,944
General public contributions and grants	\$7,436,910	\$7,487,187	\$18,427,058
Special events	\$788,242	\$809,831	\$864,259
CARES and Other*	\$94,829	\$67,262	\$2,706,416
Total public support and revenue	\$238,248,856	\$279,013,656	\$419,202,677
Expenses:			
Program services	\$232,260,156	\$279,505,173	\$392,370,479
Management and general	\$1,123,151	\$988,014	\$1,278,165
Fundraising	\$776,111	\$854,074	\$961,835
<1% Management, General, and Fundraising	0.81%	0.66%	0.57%
Total Expenses	\$234,159,418	\$281,357,261	\$394,610,479
Net Assets:			
Food Inventory	\$19,606,336	\$16,416,429	\$33,284,514
Cash, buildings (net of debt), equipment, other	\$15,066,135	\$19,297,314	\$24,333,245
Total net assets	\$34,672,471	\$35,713,743	\$57,617,759

Years Ending December 31, 2018, 2019 and 2020—Continued

	2018	2019	2020 *
<i>With donor restrictions</i>	\$1,600,673	\$1,205,399	\$750,000

* Numbers above for 2018 and 2019 are from Midwest Food Bank’s audited statements. Financials represented for 2020 numbers are year-end summaries. The Midwest Food Bank audited statements for 2020 will be finalized and available May 30, 2021. CARES and Other in 2020 includes revenue from CARES Act, including PPP Loan.



Midwest Food Bank multiplies and stewards donations through the blessings of volunteer hours and donated food.

MFB Programs

Food Pantries



Midwest Food Bank is engaged in alleviating hunger and poverty throughout the world. In 2020, Midwest Food Bank distributed over \$383 million worth of food to over 2,000 nonprofit organizations. This is all thanks to the generosity of our donors, the valuable work of our volunteers and, most importantly, the blessings of God.

The COVID-19 pandemic made 2020 a unique year. With feeding programs seeing an increase of 20-50% in need, Midwest Food Bank was challenged to distribute more food. At the same time, supply chains were disrupted. The first few months, in particular, food procurement was more difficult than usual, but MFB continued to find and distribute food.

Disaster Relief

In a typical year, Midwest Food Bank delivers 20–50 semi loads of Disaster Relief in concert with The Salvation Army and other partners. These loads primarily go to locations in the Midwest or South to victims of tornados, flooding, or hurricanes. 2020 was anything but a typical year.

Pandemic-related quarantines and business interruptions created wide-spread food insecurity. Across the U.S., people were seeking food assistance for the first time. MFB sent 179 semi loads of family food boxes to many locations (see map on page 14). Supporters of Midwest Food Bank truly have an impact nationwide.

MFB sent over 185,000 disaster relief food boxes in 179 semi loads.

MFB Programs

Tender Mercies



Tender Mercies® is Midwest Food Bank’s nutritious bagged meal of rice, beans, and soy protein, making a delicious meal. It is an integral part of fighting food insecurity in the United States. Tender Mercies is also a mainstay of our international efforts. In East Africa and Haiti, it is distributed to schools and orphanages to help young children learn by providing nutrition in their diets.

In June 2020, single serving bags of Tender Mercies were introduced. They were designed especially for Hope Packs and homebound elderly people living alone.

Tender Mercies can be packaged by machine or by volunteers hand measuring ingredients. COVID-19 brought a temporary halt to hand-packing in 2020. At the same time, MFB experienced a great increase in need for the meals.

In 2020, 11.64 million Tender Mercies meals were packaged, up from 7.22 million in 2019. 90% of the meals were produced by volunteers operating the packing machine.

Tender Mercies Meal Production



Hope Packs

Hope Packs, Midwest Food Bank's student feeding program, provides food-insecure children with supplemental weekend food. Every Friday throughout the school year, qualifying children receive a pack of shelf-stable food. This helps to ensure that children arrive at school on Monday morning ready to learn.

HOPE PACKS 5 CORE ITEMS

Individual warm meal (mac & cheese, ravioli)

Breakfast meal (cereal, oatmeal)

Fruit

Granola bar

Snack (fruit snacks, cookie)

The pandemic caused schools to adjust their teaching model for safety purposes. Agencies participating in the Hope Packs program were faced with schools remote learning days. Agencies participating in Hope Packs had to use creativity to reach food-insecure students. Many avenues were used, including scheduling pick-up times and even delivering food to students at home.

A child may be sponsored to receive Hope Packs for a school year for only \$50.

Midwest Food Bank Reach

In 18 years, Midwest Food Bank has grown from a small ministry on a family farm, to ten domestic and two international locations. Additional locations continue to be evaluated based on need and support.

Illinois—Normal

[Est. 2003 • Serving 523 Agencies]

Illinois—Peoria

[Est. 2007 • Serving 323 Agencies]

Indiana

[Est. 2008 • Serving 300 Agencies]

Georgia

[Est. 2011 • Serving 291 Agencies]

Illinois—Morton

[Est. 2012 • 4.43 Million TM Meals Packaged]

Florida

[Est. 2014 • Serving 171 Agencies]

East Africa

[Est. 2014 • Serving 40 Agencies]

Arizona

[Est. 2016 • Serving 296 Agencies]

Haiti

[Est. 2017 • 180 Tons Shipped to Haiti in 2019]

Texas

[Est. 2018 • Serving 54 Agencies]

Pennsylvania

[Est. 2020 • Serving 30 Agencies]

New England

[Est. December 2020]

MIDWEST FOOD BANK
10 DOMESTIC LOCATIONS



MIDWEST FOOD BANK
2 INTERNATIONAL LOCATIONS



International Operations*East Africa*

The COVID-19 pandemic caused business closures and strict lock-downs led to mass hunger, especially in the slum areas served by Kapu Africa (Midwest Food Bank East Africa). Working with partner ministries, Kapu Africa was able to share Tender Mercies meals in food-insecure slums.

A silver lining during this dark time is the great spiritual awakening taking place. Many of these slum-dwellers are social outcasts, shown no respect or courtesy. There are countless reports of people weeping as they receive food, asking, "Why are you doing this for me?" The gospel of Christ has been shared with many of these people before, but now they want to know what is driving the love they are shown.

7.2 Million *Tender Mercies* meals were distributed in East Africa in 2020.

Haiti

Haiti added the COVID–19 pandemic to its list of challenges in 2020. All airports, seaports, factories, and schools were closed for a time.

Most Haitian children receive their primary daily nourishment from their school lunch. MFB Haiti was able to get Tender Mercies distributed through partnerships with faith-based schools. In 2020, Midwest Food Bank Haiti more than doubled shipments of food to Haiti. Over 160 tons of food relief were shipped, nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of which was Tender Mercies meals.

In Haiti, nearly 1 million Tender Mercies meals were distributed in 2020.

We also partner with over 20 feeding centers, which provide a noon meal to 50 children up to 5 years old. Over 1,100 children receive these daily meals.

Volunteers

One of the key strengths of Midwest Food Bank is its volunteers. They are the life-blood of the organization. From leading volunteer groups to driving semi-trucks, people generously give of their time and talents to further MFB's mission. In 2020 volunteer service hours equaled 150 full-time employees.

The pandemic created safety challenges for MFB. Safety protocols were put in place at each location. Volunteer groups were limited to allow for social distancing. While we saw an increase in the amount of food needed, fewer volunteers were able to help.

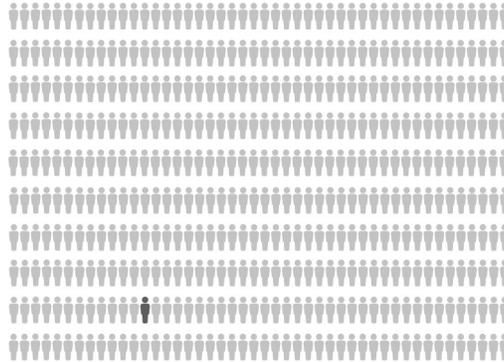
Multiple MFB locations received the invaluable assistance of the National Guard. They filled many of the volunteer positions vital to our operations—driving trucks and fork-lifts and helping with food distributions. Their presence was a blessing.



300,898 hours of service were volunteered by 17,930 individuals in 2020.

Many volunteers demonstrated their courage and dedication by increasing their hours to meet the need. They applied their personal talents and efforts for a return for others. Their service allowed Midwest Food Bank to remain open and operational throughout 2020.

In 2020, There Were 450 Volunteers for Every 1 Paid MFB Staff Member



Pandemic Response

The COVID-19 pandemic presented Midwest Food Bank with a unique opportunity to live out our mission. Yet, responding to the needs posed uncommon challenges.

Most states experienced work suspensions and quarantines, causing food insecurity. Rather than sending relief to a single disaster area, our partner, The Salvation Army, requested semi-loads of family food boxes for all over the U.S. The first relief load was sent on March 18. When the loads reach their destination, they are immediately distributed to those in need.



Procuring the contents of the boxes created other difficulties. Initially, it was a challenge to have items shipped. The increased need for shelf-stable food depleted our supplies of donated food. Leveraging our relationships with food manufacturers, Midwest Food Bank purchased some products to go into the relief boxes.



*“I live out here in Sassoon City, California. But I wanted to say thank you. I really, really, **really** appreciate what you are doing. It helps out more than you could ever know. I am a single father of an 8 year old daughter. I greatly appreciate what you do. Thank you. I wanted to say thank you. We greatly, **greatly** appreciate it. You are amazing. Thank you. This kind of thing is really helpful. Thank you. Thank you and God bless. Thank you.”*

Voice mail transcript MFB received from Tim, grateful recipient of a Family Food Box.

Nonprofit Partners

Midwest Food Bank’s nonprofit partners must be 501(c)(3) charities. They agree to give away the food received from MFB free of charge. Types of agencies include:



- Food pantries

- Soup kitchens
- Homeless shelters
- Residential programs
- Children feeding programs

In addition to the many ways the COVID-19 crisis affected Midwest Food Bank, our partner agencies also faced new challenges. Those that remained open had to alter their distribution methods. Human contact was limited as food was distributed. Our partners saw a 20–50% increase in the need for their services.

MFB Served over 2,000 nonprofit partners in 2020.



“During a time like this, when it’s a crisis throughout the world, we are grateful for the support we get from Midwest Food Bank.”

MATT BURGESS,
CEO of Home Sweet Home Ministries, Bloomington, IL.



A semi-load of relief arrives at the Navajo Nation, served by Helping Hands for the Navajo Nation, a partner agency of Midwest Food Bank Arizona.

MFB Food Sources



We receive donated food from all over the country—food produced in excess, incorrect labeling, and more. Donated food comes from various sources:

- Food manufacturers
- Food distribution centers
- USDA programs
- Grocery stores
- Private food drives

MFB Recipient of USDA Program

In May, Midwest Food Bank began participating in the new USDA Farmers to Families Food Box program. It was created to help both food producers and those struggling with food insecurity as a result of COVID-19. With funding provided by the USDA, food distributors bought produce, protein, and dairy products directly from farmer and producers. The distributors boxed the food items and gave them directly to participating charities.



MFB distributed over \$52 Million worth of nutritious produce, protein, and dairy products in the USDA program.

% Dairy, Produce, and Protein



MFB gave away nearly 1.1 million cases of the USDA Farmer[s] to Famil[ies] program food.



5% of MFB donations come from Share Partners

Week by week, month by month, Midwest Food Bank is sharing the blessings with those in need. With this same recurring cadence, MFB Share Partners make faithful financial contributions that bring our mission to life. Share Partners are generous donors who are giving funds on a regularly scheduled basis.

For people who wish to make a continual, positive impact, Share Partners makes it easy. Each week, month, or quarter, donors can make an automatic donation directly from a checking account, a debit or credit card.

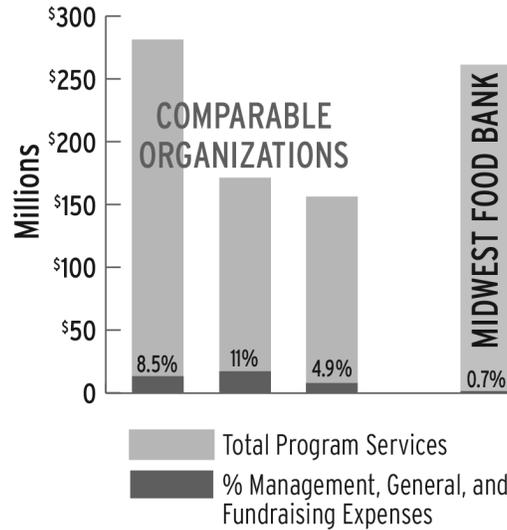
Convenience of recurring giving

- Easy enrollment
 - Donor selects timing
 - Select weekly, monthly, or quarterly
 - Donor directs giving
 - Choose to support a specific MFB location
- To become a Share Partner, please go to midwestfoodbank.org/sharepartner**



Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops
Proverbs 3:9.

Midwest Food Bank Leads the Food Relief Industry in Low Administrative Costs



Sources: 2019 IRS Form 990.



Charity Navigator, America's premier independent charity evaluator, has awarded four out of a possible four stars to Midwest Food Bank the last 9 years. Only 4% of nonprofits have achieved at least 8 consecutive years of Four Star Charity status.

The *Forbes* 21st annual list of top 100 charities is based on donations received. For 2020, Midwest Food Bank moved up to number 57. The charities on the list are rated for "Charitable Commitment," based on how much of a charity's total expense went to the purpose. Midwest Food Bank's rating is 100 out of 100.

National Board Members

- | | |
|---|---|
| DAVID KIESER, <i>President</i>
David founded MFB in 2003 with his brothers. He serves as CEO, and Board President. | ANN KAEPER
Ann is the Vice-President of Human Resources and Strategy at Growmark, Inc. |
| BILL LEMAN, <i>Vice-President</i>
Bill is owner and CEO of Lemman Property Management. | DENNY MOTT
Dennis is a retired Business Manager from Caterpillar, Inc. |
| DAVE HODEL, <i>Secretary/Treasurer</i>
Dave is a partner in Darnall Concrete. | TRENT SCHOLL
Trent is a principal partner at Ledgestone & Associates, LLC. |
| RALPH ENDRESS
Ralph is the retired owner and CEO of Young America Realty Inc. | ERIC SHELDAHL
Eric is a commercial and residential real estate entrepreneur. |
| JIM GAPINSKI
Jim is owner and CEO of Heartland Growers. | |

Functional Leadership

- | | |
|---|--|
| ERIC HODEL, <i>COO/CFO</i> | MICHAEL MEECE, <i>Human Resources Director</i> |
| LISA MARTIN, <i>Information Technology Director</i> | MICHAEL HOFFMAN, <i>Inventory & Logistics Director</i> |
| BRIAN ZINK, <i>Procurement Director</i> | DANA WILLIAMSON, <i>Accounting Director</i> |
| JADA HOERR, <i>Chief Development Officer</i> | |

Divisional Leadership

- | | |
|--|---|
| Arizona
MERILEE BAPTISTE, <i>Executive Director</i>
ERIC SHELDAHL, <i>Divisional Board President</i> | Indiana
JOHN WHITAKER, <i>Executive Director</i>
JIM GAPINSKI, <i>Divisional Board President</i> |
| Florida
KARL STEIDINGER, <i>Executive Director</i>
STANLEY SINN, <i>Divisional Board President</i> | New England
JAN YOUNG, <i>Executive Director</i>
BRENT WALDER, <i>Divisional Board President</i> |
| Georgia
WILL GARNER, <i>Executive Director</i>
JIM ROY, <i>Divisional Board President</i> | Pennsylvania
LORI RENNE, <i>Executive Director</i>
ALETA SERRANO, <i>Divisional Board President</i> |
| Illinois—Bloomington—Normal
TARA INGHAM, <i>Executive Director</i>
CHRIS STOPFER, <i>Divisional Board President</i> | Texas
DAVID EMERSON, <i>Executive Director</i>
RICH STOLLER, <i>Divisional Board President</i> |
| Illinois—Morton
LISA MARTIN, <i>Executive Director</i>
TRENT SCHOLL, <i>Divisional Board President</i> | East Africa
CHRISTINE MUTSOLI, <i>Executive Director</i>
DENNY MOTT, <i>Divisional Board President</i> |

Illinois—Peoria

MONICA SCHEUER, *Executive Director*
FRANK GUTWEIN, *Divisional Board President*

Haiti

JERRY KOEHL, *Divisional Board President*

How Can You Help?**1 Pray for Midwest Food Bank**

It is our hope to show Christ's love in our actions.

2 Volunteer

Bring your gifts and talents to further MFB's mission. Consider becoming a lead volunteer, facilitating groups.

3 Follow us on social media

Tag us in your Facebook and Instagram posts.
Check our blog and newsletter for updates.

4 Connect your friends and family to MFB

Your church or civic group would enjoy a volunteer service project.

5 Give

We strive to be good stewards of funds entrusted to us. Consider a monthly gift as a **Share Partner**.



midwestfoodbank.org





Mrs. HAYES. Thank you, Mr. Hodel.

I now recognize Mr. Edenfield. Mr. Edenfield, if you are ready, please begin your testimony. I think you are muted.

Okay, we will go to Mr. McBrayer. Mr. McBrayer, if you are ready, please begin your testimony.

STATEMENT OF MAX E. McBRAYER, JR., CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, RACETRAC PETROLEUM, INC., ATLANTA, GA

Mr. McBRAYER. Hello, this is Max McBrayer. Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Thompson, and Members of the Committee, my name is Max McBrayer and I am Chief Executive Officer of RaceTrac. Thank you for inviting me to share what RaceTrac is doing to combat food insecurity in America.

Headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, RaceTrac is a family-owned business that has been serving guests since 1934. RaceTrac, together with its franchise brand, RaceWay, operates over 750 convenience stores across 11 states, employing nearly 10,000 people. Almost all of our stores that redeem SNAP are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and nearly 20 percent of them are in rural communities. Over 10 years ago, in response to changing customer demand, we embarked on a journey to provide more healthy, fresh, and perishable food products to our guests. Today, all of our locations have robust, diverse food service operations. Food is increasingly our biggest customer draw.

RaceTrac now sells over 12,000 pieces of fresh fruit a week, and in 2020, sold almost 800,000 bottles of milk, and close to a half million fresh sandwiches. Ten years ago, RaceTrac also began to participate in SNAP. Today, all RaceTrac stores and 98 percent of RaceWay stores redeem SNAP benefits. At RaceTrac stores alone, we process three million EBT transactions per year.

Our stores have been designated critical infrastructure by the Federal Government, and have remained open throughout this pandemic, providing food and fuel to the public. COVID-19 has exacer-

bated food insecurity in the United States. At RaceTrac, we have seen this impact firsthand.

RaceTrac has seen a 65 percent increase in EBT dollars used at our stores. RaceWay stores, which tend to be located in more rural communities, have seen a 102 percent increase. Guests are constantly coming into our stores and asking if we accept EBT dollars. Not only are we seeing an overall increase in SNAP purchases among adults, including homeless adults, we have seen an increase among students who will use EBT before and after school to purchase snacks or lunch.

RaceTrac's participation in SNAP is critical because it enables beneficiaries to conveniently access approximately 1,700 competitively priced EBT-eligible products. Low-income Americans often work and shop for food during unconventional hours. Our stores are often the only easily accessible retail food store located in that particular area, and our stores are open during extended hours when other larger food retailers are closed. For that reason, having RaceTrac and other small format stores participate in the program benefits many SNAP recipients who save time and resources by not having to travel inconvenient distances from where they live or work to purchase milk and bread.

Congress created SNAP to alleviate hunger and malnutrition. To maximize beneficiaries' access to food, lawmakers intentionally designed the program to ensure that both large and small retailers can participate. This approach has been successful. RaceTrac and other small format retailers serve an important role in SNAP. We provide convenient locations for SNAP beneficiaries to access affordable food at any time they wish, day or night.

No American should go hungry. I hope we can continue to work together to fulfill the program's goal. Our industry's unique format and business model has been and should continue to be a meaningful asset in the government's effort to combat hunger in the United States. We hope to remain active partners in SNAP in order to provide essential food access to the thousands of people in our communities who have come to rely on us.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. McBrayer follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MAX E. MCBRAYER, JR., CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
RACETRAC PETROLEUM, INC., ATLANTA, GA

I. Summary of the Testimony

- RaceTrac, together with its franchise-brand RaceWay, operates over 750 convenience stores across 11 southeastern states and employs nearly 10,000 team members. All of RaceTrac's stores, and 98 percent of RaceWay stores are licensed under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ("SNAP" or the "Program") and accept Electronic Benefit Transfer ("EBT") purchases.
- Our stores, the vast majority of which are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, contribute to a variety of communities throughout the southeast United States. Almost 20 percent of our stores are in towns of 2,500 to 20,000 people. All of our stores have robust, diverse food-service operations that are increasingly our biggest customer draw.
- COVID-19 has exacerbated what was already an unacceptable situation with respect to food insecurity in the United States. At RaceTrac, we have seen this impact firsthand. Our stores, which the Federal Government designated as crit-

ical infrastructure, have remained open throughout this pandemic, providing food and fuel to the public.

- Over the past year, our store teams have seen a notable increase in SNAP purchases. *In fact, the percent of EBT transactions at our stores has almost doubled over the past year. RaceTrac has seen a 65% increase in EBT dollars used at our stores. RaceWay stores, which tend to be located in more rural communities, have seen a 102% increase.*
- RaceTrac’s participation in SNAP is critical because it enables beneficiaries to access food without excessive inconvenience or expense. Low-income Americans often work—and shop for food—during unconventional hours. Our stores are often the only easily accessible retail food store located in a particular area, and are consistently open longer than other large-format food retailers and thus provide extended hours during which customers can access food.

II. Introduction

Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Thompson, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning. My name is Max McBrayer, and I am the Chief Executive Officer for RaceTrac Petroleum, Inc. (“RaceTrac”).¹ Today I will share what RaceTrac is doing to combat food insecurity in America. RaceTrac and the entire convenience store industry places a growing importance on food service relative to even 10 or 15 years ago. Our industry’s unique format and business model has been, and should continue to be, a meaningful asset in the Federal Government’s effort to combat food insecurity in the United States. My testimony today will outline our experience as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (“SNAP” or the “Program”) retailers, and offer some suggestions for how the Federal Government can continue to harness companies like ours in its efforts to provide affordable, convenient access to food for America’s most vulnerable citizens.

Headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, RaceTrac is a family-owned business that has been serving guests since 1934. RaceTrac, together with its franchise-brand RaceWay, operates over 750 convenience stores and employs nearly 10,000 team members. Our stores, the vast majority of which are **open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week**, contribute to a variety of communities throughout the southeast United States. Almost 20 percent of our stores are in towns of 2,500 to 20,000 people. All of these locations have robust, diverse food-service operations that are increasingly our biggest customer draw. **All of RaceTrac’s stores and 98 percent of RaceWay stores redeem SNAP benefits.**

The past year has been a struggle for Americans and their families, particularly with respect to food insecurity. Our presence in rural, suburban, and urban areas throughout the Southeast gives us a unique vantage point through which to understand the critical role that convenience stores and other small format retailers play in providing food to low-income families through SNAP.

For SNAP beneficiaries, RaceTrac’s stores serve as critical locations to access food. Not only do we provide beneficiaries with a variety of competitively priced, SNAP-eligible foods, we provide them access to those foods during extended hours, when other food retailers are closed. For that reason, RaceTrac’s participation in the Program benefits many SNAP recipients, who save time and resources by not having to travel inconvenient distances from where they live or work to purchase milk and bread.

Over the past year, the percent of SNAP transactions at our stores has doubled—and we have seen a 65% increase in EBT dollars used at RaceTrac stores and a 102% increase at RaceWay stores. No American should go hungry. We hope to remain active partners in SNAP in order to provide essential food access to the thousands of people in our communities who have come to rely on us.

a. About RaceTrac

RaceTrac is composed of two operating divisions:² RaceTrac and RaceWay. RaceTrac operates 549 RaceTrac-branded retail fuel and convenience stores across

¹ RaceTrac is a member of the National Association of Convenience Stores (NACS), the National Association of Truckstop Operators (NATSO), and the Society of Independent Gasoline Marketers of America (SIGMA).

² RaceTrac also has two subsidiaries: Energy Dispatch and Metroplex Energy. Our transportation company, Energy Dispatch, hauls fuel for RaceTrac and RaceWay, and employs more than 230 drivers and operates 88 tractor-trailers out of six states (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Tennessee, Texas). Energy Dispatch delivers more than 1.2 billion gallons of fuel each year. Our wholesale fuel supplying company, Metroplex Energy, secures bulk fuel to supply RaceTrac and RaceWay stores and other third-party companies by rail, pipeline, truck, barge and vessel across 13 states (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mis-

seven southern states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Texas; and owns more than 200 contractor-operated RaceWay-branded stores across 11 states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.³ RaceTrac employs nearly 10,000 individuals across its divisions and subsidiaries.

Every day, RaceTrac operates under its mission to “make people’s lives simpler and more enjoyable”—and for that reason, the company has been named a top workplace across many of the states in which it operates, and has been recognized on the Forbes list of largest private companies every year since 1998.

Since 2015, RaceTrac has built an average of 40 new stores annually, investing about \$225 million each year across our footprint. We plan to invest another \$300 million to build 31 new stores in 2021, which will lead to expanded employment opportunities as each of our stores employs approximately 20–22 people. The company has also invested over \$33 million in alternative fuels infrastructure. To further support the communities in which it operates, since 2010 RaceTrac has raised over \$5.6 million for several charities, including the Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson’s research, Camp Sunshine (a retreat for children with life-threatening illnesses), Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle Tennessee, and the Boys & Girls Club Florida Alliance.

b. RaceTrac has proudly been participating in SNAP for a decade

Our participation in SNAP is critical because it enables SNAP beneficiaries to access food without excessive inconvenience or expense. The Program is designed to make life easier for approximately 43 million low-income Americans, including 18.9 million children,⁴ and our stores play a critical role in accomplishing this objective. All of RaceTrac’s 549 stores and 200 RaceWay stores accept SNAP benefits. **RaceTrac’s stores process roughly three million EBT transactions per year.**⁵ Throughout the Southeast, our stores are convenient places for SNAP beneficiaries to access food. Many low-income Americans often work—and shop for food—during unconventional hours. Not only are our stores often the only easily accessible retail food store located in a particular area, they are consistently open longer than other large-format food retailers and thus provide extended hours during which customers can shop for food.

Almost all RaceTrac stores and 111 RaceWay stores are open 24 hours per day, 7 days a week;⁶ and 93 RaceWay stores are typically open from 5 a.m. to 11 p.m. Our continuous and extended hours ensure that customers are always able to access our stores to purchase the food, including approximately 1,700 SNAP-eligible items, they need at any time. In rural and urban communities, our stores may be the only place for the community to shop conveniently for common food items and the only location where a SNAP beneficiary can make an EBT purchase. Because of our extended hours, our stores may also be the only location for consumers to purchase food with SNAP benefits at the beginning or end of a late work shift. One store team member put it best: “My store is in a low income area where our guests do not have reliable transportation. We are their store for supplies and food. Guests choose us for the accessibility and price.”⁷

c. RaceTrac’s Initiatives to Expand Fresh and Healthy Food Offerings

RaceTrac has been at the vanguard of the convenience store industry when it comes to providing fresh and healthy food selections for our guests. In everything

Mississippi, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia). Metroplex Energy sells about 4.8 billion gallons of fuel annually.

³Of the current group of RaceWay franchise operators, 71% identify as Desi (*i.e.*, a person of Indian, Pakistani, or Bangladeshi descent), 18% identify as Arab (*i.e.*, a person of Middle Eastern or North African descent), and 10% identify as “other”.

⁴See generally, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, *Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: FY 2018* (Nov. 2019), <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/Characteristics2018-Summary.pdf>; U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, *Program Information Report* (Sept. 2020), <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/data-files/Keydata-September-2020.pdf>.

⁵This number does not include EBT transactions at RaceWay-branded stores.

⁶Throughout the COVID–19 pandemic, to ensure the health and safety of our customers and store teams, we now close our stores for 1 hour each night to perform a deep clean/disinfect of the store.

⁷Another employee noted: “We do have several EBT guests that we consider to be our regular guests. Whether it’s a landscape worker stopping in for lunch or a homeless guest without transportation.”

we do and offer, we are driven by consumer demand—and just like all successful retailers, we constantly try to identify and respond to what our customers want.⁸

Over 10 years ago, RaceTrac embarked on a journey to provide more fresh and perishable products to our guests. This shift was neither easy nor inexpensive, requiring a significant change to our store format and operating procedures. We redesigned our approximately 5,000 square foot stores, which are nine times smaller than the average supermarket and have limited refrigerated and freezer space, to accommodate an expanded food offering that would appeal to our guests' changing tastes.

There are many challenges that small format retailers face in providing perishable and fresh foods, generally related to spoilage and food-safety protocols.⁹ To address those challenges and secure a consistent and trusted source for our fresh food programs, we had to create our own internal distribution program, RaceTrac Distributing (“RTD”). And because we don't run our own commissary, we had to institute and manage a commissary relationship in order to develop and oversee a system to assemble and distribute product to our warehouses, stores, and ultimately, consumers. Food safety protocols were embedded in every step of this process. Throughout our entire supply chain (RTD and wholesale partners), we have a rigorous food supplier vetting process, robust ingredient traceability, and end-to-end tracking and management of our cold chain, all to guarantee the safety of our offerings.

There has been a steady increase in customer demand for healthy staples over the past few years—and RaceTrac has strived to meet that demand. We offer an assortment of fresh whole fruits, cut fruit, and packaged salads; dairy products, including milk, cheeses, and fresh yogurt parfaits; breads, pasta bowls, and cereals; as well as hardboiled egg packs, “protein packs” with fresh nuts, cheeses, fruits, and meats, and fresh sandwiches. RaceTrac now sells over 12,000 pieces of fresh fruit per week—and in 2020, sold almost 800,000 bottles of milk and over 410,000 fresh sandwiches.

d. Our Stores Are Essential for Food Access

“To alleviate hunger and malnutrition,” Congress created the Program and strategically designed it to ensure the participation of both large and small format retailers as a means of maximizing beneficiaries' access to food.¹⁰ Small-format convenience stores and large-format grocery stores serve different beneficial purposes in the Program. Convenience stores tend to *supplement* the traditional grocery store with respect to food access. Many SNAP beneficiaries come to RaceTrac to conveniently purchase items such as bread and milk in between trips to the grocery store. Small-format stores like ours provide convenience—both in terms of location and hours of operation—as well as competitively priced food to all consumers, including SNAP beneficiaries. We constantly endeavor to provide convenience, value, and quality to American consumers on the go. In short, we strive to make the lives of all of our customers, including low-income consumers, simpler and more enjoyable.

Despite our best efforts to provide fresh, competitively-priced food products, COVID-19 has imposed significant challenges. In addition to increased health and safety protocols that were layered on top of existing food-safety protocols, we had to contend with sporadic supply disruptions and food shortages. We were able to overcome these supply disruptions and we continue to work diligently with our suppliers to minimize disruption for our customers, who have come to rely on our stores as an essential component to their monthly food shopping routine.

RaceTrac stores are open 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, rain or shine. They are open during normal times and during emergencies. While COVID-19 has been a historic national emergency, it is not the first time that our stores have kept their doors open during times of national or regional hardship. For over 80 years, our stores have stayed open during national disasters, including hurricanes and other extreme weather events. In the words of one frontline team member, “during disaster times like hurricanes, we are the only thing open. It's great we can help and provide the needed items to our guests in their time of need.”

⁸The entrepreneurial culture of RaceWay and its operators has resulted in store-specific food service offerings that are tailored to meet the tastes of a particular community. For instance, RaceWay operators have put in place chicken, BBQ and Tex-Mex offerings, in addition to stocking staple food items targeted to food preferences of certain ethnic groups in the communities where they operate.

⁹Unlike a grocery store, which may get daily food deliveries, small-format stores like RaceTrac and RaceWay only get deliveries a few times a week—in our case, approximately three times per week.

¹⁰See *e.g.*, 7 U.S.C. §§ 2011, 2012(o), 2018 (discussing food access and retailer eligibility).

Throughout national disasters, we do whatever it takes to keep our doors open, providing communities with places to refuel their vehicles and purchase basic necessities. This includes the ability to purchase hot foods when cooking at home is infeasible. During those times, we have seamlessly adjusted our EBT operations to effectuate Federal hot food waivers to ensure our most economically vulnerable guests have the ability to eat. (For many of our SNAP guests, there has been confusion as to why hot foods waivers were not granted during the worst of the pandemic shutdown when people were struggling to get by without childcare and other support.)

III. Food Insecurity and COVID-19—A Retailer’s Perspective

Regrettably, hunger and food insecurity are a persistent presence in our country. In 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately 35.2 million Americans, including 5.3 million children, were food-insecure. This equates to more than one in ten American households.¹¹ COVID-19 has exacerbated what was already an unacceptable situation; at RaceTrac, we have seen this impact firsthand.

Designated as critical infrastructure by the Department of Homeland Security,¹² RaceTrac’s stores have remained open throughout this pandemic, providing food and fuel to the public. Our frontline team members have shown up, day after day, complying with stringent health and safety protocols to ensure that healthcare workers, first responders, and everyday people can refuel, whether that be with a cup of coffee and a sandwich or with a gallon of gas. This availability and accessibility has been particularly important to the food-insecure during the pandemic. As one store team member described: “During COVID, guests could count on us to be there, open, and be in stock.”

For the past year, store team members have seen a notable increase in EBT purchases. According to one of our frontline employees, “many low-income working households shop with us for affordable breakfast, lunch, dinner, or snack items. EBT sales have also increased due to the state offering more assistance and increasing benefits for lower-income households.” Per a different store team member: “unemployment increases and with poverty and the homeless population levels growing, many of them shop with us because of the selection and value.” Another highlighted: “when guests enter the door, they constantly are asking do we take EBT. We have seen an increase with students as well. Kids will use EBT before or after the school day to purchase a snack or lunch.”¹³

RaceTrac’s store teams have seen a two-fold increase in EBT purchases over the past year. They have served customers with large baskets, and have watched as the guest monitors the total on the register as they ring them up, in order to add in as many items as possible under their available benefits. They have also served guests who stop in quickly to make an EBT purchase and then dash out to work. Our data confirms what our store teams have been seeing with their own eyes: before COVID (2019 and early 2020), EBT accounted for around 0.7–1.0% of our total transactions; since March 2020 this has nearly doubled to 1.2–1.6% of total transactions. Moreover, RaceTrac stores have seen a 65% increase in EBT dollars used and RaceWay stores, which tend to be located in more rural communities, have seen a 102% increase in EBT dollars used. It is clear to all of us at RaceTrac that in 2020 many of our guests have been struggling to make ends meet, and are experiencing food insecurity. Congress’s 15 percent increase of SNAP benefits has been critical to ensuring that our most economically vulnerable citizens have access to the food they need. In addition, P-EBT has been important in ensuring that eligible

¹¹Economic Research Service, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, *Food Security Status of U.S. Households in 2019*, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/key-statistics-graphics.aspx>.

¹²“Food & Agriculture,” which includes the convenience industry, was classified by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) as a Critical Infrastructure Sector in its August 18, 2020, Guidance. See Department of Homeland Security, Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency, “Advisory Memorandum on Ensuring Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers Ability to Work During the COVID-19 Response,” (Aug. 18, 2020) available at https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Version_4.0_CISA_Guidance_on_Essential_Critical_Infrastructure_Workers_FINAL%20AUG%2018v3.pdf.

¹³These anecdotes are bolstered by the available data regarding the impact of COVID-19 on food insecurity. See FRAC, *Not Enough to Eat: COVID-19 Deepens America’s Hunger Crisis* (Sept. 2020), (finding that “about one in four adults are estimated to be food-insecure during COVID-19”); Urban Institute, *Forty Percent of Black and Hispanic Parents of School-Age Children are Food Insecure* (Dec. 2020), https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/103335/forty-percent-of-black-and-hispanic-parents-of-school-age-children-are-food-insecure_0.pdf (finding that “one in four (24.7 percent) families with school-age children reported household food insecurity in September; this rate rose to over one in three (36.9 percent) among families in which someone lost work or work-related income at some point during the pandemic.”).

school children are able to access food via temporary emergency EBT benefits while their schools are closed or operating with reduced hours.

IV. Conclusion

RaceTrac takes its role in the Program seriously. Small-format stores like ours serve an important role in SNAP: we provide convenient locations for SNAP beneficiaries to access affordable food at any time they wish to, day or night. I hope we can continue to work together to fulfill the Program's goal to alleviate hunger and food-insecurity across the country.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you, Mr. McBrayer.

I now recognize Mr. Edenfield. When you are ready, you may begin your testimony now.

Mr. JOHNSON. While we wait, Madam Chair, I might just note to my colleagues they have 5 more minutes to vote, if they haven't done so yet.

STATEMENT OF RON EDENFIELD, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, WAYFIELD FOODS, INC., LITHIA SPRINGS, GA

Mr. EDENFIELD. [inaudible] two for one fresh SNAP produce purchase program with the assistance of a Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive grant knowledge, FINI, 2018 to 2019. We see the importance of these programs to our customers when they are going through difficult times.

Since the pandemic hit, I have never been prouder of our 500+ associates dedicated to serving our community. When Georgia's Department of Labor became overwhelmed with unemployment claims, we heard horror stories from our customers who went months before they received any benefits. Many are still facing this challenge, but for those individuals SNAP has been a lifeline for getting food on the table and the emergency allotments that increase benefits to a maximum were and are critically important.

When the schools in Atlanta closed due to the pandemic, many customers had to quit their jobs to care for their children. Feeding their children became a real struggle for those who rely on free and reduced-price school meals. Thankfully, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2020 that you passed allowed USDA's Food and Nutrition Service to facilitate the distribution of pandemic EBT to families affected by school closures.

Georgia families received their one-time allotment of \$256.50 in P-EBT benefits per child, based on a calculation of \$5.07 per day for the 45 days the child missed last year. Unfortunately, there have been no P-EBT benefits issued for this school year, though we are now 7 months into the year. Pilot P-EBT program is not under the jurisdiction of this Committee. I encourage you to work with the House Education and Labor Committee to examine this program and its challenges. The model is a good one; the delay is inexcusable. I would encourage this Committee to consider P-EBT model for summer feeding programs that are under your jurisdiction as well.

I also want to comment on the food boxes that were delivered to supplement families in tremendous need. I know, without a doubt, that the existing food partnership that distribute funds through an EBT card or through food banks are far more efficient and give

parents the opportunity to shop at their convenience and to purchase the best food for their children. Just imagine the frustration of a parent who receives a food box containing peanut butter with a child with a peanut allergy.

Our grocery saw increased sales. We were confronted with a significant number of costs to keep our associates and our customers safe. The national data the FMI, the Food Industry Association has collected for more than 40 years finds that the supermarket industry profit margin has never hit two percent. Perhaps the industry may hit two percent margin this year, but for my associates and for many other retailers, that profit goes back to them through our employee stock ownership plan.

In spite of these increased costs, I am proud to say that the food retail industry continues to be the largest private-sector donor to Feeding America. According to their 2020 annual report, food retailers donated more than 1.5 billion meals to the Feeding America network last year.

Although your Committee does not have jurisdiction over the WIC Program, I did want to share my frustration that Georgia has still not transitioned to eWIC. Although every state was mandated to transition to eWIC by October 2020, Georgia received a waiver to extend their timeline. We are now hearing it could be another year before Georgia is ready to launch eWIC.

When we talk about food insecurity, we recognize that SNAP is an important stabilizer for low-income families. It is also a powerful economic stimulator for the local economies.

In conclusion, addressing an issue as complex as food insecurity requires all of us to work together. Wayfield Foods will continue to work with our partners to increase access to quality food in our communities and are pleased to see the result of this work in healthier customers. I may be biased, but the House Agriculture Committee has the right person leading this important work at this critical time.

I would be pleased to answer any questions you have. Thank you.
[The prepared statement of Mr. Edenfield follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF RON EDENFIELD, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, WAYFIELD FOODS, INC., LITHIA SPRINGS, GA

Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Thompson, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Ron Edenfield and I am President of Wayfield Foods, a nine-store independent grocer with stores across the metro-Atlanta area. Wayfield Foods is an authorized retailer in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and also in the Special, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).

As a WIC and SNAP-authorized grocer for 39 years, I appreciate the opportunity to come before this distinguished Committee to share my views on food insecurity and how the many assistance programs you oversee have been a lifeline to my customers, particularly during the pandemic.

Wayfield Foods has been a part of metro-Atlanta since 1982. My goal was to bring a full-service grocery store to communities that were being all but abandoned by other retailers. Most of our stores are located in low-income census tract areas. Without the arrival of our stores, these communities would be considered food deserts. We work, live and deeply engage in these communities that now have access to a reliable, economical source of fresh produce and meats. Our customers deserve to eat better for less, like any other community in America. This is our mission, and we have devoted our brand to reflect this commitment. Almost 40 years

later, we are proud of the many ways we have become part of the community, providing jobs for over 500 associates.

Since the pandemic hit, I have never been prouder of our associates' dedication to serving our community. I know all of you experienced occasional empty shelves as customers literally rushed to get the last pack of hamburger meat or the last roll of toilet paper during some of the early days of the pandemic. Our dedicated essential employees came to work every day, even working overtime to take care of our customers, and we quickly got products back on the shelves.

As an essential industry, our stores never closed during the pandemic. Unfortunately, many of my customers have not been so lucky. Many have lost jobs or had their hours reduced. We have had Wayfield employees startled by the community need and reached into their own pockets to give a customer a few dollars when they could not pay their bill at check-out. Wayfield Foods has never wavered in our support of local food pantries and community groups to provide additional assistance, especially as this need is at an all-time high.

When *Georgia's Department of Labor*¹ became inundated with claims, we heard horror stories from our customers who went months before they received any benefits. Almost a year later, there are still customers who tell us they are having trouble receiving unemployment benefits. For those individuals, SNAP has been a lifeline for getting food on the table and the Emergency Allotments that increased benefits to the maximum were and are critically important.

When the schools in Atlanta closed due to the pandemic, many customers had to quit their jobs to stay home and take care of their children. Feeding their children became a real struggle for those who rely on free and reduced-price school breakfasts and lunches. Thankfully, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2020 that you passed allowed the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service to facilitate the distribution of pandemic EBT—or P-EBT—to families affected by coronavirus-related school closures.

Georgia families received a one-time allotment of \$256.50 in P-EBT benefits per child based on a calculation of \$5.07 per day for the 45 days the child missed school during last year's school year. Unfortunately, there have been **no** P-EBT benefits issued for this school year even though we are now 7 months into the school year. To date, less than half the states have been approved to issue P-EBT benefits for the current school year. While the P-EBT program is not directly under the jurisdiction of this Committee, I encourage this Committee in coordination with the House Education and Labor Committee to examine the program and why many states are facing so many challenges in being approved for the current school year. While implementing P-EBT remains a challenge for states, there are some very positive pieces to its model like how it is tailored directly to children in need and that it leverages the existing EBT rails. For families who already participate in SNAP, they can shop as they usually do with added benefits on their existing cards. For families who do not currently receive SNAP, they are issued EBT cards that function under the same requirements of SNAP. This allows families to continue shopping at their neighborhood grocer who is SNAP-authorized and easily redeem those benefits. I would encourage this Committee to consider the P-EBT model for summer feeding programs as well. I have always thought this approach of utilizing the EBT card for summer feeding made a lot of sense rather than having to send children away from their homes to feeding sites.

I also want to comment on the so called "food boxes" that were delivered to supplement families in tremendous need. While I certainly believe the need is there and that we should do everything we can do to help these families, I know without a doubt that the existing food partnerships that distribute funds through an EBT card or through food banks are far more efficient and give parents the opportunity to shop at their convenience and to purchase the best foods for their children. Imagine the frustration of a parent who receives a food box containing peanut butter but has a child with a peanut allergy.

There is much that has been said in the press that is less than accurate about the increased sales resulting in vastly increased profits to grocers this past year. While we certainly saw increased sales, we also confronted a significant number of costs to keep our associates and customers safe, including investments in PPE, enhanced cleaning and retrofitting stores with plexiglass to help keep cashiers, baggers and customers safe at check-out. The national data that FMI—the Food Industry Association has collected for more than 40 years finds that the supermarket industry profit margin has never hit 2%. Perhaps when this year's numbers are calculated, the industry may hit a 2% profit margin, but for my associates and for

¹ <https://www.11alive.com/article/money/georgia-unemployment-benefits-elusive/85-e4af9830-b01d-4ac3-9f2c-17c7f5767410>.

many others, that profit goes back to them through our Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP).

In spite of these increased costs and the huge demand from consumers now responsible for preparing three meals a day for their families, I'm proud to say that the food retail industry continued to be the largest private sector donor to Feeding America. According to their *2020 Annual Report*,² food retailers were responsible for donating more than 1.5 billion meals to the Feeding America network last year. And this represents only one stream of the efforts undertaken by retailers.

Although your Committee does not have jurisdiction over the WIC program, I did want to share my frustration that Georgia has still not transitioned to eWIC. Although every state was mandated to transition to eWIC by October of 2020, Georgia received a waiver to extend their timeline. We are now hearing it could be another year before Georgia is ready to launch eWIC.

Retailers and our customers are challenged to deal with an outdated system that requires customers to receive all their monthly benefits at one time and maintains the stigma of using the WIC paper vouchers. The eWIC system will benefit retailers because costly human error will be reduced, reimbursement will happen faster and there will be less risk of rejected purchases.

Please encourage your colleagues to do everything they can to move Georgia WIC as well as other states who have not implemented eWIC forward to better take care of our customers.

When we talk about food insecurity, we recognize that SNAP is an important stabilizer for low-income families, but it is also a powerful economic stimulator for the local economies and grocers. Wayfield Foods has been in partnership with a SNAP-Ed-funded community agency, Open Hand Atlanta, since 2017, to address food insecurity and health in our stores directly with our customers. Wayfield Foods & Open Hand have supported hundreds of store nutrition education sessions, employee trainings and thousands of healthy food demonstrations and produce donations over the last 5 years. We are committed to doing this work and we have witnessed firsthand, SNAP recipients making the best use of their limited funds as they learn to shop for healthy food on a budget, read nutrition labels, and other critical nutrition messages that help empower them to make better decisions related to nutrition and the health and wellness of their families.

We have also partnered with the Atlanta Community Food Bank by implementing the two for one SNAP fresh produce purchase program with the assistance of a FINI (Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive) grant in 2018 and 2019. Wayfield Foods supports this critical work, and we amplify the USDA funding with our own financial and staff support. These types of programs show that private-public partnerships can make a significant impact on the way people shop, think about food, healthy eating and nutrition.

One of the efforts we were engaged in during the pandemic was encouraging our customers and providing support with healthy and economical meal solutions with the theme—*Stay Strong with Family Meals*, recognizing that eating well helps to keep our customers healthy until they are able to be protected by the COVID vaccination.

In conclusion, addressing an issue as complex as food insecurity requires grocers, community-based organizations, food banks, hospitals, universities, and public health agencies working together to build nutrition programs that not only reduce hunger and poverty, but enhance nutrition knowledge, improve health outcomes and productivity, create jobs and economic growth, and strengthen our communities. Wayfield Foods will continue to work with our partners to increase access to quality food in our communities, and we are pleased to see the result of this work in healthier customers.

I may be biased, but I happen to think that the House Agriculture Committee has the right person leading this important work at this critical time.

I would be pleased to answer your questions.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you, Mr. Edenfield, for your testimony.

Without objection, Mr. Sanford Bishop, our soon to be fellow Committee Member, will participate in today's hearing.

Hearing none, so ordered. Welcome, Mr. Bishop.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you very much.

² https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/FA_2020AnnReport_FINAL_updated0204.pdf.

Mrs. HAYES. At this time, Members will be recognized for questions in order of seniority, alternating between Majority and Minority Members. You will be recognized for 5 minutes each in order to allow us to get in as many questions as possible. Please keep your microphones muted until you are recognized in order to minimize background noise.

I now recognize the Ranking Member, the gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. Thompson.

Mr. THOMPSON. Madam Chair, if it is okay with you, out of respect for colleagues that are going to be eventually traveling here, I would defer to the end.

Mrs. HAYES. That is okay with me.

Mr. THOMPSON. Okay.

Mrs. HAYES. I now recognize Mr. Costa, and immediately after Mr. Costa, I will recognize Mr. Austin Scott from Georgia.

Mr. COSTA. Thank you, Madam Chair, and I want to thank the Chair as well for holding this important hearing on food insecurity in America. Certainly, it has been a challenge in this country for years, but in the last 12 months during this pandemic when our complex, complicated food supply chain has been turned upside down, this deep recession created by the pandemic with the closure of restaurants and schools, we have found that hunger in America has only increased, sadly. We find people going to food banks that have never been to a food bank in their lives.

I represent a Congressional district that has significant poverty. Almost 24 percent of my constituents are enrolled in SNAP, the second highest in California in Congressional districts. And yet, it is one of the most productive agricultural regions in the entire country. Such a contrast, sadly.

But, we need to do a better job of connecting the resources. This hearing is important to do that, and I want to commend folks. Clearly, it has been indicated by the American Enterprise Institute that increased benefits over the last year—and I do want to commend Secretary Perdue and the efforts that the Agriculture Committee working together with the USDA last year did to put the Food Box Program together to provide supplemental support for our food banks and for our religious organizations to, in fact, try to bridge the gap as a result of the increased hunger that resulted in that.

The American Enterprise Institute report indicated that increased benefit has helped keep the lid on poverty at about 11 percent in the last 12 months from going higher. It could have been higher.

Mr. Waide, I want to thank you for all that you have done to help people. You mentioned in your testimony that just ten percent increase in SNAP benefits is equivalent to doubling access to all food provided to our nation's food banks. Could you speak a little more about the importance of the 15 percent increase that SNAP has had during the pandemic, and the importance of SNAP benefits, going forward, as we provided in this most recent COVID package?

Mr. WAIDE. Yes, I really appreciate the question.

SNAP as a program is really the nation's first line of defense against hunger. Certainly, food banks—

Mr. COSTA. It is our safety net.

Mr. WAIDE. It is our safety net. Certainly, food banks do extraordinary work leveraging public and private resources to get much needed food into the hands of folks who need it.

That said, just in terms of the scale at which these programs operate, SNAP operates at a much larger scale, and so, as I said in my testimony, if we reduce SNAP by ten percent or expand it by ten percent, that is the equivalent—that changes the equivalent of the entire volume of the food that is provided through Feeding America food banks.

Mr. COSTA. Okay.

Mr. WAIDE. What SNAP really allows people to do is to—and Mr. Edenfield spoke to this—is to be able to use the existing food supply chain, which is well-established, highly sophisticated, highly accessible to people all over the country, and to simply use resources very efficiently to get the food that they need that is right for their families.

Mr. COSTA. I think that is an important point, but my time is limited here. I want to ask one more question, if you don't mind.

Mr. Duvall, I want to thank all of your good work on behalf of the American Farm Bureau. As you know, I work very closely with a lot of the Farm Bureaus throughout California.

Your testimony about the importance that farmers take and the pride that they do in feeding America. I would say farmers and farmworkers—we hope to provide some legislation next week that will provide some legal status for our farmworkers. But they literally put food on America's dinner table every night, and food, I continue to tell everybody, is a national security issue.

Could you elaborate on the importance of SNAP to rural communities from your perspective, Mr. Duvall, Zippy?

Mr. DUVALL. Yes, thank you, sir. It is good to be with you today.

It is, in rural communities where the job markets are difficult, it is so important. The SNAP Program is so important in those areas. Our rural communities continue to struggle for a number of reasons, whether it be health care, whether it be education, whether it be lack of broadband. Whatever it might be that brings jobs there, and that is what is important. We need to rebuild our rural communities, make sure that they have the broadband, help create some jobs there for our people. But, those programs are vitally important.

Mr. COSTA. Thank you. I appreciate it. We need to focus on rural America as well, and thank you for your good work.

My time has expired.

Mr. DUVALL. Thank you.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you. I now recognize Mr. Scott from Georgia, followed by Mr. McGovern from Massachusetts, if you could ready yourself.

Mr. AUSTIN SCOTT of Georgia. Thank you, Madam Chair, and Mr. Waide, I want to thank you for your comments on the successful Food Box Program. I was there at the Atlanta Farmers Market when then Secretary Perdue came down, and the thing that I noticed about that—the farmers box is that is the same high-quality food that my family might enjoy if my parents were coming over for dinner, fresh produce and other things, and it is just a different

quality than the food boxes that I have helped pack with Second Harvest in south Georgia. It is important that we have the combination for people as we work to help alleviate these challenges in these really unprecedented times. I am happy that we are having this discussion and we are not attacking the Food Box Program. I want to thank all of you that complimented it, and I am going to thank the Democratic Party for their support of the Food Box Program. It is important that we do anything and everything we can do right now.

I want to, Zippy, say hello to you. It has been a while since I have seen you. I look forward to seeing you back in Georgia in Congressional District 1, and as we talk about policies that impact the price of food, it obviously places a greater burden on our low-income citizens in the United States, and part of it gets back to U.S. agriculture policy. Starving farmers can't help feed hungry people. One of my concerns is how long it takes us to get disaster relief to our producers when something happens. It is my understanding that disasters of the Midwest, those farmers still have not received any disaster payments, and there were over 200 million bushels of corn and soybeans and other things destroyed through the storms of August 10 and 11.

Zippy, could you talk about the importance of the resilience of our ag producers with regard to the food supply in the United States?

Mr. DUVALL. Sure, Congressman. I appreciate the opportunity and look forward to seeing you real soon in person, too.

Farm programs are so important to our rural communities. It bolsters the economies in the rural communities, and it is as simple as that. When we bolster their economies, we feed people. And you are exactly right. Starving farmers can't feed starving people.

So, to make sure that our country's food insecurity becomes better, that we make sure that all our Americans are fed, we have to have strong farm programs as we move forward. It is important that our farmers are surviving and have been able to get through the natural disasters and the fluctuation in the prices that we see.

Mr. AUSTIN SCOTT of Georgia. Zippy, there has been a lot of talk about the challenges of minority farmers. I see it as challenges for small farmers. I mean, the margins are so thin in agriculture right now, and they have been for many, many years. If things like *Waters of the U.S.* and restrictions on pesticides and other things that we use in the inputs of our food supply chain are restricted and the cost of producing a crop goes up, what would the impact be on the food supply chain if the cost of inputs on the agriculture producers go up? Because we all know that the food that we buy off the shelves in the grocery store, it starts with the inputs on the farm, and the next step is the harvest. And then it actually makes it through processing into the grocery store.

Mr. DUVALL. Yes. If you increase input costs, I mean, it is going to be extremely hard to continue to help feed the people in our country. You are exactly right. If it costs us more to produce it, it is going to cost the consumer more to buy it, and it is important that we streamline regulatory oversight of all the tools that are coming down the pike for our farmers to use. They need to be efficient.

And you talked about small farmers. We have enough barriers in the way. We don't need to create more barriers with over-regulation.

Mr. AUSTIN SCOTT of Georgia. Mr. Duvall, thank you for your testimony. I am extremely concerned about all of our small farmers out there, the lack of the margins. The fact of the matter is when you spend \$100 at the grocery store, maybe \$1 of that ends up being positive revenue to the farmer out there.

And so, again, thank you for your testimony. I appreciate the work of the Committee, and I just want to make sure that we have a balanced approach to solving this challenge of hunger in the country.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you. I now recognize Mr. McGovern from Massachusetts, followed by Mr. Crawford from Arkansas.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Thank you very much, and I want to express my appreciation to the panel for their excellent testimony today.

I want to thank Mr. Waide in particular for reminding us that while the crisis that we are dealing with right now is new, this issue of hunger for many in our country existed long before the crisis. One thing is clear, and that is the Federal response, our response was inadequate then, and I still believe it is not adequate now. There is more that we need to do. I disagree with the Ranking Member who took a potshot at the American Rescue Plan. It is important that we extend the 15 percent increase in SNAP. Not, and by the way, I would say that not just through September, but we ought to make it permanent. The average SNAP benefit is about \$1.40 per person per meal. That is—you cannot live on that. A cup of coffee is more than that now. We need to be thinking immediately about making that increase in SNAP permanent. I appreciate the Chairman of the Agriculture Committee holding this hearing, but we also need to appreciate the fact that if we are going to solve the issue of hunger, it falls under the jurisdiction of multiple committees, not just the Agriculture Committee. We ought to think seriously about doing joint committee hearings with Ways and Means, with Education and Labor, and other committees that have some jurisdiction over a piece of the response to ending hunger. We need a holistic approach to this.

I am grateful that President Biden and Vice President Harris have talked about the importance of dealing with the issue of hunger, and I hope that we can get some bipartisan support on a couple of requests that I have made to the Administration. One is they ought to appoint a hunger czar, or as my friend José Andrés calls for a food czar, but somebody who can coordinate an effort to kind of connect all the dots. Again, just like we have multiple committees here in Congress that deal with the issue, there are multiple agencies and departments that deal with the issue. And you know, unless there is somebody bringing everybody together in a room, it is hard to have a holistic, coordinated response.

I also hope the people will support an effort that I am trying to convince the Administration to undertake, which is to do a White House conference on food, nutrition, health, and hunger. Again, you know I don't want to manage this problem. I want to solve this problem. And you know, FRAC points out that right now we have an estimated 50 million Americans, including 17 million children,

who are hungry or food-insecure. Every one of us should be ashamed by that statistic. We are the richest country in the history of the world. We should not tolerate that at all. I would like to call on the President to make this one of this Administration's priorities. Do a conference on this issue. Bring together struggling families. Bring together the food banks, our mayors, the advocates who are on the front lines doing such incredible work, those of you who are on this panel who play a role. Bring our medical experts, our schools, our business community, our farmers. Bring everybody who has a role in this together, and let us piece together a holistic response to this with goals and benchmarks to see whether we are reaching those goals and those benchmarks.

Hunger is a political condition. We have the resources. We don't have the political will.

I will just finally say that everybody in Washington, you are never going to find anybody who is going to say they are pro-hunger. Notwithstanding some of the votes that some people take. But the bottom line is, we have to do more than talk the talk. We got to walk the walk, and we need a dramatically different approach. We need to think out of the box. We need to bring other people to the table, and we need to, again, develop a plan to solve this.

And let us, again, in the immediate term, let's make these improvements in SNAP, this 15 percent increase, let's make that permanent. We all should agree on that. The benefit is inadequate.

But beyond that, we need to develop a holistic plan, and included in that has to be the understanding that if you want to end hunger, we also have to deal with the issue of wages. The majority of people who are on SNAP right now who can work actually do work. They earn so little, they still qualify for the benefit. So, we need to do much more.

I thank the panel. I thank the Chair for the hearing, and I yield back.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you, Mr. McGovern.

I now recognize Mr. Crawford from Arkansas, followed by Ms. Adams from North Carolina.

Mr. CRAWFORD. Thank you. Let me get to Mr. Edenfield.

You referenced food boxes in your testimony, and how current infrastructure is far more efficient. I kind of struggle with that as such a broad sentiment, especially for those in rural communities like my district who have really benefitted from the program, including distributions at food pantries, especially in the early phases of the pandemic when produce was being plowed over, milk dumped, and grocery shelves emptied. The Farmers to Families Food Box Program seemed like a reasonable and efficient combination. Do you disagree with that?

Mr. EDENFIELD. Well, the food box—

Mrs. HAYES. Can I ask everyone who is not speaking to mute?

Mr. EDENFIELD. Well, the food box is a short-term solution, and it has been beneficial. There is no doubt about that. But talking about long-term solutions, a lot of things, especially when we are talking about the rural areas, and you mentioned rural areas. Rural areas also are where we have food deserts, and a lot of times, the food deserts you just don't have that much population. Anything that takes away from having a store there, a full line store

to select from, it is like a competition there. And I must say, the competitions aren't good. But one of the things I think in looking at food deserts is anything you can do to alleviate that.

I am not saying it wasn't good. It was a good thing. It certainly served a purpose, and it is a good short-term solution. I just don't look at it as being a long-term solution. Also, especially when it is predetermined what they are going to get in that box. Now, some of the things that went through the—it was entirely different, but when it is not—it is predetermined what a family is going to get, as I mentioned earlier, I mean, if a family gets peanut butter and they have a child with a peanut allergy, that is not a good thing. So—and as hard as farmers—I grew up in a farming community, so I will always have a heart for farmers. As a matter of fact, it is some of the hardest, most fulfilling work there is, and I still—when I go back home now to south Georgia, I look at the farm community and how different it was when I grew up, there has been a lot of changes there, and there have been a lot of changes from the food deserts—when I was growing up, they had different things like garment factories and everything to help support that economy that they don't have anymore. Basically, it is farming and it is going to create more of a challenge to have quality grocery stores in these areas, especially if food distribution [inaudible]. Did I make sense?

Mr. CRAWFORD. Thank you, I appreciate it.

I want to ask Mr. Duvall if you have any thoughts on how we can expand distribution points moving forward, particularly as we look at options to continue a more direct farm to family link without putting government bureaucracy in the middle of that?

Mr. DUVALL. Sure, Congressman. I appreciate the question, and of course, without putting bureaucracy in the middle of it, if we've got to go to our NGOs and our local communities, Farm Bureau is one of those. We know the people in our community. We go to church with people that know people in that community that need help. And the people on the ground, just like tending to our farmland, we know our land better than anything. Those NGOs in those communities know the landscape of their communities, and they know where they can help. What we have to be careful of, though it is not easy for someone to admit they need help, so also we have to be working with the regional NGOs to be able to offset some of that pressure on people to be able to come forward and be able to receive the help that is available to them there.

But our farmers and ranchers and our Farm Bureaus are there and willing to help any time that they can and in any way they can.

Mr. CRAWFORD. Thank you.

Madam Chair, I yield back.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you.

I now recognize Ms. Adams from North Carolina, followed by Mr. DesJarlais from Tennessee.

Ms. ADAMS. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the Ranking Member as well for hosting the hearing today. To the witnesses, thank you for your testimony.

It is an incredibly urgent and important conversation. Right now, more than 50 million Americans are struggling with hunger, with

an estimated 17 million children living in households facing food insecurity. Over 18 million Americans are receiving unemployment benefits, and up to 40 million Americans cannot afford rent and fear eviction.

In North Carolina alone, 1.5 million people currently depend on SNAP to put food on their tables, an increase of 300,000 North Carolinians since the pandemic began. In Mecklenburg County, where my district is, there are more than 150,000 people receiving SNAP, an increase of more than 50,000 people since March of last year. It is clear that there is a hunger crisis in our nation, and the jump in SNAP participation only shows us part of a larger picture.

Mr. Duvall, thank you for your testimony in support of America's farmers. In this Committee, we are incredibly proud of the contributions that farmers make to our nation, and we are glad to hear of the great work that you have done, and that farmers have done, to combat hunger.

I do want to ask some needed additional context to your remarks. In addition to the increase in SNAP benefits, which the American Enterprise Institute has estimated has kept millions of Americans out of poverty, our Committee also provided a rather large number of needed Federal relief dollars to producers in this country.

My question to you is, to build upon the importance of that interconnection, Mr. Duvall, could you comment on the importance of SNAP in rural communities, such as those in your home State of Georgia?

Mr. DUVALL. Yes, ma'am. Anytime you go into the rural parts of our country, it is vitally important that those SNAP dollars be there. On a previous question I talked a little bit about rebuilding our infrastructure that will bring jobs back out to our rural communities, and that is hopefully going to come through this Biden Administration and through you all in Congress. But it is vital. We have seen an increase in costs of food to families that are going to the grocery store to buy it of about six percent, where normally on a year-to-year basis it is about two percent. There is a desperate need out there for help, and those funds are very important.

Ms. ADAMS. Well, thank you so much.

Mr. Waide, in my district Loaves and Fishes is a nonprofit that provides groceries to individuals in Charlotte Mecklenburg in short-term crisis has a program that provides unutilized perishable TEFAP foods to those in need. It alone has increased from serving around 500 people per month pre-pandemic to serving between 5,000 and 7,000 per month.

So, can you expand on how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the way you store, handle, and distribute food, and how you have managed those hurdles?

Mr. WAIDE. Thank you for the question. The key challenge that we face from the pandemic in how we operate is really in the distribution methods. Rather than ask clients at food pantries to come inside, shop for food, and then leave, we have really pivoted to a mobile distribution model where people are driving through parking lots and we are putting food directly in trunks or in cars, just to maximize peoples' safety.

There has been a huge influx of perishable products through the Food Box Program and through other sources of food that we have

relied upon significant investments in our infrastructure in freezer and cooler capacity to help handle that food. And then, of course, we have had to buy a lot of food. My food bank alone is purchasing \$1 million or more per month in food purchases, about five times what we were doing prior to the pandemic, and we think that is going to continue kind of indefinitely.

So, those are some of the ways we have had to adapt, and we expect to have to operate in this way for a number of months to come.

Ms. ADAMS. Well, thank you for all that you do. I had a Kellogg fellow who worked—who was in my group, Bill Bolling, who worked with the Atlanta Food Bank. Is he still with you?

Mr. WAIDE. Bill was my predecessor and right now, he is failing at retirement.

Ms. ADAMS. Oh, okay. When I saw the Atlanta Food Bank—
Mr. WAIDE. He is still very active in our—

Ms. ADAMS.—I looked, and I said you don't look like Bill. Thank you for all your work.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN [presiding.] Thank you, Ms. Adams.

And now, I recognize Mr. DesJarlais for 5 minutes.

Mr. DESJARLAIS. I thank the Chairman, and thank our witnesses for being here today for this important hearing.

Mr. Duvall, as you know, the average U.S. family spends just shy of ten percent of their disposable income on food, while other countries experience much higher food costs and spend a higher percentage of their disposable income on food. Many of these countries employ market distorting farm policies, or no farm policy at all, leading to volatility and availability of and price of their food. What role does farm policy have in stabilizing the availability and price of food in the United States?

Mr. DUVALL. It plays a huge role, because these farm programs, they bolster the economies in our communities, and as you bolster the economies there, we also produce the food and generating the money in our communities to be able to feed our hungry people there.

We are the bread basket of the world. We are known—and we are proud of that. We should never have hungry people in our communities and across this country. We look forward to working with you all to find other solutions to be able to solve this problem.

Mr. DESJARLAIS. Okay. We touched upon this the last time you were here, which wasn't long ago, so it is great to have you back. But you know, here on the Committee, we strive to be very conscientious about how policies may impact the price of food, and in turn, place an even greater burden on those struggling to feed their families.

I am greatly concerned when I hear priorities of folks across the aisle, particularly as it relates to imposing burdensome regulations on farmers, whether it be for climate change, WOTUS, or even restrictions on crop protectants and provide cost-effective ways to manage the risk of weeds and pests. Do you share these concerns, and what is the impact on the overall food supply chain if we arbitrarily increase the cost of production on our farmers and ranchers, and who winds up paying for these mandates?

Mr. DUVALL. Well, of course, first of all we need to be as efficient as we can, and [inaudible] better. We need to streamline the approval of the new tools that are coming down the pike for our farmers to be more efficient, and then, of course, if you raise the cost to our farmers to produce that food, someone has got to pay for it, and it is going to be paid for by the consumer at the end of the chain.

Farm programs play a role in making sure that we keep it—the fluctuation of prices from going up and down, and our risk management tools are vitally important to making sure that we can protect our farms and be there year after year after year.

So, all of this put together helps our country be food-secure, and now we have to figure out how best to deliver it to the people that need it, especially during this pandemic when so many people lost their jobs.

Mr. DESJARLAIS. Absolutely, and I appreciate your comments. I also want to thank the Chairman again for his comment at the last hearing about making sure that Farm Bureau, stakeholders, producers would have a seat at the table when we talk about imposing regulations, and so, I appreciate his commitment to that as well.

With that, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, and now, the lady from Maine, Ms. Pingree, you are recognized for 5 minutes. Is she here?

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Sorry, I moved an inch away from my camera. I apologize. Thank you. I wasn't expecting to come up.

I want to just thank the witnesses. I really appreciate your testimony, and I appreciate the Chairman for getting such a diverse group to testify in front of us.

So, Mr. Edenfield, thank you for your testimony and for your support for your customers, making sure that people had access to healthy food. I really appreciate what you talked about.

You mentioned that your store was part of the incentive program to help SNAP participants to buy more fruits and vegetables a few years ago, and I know in my home State of Maine, the Harvest Bucks and Farm Fresh Rewards Program have become only more important during the pandemic to help people access fresh and healthy foods. Can you talk about what it would have meant for your business and your customers if those fruit and vegetable incentives for SNAP had been available during the pandemic?

Mr. EDENFIELD. Thank you for the question. No, the pandemic would have been an absolutely ideal time to have that, because the response was great. When we participated in that program, we tried to have extra specials going on: not only did they get double, sometimes they almost got triple what they would have normally got in fresh produce.

And so, it is a great program. As far as health initiatives, some of the things that we do as far as pushing and working with our community on healthy initiatives, and it just kind of fit right with that. And, it certainly meant a lot to our customer base, and it was very, very well received, and utilized where I thought we got the most out of it and the customers got the most out of it.

Ms. PINGREE. Great. Well, thank you for that, and I do think when we talk about hunger—and clearly that is the focus of this

hearing, but we also have to remember that it is not just about calories, it is also about making sure people get fresh fruits, healthy vegetables, so that kids can grow up with a healthy diet and build those habits. I know how important it is and I know that is important certainly to the food banks.

Mr. Duvall, Zippy, thank you so much for once again being with us. You are now a regular at our hearings, and so, we appreciate you taking the time to be with us.

I have been working on this issue of reducing food loss and waste, and it is such a strange contrast in our country to be wasting about 30 percent of the food, yet we have so many people going hungry. And that was really exacerbated during the pandemic, particularly in the early days. You mentioned that it was just heart-breaking to watch farmers having to slaughter animals that couldn't get to the slaughterhouse or plow under fields of vegetables, and I appreciate the work that you talked about making sure that farmers could move that food.

But, sometimes I hear that there are obstacles for farmers who want to donate food, or just even make the connections to make sure that food can get to the places it needs to be. Can you talk about that? Have you seen farmers experience an issue around donating, or just the obstacles of getting the food where it needs to go?

Mr. DUVALL. Yes, ma'am. It is very difficult. When we have a just in time system like we do, and we have something like this happen, it really clogs everything down because most farmers, especially medium to larger size farmers, have a particular way they are going to sell it. They are going to sell it that way, and they do it day in and day out, every day. Now, the smaller farmers, we saw an increase in their capability of selling direct to the people, but that is through farmers' markets, local farmers' markets, and anywhere we can do to assist them to make it easier for them and have access to areas where they can use the SNAP program benefits to be able to purchase those, that is good for those smaller-type farmers.

But yes, sometimes it is very difficult for them to be able to make that transition from that just in time to trying to go somewhere different when the interruption comes in the chain.

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you for that. I think we have learned a lot about the just in time food system and the food chain in general, and certainly that gives us opportunities to look into that. And I appreciate you mentioning the small- to medium-sized farmers. I know in our state, there was a tremendous increase for small- to medium-sized farmers who were able to sell directly, but you are right. Some of them also experienced problems, how do the customers make contact with them, and often for things like SNAP benefits, you need to have broadband access so that you can actually use a card at a farmers' market, and that leads to another program we talk a lot about—or problem we talk a lot about on this Committee. I am glad to hear that talked about.

My time is up. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I really appreciate this hearing today.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

And now, the gentleman from Illinois, Mr. Davis, you are now recognized for 5 minutes. Is he here? Okay. Is Mr. Davis—okay. We will then move to Mr. Mann from Kansas. Proceed.

Mr. MANN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for having this important hearing. Mr. Chairman, I request unanimous consent to submit a letter in support of the Farmers to Families Food Box Program from the Topeka Rescue Mission Ministries.

[The letter referred to is located on p. 134.]

Mr. MANN. My question is for Mr. Hodel. The Midwest Food Bank is active in combating food insecurities across the U.S. and around the world, and works with more than 2,000 agencies to distribute food. Within the U.S., the Midwest Food Bank's reach spans both urban and rural communities, definitely understand and appreciate that, and including those that look like rural areas that I represent throughout the big 1st District of Kansas.

Could you tell me a little bit, if you would, about your work in rural communities and how your organization has adapted and is adapting to meet the needs of our rural citizens?

Mr. HODEL. Yes, thank you, Mr. Mann. I appreciate the question.

The way our distribution model is set up, we are very focused on reaching the rural communities, and a lot of that is done through remote or satellite distributions. And so, we will take semis out of our main warehouses and we will work with other organizations, other businesses, and bring that semi a load of food of both frozen, cooled as well as shelf stable food, and we take that out into the rural communities and set up a remote distribution so that it is closer and easier access for our agencies and our pantries to come pick up the food. And so, we are very proud of our effort to be able to serve the rural community, and it is tied all the way back into our organizational roots, and the focus on the farmers and reaching back into those communities.

Mr. MANN. Great. I understand, you and I both grew up on a farm and in the production side of agriculture, and that side of the food supply. How does that influence your work on food insecurity issues coming from the production side of the industry, and now with what you are doing today?

Mr. HODEL. Yes, on a macro level, you are born and you are taught from your parents and your grandparents that your job as a farmer is to feed America. And so, in the nonprofit sector of a food bank, you carry the heart of that mission with you, and you know your job is still to feed America. This is now, unfortunately, families that have fallen on troubled times or somebody that has lost a job or whatever the situation might be, it is still kind of that same macro mission that was seeded in you at a young age.

For me, it is an easy transition to go from both the producer as well as an organizational leader to make sure that that mission is fulfilled, and that you are helping somebody get fed, just equitably and without discrimination.

Mr. MANN. Yes. I appreciate what you all do. I represent the big 1st District of Kansas, a lot of farmers, ranchers, livestock producers who are trying to feed the world, care a lot about hungry people throughout the country, in their communities, and really appreciate you all being on this panel and serving with us today.

Mr. HODEL. Thank you.

Mr. MANN. With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

I am going to take my questions. I wasn't here at the very start, and I want to thank Mrs. Hayes for stepping in for me.

The real fundamental question that I want to get each of my guests, all five of you are all so distinguished. Mr. Waide, Mr. Duvall, Mr. Edenfield, Mr. McBrayer, and Mr. Hodel, if you had to name one thing, what would be your major thing as to why we are now in this hunger crisis? We need to get that question answered from each of your variety of perspectives, because you each come from different perspectives. But if we are going to get the right answer, we have to make sure we ask the right question. And that is if you could share with us why we are in this hunger crisis today? What would be that one major thing, in your mind, each of you, quickly please?

Let's start with you, Mr. Waide.

Mr. WAIDE. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Great question. Fundamentally, the answer is that an extraordinary number of American families have experienced economic disruption as a result of this crisis, and they were, prior to the crisis, at a place of real vulnerability where they couldn't absorb the kind of economic impact they faced as a result of losing jobs, of having their kids out of school, and so forth.

And so, for us to solve that problem, obviously we have to get the economy going, but when people face that crisis, we have to have a really robust intervention system to help people stay solid until they can get back to work and back on their feet.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Waide, while we're on that, the food banks and Feeding America, you all are at the front of the point of the spear when it comes to this issue of food insecurity and hunger, being the community food banks. It would be helpful for us in the Committee and the people across the nation who may be tuning in as to how do you get your food, your supplies to feed the hungry as you do? Could you share with us how the food banks acquire that food that you all deliver? How do you get it, and what do we need to make sure that your food supply chain is secure?

Mr. WAIDE. Food banks work with a wide variety of food suppliers to get the food that we then distribute in the community. We work with manufacturers and distributors to source excess inventory from those channels. We work with farmers to get any number of agricultural products, especially produce directly from the farm, surplus farm products that we can then move through our system. We work with retailers to get short-dated and excess inventory from stores to our vast network of agency partners really quickly so that that food can still be utilized, and of course, we work with government to utilize Federal programs like TEFAP and to provide lots of accountability and food safety measures to ensure that government-funded program goes where it needs to go when it needs to be there, with lots of accountability around it. And then last, we purchase a lot of food, and that is an important part of our supply chain.

We then move that through a grassroots network of partners. We provide lots of advice and guidance and oversight for those partners to ensure they are serving people equitably, to ensure they are

not charging people for food, to ensure they are operating safely, and using that food in responsible ways. And that ensures, then, that we are feeding literally tens of millions of people every year.

The CHAIRMAN. And let me just ask you this, because you are key and we need to know this. And so, who pays for this? Where do you get your money from? What is it that is your greatest need and threat to not being able to adequately respond? Because I tell you, in my working with you, I was just fascinated. But people say they go and they get their food from the community food bank, you are there, you got plenty, but the question has to be what is it that we need to do for the food banks here in Congress to make sure that your supply of being able to acquire this food is safe? Because you mentioned people contribute, you get this, but as the economy goes up and goes sideways, where are we in terms of making sure that our community food banks are secure and do you need us in Congress to be able to provide a way for you all, the food banks, Feeding America, to get more resources to make sure that you don't run out of food?

Mr. WAIDE. Mr. Chairman, the majority of our funding as food banks comes from private sources. In Atlanta, 60 percent of our funding comes from private fundraising. We certainly have some amount of government funding, about $\frac{1}{4}$ of our funding, and then we have fees and other sources of revenue that make up the difference.

I think for us, the most important risk that we face and the most important thing that this Committee and Congress and the Administration can do to support us is to continue to invest robustly in food purchases through TEFAP and other USDA programs. If that food supply declines, it would significantly impact our ability to respond in the way that we have. My food bank has sourced about 50 percent of our inventory since June from TEFAP and from the Farmers to Families Food Box Program, the majority of that through TEFAP. And so, significant investments in that program are the most important thing to help us continue to distribute food.

And the second thing I would say, of course, is we need to continue investing in SNAP as a way to relieve some of the burden on food banks.

The CHAIRMAN. Very good, and there is so much here for us to inquire. My time has certainly run out there, but I will come back to each of the others in my closing comments and try to get answers there. But there is one other that we got to get an answer from, and you can be thinking about it, and that is our veterans. It is unthinkable that we have over one million of our veterans going hungry. That is right. And there are some estimates that it is more than that. I want to come back to that, because we have to make sure that all of our American people are not going hungry, and most certainly not our veterans.

With that, Mr. Davis is back, so for the next 5 minutes we recognize Mr. Davis.

And panelists, I will come back to my line of questioning because there are some very important things here, because I want you all to be thinking about how we in Congress can help you.

Now I recognize Mr. Davis.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks again to the witnesses. Those pesky little votes they are calling, I apologize. I am—was a little late getting back here.

But I have always been a big supporter of the Farmers to Families Food Box Program. As a matter of fact, if you talk to former Secretary Perdue, he would tell you I bent his ear and his staff's ear at the beginning of this pandemic to talk about ideas that ended up culminating in this very successful program that I advocated for, and we have seen, just based on the testimony already, the immense value to every single American who needed these boxes that got them.

So, it is an innovative program, proved to be immensely valuable, and we are combating hunger in a time of crisis. It is disappointing to see so many people make feeding hungry families actually a political issue. In my opinion, this program is the type of innovation we need, and should be the start of a conversation on how we can use it as a model for years to come. Additionally, I would like to submit for the record, Mr. Chairman, a study from the Wallace Center that showcases the value of investment in this program.

[The report referred to is located on p. 121.]

Mr. DAVIS. My question for you, Mr. Hodel, your testimony reflects on the immense value of this Food Box Program, too, and as you know, the program currently asks that dairy, protein, and fresh produce be provided in a combination box. Is that the correct approach?

Mr. HODEL. Yes, thank you, Mr. Davis, for the question.

I would say it depends. If it works. Personally for Midwest Food Bank and for the majority of our agencies that we serve, receiving them in kind of a bulk item allows us better flexibility in terms of refrigeration and freezer. When it comes in a combination box today, it limits us a little bit in terms of the time that we have to get them out to an agency, and an agency that may not have a lot of refrigeration space has to immediately get those into the trunk of a car. That works really well. We had a partnership with Jackie Joyner-Kersey Foundation where we distributed 500 boxes in east St. Louis, and it went from the truck to the trunk of the car, and those boxes worked really well. In general, we would probably prefer them to be in bulk so that we could put the meat into the freezer and we could freeze it, and we could put the milk and the produce into the cooler and we could hold it, and it gives us just a little bit more flexibility in terms of the supply chain to be able to get those to our agencies and the agencies also would have that same flexibility.

Mr. DAVIS. Excellent. I know you have alluded to this before, Mr. Hodel, and so have the other witnesses. I think there is unanimous support for the program. We just want to make it better.

I do believe from your testimony, you believe that there is a value to continuing this Food Box Program in a post-pandemic era. Give us another reason why you think that that is a good idea?

Mr. HODEL. Yes, absolutely. I think diversity is key, and so, the programs that have been talked about here today are all very good, but this program really is an additional pipeline of nutritious food into the supply chain for food banks. And so, that is why the nutritional value of it, and then the partnership that can be connected

and the exposure that the food bank has to the farmer and to the producer to get this great product, and to get it into the food bank pipeline, I sincerely plead that it continues because we have seen it as a tremendous benefit to the families that are in need and are fighting hunger. It really gives a nutritious option for them to have.

Mr. DAVIS. Well, Mr. Hodel, thanks again for joining us today. I hope all is well back home. I will be there hopefully in a matter of hours, but I appreciate your comments, and the comments from all of our witnesses today.

And for the new freshmen on the Committee, I am actually going to yield a minute back, which doesn't happen often. So, mark this day down.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, and thank you for giving us that extra minute, because we can use it.

And now I will recognize the lady from Virginia, Ms. Spanberger. You are recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. SPANBERGER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses who are here today. I am so grateful that this Committee is holding a hearing on this incredibly important topic.

Before the pandemic, far too many families had to make sacrifices to feed themselves and their children, and this crisis has only worsened food security in our communities, including mine in central Virginia. The realities of this crisis are that parents must make difficult decisions about what to forego to feed their children, and recently unemployed people are experiencing hunger, sometimes for the first time, and there remains a severe lack of available resources for those who have been suffering from hunger long before this pandemic.

I have heard about these issues all across the communities I serve, ten counties in total, and I have been a frequent visitor because of a personal interest and also because of this wonderful Committee assignment to our local regional food bank to understand really what goes into ensuring that people throughout central Virginia and our food pantries that serve them have the resources that they need. As an example, before the pandemic, a church located in Henrico County reported that they typically served about 24 families a week through their food pantry. But just last month, there was a line of 125 cars waiting to receive food at the drive-thru pantry. And I know I am telling stories that many of my colleagues have heard across their districts and certainly our witnesses know firsthand through their tremendous work to ensure that people are having their needs met and that we are delivering these tremendous and important programs. I am grateful to each of you for your efforts to ensure that food is delivered to hungry Americans, and I wholeheartedly support efforts to improve Federal programs and their efficiency and effectiveness, and Mr. Hodel, I really appreciated your answer to Mr. Davis's question about how you store the products you receive through the food box.

But, I will get to my questions. Mr. Edenfield, SNAP online recently became available for some large-scale grocery stores, and there are currently several grocery stores in central Virginia that

allow SNAP recipients to purchase food online. What obstacles do you foresee in trying to implement SNAP online for midsize and smaller grocery stores?

Mr. EDENFIELD. Well, thank you. That is a very good question. For us—and we are small. We are a nine-store independent. It takes a little bit more on technology and it takes more to get into it. One of the things that I am still not sure exactly how it works is who, there is a cost on the—if you are talking about home delivery, there is an extra cost there, and how that would work out. And so, I think that I would like to find out more about this here, and I can see this coming because sometimes there is a real need.

I know in our stores, there is a problem with transportation sometimes. I have seen people that live a $\frac{1}{2}$ mile or $\frac{3}{4}$ mile, maybe even a mile from the store going down the street with bags of our groceries sometimes. So, it is an issue. It is an issue that needs to be looked at. But it is going to be a little bit more challenging for the smaller independents as far as the technology and everything that—to get there, and we are close to being ready for that, but we are not. Well, like I said, one of the things—the questions I have is who pays that delivery charge there?

Ms. SPANBERGER. And Mr. Edenfield, I have an additional question for you.

I am curious if you could provide your thoughts related to the use of SNAP benefits to purchase hot foods. Currently, families can't use SNAP benefits to purchase hot foods, and I am wondering what your thoughts are on this current policy, whether it might place a burden on SNAP participants who visit grocery stores like yours, and who might need additional flexibility? I know it is a little bit of a leading question, which I admit, but I am curious about your comments on this, sir.

Mr. EDENFIELD. Well, there are mixed emotions on this here because that spreads out when you talk about hot foods. I guess it could be so many different things. Most of the hot foods in most grocery stores are pretty economical. You can get a rotisserie chicken at a pretty low cost. I would have mixed opinions on it because sometimes I guess it would open the door maybe for other things, but at the same time—and the example of rotisserie chicken, while it can be bought hot, it can be cooked a day and refrigerated and bought the next day cold. So, it can be a little confusing. That is a very good question.

Ms. SPANBERGER. That is a very good example, sir. I appreciate that very much. Thank you.

Mr. EDENFIELD. It would take a lot of work, a lot of talking to go over this here and a lot of discussion.

Ms. SPANBERGER. In terms of delineating what elements and portions of your store or other stores would be eligible for it. That makes sense.

Thank you very much, Mr. Edenfield. Thank you to the other witnesses, and Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Ms. Spanberger.

And now I will recognize the gentleman from Georgia, Mr. Rick Allen, for 5 minutes.

Mr. ALLEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and again, I want to thank you for hosting this hearing today, and hearings on these important matters.

As we go forward, one of the things that, that we hear every time that we get together and talk about hunger, is the number of people who go to bed, particularly children, hungry at night, and when they go to bed, and then we have other folks who are not getting the food supply that they need. Yet when you look at the amount that our farmers are producing, I mean, it is 120 percent, plus we export 25 percent of the food produced here. I think we need to go from the source. In other words, let's find the children that are going to bed hungry, and let's find out what the root of the problem is there. That should not happen in this country. I agree with you, Mr. Chairman. We need to go directly there and work backwards and see how is the most efficient way to make sure they don't go to bed hungry.

I was very proud of the folks in my district who provided breakfast and lunch and their snack pack for every child in my district. No child should have gone hungry in the 12th District of Georgia.

So, my point being—and Zippy, this question is for you. Obviously, we have gotten very efficient. In fact, farmers are just about producing themselves right out of business. Going forward, we have thrown \$6 trillion at this problem, and another \$2 trillion is going to be signed into law this week. That takes our borrowing to \$30 trillion. We are seeing inflation—six percent inflation, as you mentioned, at the grocery store. We are seeing gas prices increase dramatically, and as we see this and it begins to spiral, is it directly related to the amount of borrowing this government is doing and the impact it is having on capital markets? Zippy, could you tell me your thoughts on that?

Mr. DUVALL. That is a good question, Congressman, and I don't know that I can even get my mind around \$1 trillion, to start with, coming from the farm.

I don't know that I am qualified to answer that question, Congressman.

Mr. ALLEN. How about—

Mr. DUVALL. But it can't be good for us as a country.

Mr. ALLEN. Yes, the ag economists, have they looked at the potential risk of the collapse of capital markets that our farmers so depend on for this national security and food security issue?

Mr. DUVALL. No, sir, not that, I don't have their evidence in front of me.

Mr. ALLEN. Okay. I would suggest that we get our ag economists to look at the current financial picture, and the dependence of our industry on government and the ability for government to continue to fund that, in addition to their borrowing costs and what those borrowing costs could look like if we continue—I don't see this stopping. That is the thing that concerns me. I don't see anybody that is thinking anything about, big deal, \$30 trillion. Well, heck, why not make it \$60 trillion if it doesn't matter? I just don't know where you draw the line here, but I can tell you this. There is no reason in the world why we—anyone in this country should go hungry. Of course, we know in the last event that frankly, the processing folks were a big part of the problem, yet I called all of my

processors in my district and they are working 24/7. I said how are you doing this? They said, well, we are working per CDC requirements, and our folks are showing up for work and we are getting the job done. And of course we have had tremendous efforts from healthcare professionals, teachers. None of this has been easy. But if you look at where we are financially, the importance of food, Zippy, we have to look at the impact of what we are doing here in Congress as far as spending goes, and how that is going to impact our ability to produce the food we need. I think your organization needs to get the right professionals together and we need to look at this key component of how our economy works.

Mr. DUVALL. Congressman, we have some great economists here, and we will put them to work to see what the answer to your question is, and try to get back to you.

Mr. ALLEN. We will save that answer for a future hearing. Thank you, Zippy.

I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Congressman Allen.

And now I recognize Ms. Kuster of New Hampshire for 5 minutes.

Ms. KUSTER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you again for scheduling this important hearing.

Hunger is so heartbreaking and food insecurity is plaguing my state just as it is the rest of the country. One in seven people in New Hampshire are now struggling with hunger, and the number of food-insecure has grown by almost 70 percent.

Part of the tragedy is this challenge is not new. COVID worsened the problem, but I like to say it pulled back the curtain and exposed the staggering degree of food insecurity that existed even before the pandemic. No one in America should have to go hungry. We can and must do much better.

So, I have been proud to help champion increases in food assistance in the COVID response packages that Congress has passed over the last year. Yet, American Recovery Act which we passed and sent to President Biden just yesterday provides billions in additional food support at a time when Americans still desperately need it.

I am also constantly inspired by the work of our food and nutrition organizations across New Hampshire, including the New Hampshire Food Bank, which has provided 15 million meals in 2020, and logged over 15,000 volunteer hours all in the midst of a pandemic health crisis, with great help from our New Hampshire National Guard.

But it is clear that food banks and soup kitchens and incredibly dedicated volunteers and advocates cannot stem the tide of hunger alone. Without robust support from SNAP and WIC and other Federal nutrition and food assistance programs, countless more of our friends and neighbors won't know where their next meal is coming from.

Mr. Waide, your testimony demonstrated perfectly when you say increasing SNAP by ten percent has the practical effect of doubling the amount of food already provided by our food banks, and to that end, I have been excited to see SNAP online purchasing pilots

launched in 47 states, including New Hampshire. My hope is that these pilots will continue and grow.

From your perspective, Mr. Waide, have you seen the impact of SNAP online pilot programs in Georgia, and how does it help reduce the stigma of SNAP? And also, those who are sick or elderly or unable to get to a store?

Mr. WAIDE. Well, as an initial statement, for this larger food insecurity crisis, we have to take a both/and approach to the overall issue, and we need more investment in food commodity programs like TEFAP and the Farmers to Families Program. We need more investment in SNAP, and so forth.

The solution is all about access and making it easier for folks to access food, given all of the challenges that we are navigating. Online access to SNAP in this environment where we are still needing to practice social distancing, where people are challenged in terms of their time commitments to get to the grocery store, can help ensure that families, especially families with children, can access the food that they need. It is also important for seniors who face higher risks around the virus and who are challenged to get to the grocery store.

So, we certainly think any effort to increase access is a good one, and with the right kind of controls, we can do this in a way that is both accountable and increases accessibility.

Ms. KUSTER. Excellent, and thank you for mentioning the Farmers to Families Program. I don't think it is lost on any of us that for some folks living in rural communities, their farmers and producers are closer to home than the nearest grocery store or in a food desert, a convenience store.

Mr. Duvall, do you think helping farmers' markets and rural farm stands become licensed under SNAP and able to accept EBT will make a difference in addressing rural hunger?

Mr. DUVALL. By all means it would. I mean, we have seen an increase in people coming to those small markets, and we need to make sure that those funds are available through those small markets.

Ms. KUSTER. Excellent, and I know that will be a boost to our small family farmers in New Hampshire.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I yield back with 10 seconds remaining.

The CHAIRMAN. Very good. And now I recognize Mr. Johnson of South Dakota. You are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. JOHNSON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Like all of my colleagues, I want to thank the panelists who have done a nice job and an insightful job of getting us a better understanding of hunger in America. I particularly would like, Mr. Hodel, talking about the poverty to prosperity pathway, and talking about helping people for a season, not for a lifetime. I think that is a beautiful goal and an aspiration that is, frankly, I am sure, shared by every Member of the Committee. How do we get people on that pathway out of poverty?

And with that in mind, I want to talk to all of the panelists about how we help America, how we help Americans and American families move from an unfortunate position of dependence and needing this necessary help to a greater degree of independence.

And so, you have been wonderful advocates today, but all of you or most of you are also employers, and so maybe you can share a little bit with the Committee things that your organizations are doing to make sure that you are creating jobs or giving your employees better career development, or just in any other way really contributing to an economic vitality that can help lift people out of poverty. And I suppose I should pick somebody so we don't have a free for all, so Zippy, my friend, if you want to go first, and then we will—I will call on others from there.

Mr. DUVALL. Well, thank you, Congressman. I appreciate the question.

Of course, our farmers are all the time creating jobs. We have limiting factors that keep us from doing that through regulation, or whether it be lack of labor, but if you really look at what the graduates come out of our ag schools, there are more jobs available than there are students that come out. It comes down on our end of creating jobs, it comes down to awareness and the education of our children that, "Hey, farming is not a bad place to make a living. And just because you would go work under a farmer on his larger farm, doesn't mean that you are less of a citizen than anyone else." We need to put the education out there to our young people that there is great opportunity in our farmland, and our farmers will hire them and put them to work.

Mr. JOHNSON. Yes, very well said, Mr. Duvall. Thanks.

Madam or Mr. Chairman, I can't see the time, and I know Chairman Scott wanted to keep us on, so when I have a minute left, maybe just politely give me a nudge.

Mr. McBrayer, how about you and RaceTrac. Talk to us about your efforts.

Mr. MCBRAYER. Sure, I am glad and happy to talk to you about our efforts.

As I said earlier, RaceTrac is a privately owned company, 750 stores in 11 states. We are spending about \$350 million in capital every year building new stores, and each of those new stores takes 20 to 25 additional jobs to run. In addition to that, we have 10,000 employees. We operate in a business where turnover is quite high, and so, we are hiring 1,200 to 1,300 people a month into our stores. We think we are on the frontline of creating not only access for SNAP beneficiaries with the dignity of choice of the food that they eat, but if they are unemployed, we will take their application at our stores any time, because our needs are great. We were able to stay open the entire pandemic. We didn't have to close our stores unless directed by government to do so, and we meet people at the point of their need with access to food.

We can only do that because of the dedication of our folks in the field, and that need is growing every day.

Mr. JOHNSON. Thank you, and I did find the timer and I have just a minute left, so my apologies to Mr. Waide and Mr. Edenfield and Mr. Hodel. You are not all going to be able to answer. Do any of the three of you particularly want to use the last minute we have?

Mr. WAIDE. Yes, this is Kyle Waide from the Atlanta Community Food Bank.

Mr. JOHNSON. Thank you.

Mr. WAIDE. Our view about how we are trying to create economic opportunity for our team is that we believe we are more successful when our employees are engaged, and they are engaged when we are demonstrating how much we value them through our professional development efforts and the way in which we compensate them and provide them with benefits.

We have continued to develop new training programs to help people access new opportunities here at the food bank, like a driver's apprentice program. We have continued to provide supplemental pay or hazard pay to our employees even now, 12 months after the onset of the pandemic. We have a minimum salary at the food bank of \$15 an hour. We provide extensive health benefits, and we think it is critically important for us to retain our employees, and keep them engaged for us to be successful. I think those practices, if practiced broadly by the private-sector, can really benefit lower income workers who face the brunt of food insecurity, not just during times of crisis, but all the time.

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. Waide, well said.

Thank you, and I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Congressman Johnson.

And now I will recognize Mrs. Hayes from Connecticut for 5 minutes.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today, and for holding this incredibly important hearing on food insecurity.

Every community in our country has seen the impact of astronomical hunger over the past year. Nationally, we have heard that food insecurity could be impacting as many as 50 million Americans, including 17 million children. That number is so large that it is almost inconceivable. To put it in perspective, it is about 13 times the population of the State of Connecticut.

Yesterday in Congress, we passed the historic American Rescue Plan to begin to address this crisis by continuing the crucial 15 percent increase to SNAP, bolstering SNAP online purchasing programs, and supporting critical child nutrition programs like WIC, pandemic EBT, and providing needed funds to ensure seniors have regular nutritious meals.

As the Chairwoman of the NODO Subcommittee, I intend to continue lifting up this vitally important work and improvements to Federal nutrition programs, and working with the Ranking Member and the Subcommittee Members to address hunger before it strikes.

My question today is for Mr. Waide. There is a misconception about the type of person who typically struggles with food insecurity. In your testimony, you described increased demand at the Atlanta Food Bank due to the pandemic. Can you speak to the demographics and the changing demographics of the clients you have served throughout the past year?

Mr. WAIDE. Well, thank you for the question. First of all, this food insecurity crisis that has been exacerbated by the pandemic has really touched all communities far and wide, and we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of people who are experiencing food insecurity for the first time, who are coming to food pantries

for the first time. Thirty-five to 40 percent of the people that we are serving are doing so for the first time in their lives.

That said, we also know that communities that were already vulnerable prior to the pandemic have experienced this rise in food insecurity more severely. Communities of color, especially Black and Latinx communities, have disproportionately experienced these challenges. We know that rural communities have as well, and fundamentally, it is a challenge facing families who typically work in lower income, lower wage jobs. Our prototypical client base or client household is a family with kids where somebody is working or trying to get back to work, and simply they cannot make the math work in their day-to-day lives. The long-term solution to that is how do we create more economic opportunity for those families, while providing them the supports they need to establish themselves in higher paying jobs and opportunities.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you. I think that is a very important point to make. Many of the people who we have seen visiting our food banks are people who are working a job and just trying to make ends meet, and they can't get the bottom line to balance out.

Mr. Waide, how would you describe the influx of funding, commodities, and waivers from the COVID relief packages—how have they bolstered your ability at the Atlanta Food Bank and other community organizations to combat hunger in Georgia, and how do you think Congress can continue to build on the progress that we have made thus far?

Mr. WAIDE. We could not have done what we have done without the support of those Federal programs. Our food bank is distributing 65 percent more food today than we did prior to the pandemic. We will complete this fiscal year having distributed close to 120 million pounds of food, and the funding that we have also received, not just through Federal programs, but through generous philanthropic support from the private-sector, has allowed us to respond so aggressively.

We know that this crisis is not going to be over any time soon. We expect higher levels of food insecurity well beyond 2021, and so, for us to continue to respond to this elevated level of demand, we need ongoing access to food support from Federal programs. For us, the TEFAP Program has been critically important. This is product that we have a well-established supply chain for accessing and distributing. The Farmers to Families Food Box Program has also been critically important, and we support finding ways to sustain that program while making important improvements. The improvements that we would recommend around the Food Box Program are really making it more long-term sustainable and improving some of the execution around the program. There is a lot of churn in the distributors that are selected to operate the program, meaning we are reinventing the supply chain with each new round of funding. We are also engaging a lot of partners who don't have real experience in this work, and we would urge the USDA and the Committee to consider making changes to the Food Box Program so that it operates more like TEFAP with the kind of accountability measures that are in place there that allow us to ensure that the food goes to the right place.

Mrs. HAYES. [presiding.] Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Waide.

I am sorry, my time has expired. Thank you. I am sorry, my time has expired, but that is very helpful. Thank you.

First of all, I want to just apologize to my colleague, Mr. DesJarlais for the mispronunciation of his name earlier.

I now recognize Mr. Moore from Alabama, followed by Mrs. Bustos of Illinois.

I apologize. I now recognize Mr. Feenstra.

Mr. FEENSTRA. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Ranking Member Thompson.

First, I want to thank each of our witnesses for their testimony today. Hunger is an important issue to examine, and we know the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted hunger in many, many ways.

Iowa's 4th Congressional District is one of the leading districts for agriculture production in the nation, supplying beef, pork, eggs, dairy, turkey, and more to our nation's food supply. I know farmers in my district are passionate about the role they play in feeding the world, and know firsthand the responsibilities they have in affordable, predictable, and safe food supply oftentimes goes unnoticed.

This question is to Mr. Duvall. Mr. Duvall, at the beginning of the pandemic, we saw supply chain disruptions and bulk purchases of food at grocery stores that resulted in some shelves of food at grocery stores to be empty. For example, entire meat sections were empty of all products at many stores; beef, chicken, pork, turkey completely sold out. For some families, this likely meant that they were unable to access foods they would normally purchase for their families, or had to look towards more expensive and unusual products to purchase for their families.

I believe it is important that we examine what could have been done to prevent a situation like this from taking place, and proactively think about situations in the future that could impact the regular supply of food products in our grocery stores.

Mr. Duvall, could you discuss any ideas the American Farm Bureau may have about how to better secure our supply chain to ensure product supply disruptions don't happen again, and number two, could you also discuss any threats to our agriculture supply that you believe this Committee should be looking at in the future, like African swine fever, foot-and-mouth disease, bird flu, *et cetera*, that could have potential causes for disruptions as we move forward in society? Thank you.

Mr. DUVALL. Well, to speak to the disruptions, we have learned a lot. I know that all links of the food chain have learned extremely a lot, and we have to be nimble to be able to change as these issues come up. Hopefully we will never see another pandemic, but I know we will be more prepared for it. To realize that we really made that change in about 4 months was pretty amazing how resilient our food supply chain really is. But we have learned a lot and—but if you think about putting in things to make—the things that we have been implementing, it slowed the system down. And when you slow the system down, it is not as efficient and it costs more. There is a balance between how much are we willing to spend trying to get it there, and it is mostly in processing, of course, not at the farm level, processing. How much are we willing to spend and how much of that is going to be passed on to people at the grocery store,

and what does that do to hunger? It makes it worse. So, to slow it down is expensive.

Speaking to the farmer, what we can do to the farm and make sure that that food is always there? Our risk management programs in the farm bill are absolutely crucial. It is the cornerstone on the farm bill, and we need to make sure that we streamline the approval process of the new products that come out to help us be more competitive in the world and to stay on the cutting edge, so that we can be efficient.

Mr. FEENSTRA. Thank you, Mr. Duvall, and I just wanted to say, my family works very hard on a cattle and hog farm in northwest Iowa, and you know, it was really a scary time when March and April hit, and all of a sudden we had to make big decisions because the packing plants were closed, and there was no meat or produce on the shelves.

I just hope, I learned a lot, but when it comes to African swine flu or bird flu, can you talk about how we should be proactive in those areas? Because that could be the next thing. We had it with COVID, but now there are other storm clouds on the horizon that could do the same things.

Mr. DUVALL. You are exactly right. When HPAI came through with poultry—I am in the poultry industry. It was great communications between universities and State Departments of Agriculture and the Federal Government. We just need to make sure that all those plans are there, and of course, I have mentioned this many times. The importance of research and development dollars to make sure that we are ready to vaccinate or do whatever we have to do to protect our animals and the people as we move forward.

Mr. FEENSTRA. Thank you, Mr. Duvall, and I yield back.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you.

I now recognize Mrs. Bustos of Illinois.

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right, thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Hodel, thanks for your testimony before the Committee today.

Last summer, I took a virtual tour of Midwest's warehouse in Peoria, and got to meet some of your wonderful team members. One issue that came up during the conversations that I had there was the issue of storage, and with the Farmers to Families Food Boxes, many of the food banks and pantries didn't have the infrastructure that was needed so they could keep perishable commodities fresh. We heard this from other places as well. My question is did the Midwest Food Bank have the cold storage infrastructure that you needed to keep items like milk and eggs and meat fresh? And as part of the Farmers to Families Food Box Program, did you receive an allotment of funds for storage and distribution?

Mr. HODEL. Yes, thank you, Mrs. Bustos, for the question.

In general, yes, we did have adequate capacity. Midwest Food Bank has worked hard to ensure our freezer and cooler capacity size is adequate as we build and expand our facilities. We did bring on additional storage. We were able to purchase some additional external trailers or seed containers, so we added some capacity in the midst. In some cases, we were blessed to do that with some private funding and support. In other cases, we did see some CARES

dollars get extended out to the food bank that allowed us to put that cold storage and capacity in place.

Like anything with the disruption, we kind of had to modify our modes of operation multiple times in real time. One of the things that we did to accommodate for that was to increase the frequency of our distribution. Knowing our agencies could not hold the items, we would increase their pick-up two, three times a week so that they could take what they could hold and distribute within a day, and come back the next day. Those were some things from an operational perspective that we just had to be nimble and work our way through.

Mrs. BUSTOS. How do you see that, as far as the cold storage, going forward? Do you still have additional needs, and if you could even broaden that beyond just your own organization, what you are hearing from your colleagues as far as what the need is for cold storage?

Mr. HODEL. Yes, I think that is always the prized space in the warehouse is the cold storage, and it varies. It varies across the food banks that we have or the food banks that I visit. I think support for the wholesale food banks to have that infrastructure in place would certainly be welcome funding support, because we know that those dollars translate in holding nutritious food. And so, those dollars really at the end-user client result in that they get a more healthier food item, because we were able to have it in cold storage.

And likewise, I think the granting opportunities available for even our agencies, there are thousands of pantries across the U.S. that would benefit from additional coolers and additional freezers. We try to connect them with those resources as well. It is both at the wholesale food bank level, but also at the retail food pantry level that that benefit would help.

Mrs. BUSTOS. Thank you, Mr. Hodel.

A follow-up question. The Midwest Food Bank serves a large portion of central Illinois, including parts of the Congressional district that I serve. What are some of the unique challenges that you have faced in delivering meals to more of the rural areas in our state?

Mr. HODEL. Yes, the infrastructure for people to get to our food banks—and so, we have just had to kind of extend ourselves out in terms of our distribution sites. But, it is also the challenge of just knowing who is in need. Sometimes them raising their hand or getting a good contact with them, we have found it requires kind of multiple trips into a region and setting up a mobile pantry, then the word starts to spread. And so, it is through repetition and some consistency that is key, but at the same time, making sure you have product there that they can take home and use, and it is a benefit for them and their family.

So, it is a journey that we continue to learn, but we certainly have our eyes and ears open to how we can best serve kind of all of the rural areas equally.

Mrs. BUSTOS. All right, very good. Thank you, Mr. Hodel.

My time is about ready to expire, and with that, I yield back, Madam Chair.

Mr. HODEL. Thank you.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you, Mrs. Bustos.

I now recognize Mr. Moore from Alabama.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just have a question for Mr. Hodel. If we have been told over the years to give a man a fish, you will feed him for a day. You teach him how to fish, you will feed him for a lifetime. I was just curious. I know food banks have evolved over the last few years and you all have made some great changes and adjustments, especially considering this pandemic we have been facing. Are we working to connect families with programs other than just SNAP? There are some training programs, employment opportunities, and the one thing I picked up on this call is there are plenty of opportunities for people to work, and I am sure there are some people coming through there if we could coordinate the training, not just feeding them, but teaching them, so down the road they have opportunities to have employment, and they are not so dependent on us to feed them. I think that that is the direction that I would love to see us go: less dependency on government, more independency for people out there.

I am just curious if you guys have had an opportunity to connect socially with other groups and organizations maybe and through the SNAP Program, the training programs to allow these people to get off of SNAP and get on their own feet? I think that is—at the end of the day, government programs are great safety nets, but I don't want them to be spider webs. I don't want to trap people in those programs. I want freedom and opportunities out there. Is that something we can do, Eric, or do you all see us going in that direction at some point? And Mr. Waide, feel free to weigh in as well. I am just curious as to your input on this.

Mr. HODEL. Yes, thank you for the question, Mr. Moore.

We do certainly try to connect those individuals that are in need, and to get them plugged in. One of the things that was a benefit during the pandemic, as businesses had to close or do furloughs, we provided a place for their employees to come and their employers encouraged them to come and volunteer, so they were able to still get paid by their company, but they were volunteering and they were giving back to the community. That was an example of probably keeping somebody from slipping into that poverty level, by keeping them employed but also giving them purpose and putting them to work, so they knew what it was to serve the community.

And so, those are the types of creative programs that we try to be open and partner with, the business and the supporters of the food bank.

Mr. MOORE. Well great. That is a great answer. I am glad that you do that. I think sometimes we have to think on our feet, and certainly I know those of us in the private-sector, and here in government, obviously, in the last few years have had some challenges, so anything we can do to get people to work and to give them opportunities, I appreciate that. I must say, hopefully we can start training them to work outside just our organization, but in the private-sector because one gentleman on here said he had 1,300 job openings a month. They are hiring people, and I know that Zippy said he needed some people on the farm all the time, so anything we can do to produce opportunities and train people to con-

nect with just the food bank for the training programs, I would be supportive of that. Thank you.

Mr. WAIDE. If I may, Representative Moore, I would love to add to the context here.

At our food bank, we certainly agree that helping people get access to increased opportunity through higher paying jobs is an important part of solving for food insecurity. Just yesterday I was down at Atlanta Technical College where we are partnering with them to distribute food to students who are trying to access greater opportunities. We work with Goodwill and other workforce development organizations. And so, that is really important.

At the same time, it is important to understand that these kinds of transitions are not a light switch, and that it takes time for families to make such transitions. And in the meantime, we have to support them so that they can sustain the effort that is required to get the training they need to access new kinds of opportunities. So, that is the first important point.

The second important point is it is important to also recognize that there is a tremendous amount of turnover in the people who access SNAP during normal times. In Georgia, the average amount of time that people spend on SNAP is less than a year, which means the program worked as it is intended. People get on the program as they face crisis, and then as they regain stability in their lives, they exit the program. Which is exactly what we want for our food pantries as well, is to help people transition out of a place of needing help and into a place where they can provide for themselves.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Waide. I appreciate the input. I will say in my district, prior to the pandemic, we saw 15 percent user rate drop to 13 percent, so that is encouraging. We like to see people getting on their own feet, so thank you for what you do. We appreciate what you guys do and what you are doing for our country and our hungries, as we call them.

Thank you all so much for your time. I yield back.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you.

I now recognize Mr. Carbajal from California.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses that are participating today.

Certainly, COVID-19 has forced millions of Americans into economic uncertainty, unsure whether they will be able to keep the roof over their heads or put food on the table.

Under the last Administration, USDA and SNAP emergency allotments to bump existing SNAP households to the maximum allotment. This meant that households already receiving the maximum allotment, which are the lowest income SNAP households, did not benefit from emergency allotments. Mr. Waide, can you talk about how this policy might have affected the people in the communities your food bank serves, and whether you think it would be beneficial for those communities if SNAP households already receiving the maximum allotment also received emergency allotments?

Mr. WAIDE. Well, thank you for the question. What we know is that some of the families who have been most impacted by the current crisis are families with children. They are sort of facing the crisis on two fronts. On the one hand, they are facing economic

challenges related to losses of jobs. On the other hand, they have kids who ordinarily would be physically in school and they are not able to go to school physically. They are not getting access to the meals in the school, and it is hard for parents to leave the kids at home to go to work. And so, those households are often the maximum beneficiaries in terms of the SNAP Program, so we do believe that helping those families have access to more benefits would be helpful, because those are the families that are experiencing, by far, the greatest challenges.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you very much.

Mr. Duvall, in your testimony, you discussed the ingenuity of farmers across the nation, and the important role those changes have played in fighting food insecurity. Can you talk about some of the obstacles that farmers faced in trying to donate food early in the pandemic? How can we make it easier to connect farmers who have extra food with those who are in need?

Mr. DUVALL. Yes, sir. Thank you for the question.

A lot of our farmers' markets just disappeared, because they were going to food services rather than to grocery stores, and they had to adjust for that. The Farmers to Families Food Boxes was a great place to help those farmers that lost their markets go straight into that program. Programs like that and ones that are sustainable in the future that are open to all size farmers—I heard the combination box spoke of earlier, when the funds are slim, that kind of takes the ability for small to medium-sized farmers to be involved in that. We need to have a steady flow of funds going into programs like that so that our farmers can be prepared to market to that program.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you so much.

Mr. Edenfield, your testimony mentions the partnership Wayfield Foods has with the SNAP-Ed funded community agency, Open Hand Atlanta. How has the pandemic affected that partnership and the nutrition education programs offered?

Mr. EDENFIELD. Well, it has affected it because that is one, I say one on one. We have groups where there are 10 to 15 people, and so, there hadn't—since the pandemic, there really hasn't been any of that at all because of the opportunity to distance and it just kind of threw that off track, along with some other things there. Really, for the last year, there really hasn't been any movement in that. It is a great program. I think it is all volunteer, the people that come to it, and as far as spending wisely, not only healthy eating, but to get the most out of your money, feeding a family of four on \$10, and planning for it to be a healthy meal. It is a great partnership and a great plan, but there hasn't been anything going on there in the pandemic.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you very much, Mr. Edenfield.

Madam Chair, I yield back.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you. I now recognize the Ranking Member of the Nutrition Subcommittee, Mr. Bacon from Nebraska.

Mr. BACON. Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I look forward to working with you on this great Subcommittee, and working as a strong team to do what is right for our country and our communities.

I appreciate our panelists today. Thank you for sharing your wisdom and your perspective.

We have the greatest economy in the world, but yet, we need to have a strong safety net that is effective and efficient. The best poverty program and the best way to fight food insecurity is a growing economy and jobs. We can't lose sight of that as well. Prior to COVID, the largest wage earners were seeing increases in income, the higher percentage and the highest wage earners. We were seeing that poverty gap close for the first time in about 2 decades. Unemployment was at a 50 year low. Our goal right now should be to defeat COVID, and get our economy back in high gear, and we are on that track, particularly with the vaccines.

With that said, we are always going to need a strong safety net to ensure the most needy among us have access to nutritious food, and out of that, one of our main goals is to have a smart safety net program that is giving a hand up as a primary focus. Helping folks become independent for themselves and their families is an important priority.

So, Mr. Hodel, your testimony mentions helping recipients for a season, but not a lifetime. Tell us more about that—and you may have done this a little bit in some previous questioning, but we have—are going on our fourth vote so we have been in and out. So, hopefully we are not being redundant. But I would appreciate any statistics or recommendations that you have, and how we could perhaps modify SNAP that would help with that goal of making it a seasonal program *versus* a lifetime program. I would appreciate your perspective.

Mr. HODEL. Yes, thank you for your question, Congressman Bacon.

Food insecurity, we have talked about this a little bit, hovered around 11 percent for 2000 to 2007. The economic downturn in 2008 spiked the food insecurity back to 15 percent, and so to your point, the economic disruption really drives an increase in the food insecurity, and so, that 10 year journey of progress we are now back on. We have to work our way to try to help fight food insecurity to get it back to where it was pre-pandemic, or even better.

Our independent organization serves pantries who welcome anyone in with a need, and our clients do the same. And so, our clients can change over the course of a month, and their clients can do the same. Specifically, we have had situations where we talk about a hand up or bringing people up. We have had clients that have transitioned into volunteers and even transitioned into employees at Midwest Food Bank. You can see the food relief support that they got to get their family on track, the ability to be in action and the purpose of working or volunteering, then developed skills that they were able to really demonstrate that turn into an employment opportunity for this person.

And so, I think that is a journey that we can kind of work with people, and it is individual by individual and it is family by family. We continue to survey our agencies to make sure that we are staying in touch with them and their needs, and we want to make sure that we are providing them the best service, the right products, and then providing holistic support. And so, this an area of focus of the food bank as we continue to go forward.

Mr. BACON. Thank you.

My next question is to the entire panel, or whoever would like to speak up, not that everybody has to.

We put in about \$40 billion in additional nutritional programming and funds over the five previous COVID relief bills. Were any of you surveyed about these needs or asked to provide testimony as we developed the spending? If so, how, and by whom? Thank you.

Mr. HODEL. Yes, I guess I will answer the question. I wasn't surveyed, but certainly would be willing to be a part of the solution, going forward.

Mr. BACON. Right. Thank you very much, Mr. Hodel.

Any of our other panelists? Did anybody reach out to you about what the needs would be when we came up with this \$40 billion?

Mr. McBRAYER. This is Max McBrayer. We were not surveyed, nor was there any outreach. But as previous, we would be happy to—

Mr. BACON. Thank you, sir.

With that, Madam Chair, I will yield back.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you. I now recognize Ms. Craig of Minnesota.

Ms. CRAIG. Thank you so much, Madam Chair, and thanks again for holding this incredibly important hearing.

My family and I are frequent volunteers at the Open Door in Eagan, Minnesota, and it has just been extraordinary to see how many ways across Minnesota our food pantries have figured out how to distribute food during this pandemic. The Open Door Mobile Pantry has allowed the organization to distribute food at more locations throughout Dakota County. On the other hand, Open Door found that during the pandemic, they were lacking other critical pantry infrastructure, like extra refrigeration to keep up with the growing demand.

Mr. Waide, let me start with a first question for you. What do you see as the greatest infrastructure challenges at our charitable food distribution sites, and how can the Federal Government be a better partner in addressing these infrastructure needs?

Mr. WAIDE. Well, thank you for the question.

What we have seen in metro Atlanta and north Georgia is that when we can make critical infrastructure investments, particularly in freezer cooler capacity, not just in our food bank, but in our vast network of community-based feeding program partners, then we can dramatically increase access to perishable products, which are often more nutritious. And so, investments from the Federal Government, from USDA to help grow this capacity beyond the way that we have grown it already will help us take advantage of all those great products that our agricultural community is producing in surplus and get it to families who need it.

Ms. CRAIG. I appreciate that, and I guess I am going to stick with you here for one more question then. Also in my district, Neighbors Inc., which is based in South St. Paul, provides emergency assistance and supportive assistance programs to low-income community members in northern Dakota County. I have heard from Neighbors Inc. that those who were once volunteers turned into clients over the course of the COVID-19 health crisis.

Mr. Waide, you talked about the importance of your volunteers who pack food boxes, organize food distributions, and address other needs. How has the pandemic affected your ability to retain a volunteer workforce? And of course, we are all looking forward to the day when those vaccines are in arms and we can get back to volunteering in our community.

Mr. WAIDE. Well, again, another great question. The high-level view on that, without getting too in the weeds, is we have been really inspired by the degree to which volunteers have continued to participate in our work. Many of them are seniors and put themselves at risk to continue to do that work. They are doing it out in the community to get food to people in need.

That said, in our facility we have stopped utilizing volunteers and have not resumed that yet, just as a way to minimize risk inside our building. Not every food bank has done that, but that is what we have done. And we were really fortunate to have the National Guard step in to replace that volunteer capacity to help us continue to do our work. Volunteer access is critical, especially critical out in the community in local pantries, and we are doing everything we can to help connect volunteer labor to those frontline pantries so that they can continue to serve the community.

Ms. CRAIG. Well, I appreciate your testimony today, and all of you. I will just add as a final remark here that, I know I visited almost every food distribution center. Sometimes cars were backed up 1 or 2 miles for months in my Congressional district and across Minnesota. I know as our COVID relief packages have been developed, that input from a number of us has been obviously received and we have been very focused on making sure that the COVID relief packages address food insecurity in our country.

So, thank you very much to all of you, and Madam Chair, I yield back.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you, Ms. Craig.

I now recognize Mrs. Cammack from Florida.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate it, and thank you to all of our witnesses here joining us virtually. I know that we have had votes called throughout this hearing, so I have been in and out, but again, I appreciate an opportunity to talk about this very important issue.

As we all know, 2020 was unlike any year that we have ever experienced, and this program has been a godsend to many folks, both as producers, but also as consumers. I am excited to talk about that here today, and like Representative Craig, I visited several food banks in my district and have talked with folks and gotten their feedback, so I am excited to hear from our witnesses here today.

Particularly, I heard from food banks and other nonprofits in our district who struggled at the onset of the pandemic to provide food to our constituents. They report that the Food Box Program really is a lifeline for our communities, and there are ways that we can further develop and streamline this.

But despite the important achievements of this program, I have also heard from several of our local producers about their struggle to participate in the program. The program, in earlier rounds, purchasing gave several of our local producers the opportunity to pro-

vide produce only, meat only, and dairy only boxes. However, when we moved to the combination boxes, that raised logistical costs to the point where many producers reported they could no longer participate in the program, in addition to other hurdles that they couldn't overcome. It is disappointing to hear from farms within my own district that after delivering nearly one million produce only boxes to Americans in need, they were unable to participate in later rounds that required combination boxes. What is even more, even as I have spoken to those who have continued to participate in the program, they have struggled amid extremely short, inflexible turnaround times with suppliers expected to ship out boxes only 7 days after being awarded a bid.

As we move forward with improvements, I hope we can remember that this program is called the Farmers to Families Food Box Program, and its success is determined not just by how many boxes are delivered to Americans in need, but also how many of America's agricultural producers, big and small, are supported through this challenging time.

So, with that, I am going to jump into some questions for Mr. Zippy Duvall. Zippy, it is good to see you. Your testimony told a similar story of many farmers around the country who care not just for producing food, but also ensuring that it gets to those most in need. And that being said, I have heard from many of Florida's producers about the difficulties associated with the switch under the Food Box Program from a produce only, dairy only, meat only box to the combination box.

From what you and your members have seen, what effect did the shift to a combination box have on your producers who participated in the Food Box Program as a whole?

Mr. DUVALL. Well, it did restrict the use of the program for our small- to medium-sized producers, and we heard earlier that food banks really work better when they get it in bulk. But our smaller guys can't do that, and those hurdles were put up. Well, we know that USDA was faced with a problem to be able to stretch the dollars, not knowing that there would be additional funds put into the program. They had to stretch those dollars as far as they could to feed as many people as they could, and we think that is why the combination box came into effect. Knowing that there is going to be a steady stream of dollars in a program like that, and not moving the goalpost when it comes to regulations that you have to abide by to get in the program. Set it up to where the farmers can get used to how they are going to deliver it, and allow them to produce it.

But we got to keep in mind, it is a farmer to family food box, and the ones that got hurt the most were our small- and medium-sized farms in that situation.

Mrs. CAMMACK. And as a follow-up to that—so, I heard some of our local producers talk about how they came across folks that were bidding on this and participating in the program using foreign produce that had been dumped on our markets. Have you heard that same thing?

Mr. DUVALL. I heard that. I can't qualify it, but I did hear that.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Okay. That kind of defeats the whole local domestic produce to our communities in need issue, again, and then

as a follow-up, so how would you recommend moving forward that we can improve this? I think there is a logistical push that we are seeing on the recipient's side which would help streamline a little bit, and that both Eric and Ron have spoken to. But from the farmer and the producer side, what can we do to streamline to ensure that more farmers, especially our smaller and midsize producers, are able to participate in the program, regardless of where they are at geographically?

Mr. DUVALL. We got to make sure that we understand the small family farm. It is a small business, doesn't have an HR department, doesn't have a stream of lawyers. It doesn't have anyone that is out there helping them abide by the rules that are put in front of them to participate. We got to make it simple. We got to streamline it, and we got to shape it so it will fit all sizes of our farms, and make sure that it is funded.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Excellent. Thank you so much, Zippy. I think my time has expired, and I appreciate it.

With that, I yield back.

Mr. DUVALL. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN [presiding.] Thank you very much, and now I recognize Congresslady Schrier of Washington.

Ms. SCHRIER. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much to our witnesses. I really appreciate all of you being here to discuss the very real and pervasive issue of hunger in America.

Now, the Feeding America network of food banks, which is the largest charitable food assistance network nationwide, has experienced average increases of almost 55 percent in demand for food assistance since the start of the pandemic, and in some areas, far more. Last year, food banks provided six billion meals to people in need. Now, the number of children not getting enough to eat is ten times higher than it was before the pandemic, and research by the University of Washington showed that in my home state, about $\frac{1}{3}$ of households surveyed are now food-insecure. Fifty-nine percent of these households include children, and people of color were $1\frac{1}{2}$ times more likely to be food-insecure. As a pediatrician, I cannot overstate how important it is to ensure our children not only have access to food, which is clearly the first priority, but also that the foods are healthy and nutritious and varied, and ideally, local. Poor nutrition is linked to poor school performance, and also to later chronic diseases, ranging from diabetes to heart disease.

So, one of the ways that USDA tried to tackle this was what we have talked about a lot here, the Farmers to Families Food Box Program, and in fact, I heard from multiple small farmers and co-ops who participated in the first round who loved this program. The food banks called it a lifeline, and the farmers, as they experienced full scale market failures because of school and restaurant closures, were really saved by this program. However, there are unresolved problems and later issues that Representative Cammack just talked about. I led a bipartisan letter with the Washington State delegation outlining some of the changes needed, and she touched on some of these, being, kind of involving large farms and not small ones, having really big boxes that were too much for food bank refrigeration systems, lack of notification when things were

coming, shipping food from across the country and leaving out our small and local farmers, and many of these small and local farmers were really just shut out in the later rounds, leaving their farm circumstances really in dire situations, despite a really well-intended program.

And so, I was wondering, at best the Food Box Program provides this unique opportunity for USDA to catalyze just an extraordinarily effective response to food insecurity, developing, getting food from farms to families, but as my colleague just discussed, leaving the smaller farms out. I was wondering, what steps, Mr. Duvall, might you consider in future rounds to make sure things like smaller packaging, separating perishables from nonperishables, in meeting the needs of food banks might be considered?

Mr. DUVALL. Well, you have touched on it some yourself in your question. We have to go in and investigate what happened between the beginning of the program and what was happening at the end, and fix those problems and make sure that all size farms have the opportunity to participate in that.

In any program, when you make it more difficult, the small family farm gets left out.

Ms. SCHRIER. That is right. Now, I have a follow-up question, and maybe this one is best for Mr. Waide.

In the last Congress, I introduced a bill, H.R. 6724, Farmers Feeding Families Coronavirus Response Act that actually would be a bit more nimble. It would channel money to the states, and then the states do have relationships with the small and medium farmers, and with the food banks. And so, I was just wondering, Mr. Waide, can you—have you thought about having food delivered more on a small scale, getting the states involved and distributing it more like the TEFAP Program?

Mr. WAIDE. So, thank you for the question. We certainly think that there are advantages to the TEFAP system that should be integrated in the way that we think about a food box program. I think forward looking visibility on how long the program is going to last is really important, having consistency in the participants. And in particular, the issue you are raising is really important of—and that Mr. Duvall is raising is getting great input from people at the local level about how the program can work better.

We have a great relationship, in part thanks to Mr. Duvall, with Georgia farmers across the food banks serving Georgia. Commissioner Gary Black here in Georgia helped facilitate that relationship, and there is a really strong community in Georgia of all of those agricultural participants. Speaking to them at the local level will help ensure the program can be sustainable and meet both of its objectives of getting food to people while also supporting farmers.

Ms. SCHRIER. Thank you very much. The states have great relationships.

I am out of time. I wanted to thank you, and I yield back, although I don't think I have anything to yield.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

And now we will hear from Mr. Baird of Indiana. You are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BAIRD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I really appreciate all the witnesses being here today and sharing their expertise about the food insecurity.

I am going to start with Mr. Hodel. I have thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to learn more about your organization and the model that you have used and the way you do business. In terms of food security, each and every one of us in this hearing are probably fortunate compared to some on the global average. I have particularly enjoyed learning about how your organization is so successful, including counties that are in my district here in Indiana, and through such a massive volunteer base and without dependence on government assistance. And most striking to me as a note I found reported on your website that 99 percent of every dollar your organization receives is spent on program funding and goes back to those in need, and whom the donors feel that those funds should go to.

Mr. Hodel, would you share your perspective on how your model of doing business might be expanded to deliver these quality foods that we produce in this country to the food desert areas?

Mr. HODEL. Yes, thank you, Mr. Congressman. I appreciate the question.

We are thankful to be able to serve in Indiana. We have a great division there, and a great partnership with leaders, and so it is a team effort that we really are privileged to be able to serve the greater Indiana community, and counties and individuals.

Our model is really built off of volunteers. Volunteers are our secret sauce. Mr. Waide talked about that a little bit, their reliance on the volunteers as well, and so we are tremendously blessed and we do a lot to train, empower, and educate our volunteers so that they can play critical roles within our locations. Each of our divisions operates with about four paid staff members, and so from there, they provide the leadership to then have core volunteers, and then also to lead volunteer groups that come into the facility. A big part of our efficiency model goes to the credit of the community giving back, and I think that is also part of our mindset. We are serving a community, and we are looking to the community to help them give back to those that are in need. And so, it is definitely a community focus that we bring in to our locations, and we try to be open and flexible with a variety of volunteer opportunities, as well as a variety of volunteer times. And so, we try to be flexible for those individuals to come in and help.

We are also blessed with major corporations that have volunteerism as a part of their mission, and so, a lot of our locations that we operate out of have a fantastic relationship with the corporations that also provide the volunteer base to the food bank. That is probably our main driving force that allows us to operate efficiently.

The next level then would be the donated food. Our partnerships with food manufacturers, food distributors, grocery chains, *et cetera*, we are incredibly thankful and blessed to be able to have that donated food that we take and we rescue and we bring into the food bank and make sure that we have it reorganized and ready for our pantries.

So, that is probably the two-pronged approach in terms of our model, and our focus on efficiency.

Mr. BAIRD. Well, thank you for that.

I want to move to Mr. McBrayer now. In your testimony you referenced the important role that convenience stores play in somewhat of a—like a missing middle for those further removed from larger grocers, which is really those that are living in food deserts. I commend the efforts your stores have undertaken to provide healthier options, and to be a resource for our communities and your communities in providing quality food.

So, my question really comes, Mr. McBrayer, do you think that there is opportunity to leverage the National Network of Convenience Stores as a potential distribution net [inaudible]?

Mr. MCBRAYER. Congressman, I missed a good portion of what you said. Would you mind repeating?

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, that was a very good question, because that is sort of what we are looking for in this Committee, how we can solve this problem.

Mr. McBrayer, did you hear it?

Mr. MCBRAYER. I am going to take a stab. I heard about half of it.

Mr. THOMPSON. Jim, you may want to turn off your camera to get good audio.

Mr. BAIRD. Okay.

The CHAIRMAN. Could you ask that again, Jim, your question?

Mr. BAIRD. Now can you hear me?

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, we can hear you.

Mr. BAIRD. Okay. I just, Mr. McBrayer, you referenced in the importance of the convenience stores and that you serve maybe kind of a missing middle for those further removed from the larger groceries, and so that really ends up being the people we are talking about that end up in the food deserts. And so, I commend your efforts. And so, to get to my question, do you think there is an opportunity to leverage the National Network of Convenience Stores as a potential distribution network for helping deliver these high-quality foods, particularly to those food deserts? Did you get all that?

Mr. MCBRAYER. Yes, I did. Thank you.

Yes, our convenience stores—and I am speaking of RaceTrac and RaceWay, provide that last mile, which is a term of art these days, to meet people where there is need, whether it be at 4 o'clock in the afternoon or 4 o'clock in the morning.

The convenience store industry is about 160,000 individual stores in this country. It is absolutely an important idea to talk with our trade organizations of which we are members of three, and say how might we do this and get participation in that discussion, because we are the last mile. People who shop at grocery stores—we are not the solution to the whole problem. We are the point at which people can interface quickly and with dignity and obtain food to take home and eat. We can also provide more, as we talk about how we might be willing and able to do that under some type of Congressional approach.

I would like to say that the SNAP Program, as we see it, is functioning very, very well. It is not complete, but there are opportunities, going forward, and we would avail ourselves of that.

Mr. BAIRD. So, thank you. I can't see the clock on how much time I might have left, but if there are any other witnesses that would like to testify, feel free to do so, if I am not over my time, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, you are, but, you have really hit on a very good point, and it is the sort of thing that we are after in this hearing. And we can follow up on it, but if there are any other panelists that might want to elaborate on this—

Mr. BAIRD. I yield back. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Did you hear me?

Mr. BAIRD. Yes, yes.

The CHAIRMAN. Oh, you yielded back, but let me just take it just a little bit further, because there may be, Mr. McBrayer, in response to his inquiry about setting up a distribution network. You see, people have to understand, convenience stores are the lifeline for rural areas. Many of them don't have Krogers or all the varieties that are in our urban centers. And so, I am very interested in us following up on that, and your question was a good one. And staff, you all write that down to see how we might—and Mr. McBrayer, your answer was right on target. And there may be a need that we in Congress can get some added resources to fill in the gaps here. But I would like to work with Mr. Baird.

All right. I like that one, and we will follow up with it. Thank you for that.

And now, I will recognize Mr. Bishop of Georgia for 5 minutes.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and our Ranking Member. Let me go back and be sure to welcome my good friends from Georgia who are witnesses, Mr. Waide, Mr. Hodel, Mr. Edenfield, and Mr. McBrayer, and of course, my friend of long standing, Mr. Zippy Duvall. I want to also send a special note of condolence to Mr. Edenfield on the passing of Mr. Moses White and his wife from COVID, who for years were strong advocate for grocery stores. We still grieve with you on the loss of Mr. Moses White.

Let me get right to it. I can't see the clock, despite the increasing food insecurity among our active-duty military families during the pandemic, the service members basic allowance for housing, the BAH, is treated as income for determining SNAP eligibility, which results in military families experiencing food insecurity, and being determined ineligible for SNAP benefits. And Congress so far has been unsuccessful in addressing this gap, either in the farm bill or in the National Defense Authorization Act so, it has fallen to the food bank networks and other charitable organizations to perform the government's role in ensuring that America's military families don't go hungry.

Today, the food pantries operate on or near every military base in the U.S., including Fort Benning in my district, and a Marine Corps Logistics Base in Albany.

So, Mr. Waide and Mr. Hodel, can you talk about the work that your food banks and the other food banks in your area do to serve the military families, and can you characterize the need that you are seeing among this subpopulation?

Let me just go ahead and ask my second question, which will be directed to Mr. Edenfield on rural grocery stores. Of course, the lat-

est estimates suggest that 1.1 million rural households lack access to a vehicle, and they have low access to supermarkets or grocery stores. They live over a mile away, and some of the residents in my district like those in Crawford County and Talbot County, the nearest grocery store is over 15 miles away. Mr. Edenfield, you can think about what can we do to make it easier for small, rural counties to attract investment and support for bringing grocery stores to the area?

Other residents that live in my district like in Columbus or Albany, which are considered urban areas, they still are almost ½ hour from the nearest full-service grocery store. Some of them are hosting pop-up grocery stores in trucks, but this isn't a really sustainable solution for rural or urban food deserts. What can we do to increase the number of supermarkets in our rural and in our minority communities in the urban food districts?

If Mr. Hodel and Mr. Waide will go first and save some time for Mr. Edenfield, I would appreciate it.

Mr. HODEL. Go ahead, Mr. Waide, and then I will follow.

Mr. WAIDE. Great. I appreciate the question, Congressman, and I think at our food bank, we certainly see a disproportionate number of veterans accessing services throughout our pantry network. We work with a variety of community-based partners that in particular serve veteran populations. We know that other food banks around the state, as you mentioned, operate food pantries and food distributions actually on site at bases located across the state. And we know that this population faces unique challenges that we have to be prepared to face.

For us at food banks, we are serving veterans in the way we serve everybody, which is let's get them access to food. We think we need to be creative as a country, as a network of food banks to develop solutions to meet veterans where they are and get them the access that they deserve.

Mr. HODEL. Yes, I will add in for Midwest Food Bank, a couple points of interest. Our human resource director is a Purple Heart veteran, and so we have a heart and an eye towards our veterans and we appreciate their service for our country. We also provide kind of a holistic opportunity where veteran families will come in and utilize our facility and they will have meetings around kind of reentering the workforce, and talk about emotional topics like post traumatic stress disorder. We allow that group to come in and operate their meetings out of our facility, and then also provide that physical food service to the veterans as well.

Those are a couple of things that we are doing and focused on at Midwest Food Bank.

Mr. BISHOP. I am particularly interested in the active-duty military people who are usually low-grade, non-commissioned officers who have families, and of course, since the SNAP eligibility includes their BAH, they end up not being ruled eligible so they end up having to come to food banks.

Mr. HODEL. Yes, no comment on that policy, but definitely a comment on our desire to serve them as they come to the food bank to make sure that they have the food that they need.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you both.

Mr. Edenfield, if I have any time—I can't see the clock.

Mr. EDENFIELD. Yes. First, Congressman Bishop, I want to thank you for the condolences of Moses and Joyce. We miss them dearly.

Now, on the rural grocery stores, that is a challenge and it is hard to answer, because in the last 40, 50 years so much of that is strictly farming, where at one time, as I mentioned earlier, there was some small manufacturing works, garment factories and something like that to help support those communities. And now, there pretty well is farmers and farming and the farm laborers. It is a numbers thing and it just takes so much to be able to—even the small grocery store. It is still going to be, unless something else can move into these areas, or if there could be just a little more population, it is going to be hard sometimes to get. And 15 to 20 miles is a long ways to go.

I can understand that, but unfortunately, I don't know that there is a quick and easy answer to it.

Mr. BISHOP. You also have the issue in urban areas.

The CHAIRMAN. Time.

Mr. BISHOP. Has my time expired?

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, it is a little over 2 minutes, my friend from Albany. I didn't want to interrupt that line of questions because, combined with what you are bringing up and what Mr. Baird was talking about gets to the whole meat of why we have held this hearing. We have to find creative ways to end this hunger. And that starts with where people go to get the food. Our food banks, our convenience stores, our grocery stores. And we have to develop the mechanism and infrastructure where they are.

Let me get to some other Members, and we will come back to that point. Let's see. Mr. LaMalfa from California, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. LAMALFA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the time, and the kind way you conduct the Committee here.

Well, at the risk of maybe some redundancy since we have been running back and forth between votes and who knows who has asked what, I just have a couple thoughts here on how we are doing things and how we can be more successful.

I was particularly interested, again, in furthering the thought on the Farmers to Families Food Box Program, which seemed to have pretty good success and very much so delivering quality, fresh food that hadn't quite been as available in the past, and it is, of course, domestically grown food. Can we touch on that a little bit more, Mr. Hodel, on how that has benefitted the food bank's ability to deliver a good quantity and good quality of food to those in need?

Mr. HODEL. Thank you for the question.

We typically run with 4 to 5 weeks of supply, as we try to look out and be prepared for our agencies, and we were running at that level last January, February. And then the pandemic hit, so we continued to be strong in our procurement. We continued to lean into purchase of items to make sure that we had our shelves stocked. But we saw our weeks of supplies dip to 3.2 weeks of supply in April, and 2.6 weeks of supply in May. And a conversation that I had with some other CEOs of food banks, they were seeing the exact same scenario unfold.

For us, the Farmers to Families Food Box was a huge boost. In June we returned—as that program became aligned, we returned

back to 4 weeks of supply. We could see very much in our metrics what that value influx of food did in terms of being able to supply to our agencies, and then let alone the nutritional benefits. It has been talked about and commended very well, the milk, the fresh produce, the meat and the protein, the cheese, the dairy products, just tremendously well received. Which again helps with that nutritional cycle improvement for those that are in need.

Again, very appreciative and the feedback we got all the way through our agencies and our clients was extremely positive and thankful and grateful for the Farmers to Families Food Box.

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Hodel, I am not trying to put words in your mouth, but how would you compare the quality of what was coming in the food boxes *versus* the delivery of the freshest or the highest quality food in past practice? Did this improve that quality, as well as the quantity? You were talking about getting back up to that timeline of a longer period of supply on hand.

Mr. HODEL. Correct. I mean, when we look at our metrics in terms of the percent of nutritional value of food that we distributed, we saw almost a double digit increase with the addition of that. The quality of the food—we are blessed with some good relationships with some retailers and some producers that we have a pipeline to fresh yogurt, to fresh strawberries, so we do feel like we get good quality food that comes into our coolers and goes out to our agencies. Quality to quality, it is very equivalent, but just in terms of the overall net benefit of the nutritional volume of food that went out of our facilities was almost a ten percent increase, which we were very thankful for.

Mr. LAMALFA. Let me talk about food waste here a little bit. That is really—sticks in my craw—as well. One of my colleagues talked a while ago about the number being about 30 percent of food that just flat goes to waste, and do you find with the food banks that maybe some jurisdictions have health department regulations that aren't really realistic as far as how food quality might still be, even though there might be an expiration date or a use-by date? Talk about that a little bit, please. I mean, more food that can actually be reaching people that is arbitrarily—maybe in my view—deemed as not quite good.

Mr. HODEL. Yes, great question. The Good Samaritans Act allows us to be able to take those post-dated items and to give those out, which again, we are thankful for the foresight of our forefathers to putting that in place. But we do have a—kind of a food distribution challenge to be able to identify and rescue and connect where that extra or excess food is, and so that is a logistical challenge that our procurement team works through to try to make sure that we are connecting where there is opportunity and where that waste is occurring, to make sure that we are salvaging that and bringing it into the food bank network.

And so, at times on the business side I would say there is some hesitancy at times to maybe form that partnership with a food bank for fear of the risk that it maybe imposes on them as a business. Policies around kind of reducing that risk for a business would be helpful and would be an additional pipeline of opportunity for food that the food bank network could leverage.

Mr. LAMALFA. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, would you mind yielding me another 30 seconds so I could ask Mr. Duvall something?

The CHAIRMAN. I yield the gentleman an additional 30 seconds.

Mr. LAMALFA. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Duvall, I wanted to touch on with the issues we are facing with food supply and such, how important is it as a representative of farmers in America that we have a domestically grown food supply *versus* reliant upon imported food, and the challenges that farmers are facing in America in 20 seconds?

Mr. DUVALL. Yes, my 20 seconds is food security is national security, and it is absolutely essential that we as a country be able to feed ourselves. For example, when we had energy insecurity and we would depend on other countries for energy, we surely don't want to go there with our food. It is vitally important we continue to do that.

Mr. LAMALFA. Thank you, sir. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. All I can say to that, my good friend, Zippy Duvall, is amen. That is why we are having this hearing, because if we don't do something about these food shortages, then you truly have a national security issue when we have to depend upon other nations to feed the most powerful nation in the world. I assure you, we will no longer be the most powerful nation.

And I can't thank the Committee enough. I mean, you all are asking some great questions. Our panelists are giving some great help here as our experts.

And now, let me continue with Mrs. Axne from Iowa. Is she on?

Mrs. AXNE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is so good to be here, and thanks to all the witnesses for sharing the work that your organizations have done during this time of need.

We have 42 million Americans, including 13 million children, who are estimated to experience food insecurity this year. We all know on this Committee that this needs to be discussed, and I really appreciate everyone for being here, and for our Chairman in making this a priority.

As you just mentioned, Zippy, it is a shame that we have food insecurity in this country at all, but the effects of the pandemic have only worsened the situation. In Iowa, we saw an increase of 50 percent in food insecurity, with over 450,000 of our friends and neighbors struggling to get the food they need. But we know this is an issue in every community, rural and urban. But as Mr. Waide noted in his testimony, rural communities have experienced higher levels of hunger before the pandemic, and the pandemic has only exacerbated those issues. In fact, Feeding America's latest reports estimates that over 14.4 percent of rural Americans were food-insecure last year, and that is six million individuals in rural communities who lack the food they need.

I am also very concerned about the availability of fresh and healthy food options for these communities. For example, when I am traveling across my district, 16 counties, it is majority rural, and I stop at a convenience store, often the only fresh item is truly a yellowing and bruised banana that is sitting on the counter. In fact, these convenience stores are often the easiest place and the most accessible place for folks to shop in between trips to the gro-

cery store, which could be quite a distance away. We have to make sure that all of our communities have access to fresh, healthy foods in a convenient and affordable manner. And I am sure that is something we all support here on the Committee. I am so glad, Mr. McBrayer, to hear about the priority your business has placed on expanding those offerings to your customers.

My first question, Mr. Waide, you noted in your testimony that smaller and more rural parts of the country have not had equitable access to CFAP products. Can you expand on that, and what would be your suggestions to fix this?

Mr. WAIDE. Well, thank you for the question.

The issue is that the way in which we are distributing the CFAP products is relying upon the relationships that the distributors that are awarded the contracts have in communities, and the incentives for those distributors is to move the product, generally as quickly as they can so they can complete the contract. They don't always have relationships in every part of the country, especially in those parts that have fewer resources and higher rates of food insecurity and lower access to the kind of products that you are talking about.

The solution is that we are utilizing networks similar to the Feeding America network, where we have real relationships on the ground in every county in the United States. And so, listening to local stakeholders, utilizing those organizations that already have expertise in handling this product that already know how to get product to even the more difficult to reach areas, needs to be a part of the accountability that we put around the program. Right now, there is not as much accountability around the CFAP Program around how product is distributed equitably as there is around the TEFAP program, and so, we would use that as a model for how you put some of those accountability measures in place and leverage the expertise of organizations that know what they are doing in this space.

Mrs. AXNE. Well, thank you for that answer, and that is going to give us another opportunity to look at fixing that problem. I really appreciate that. That is a common-sense solution that we should be able to get behind. So, thank you for that.

I have heard from food banks in my state that the demand for mobile food bank setups have doubled this last year, mostly in rural communities. Can you inform us on the Committee about the successes and challenges that those rural food banks are having in meeting their community's needs?

Mr. WAIDE. Sure. The mobile distributions have been extremely important to our ability to reach all aspects of our community, particularly given the social distancing that is required to operate safely. And it allows us to move a lot of food very quickly. The challenge around those operations, just going forward, you have to be there when the people are there, and so, it is not as well developed an infrastructure as you have maybe in some more densely populated areas where people can go to standing pantries at hours that are more convenient to them.

Part of the solution that we are trying to develop is how do we make those mobile distributions more accessible at more times, more frequently in communities that are more remote, and food banks around the country are developing solutions around that.

Mrs. AXNE. Thank you so much. I know we are out of time, but that is why I am so proud to support the American Rescue Plan, because SNAP also plays a big part of this, and I know the food banks are a great part, but we need the support from SNAP, and this is going to help us get to those needs.

Thank you so much. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mrs. Axne, and now I will recognize my good friend, Bobby Rush, from Illinois. You are now recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. RUSH. I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to welcome all the witnesses today, and as I have indicated once before on this Committee, I am the grandson and son of two Georgia farmers. I was raised, born on a farm in Sylvester, Georgia, southwest Georgia, and spent my early years on a farm. Mr. Chairman, I would also like to say in the late 1960s, early 1970s, I was part of an organization that created in this nation the first network of free feeding programs named Breakfast for Children Program. And I am so delighted to be a part of this very important hearing today.

My question goes to Mr. Edenfield. Mr. Edenfield, in your testimony, you encourage, and I quote, "this Committee to consider a P-EBT model for summer feeding programs as well." Can you please discuss how this particular modeling of the P-EBT benefits for summer programs could ensure that kids do not go hungry?

Mr. EDENFIELD. Yes, sir, thank you.

This is something I see as very important because each summer, as a matter of fact, I tell my team we try to structure a lot of our ads, a lot of what we are doing, when we realize the kids are out of school, they are not going to be getting that lunch program. We take bread, we take some lunchmeat, some fruits, how to have a healthy lunch that is there, and try to have as equal amount of food as possible [inaudible]. And I thought for many years now that this is—now sometimes there are other programs, but there is not really a family program where you stay at your house and you have those extra benefits that comes here in the summertime. I think that is something that is very important to look at.

Mr. RUSH. Yes, but let me ask you another question, Mr. Edenfield, or any of the other witnesses. As a part of the distribution system for food and to address the food insecurities that far too many Americans are facing, is there a role for cooperative food stores and cooperative—at one time in American history, a cooperative helped play a key role. Is there any place, any space in the landscape for—our nation today for cooperatively owned food distribution sources?

Mr. EDENFIELD. That is a good question too, and if there is—and this would be—of course, this is an opinion—would be more so in the rural areas there right now. And they could not—I am not saying it wouldn't work in other areas, but there is such a shortage in some of the rural areas that that would—when you talk about a cooperative there, so many people buying in and having ownership in that there that would help make that work. And so, it would seem like to just think about it, that would be the most logical place to start a plan like that.

Mr. RUSH. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, thank you so much, and I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Bobby.

And now, I recognize Mr. Al Lawson from the great State of Florida, 5 minutes.

Mr. LAWSON. I thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I welcome everyone to the Committee. I know that there have been a lot of questions asked over the last 3 hours or so, but I have this question. I will give it to Mr. Waide. Florida 5th Congressional District is no stranger to food insecurity, and sadly, the COVID-19 pandemic has only made the situation for our families even worse. From Farm Share of north Florida, northeast Florida, to Second Harvest of Big Bend, food banks and their services have been essential in feeding Floridians. Can we talk about the unique way food banks like yours have been able to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and how you think the Federal Government can better help you all on the other side of the pandemic?

Mr. WAIDE. Well, thank you, Representative, and as we have been talking about this morning, the way that the food banks have been able to respond to this crisis is we have really dramatically grown our sourcing of food by buying more food, by working closely with our food donor partners, leveraging Federal commodities that have been provided through the various stimulus packages, and then really growing the number of mobile distributions that we provide, continuing to support the needs of our existing partners, and just working to expand our transportation capacity so that we have more food going more places more often to make it more accessible.

The support we need, going forward, to continue to respond to elevated levels of need, which we think will be with us for some time, is certainly we need ongoing investment in TEFAP, in the Food Box Program, so that we continue to have the inventory we need to respond. If those programs are not sustained for the current levels, there is no way that we are going to be able to replace that volume of food using private sources. We need those programs to continue to be funded aggressively.

We also think it is important to continue to sustain expanded SNAP benefits to reduce the burden on food banks, and we think, as some folks have been talking about, pandemic EBT is a program that is really important, particularly as we think about the impact on kids—families with children.

Mr. LAWSON. Okay, thank you very much.

My second question, from veterans to college students, my district is the home of many of the most vulnerable population when it comes down to food insecurity. And as the COVID-19 crisis highlighted how these special populations have often been forgotten in our social safety network. What recommendation would you all make to ensure our students—even though I know several universities in my district have food banks—veterans, and I have a lot of veterans in my district, especially in Duval, probably more veterans there than in any other place in the State of Florida. And all of them can be served by programs such as SNAP and The Emergency Food Assistance Program.

Mr. WAIDE. It is critically important—our food bank believes it is critically important that as we think about the populations you described, we just make food as accessible as possible. And the

easiest way, the most efficient way to do that is through expanded benefits in the SNAP Program. That is a program that is widely accessible, it is really efficient, it works. And it is the easiest way to get food to people who need it, using our existing world-class infrastructure of grocery retailers that are available all across the country.

Mr. LAWSON. Okay, thank you very much. That is a great answer, and I look forward to working with you.

Mr. Chairman, with that, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. All right. Now, may I ask, is Mr. Panetta back?

Mr. PANETTA. Yes, Mr. Chairman, I am here.

The CHAIRMAN. Very good, very good. We will now go to you, Mr. Panetta, and you are now recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. PANETTA. Outstanding. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to all the witnesses for your preparation for being here for now going on 4 hours. I appreciate your patience with this. I am the last questioner, but I will make it quick even if I am not.

Look, I just wanted to obviously thank the Chairman for holding this type of hearing that really, with the diversity of all of the witnesses' experiences, shines an excellent light on the issues with hunger, not only during COVID, but when we are not in COVID as well. As many of you know, I come from the Central Coast of California, and as Zippy Duvall knows well, they call it the Salad Bowl of the World. We are surrounded by fresh fruits and vegetables, but sometimes the people that harvest those fresh fruits and vegetables don't have access to the food that they are working around all day, unfortunately. And that is why these types of programs that we are talking about are very, very important, especially during COVID-19. Every week that I am in the district, I get out to a food bank, and as you can imagine, I have seen those lines only get longer, unfortunately, over this past year.

But, as it was said in a hearing we had last term, food banks, as important as they are, we cannot food bank our way out of this. And so, clearly, that is why SNAP is so important in this crisis, and it is also a situation which is being remedied or addressed at least with the American Rescue Plan, considering the 15 percent increase in SNAP funding. Which I believe, and I am sure some of you believe, will be very beneficial and instrumental in dealing with our hunger issues.

Mr. Waide, I know you have been answering a lot of questions today, but I have one final one for you. You mentioned that increasing the SNAP benefits by ten percent is equivalent to doubling access to all of the food provided through our nation's food banks. What would the cost to charities and nonprofits be to fill in the gaps if SNAP benefits were reduced?

Mr. WAIDE. Well, if SNAP benefits were reduced, again if we reduce the SNAP benefits by ten percent, we would have to double our network. And so, we are already distributing 65 percent more food today than we were prior to the pandemic at my food bank. We are spending more than 50 percent more than we were in our expenses to do that. And so, we would have to go and find the resources to double that again just to make up the difference of a ten percent cut to SNAP.

Obviously, that would not be achievable for any length of time, and that means that American families, kids, seniors would go hungry.

Mr. PANETTA. Understood, understood.

Mr. Edenfield, if I may, can you talk about how the important role of SNAP—I want to hit on kind of in normal times—and as an income support for low-income workers in better times, what have you observed? Is it efficient? Are people using SNAP to buy the right kinds of food for their families?

Mr. EDENFIELD. We find it to be very efficient. We find that if you take—and we have some stores that have a heavier concentration of SNAP customers than other stores. And where it is a heavy concentration, there is definitely more of the home-cooked type meals, from scratch type meals, whether it is your rice or your flour or your milk, so many different things, and then so there is much more cooking going on, and this also stretches the dollar a little bit more. And so, I find it to be very efficient and very effective.

Mr. PANETTA. Great, great.

President Duvall, let me just kind of pivot over to you. Obviously, farmers in my district did a pretty good job in donating food throughout the COVID-19 pandemic; but, can you go into some of the obstacles that farmers faced in trying to donate food during the pandemic?

Mr. DUVALL. Well, it is just the awareness or where they go with it. That is the biggest obstacle, and when they get there, are they going to accept it? I think the coordination is the biggest obstacle.

Mr. PANETTA. Fair enough. I appreciate that.

Once again, thank you, everybody, and thank you for your service to those who need it the most. I appreciate that.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Ladies and gentlemen, this has been an historic and very impactful hearing on a very historic issue. We have not had this amount of hunger and food insecurity certainly in our lifetime here. And it is our responsibility as the House Agriculture Committee to be bold and to understand this is our challenge here. And I want everyone to know that I have had some discussions with both the Speaker as well as President Biden in the Oval Office when I was there, particularly dealing with how we are able to make sure we have adequate food supply in two of the most pressing areas: in our rural communities, which don't have the grocery store. And I am so pleased when I heard Congressman's—Mr. Baird's comments and the reply from our convenience store CEO, Mr. McBrayer, on how we can come together.

And so, I want everyone to know how this entire Federal Government is aware of this issue, and they are looking to us in the House Agriculture Committee, as well as the Senate Agriculture Committee, to come up with solutions.

So, I can't thank our Committee Members enough for all that you all have done, and I do want to say a word to Mr. Edenfield about my good friend, Moses White. Please make sure you give our warmest regards to Moses White's family. Moses White and I went to FAMU, Florida A&M together, and he passed recently, but he

was a champion for getting out there and making sure that folks did not go hungry. Mr. Edenfield, your stores have been certainly leaders in that.

At this time, before I give my closing remarks, I would like to recognize our distinguished Ranking Member for his closing remarks and any other information you would like to share.

Mr. THOMPSON. Sure, and my 5 minutes of questioning. I deferred to the end here—

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, please.

Mr. THOMPSON.—because I knew that—I mean, it kind of creates some hardship when we have these hearings on going home day, because folks are depending on airlines, and there are fewer and fewer choices. I wanted to make sure all of our Members on both sides of the aisle had the best opportunity to speak.

And so, let me do my questioning first. Mr. Chairman, first let me say I am grateful that President Biden and Speaker Pelosi have finally caught up to where the Agriculture Committee has been in a bipartisan way for years. I welcome them to this. We have been the leader on this, and it is great that they maybe have had an awakening on just how important our work is here that we have always done, the 2014 Farm Bill, the 2018 Farm Bill.

My question, first of all, thank you to all of the witnesses. Nutrition assistance requires collaboration between governments, non-profits, communities, individuals, churches, my home community Alliance Club, other service organizations, volunteers. It just—it is amazing how many people come to the table, and it is those partnerships, public-private partnerships and efficient interactions between Federal, state, and local agencies, and quite frankly, the nonprofits, the churches, everyone that is involved.

So, let me start with Mr. Hodel. How do your collaborative efforts improve service delivery, and are there areas for improvement to ensure that recipients' needs are met?

Mr. HODEL. Yes, thank you for the question.

At the Midwest Food Bank, we believe we do have the capacity and efficiency model to serve our communities quickly and fairly. And, this last year has taught us doing more of the same is maybe not prudent, but also stopping and fixing is certainly not an option. Experimenting, disrupting, and trying new efficient channels to market that are innovative I think are our solution. It has been talked about today that there is a multi-prong approach to help fight and solve this food insecurity, and so the initiative and continued refinement of the Farmers to Families Food Boxes is a great example of an additional pipeline. How do you provide that pipeline to the farmers? How do you make it incentivized for the farmers to be able to sell and receive fair value for their products? And even what type of reward is there for food rescue? And, those are the kinds of questions that can be tackled, and I am willing to be a part of that conversation, but also there has been some great progress in this last year, and we are appreciative of that.

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you. Thank you for that.

Mr. Waide, your thoughts on how—with your operation, how do collaborative efforts improve your service delivery, and are there areas for improvement that we should be looking at?

Mr. WAIDE. Well, our entire model is based on collaboration. My food bank has 170 employees. We are trying to feed close to a million people, and we can't do that without an extraordinary number of partners and volunteers and donors, who all get engaged in the effort to fight hunger.

In terms of improving the way that we operate, certainly our food bank is looking at ways that we can operate better, and the lessons learned from the pandemic are that we have to move faster, we have to be bigger, we got to get closer to where people are. We are going to need help from government to do some of that work. We certainly need help with food inventory. We need help in terms of sustaining access to SNAP. But we also need great investment and collaboration in the private-sector, and we are leveraging expertise from world-class logistics companies here in Atlanta to help us think about how we improve. We are leveraging expertise at community-based churches to understand how we can serve people with greater compassion, and we are going to put all that together to do even more to serve our food-insecure neighbors who need our help now more than they ever have.

Mr. THOMPSON. Mr. Waide, thank you for that.

President Duvall, Zippy, the first thing is just an observation that perhaps you think about. I know I am thinking about it with, from ag, with resources for ag economists. Just as kind of a follow-up to Mr. Allen's questioning, with the amount of spending that we are seeing, and obviously when there is a crisis, I appreciate, quite frankly, the roughly nine percent of the bill that is going to the President's desk here tomorrow of \$1.9 trillion. I think that is really important and helpful. I have concerns over the 91 percent, but what I would like us to look at, it would be helpful for all of our ag economists to take a look at the impact, we can go back in history to see this—the question will be, what was the impact on food affordability? Because affordability and access speaks to having proper nutrition, and with higher inflation—our inflation has eked up. I hope it doesn't go any further, but I am afraid with the amount of—the massive spending it might. That is not really looking for a response, Zippy, but something I know I want to work with ag economists to look at—and you have some great ones at the American Farm Bureau Federation.

My question for you actually has to do with the—it was suggested by one of our witnesses today that the Farmers to Families Food Box Program funds were not efficiently used. Now, your testimony suggests there may be a place for a program like it moving forward. I wanted to give you an opportunity to talk more about that, and what that balance might look like moving forward.

Mr. DUVALL. Well, what we got to look at is our farmers always answer the call. If there is a new program out there that is put forward to help feed people that need it so badly, our farmers will adjust their marketing schemes, they will adjust their production, they will adjust their processing in a way to do that. And we just have to remove all the barriers that they have to go through to get there, and be creative in what those programs look like.

Mr. THOMPSON. Very good. Well, let me just pivot into my closing remarks. Mr. Chairman, I promise it will be brief. They are all thank yous.

Thank you for this hearing, first of all. Zippy, thank you to you and our American Farm Bureau, all of our state and county Farm Bureaus. Quite frankly, nutrition starts with our producers. Two simple truths: farmers feed and nutrition matters. And so, thank you for that. Thank you to Mr. Edenfield and Mr. McBrayer, I want to thank you and your team members that work for you. They have been working as life essential employees when other folks have been sheltering at home or telecommuting. They have been working in settings that probably have had more interactions with the public in a pandemic than any setting that I can think of. The stories that we hear, the large gatherings and these grocery stores, convenience stores, on behalf of everyone on the Agriculture Committee, our appreciation to you and your teams. And thank you for carrying those fresh foods. Those are incredibly important. That is what makes the Farmers to Families Food Box so important. It really is concentrated with fresh foods, it is good for families, good for health, and good for agriculture.

And finally, thank you to Mr. Hodel and Mr. Waide for the work of your food banks, and all those that work so hard to make them successful.

And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, and I concur with you. You and I were exchanging glances as we were hearing the expertise from our participants, and from the excellent questions and exchanges from our Members. And I hope that those who have been across the country who have been watching this hearing, you will go away with it knowing that we are very serious about making sure we solve this hunger crisis that we are in.

I want to just have a few closing comments so people will know where we are going to go from this point so that everyone should know, this doesn't end. This is the beginning of our approach to deal with hunger in our nation.

And so, I want to start with Mr. Kyle Waide. Mr. Waide, if you recall, you and I had a conversation a few months ago as we were doing one of our COVID-19 testing drive-thrus and food distribution. And at that point, I mentioned to you that we were going to have a hearing, but I also recall that you brought to my attention that there might be a need for some language change within something that we could do here in Congress, and I am wondering, I certainly put you in touch with the staff, and I wanted to make sure we had responded to that. I think you may remember. Do you remember that conversation we had, Mr. Waide?

Mr. WAIDE. Well, we are in touch with your staff, Mr. Chairman, and are in good dialogue around that.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. You know what I am talking about? Do you remember that? It had to do with some aspect of making sure that you were getting the kind of smooth transition with some phase of your activities with us here in Federal Government. If not, we can proceed and pursue that, and I just can't remember exactly what it was on, but my mind was back there.

But I want to thank you, Kyle, for that, and I am asking that you continue to work with our staff, because I want to try to find some ways that we can help here in Congress the food banks. You are a very important part. All you have to do is watch the TV news

and see the lines of cars and trucks and vehicles, some miles long, some in the car since 4 o'clock in the morning, coming to our food banks. You are their lifeline.

And so, it is very important for us to know how much more we can help you, and help our food banks.

And Mr. Edenfield, with Wayfield, I know the history there. You and I have been partners for a long time in Georgia, and especially working with my good friend, Moses White, and our relationship there. And I just wanted to also let you know that we want you to work with our staff and our Committee. The reason we have these hearings, folks, is to bring in the expertise, get the information, and then we in the Committee parcel out much of this to our Subcommittees, and it may be certain pieces of legislation that we need to introduce, and it may be appropriations of funds that come from these hearings. We look forward to continuing that relationship.

And Mr. McBrayer, obviously you know I am coming to you because of the great interplay you had with Congressman Baird, and that is something that really has perked the interest of our Committee because Mr. Bishop even came in to that. You can see the enthusiasm within our Committee to reach out to you. You are the ones out there that are in the point of the battle. They come to you. They come to the grocery stores. They come to Wayfield. They come to Kroger. They come to your convenience stores to get the food. But we have a problem of the rural-urban divide, and those fault lines are getting larger and larger, and none larger than our food. And so, I am very interested, Mr. McBrayer, and you see the Members of the Committee are, about seeing how we can enhance that and utilize and develop it. It would be wonderful, like Mr. Edenfield said, if we could get grocery stores popping up in the rural areas. But it is all business, and they are going to go where they have the largest market. But those convenience stores are there. I know. I grew up in Aynor, South Carolina, and if it weren't for the convenience store, the furthest grocery store was down the road in Conway. And if you wanted to go to a big one, it is up in Florence or down to Myrtle Beach. But there was a convenience store in Aynor that provided our food. So, that is the case throughout.

I am overwhelmed with this hearing, with the amount of information that you all have given.

Zippy, what can I say about you, my friend? You are always there and you bring in such valuable information. And Mr. Eric Hodel with the Midwest Food Bank, your comments and your participation were great.

And so, I come to the end of this hearing, but believe you me, this is the beginning of our work to make sure that we will not have this hunger crisis much longer. I commit this Committee to doing that. Our staff is committed. I just want you all to stay in touch with us, and we will come out with that.

And I might mention also, what we want to do, we wanted to get a series of these hearings in and bring in—and so we would know what to do. The next hearing, as you know, will be on the status of the Black farmers, and we will have that on the 25th. That is 2 weeks away, and then the rural development, as I said, Ranking

Member, you and I said we would work together on rural development, and that hearing is scheduled for right after the Black farmers hearing, so we can get that. And then, for those of you who might know, our staff then goes to work, pulls the subcommittee hearings together with all our subcommittees so we can parcel out the work ahead, and each Member and each subcommittee will have their responsibilities.

So, with that, I turn to my wonderful staff. Is there anything else we need to mention before I close out? We are good, except one thing, to say thank you to our wonderful staff who has done a good job, and you are part of the staff as well. We have two staffs. Congressman Thompson has a staff, I have a staff, and don't they work together well?

Mr. THOMPSON. They did a great job.

The CHAIRMAN. So, let's give them a hand. We see the Chairman and Ranking Member giving them a hand.

Thank you all. It has been wonderful. God bless all of you. Thank you. This meeting is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:10 p.m., the Committee was adjourned.]

[Material submitted for inclusion in the record follows:]

SUBMITTED LETTERS BY HON. DAVID SCOTT, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM
GEORGIA

LETTER 1

ON BEHALF OF DENIZ BESIK, P.H.D., ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF MANAGEMENT, ROBINS
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND

Chairman Scott and Ranking Member Thompson:

I would like to thank you for holding this hearing on food security. I appreciate the opportunity to provide my thoughts on this important issue and potential solutions for the Committee to consider, including through operations research.

My name is Deniz Besik. I am Assistant Professor of Management in the Robins School of Business at the University of Richmond. My research focuses on supply chains in the food industry, and I study perishable food supply chains, focusing on food quality and safety. I am also a proud member of the Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences, which is the world's largest international association for professionals in operations research, management science, data science, and analytics. These important tools are helping many sectors save lives, save money, and solve problems.

Food is essential for sustaining life, and maintaining a healthy diet requires physical and economic access to nutritious, sufficient, and safe food. A food-insecure household cannot provide enough food for every person to maintain a healthy and active lifestyle. In contrast, the word "hunger" is defined as a consequence of food insecurity, referring to feelings of discomfort, sick, and uneasiness due to prolonged and involuntary lack of food, according to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

A year before the declaration of the global COVID-19 pandemic by the World Health Organization in March 2020, the USDA states that 10.5 percent of U.S. households, this is about 13.7 million (one in nine people), experienced food insecurity in 2019. Beyond the short-term impacts of [COVID]-19, in the form of sickness and death, or its possible long-term impact on the wealth of nations, one of the very crucial issues still pending to be addressed is food insecurity in the United States.

According to the Allianz Financial report, in 2020, a year defined by a global pandemic, the United States could rank the wealthiest in terms of its net financial assets in the world. Simultaneously, more than 42 million people (one in eight), including 13 million children (one in six), suffer from food insecurity and hunger in the same year, according to Feeding America. To be able to address the issue of hunger in the United States, the first step is to identify: who is food-insecure, where do they live, and then we can suggest possible solutions.

This past year has helped us to identify weaknesses within our food system or food supply chains. COVID-19 crisis elevated the already existing inequalities regarding healthcare and food insecurity status of vulnerable communities, including low-income people, children, older adults, and immigrants living in the United States. One category of high-risk groups who might suffer from complications of COVID-19 is those who have chronic illnesses such as hypertension, coronary heart disease (CHD), hepatitis, stroke, cancer, and asthma. According to a USDA report, chronic health conditions are associated with a low level of food security status among people living at or below 200 percent of the Federal poverty line (FPL). Additionally, according to a report by the Food Research and Action Center, in 2020, the food insecurity status among Black and Latinx Americans is shown to be disproportionately high, where one in five Black and Latinx adults with children reported that they experience food insecurity.

Another contributing variable towards food insecurity is the issue of "food deserts" in the United States. The USDA defines "food deserts" as the situation where low-income communities lack stores that sell healthy and affordable food. Americans who live in food deserts, or "nutritional wastelands" in urban or rural settings, can't obtain healthy food to maintain a well-nourished diet, resulting in obesity and other diet-related illnesses. According to a USDA statement in 2017, which also includes a location finder for food deserts, about 13.5 million people have low access to healthful food sources. Another report by the USDA in 2015 also shows that 2.1 million households who lived in a food desert also needed a vehicle to access the nearest supermarket.

At present, the food and agricultural industry is one of the largest sectors in the United States, accounting for approximately 20% of its economy, comprised of an estimated 2.1 million farms, 935,000 restaurants, and with more than 200,000 registered food manufacturing, processing, and storage facilities, according to the United States Department of Homeland Security (2019). The Alliance of Food Chain

Workers (2016) report states that there are over 21 million workers employed in the food industry, making up 14% of the United States' workforce. Moreover, the United States' agricultural sector shows steady growth, with consumer spending on food reaching over \$1.6 trillion annually (Plunkett Research (2011)). The food industry dynamics are very complex; the connection between various stakeholders is intertwined, and all the players work towards providing food to the consumer, starting from the farm and ending at the dinner tables of the consumers, while maximizing profits under tight competition. Creating and sustaining the connection between the farm and the consumer is called a food supply chain network.

Food supply chains are very intricate local, regional or global networks, creating pathways from farms to consumers, encompassing production, processing, storage, and distribution. Food or agricultural supply chains are divided into two main types: perishable food supply chains and non-perishable food supply chains. (Besik and Nagurney, (2017), Nagurney, Besik, and Dong (2019)). Perishable foods include fresh produce in fruits and vegetables, dairy, meat, and fish. Fresh produce is seen as one of the most dynamic branches in the food sector, with an annual consumption value of 100 billion products. In the United States, the growth in demand, and the increased expectations of the consumers for year-round availability of fresh produce, has spurred food supply chains to evolve into more sophisticated systems involving overseas production in different countries, including Mexico, Argentina, Chile, and even Canada. Due to seasonality, most of the fresh produce sold in the grocery stores in the northeast of the United States is imported from other countries or grown domestically in a state such as California or Florida (Cook (2002)). It is reported that $\frac{2}{3}$ of the United States' vegetable imports come from Mexico, and most of the remainder arrives from Canada (Cook (2002)). Hence, the interactions between the demand and supply of food are no longer limited to a nation or a region but have grown into a more extensive cross-border operation, including complex relationships and long distances.

There are many challenges related to food supply chain management, such as food quality and safety, or the impacts of trade policies (Nagurney, Besik, and Li (2019)). It is not very straight-forward to conceive a general rule of thumb for managing food supply chains. When a supply chain disruption such as the COVID-19 pandemic hit the United States, every stage and player in the food supply chains, including farms, processors, packers, distributors, retailers, and consumers, had been affected tremendously. When the nation went under partial lock-down in most states, many people suffered from unemployment and started experiencing food insecurity for the first time in their lives. According to Feeding America, nearly 33.5 million people in America filed unemployment. At the same time, the demand at U.S. food banks increased by an average of 70 percent in 2020 from their values in the previous year. More shockingly, 40 percent of food bank demand originates from consumers that have never used food banks before.

While American citizens were filing unemployment and the demand for food banks skyrocketing, grocery stores, representing the endpoints in food supply chains, experienced rises in food prices, especially those in the category under perishable. Demand shocks coupled with disruptions in supply chains affected meat, fish, dairy, and egg prices. COVID-19 outbreaks in certain U.S. meat processing facilities created a meat shortage in many supermarkets and caused the meat import prices to rise 16 percent in May 2020, according to World Economic Forum. Additionally, U.S. consumers experienced a 4.3 percent price increase for meats, poultry, fish, and eggs; whereas they paid 1.5 percent more for fruits and vegetables, with an additional 2.9 percent for cereal and bakery products, contributing to a 2.6 percent overall price increase for groceries at the supermarkets in April 2020 (*Washington Post* (2020)). Furthermore, as restaurants and schools were closed, consumers started to visit grocery stores more, forcing some producers to change their supply chain operations such as processing, packaging, and distribution to adapt to the supermarkets' requirements. As a result of this change in demand markets for producers, some farmers had to either accept lower prices for their produce or destroy their products. The contrast of seeing people forming long lines in front of food banks while farmers were destroying their produce demonstrates how fragile the food systems or food supply chains are.

To gain resiliency in food supply chains and find some solutions to food insecurity and hunger in America, we need to start thinking about all the players in the food system, including the government, through providing food assistance programs such as SNAP. Federal food assistance programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), previously called Food Stamps, provide various benefits in alleviating the food insecurity or hunger levels of households, including the vulnerable communities. People who are registered for SNAP can buy food in all food stores. According to several studies, the SNAP program helped to reduce the level

of food insecurity and hunger in the United States (Gundersen, Kreider, and Pepper (2017), Ratcliffe and McKernan (2010)). SNAP Program is a crucial defense mechanism for fighting against food insecurity and hunger in the United States. However, the research community could explore more on this subject by using operations research tools such as big data analysis combined with statistical tools to highlight the significance of the SNAP program in the United States. Combining information by the Federal and local governments with geographical data for food deserts provided in the USDA website could help operations researchers identify the communities in need and how much the SNAP can help eliminate food insecurity.

Food banks are also another player in our food system, which can contribute to eliminating food insecurity and hunger in the United States. According to Feeding America, food banks across America distribute 4.3 billion meals each year. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many food-insecure households looked for a solution at food banks. While donations to local food banks were skyrocketing, the Farmers to Families Food Box Program was initiated by the government in 2020. As a part of the Farmers to Families Food Box program, USDA purchased \$6 billion worth of fresh produce, dairy, and meat products from producers in the U.S., which were sent to food banks through local and regional distributors, creating a new food supply chain from distributors to food banks. However, given the complexity of food supply chain management, especially in perishable food chains, food banks' operational characteristics could be limited. Few main issues related to food banks originate from a limited number of volunteers, lack of storage space, and possible logistical and quality problems due to the perishability of most fresh produce, dairy, and meat products. Providing efficient food supply chain management by considering the role of food banks as a new player in the game is still waiting to be explored by the research community. Using operations management tools such as mathematical programming and big data, the supply chain management between farms and food banks can be improved to reduce food insecurity and hunger in the U.S.

Although some food assistance programs such as SNAP have a stricter eligibility criterion, including a citizenship requirement, they might have a better chance of delivering food more efficiently to those in need as they rely on supermarkets or retail food stores. Food supply chain operations can be maintained a lot more efficiently when the demand markets are retail stores since supermarkets have trained workers, better logistical operations in terms of distribution, better quality or safety standards, and more experience in conducting operations related to food supply chains.

The importance of small farms and locally grown food will also continue to be important in our food system. The recent supply chain disruption caused by the [COVID]-19 pandemic showed us that relying solely on a centralized food supply chain could have dire consequences in terms of food shortages and price increases, resulting in an additional increase in the food insecurity levels of many households. More incentives for additional support for operational challenges could help small farms sell their products at various demand markets. Small farms usually experience logistical issues caused by the bottlenecks in their distribution and processing operations, which hinder their presence at supermarkets, retail outlets, and also farmers' markets. Operations research and operations management tools such as bottleneck analysis, capacity planning, or other devices, including optimization methods for minimizing a costly distribution, can help farmers to overcome the bottlenecks and logistical difficulties in their supply chains. Enhancing the availability of locally grown food with reasonable prices can create a more decentralized food supply chain, which could help the economy hedge against future food supply chain disruptions. Additionally, e-commerce is an excellent platform for farms selling their products; hence more opportunities can be provided for them to switch to e-commerce.

Another crucial problem in our food system is the amount of food that is going to waste, while many households suffer from hunger and insecurity. USDA estimates the food waste in the United States as somewhere between 30-40 percent at the retail and consumer levels, approximately 133 billion pounds in volume and \$161 billion worth of dollars. Some of the tools that could help reduce food waste could be Big Data, the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence, or smartphone Apps to help connect supply and demand points in food supply chains. By using networks of retail stores, large farms, packers, processors, or food banks can be used to match those who are food-insecure. Such technological advancements could help to utilize resources along food supply chains in an optimal amount, which could help alleviate food waste and food insecurity in America.

Apart from the points above, outreach programs should be conducted to make food-insecure households informed about the benefits of food assistance programs such as SNAP.

Again, I appreciate the Committee's attention to identifying policies that can help reduce food insecurity in this country. I am always available to further discuss these issues, especially as they relate to securing our supply chains and leveraging operations research tools.

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LETTER 2

ON BEHALF OF BIOTECHNOLOGY INNOVATION ORGANIZATION

March 11, 2021

Hon. DAVID SCOTT,
Chairman,
House Committee on Agriculture,
Washington, D.C.;

Hon. GLENN THOMPSON,
Ranking Minority Member,
House Committee on Agriculture,
Washington, D.C.

Dear Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Thompson, and Members of the Committee:

The Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO) is pleased to submit a statement for the record to the United States House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture hearing entitled, “A Look at Food Insecurity in America.”

Introduction

BIO¹ represents 1,000 members in a biotech ecosystem with a central mission—to advance public policy that supports a wide range of companies and academic research centers that are working to apply biology and technology in the energy, agriculture, manufacturing, and health sectors to improve the lives of people and the health of the planet. BIO is committed to speaking up for the millions of families around the globe who depend upon our success. We will drive a revolution that aims to cure patients, protect our climate, and nourish humanity.

Existing Challenges of Food Insecurity

The Committee's hearing examining food insecurity comes at a critical time. As we are all too aware, 1 year into dealing with the pandemic, COVID–19 has also exposed the vulnerabilities and inequalities in how communities are disproportionately impacted, our capacity to respond to crisis, our ability to maintain our supply chains, and to withstand an economic downturn.

Unfortunately, the challenges of hunger and food insecurity predate COVID–19. According to Feeding America,² before the coronavirus pandemic, more than 35 mil-

† **Editor's note:** items annotated with (†) are retained in Committee file.

¹<https://www.bio.org/>.

²<https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/facts>.

lion people struggled with hunger in the United States, including more than ten million children. The coronavirus pandemic has left millions of families without stable employment. As result, more than 42 million people, including 13 million children, may experience food insecurity.

According to the United Nation's (UN) nearly 690 million people are hungry, or 8.9 percent of the world population—up by ten million people in 1 year and by nearly 60 million in 5 years.³ As a result, the world is not on track to achieve the UN's goal of Zero Hunger by 2030 and profound changes are needed to nourish not just the 690 million hungry people today, but the two billion additional people the world will have by 2050.⁴

Using Innovation to Tackle Hunger

As part of BIO's BIOEquality Agenda,⁵ fostering enhanced nutritional opportunities is critical to promoting health equity. By broadening access to biotech advances that improve nutritional wellness, we can enhance overall community health.

Developing and deploying new innovations in crop and animal production will be critical to feeding a growing world. As highlighted by the United Nations, biotechnology can contribute to combating global hunger and malnutrition. Approximately 140 million children in low-income groups are deficient in Vitamin A. This situation has compounded into a public health challenge. The World Health Organization reports that an estimated 250,000 to 500,000 Vitamin A-deficient children become blind every year, half of them dying within 12 months of losing their sight. Golden Rice, a crop produced using the tools of biotechnology, contains three new genes that helps it to produce provitamin A.^{6*} Because of these benefits, 150 Nobel Laureates and 13,270 scientists and citizens wrote in support of crops and foods improved through biotechnology.⁷

Gene editing can fast track genetic improvements in plants and animals to keep pace with a growing population⁸ and enable growers to produce higher yields with lower fertilizer, water, and nitrogen inputs.⁹ This technology can help us create more resilient crops able to withstand more variable weather events due to climate change by increasing plant tolerance to heat, floods, salinity, droughts and extreme cold.

Gene editing can also boost the nutrient levels of fruits and vegetables. Increasing the vitamin and mineral contents of plants, particularly staple crops, such as, potatoes, corn, soybeans, and wheat can address hunger issues globally and, in the U.S., where large portions of the population do not meet their nutrient requirements.¹⁰

Incentivizing the utilization of biotech in specialty crops can also help address the lack of fresh fruits and vegetables in food deserts in urban and rural communities. Consumers are already enjoying non-browning features in apples and potatoes. Extending the shelf life of produce can increase the availability of fruits and vegetables.

Additionally, it will cut down on food waste. According to USDA, in 2018 Americans threw away roughly 150,000 tons of food each day with fruits and vegetable accounting for 40 percent of that total.¹¹ Globally, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)¹² estimates that worldwide, the amount of food wasted is enough to feed two billion people—more than double the number of people struggling with hunger.

Demand for protein, particularly in developing countries, will dramatically rise with a growing population and middle class. The OCED and FAO predicts meat consumption will grow 12 percent in the coming decade.¹³ While traditional breeding has led to increased production, precision breeding of animals to produce more meat or milk will be critical to sustainably meet this demand by making similar improvements in a fraction of the time.

³<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/hunger/>.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵<https://www.bio.org/bioequality-agenda>.

⁶<https://unchronicle.un.org/article/biotechnology-solution-hunger>.†

* **Editor's note:** items annotated with (†) are retained in Committee file.

⁷https://www.supportprecisionagriculture.org/nobel-laureate-gmo-letter_rjr.html.†

⁸<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/17/science/food-agriculture-genetics.html>.†

⁹<https://innovature.com/article/dr-kasia-glowacka-plants-may-thrive-less-water>.†

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¹³<https://www.meatpoultry.com/articles/4395-global-meat-consumption-to-rise-73-percent-by-2050-fao>.†

As an example, the first bioengineered food animal approved to date, the AquAdvantage salmon, is a fish that can grow large and healthy with fewer resources, near population centers. Faster growth to harvest weight will increase access to affordable and nutritious protein.

Using microbials and synthetic biology, we can boost nature's ability to grow more food on less land and create food ingredients. Through synthetic biology we can make vanillin that is molecularly identical to the bean.¹⁴ Separately, using synthetic biology to edit brewer's yeast to produce hemoglobin is key to the development of new alternative proteins.¹⁵

Conclusion

Innovation can be a solution to food insecurity. However, we must incentivize and invest in the research and development of these technologies and practices and streamline and expedite regulatory pathways for breakthrough technology solutions.

BIO is committed to working with the Committee and Congress to address food insecurity. We urge you to support policy that advances pioneering technology breakthroughs. With science we can ensure everyone has access to affordable healthy fare and achieve universal nutrition[.]

SUBMITTED STATEMENT BY HON. DAVID SCOTT, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM GEORGIA; ON BEHALF OF BARBARA P. GLENN, PH.D. CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE

On Behalf of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA), we appreciate the opportunity to submit this statement outlining the priorities of state departments of agriculture on policies related to food insecurity in America. We request that this statement be included in the record of the upcoming, March 11th hearing of the Committee on Agriculture focusing on "A Look at Food Insecurity in America".

NASDA represents the commissioners, secretaries, and directors of the state departments of agriculture in all 50 states and four U.S. territories. State departments of agriculture are responsible for a wide range of programs including food safety, combating the spread of disease, and fostering the economic vitality of our rural communities.

On March 8th, NASDA sent a letter to USDA supporting the continuation of the Farmers to Family Food Box Program as well as recommending ways to improve its effectiveness. NASDA proposed the following enhancements to USDA:

- Increase the variety of meat products by removing the current restriction that limits products to only pre-cooked meats.
- Provide vendors an additional 2 to 3 weeks between the awarding of the contract and the start of the performance period.
- Consider the adverse impact on smaller farms and distributors when contracts are awarded to vendors solely on having a lower price.
- Remove county restrictions within awarded states which create significant difficulty for both vendors and distributors.
- Give preference to vendors who previously participated in the program in the bidding review process based on contract performance.
- Provide vendors greater flexibility in curating food boxes to allow for the selection of items based on local preference and local availability.
- Increase the participation of socially disadvantaged and BIPOC farmers and vendors.

These recommendations will encourage and increase participation of local farmers and vendors as well as ensure USDA can make a greater difference in the local communities who need it most.

Additionally, NASDA recently published a Food Security Toolkit (see attached) to increase awareness and improve coordination around hunger solutions. The Food Security Toolkit concludes that when state departments of agriculture partner with other entities, state residents become more food-secure and farmers, ranchers and food producers within the state benefit from wider market-access. NASDA surveyed state departments of agriculture and found that successful state food security pro-

¹⁴<https://wholefoodsmagazine.com/columns/debates/synthetic-biology-key-to-a-healthier-plan-or-threat-to-organic/>.[†]

¹⁵https://www.bio.org/blogs/synthetic-biology-sustain-agriculture-and-transform-food-system.[†]

grams involve partnerships. The partnerships that reported the most success include engaging in Public-Private Partnerships, Food Policy Councils and Federal grant programs.

Examples of programs and partnerships include:

- The Kentucky Department of Agriculture's Kentucky Hunger Initiative, for example, brings together farmers, charitable organizations, faith groups, community leaders, and government entities to begin a dialogue to help reduce hunger. The effort, which started as a task force in 2016, has since reformed the state's food donor immunity law and raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for hunger relief.
- Tennessee Department of Agriculture's partnership with Cul2vate, a faith-based farm worker training and hunger relief program, produces and donates thousands of pounds of produce each year for food-insecure people.
- New Mexico Department of Agriculture's SNAP-Ed Double Up Food Bucks program provides families and seniors with additional funds to purchase food from local farmers. This program benefits local economies while bringing fresh foods into homes.
- Oregon's Department of Agriculture partnered with the Oregon Farmers Market Association to create an online portal where people could place an order online and do curbside pick-up at farmers' markets across Oregon. This online portal resulted in an additional \$390,000 sales at 30 farmers markets across the state.

Another area that has been a point of focus for NASDA members is food waste. NASDA members unanimously passed an action item recently at our annual Winter Policy Conference requesting the inter-agency agreement between USDA/EPA/FDA regarding food waste be extended to 2030, consistent with the national goal commitment results. Even further, NASDA supports additional efforts to improve coordination and communication amongst Federal, state and municipal stakeholders to use resources more efficiently and effectively to address food waste.

Last, the [COVID]-19 pandemic has underscored the essential work performed by meat and poultry processing plants of all sizes. Many smaller processing plants saw an increase in demand for services due to pandemic-related supply chain disruptions. These processing plants stepped up to reduce processing backlogs and help support their local food supply. Limit in terms of facility size and processing capacity, these small plants need equipment upgrades and workforce enhancements in order to keep pace with increased demand. NASDA urges Congress to expand meat establishment modernization grants to any small meat establishment operating under state or Federal inspection. Regardless of the destination of the meat and poultry products made by an establishment, *i.e.*, intra- or interstate, modernization of an establishment will add resiliency to the food supply chain, thereby protecting consumers from price shocks, avoiding distress to producers caused by unexpected herd culling, reduce local food insecurity, and bolster local economies.

NASDA stands ready to assist this Committee in any way possible as it carves a path forward on this important policy issue.

Please contact Zachary Gihorski ([Redacted]) if you have any questions or would like any additional information.

NASDA Food Security Toolkit

A Resource for State Commissioners, Secretaries and Directors of Agriculture



Foreword



“As the leaders of the state agriculture departments, NASDA members are constantly searching for innovative ways to advance agriculture in our states and reduce hunger across the nation. NASDA is well positioned to take on food insecurity due to NASDA members’ position to influence policy, their closeness to America’s farmers and ranchers, their ability to connect all facets of the food supply chain and duty to serve their states.

“For more than 100 years, NASDA members have understood that partnerships are an important tool for improving food security, but this project aims to take a closer look at exactly what partnerships are the most effective and identify resources and ideas to share amongst fellow commissioners, secretaries and directors of agriculture.

“The NASDA Food Security Toolkit highlights what our members are already doing to reduce hunger and offers examples for how we can learn from each other to ensure every American has access to fresh and nutritious food. It is unacceptable that one in nine Americans are considered to be food-insecure. Sharing best practices will help us achieve a more food secure nation.”

Dr. RYAN QUARLES,
NASDA President & Kentucky Commissioner of Agriculture.

Introduction

U.S. farmers, ranchers and producers have reached production heights only dreamed of by earlier generations; however, today *one in nine people struggle with hunger*¹ in the United States. While American farmers produce an abundance of nutritious food, the fact that people remain food-insecure demonstrates that more partnerships and connections must be built into our food systems to ensure everyone is well fed.

This toolkit illustrates successful state department of agriculture-led food security partnerships that can be replicated or modified to work in other states looking to build on current programs or initiate new ones.

¹<https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/food-insecurity>.

Defining the Terms

Through NASDA's data collection process and the final toolkit, the terms "food security," "food insecurity," and "food desert" are used. NASDA uses the U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service's definition of these terms:

*Food Security:*² Food security means access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.

*Food Insecurity:*³ Food insecurity is the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.

*Food Desert:*⁴ Areas with limited access to supermarkets, supercenters, grocery stores, or other sources of healthy and affordable food.

This toolkit illustrates that when state departments of agriculture partner with other entities, state residents become more food-secure and farmers, ranchers and food producers benefit from wider market access. The toolkit analyzes state agriculture departments' existing food security programs and partnerships and offers states resources needed to create programs that eliminate food insecurity in the United States. It also highlights food security initiatives prior to COVID-19 and initiatives that emerged because of the pandemic. Survey data was collected through 2020, and therefore, some programs described represent food security initiatives created in response to the pandemic. NASDA intends for this toolkit to increase dialogue amongst state agriculture department leaders on the most effective methods to form partnerships and create programs to eliminate food insecurity across the United States.

Acknowledgements

Inspired by NASDA members' unique ability to form partnerships across the food supply chain and influence food and agriculture policy, this project was led by NASDA President Dr. Ryan Quarles. NASDA would like to thank the NASDA Foundation for their contributions to the NASDA Food Insecurity Survey and the NASDA members and state department of agriculture staff who took time to participate in building this toolkit.

Partnerships—Who State Departments of Agriculture Are Working With

NASDA's survey of state departments of agriculture found that successful state food security programs involve partnerships. Of the forms that partnerships can take, state departments of agriculture reported success from engaging in Public-Private Partnerships, Food Policy Councils and Federal Grant Programs.

Public-Private Partnerships

Public-Private Partnerships allow state and private groups to multiply efforts and resources to reach people experiencing food insecurity. As defined by *World Bank*,⁵ Public-Private Partnerships are a contract between a private party and a government entity for providing a public asset or service. In this toolkit, state departments of agriculture serve as the government entity in the public-private partnerships, community food and other businesses serve as the private party, and the public asset provided as the result of the partnership is greater food security.

Food Policy Councils

*Food Policy Councils*⁶ are committees of community leaders who evaluate and address food system issues through policy-based solutions. Stakeholders vary in their background and knowledge of the food system, but most groups include leaders from agriculture, health, environment and economic development sectors. Food Policy Councils can provide an organized approach to assessing, developing and implementing a path to eliminate food insecurity in states and localities.

² <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/>.

³ <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/measurements.aspx#insecurity>.

⁴ <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/documentation/#definitions>.

⁵ [https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/publicprivatepartnerships/overview#:~:text=Public%2Dprivate%20partnerships%20\(PPPs\)%20can%20be%20a%20tool%20to,infrastucture%20services%20to%20more%20people.&text=The%20World%20Bank%20Group%20is,PPPs%20as%20one%20delivery%20option..](https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/publicprivatepartnerships/overview#:~:text=Public%2Dprivate%20partnerships%20(PPPs)%20can%20be%20a%20tool%20to,infrastucture%20services%20to%20more%20people.&text=The%20World%20Bank%20Group%20is,PPPs%20as%20one%20delivery%20option..)

⁶ <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/toolkits/food-access/2/food-systems-models/food-policy-councils#:~:text=Food policy council is one,established by non-governmental agencies.>

Federal Grant Programs

Federal grant programs make funding available for states to implement programs that accomplish shared goals between Federal agencies and state agencies. Throughout this toolkit, state departments of agriculture partner with Federal agencies such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture.



Successful State-Led Programs Designed To Increase Food Security

Every state faces its own unique circumstances around food insecurity. Below are programs that state departments of agriculture have enacted, that have proven to be successful and can be replicated or modified to work in other states.

Public-Private Partnerships

NASDA Finding: State departments of agriculture can benefit from public and private partnerships around food security and make a larger impact than they would operating alone. Tapping into supply chains, retailers, wholesalers and producers allows a larger reach for states to provide nutritious food to people who experience food insecurity. Through feedback from state departments of agriculture, NASDA found that developing policies within public-private partnerships is a vital component of their success.

Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

The *Virginia Food Access Investment Fund Program*⁷ uses the *Equitable Food Oriented*⁸ Distribution model to support food access and equity projects by investing in new or expanding food retailers that address food access issues in the Commonwealth. The program uses a rubric to determine project eligibility that could easily be used in other states.

Hawaii Department of Agriculture

Hawaii's *Aloha + Challenge*⁹ has a goal of doubling local food production in their state by the year 2030 to help combat hunger.

Idaho State Department of Agriculture

Idaho's *Community Donation Gardening Program*¹⁰ donates produce to local food banks and assists with food aid programs to help find locally sourced food.

Arkansas Department of Agriculture

The *Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance*¹¹ started a gleaning program more than 10 years ago that has been used as a model for other states. The alliance uses volunteers for gleaning events across the state and works closely with the Arkansas Department of Corrections for the use of inmate labor at some sites.

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Florida's *Food Recovery Program*¹² works with farmers to collect surplus produce through gleaning and provides schools with guidance on food waste audits, share tables, food donations and composting.

⁷ <http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/marketing-food-access-investment-fund.shtml>.

⁸ <https://www.mandelapartners.org/efod>.

⁹ <https://alohachallenge.hawaii.gov/pages/local-food-production-and-consumption>.

¹⁰ <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/ffed/community-donation-gardening-toolkit/>.

¹¹ <https://www.arhungeralliance.org/programs/arkansas-gleaning-project/>.

¹² <https://www.fdacs.gov/Food-Nutrition/Nutrition-Programs/Food-Recovery-Program>.

Kentucky Department of Agriculture

Kentucky's *Farms to Food Banks*¹³ partnership has been successful since 2011 providing over *18.5 million*¹⁴ pounds of produce to needy families. The program encourages farmers to glean produce that is still good to eat but cannot be sold. Kentucky farmers who participate in Farms to Food Banks receive a state tax credit.

NASDA Finding: Thirty percent of state departments of agriculture hold public-private partnerships with food banks and other private community groups.

Tennessee Department of Agriculture

Tennessee has found success by partnering with *Cul2vate*,¹⁵ a faith-based farm worker training and hunger relief program. Located in Nashville, Tennessee, the nonprofit produces and donates thousands of pounds of produce each year to local hunger relief programs and serves as a demonstration farm.

California Department of Food and Agriculture

California partners with the *California Association of Food Banks*¹⁶ that delivers 160 million pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables to food banks around the state. Farmers who donate surplus to the food banks are eligible for a 15 percent state tax credit. The program provides a small fee for the "pick and packers."

Connecticut Department of Agriculture

Connecticut works with The Salvation Army to provide nonperishable food boxes at COVID-19 testing sites. Partners include the National Guard, Emergency Management Regional Coordinators, colleagues and universities and private businesses.

Delaware Department of Agriculture

Delaware's *First Chance Delaware*¹⁷ encourages public, private, nonprofit, philanthropic, business entities and community partnerships that work to end childhood hunger and expand access to nutritious food for low-income children.

New York Department of Agriculture and Markets

*Nourish New York*¹⁸ is a response to the needs created by the pandemic and connects farms with the emergency food system. \$35 million has been allocated to ten major food banks in New York to purchase directly from New York farms.



Tennessee Commissioner of Agriculture Charlie Hatcher D.V.M. and Tennessee First Lady Maria Lee harvest produce for the Cul2vate program (June 2020).

NASDA Finding: Livestock and wild game programs are a successful option for providing families with nutritious protein. Partnerships with youth organiza-

¹³ <https://feedingky.org/farms-to-food-banks/>.

¹⁴ <https://www.nkytribune.com/2019/08/ryan-quarles-farms-to-food-banks-reduces-hunger-in-kentucky-and-helps-farmers-too/>.

¹⁵ <https://www.cul2vate.org/>.

¹⁶ <https://www.cafoodbanks.org/farm-to-family-donor/>.

¹⁷ <https://governor.delaware.gov/first-chance-delaware/>.

¹⁸ <https://agriculture.ny.gov/NourishNY>.

tions such as *The National FFA Organization* and *4-H* can contribute significantly to these types of programs.

West Virginia Department of Agriculture

West Virginia established *Hunters Helping the Hungry*¹⁹ over 30 years ago with the assistance of two area food banks that have provided 1,026,593 pounds of venison to families in need.

Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship

Iowa has launched four programs that connect the food supply chain with food-insecure Iowans:

- *Pass the Pork*²⁰ farmers donate pigs for processing and the meat is given to families in need.
- *Beef Up Iowa*²¹ beef is donated to Iowa State University meat processing lab mostly by 4-H and FFA members. The CARES Act funds cover the costs associated with these donations from youth organizations.
- *Turkey to Table*²² Iowa producers, markets, food pantries and other private organizations partner together to provide turkey to needy families. CARES funds are available to help cover these costs.
- *Pack the Pantry*²³ is a grant program supported by CARES funding that allows food pantries to apply for funds to purchase cooling units to be able to refrigerate more fresh foods for hungry families.



Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig and *Pass the Pork* partner organization staff fill a truck destined for local food banks with pork donated and processed by Iowa farmers and producers.

Food Policy Councils

NASDA Findings:

- Two-thirds of NASDA members have developed policy through Food Policy Councils to reduce food waste and increase food security in their states.
- 30% of states have adopted programs that encourage producers to donate surplus or blemished items to local food banks.
- 7% of states have programs that give grocery stores and wholesale retailers' certain liability protections from lawsuits when donating food.

West Virginia Department of Agriculture

West Virginia worked with partners to raise awareness about legislative opportunities to fight food insecurity. The success of these partnerships led to additional state funding.

¹⁹ <https://www.wvdnr.gov/Hunting/HHH.shtm>.

²⁰ <https://donorbox.org/passthepork>.

²¹ <https://donorbox.org/beefupiowa>.

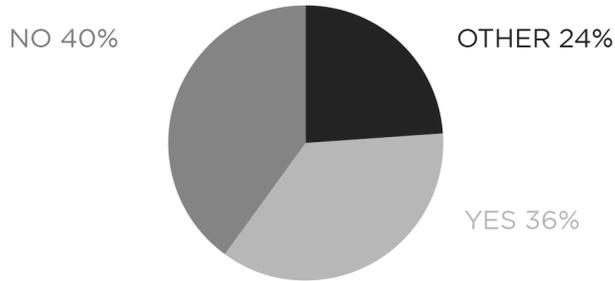
²² <https://iowaagriculture.gov/news/cares-act-turkey-purchases-delivered-to-ne-iowa-food-bank#:~:text=The Turkey to Table program,the Iowa Food Bank Association..>

²³ <https://iowaagriculture.gov/news/pack-the-pantry>.

Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry
 Oklahoma has created *grants for grocery stores*²⁴ in food deserts.

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
 Florida passed the *Ms. Willie Ann Glenn Act*²⁵ that requires each school district to develop a plan to sponsor or operate a summer nutrition program.

Nationwide Percentage of State Departments of Revenue that Provide Tax Incentives for Farmers Who Donate to Charitable Organizations



Oregon Department of Agriculture
 The *Oregon Hunger Response Fund*,²⁶ covers approximately five percent of regional food banks' expenses for capacity and infrastructure, such as warehousing, cold storage, transportation, and some programmatic costs. Some funds are distributed evenly, and some are distributed based on a formula that includes unemployment rate and those in poverty level. Some funds are set aside for Oregon Farm Bureau to procure food—such as “pick and pack out” and funds to repackage those foods for distribution.



Federal Grant Programs
 NASDA Finding: As co-regulators with the Federal Government, NASDA members work in close state-Federal partnerships on a range of programs. For food security programs, flexibility to use Federal resources to meet the needs food-insecure people has been a key to success.

Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
 Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System²⁷ program makes connections between production agriculture and the nonprofit sector responsible for distributing nutritious food to Pennsylvanians at risk of hunger. PASS allows Pennsylvania's agricultural industry to donate safe food products while being reimbursed for the costs involved in harvesting, processing, packaging and transporting these foods. Since the program's start in 2016, more than 18 million pounds of Pennsylvania-produced product have been distributed to those in need of food assistance.

²⁴ <https://stateimpact.npr.org/oklahoma/2017/04/20/legislature-approves-measure-to-lure-healthier-grocery-options-to-fill-oklahoma-food-deserts/>.
²⁵ http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=0500-0599/0595/Sections/0595.407.html.
²⁶ https://oregon.public.law/rules/oar_461-192-0000.
²⁷ https://www.agriculture.pa.gov/Food/food_assistance/Pages/Pennsylvania-Agricultural-Surplus-Program.aspx.

New Mexico Department of Agriculture

New Mexico and Maryland participate in *SNAP-Ed programs*²⁸ which provide additional funds to families and senior food assistance benefits so food from local farmers' markets can be purchased. This program benefits local economies while bringing fresh foods into homes.

Missouri Department of Agriculture

Missouri participates in the *Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program*²⁹ funded by USDA. The program creates an additional resource for seniors, and the benefit doesn't affect any SNAP or medical assistance they may receive.

Nevada Department of Agriculture

Nevada's *Breakfast After the Bell*³⁰ requires all Nevada schools with 70 percent or greater free/reduced lunch eligibility to implement an option for students to have access to breakfast after the start of the school day. After the funding was completed for program implementation, Nevada saw a greater increase in USDA School Breakfast enrollment.

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

Wisconsin's *Food Security Initiative*³¹ (funded by the Federal Coronavirus Relief Fund) was incredibly successful. It provided \$5 million in funds to help the food insecurity network adapt to the increased demand during COVID-19 through infrastructure investments and \$20 million for the purchase of food with an emphasis on Wisconsin products.



Photos from local farmers['] markets participating in New Mexico's *SNAP-Ed Double Up Food Bucks program*.³²

Resources

NASDA recommends utilizing the following organizations and tools based on responses in the food security survey from NASDA members.

*Hunger Relief Organizations*³³

*The Food and Nutrition Service Programs*³⁴

*Food First & Community Food Security Coalition Report, "Food Policy Councils: Lessons Learned"*³⁵

*USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture Hunger Food & Security Programs*³⁶

²⁸ <https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/nutrition-education/nutrition-education-materials/farmers-markets>.

²⁹ <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sfmnp/senior-farmers-market-nutrition-program>.

³⁰ https://agri.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/agri.nv.gov/Content/Resources/Data_and_Reports/Food_and_Nutrition/School_Nutrition/Remediated%20SB503_2020report_r1.pdf.

³¹ https://datep.wi.gov/Pages/News_Media/Covid19FoodSecurityInitiative.aspx.

³² <https://www.doubleupnm.org/>.

³³ <https://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/hunger-relief-organizations>.

³⁴ <https://www.fns.usda.gov/programs>.

³⁵ <https://foodfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/DR21-Food-Policy-Councils-Lessons-Learned-.pdf>.

³⁶ <https://nifa.usda.gov/program/hunger-food-security-programs>.

*The Food Industry Association: Tips From Grocery Store, Manufactures & Other Partners*³⁷

Conclusion

NASDA survey data concludes that when state departments of agriculture partner with other entities, state residents become more food-secure and farmers, ranchers and food producers within the state benefit from wider market-access.

“NASDA members understand that no one group, state or organization can take on the issue of food insecurity alone and succeed. Pursuing partnerships extends our reach, reveals new perspectives, multiplies our impact and inspires others to engage and take action.”



Dr. BARB GLENN,
NASDA CEO.

NASDA is a nonpartisan, nonprofit association which represents the elected and appointed commissioners, secretaries and directors of the departments of agriculture in all fifty states and four U.S. territories. NASDA grows and enhances American agriculture through policy, partnerships and public engagement. Learn more about NASDA at www.nasda.org.

SUBMITTED STATEMENT BY HON. JIMMY PANETTA, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM CALIFORNIA; ON BEHALF OF ROBERT GUENTHER, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, PUBLIC POLICY, UNITED FRESH PRODUCE ASSOCIATION

March 16, 2021

Hon. DAVID SCOTT,
Chairman,
House Committee on Agriculture,
Washington, D.C.;

Hon. GLENN THOMPSON,
Ranking Minority Member,
House Committee on Agriculture,
Washington, D.C.

Dear Chairman Scott and Ranking Member Thompson:

United Fresh members fully support the House Agriculture Committee’s efforts to bring attention to the millions of Americans who are still struggling to make ends meet and who are relying on America’s important safety net programs to put nutritious food on the table. That is why we would like to respond and submit this letter for the Congressional hearing record from your March 11, 2021 hearing titled “A Look at Food Insecurity in America.” In particular, United Fresh would like to share our views on an important program discussed during the hearing the Farm to Families Food Box Program.

Over the last year, United Fresh members from across the country have participated in the Farmers to Families Food Box Program over the last year. Because of the success and strong support of this program we convened a 100-member working group of growers, distributors, and recipient nonprofit agencies during the past 3 months. The group will be issuing a report with recommendations shortly, but we would like to take this opportunity to highlight several key points:

- (1) A family food box program is an effective way to absorb perishable, “surplus” fruits and vegetables and provide healthy food to high-need families.
- (2) Pivoting from delivering to institutions and restaurants to packing boxes for distribution to households maintained and created jobs in the fresh food supply chain and protected these workers from joining the millions of unemployed and perhaps needing food boxes themselves.
- (3) When AMS provided more contracts in each geographic area distributors were able to quickly make direct connections with nonprofit partners, reducing the amount of time it took to get healthy, fresh food to families.
- (4) We know that diet-related health conditions are a prime risk factor for complications from [COVID]-19. This makes it more incumbent on policymakers to ensure that the emergency food we provide will build health. Boxes that

³⁷ <https://www.fmi.org/family-meals-movement/make-meals-happen/view/nfmm-news-page/2020/04/17/grocery-store-manufacturer-other-partners-our-friends-joined-in-with-their-best-resources-to-make-staying-at-home-a-little-easier>.

only contain produce and that offer a variety of colors and some ready-to-eat fruits and vegetables concentrate the nutritional benefit to households.

We look forward to the end of this health emergency but in the meantime, United Fresh's members are doing all they can to continue to provide markets to U.S. fresh produce growers and nutritious food to our neighbors.

Sincerely,



ROBERT GUENTHER,
Senior Vice President, Public Policy.

CC: House Agriculture Committee Members.

STATEMENT SUBMITTED BY HON. GLENN THOMPSON, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM PENNSYLVANIA; ON BEHALF OF DAVE DONALDSON, CO-FOUNDER, CHAIRMAN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, CITYSERVE, INTERNATIONAL; FACILITATOR, FAITH-BASED COLLABORATION FOR F2F*

Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Thompson, and Members of the full Committee, CityServe offers the following comments on U.S. nutrition programs and the role that faith-based organizations provide in the execution of Federal social programs.

Background

CityServe International is a [501(c)(3)] tax-exempt faith-based organization that provides logistical and structural guidance to churches that feel ill equipped to fully reach and meet the needs of their local communities. Local needs and community initiatives include addressing hunger as well as meeting the needs of the poor and disaffected, the addicted, and the exploited. Through capacity and partnership building, CityServe assists in empowering churches to make greater community engagement and impact across the world. CityServe's collaborative network includes faith-based nonprofits, corporations, retail stores, farmers and ranchers among other food supply partnerships.

Since 2016, CityServe has built relationships with interconnections to service the multiple needs of communities across the globe. Through these relationships CityServe has mobilized churches and leveraged their influence and resources. From this a supply chain network of "HUB's" were established that channel these resources. These HUBs include warehouses for household goods, furniture, toys, and food to local churches serving their communities. Local churches are the primary Point of Distribution (POD). Each POD has committed to be actively involved with their neighborhoods and community through compassion and evangelism. In 2020, CityServe and its regional affiliates distributed over \$400 million of in-kind gifts through PODs to needy families across America.

Hunger Relief Programs

Specific to nutrition assistance, CityServe recognizes that 41 million Americans face hunger every day and that food insecurity affects all genders, ethnicities, ages and backgrounds. Through-out our network we have established over 2,000 distribution sites that have been trained in proper food management, distribution, and means testing while following CDC's [COVID]-19 social distancing guidelines.

In addition, the food box program has been catalytic in discovering other needs of families that CityServe is able to tangibly meet by providing beds, diapers, school supplies, and home furnishings among other items. By cultivating the trust of under-resourced families, CityServe has successfully linked them to both public and private programs geared towards helping them move from dependency to sustainability.

Aggressive incorporation of our nonprofit model within the current body of food assistance programs would allow us to reach an additional 20 million people annually and help pull Americans out of poverty and deal with the conditions that contribute to food insecurity.

Pandemic Response

For more than 9 months CityServe and its 2,000+ affiliated organizations have worked to ensure the neediest among us have the opportunity to receive food due to no fault of their own. As we are well aware, [SARS]-CoV-2, also known as the

* **Editor's note:** F2F stands for Farmers to Families Food Box Program.

novel coronavirus (COVID-19), continues to have significant and persistent economic disruptive effects on urban and rural communities across America. In response, USDA implemented the Farmers to Families Food Box Program (F2F) to purchase and distribute agricultural products to those in need. The program, while not perfect in its first iteration, would come to be transformative in not just reaching those acutely affected by recent joblessness, but also the long-term unemployed who have given up on both employment opportunities and traditional government social support systems.

In an effort to bolster the program, CityServe shifted its focus towards incremental improvements for F2F and even coined “Last Mile” to describe its mission to assist the hardest to reach regions in the nation. USDA’s subsequent changes to the program in Rounds Two and Three enabled CityServe, among many other non-profit and faith-based organizations, to efficiently maximize the reach of the box program. USDA incorporated this last mile delivery concept, and now defines Last Mile organizations within the structure of the program. To date, CityServe and its affiliates have assisted in the delivery of 14 million boxes to urban, rural, Tribal Nations and to the Rio Grande Valley. In addition, CityServe has formed enduring relationships with over 30,000 families and individuals who were given a food box but now have also found new purpose and commitments within their communities.

The majority of last mile food box distribution work has been funded through direct donations and targeted fundraising. With the successful execution of last mile deliveries, however, some USDA contractors voluntarily contributed to CityServe in the early rounds of F2F. These monies offset the costs of the last mile deliveries such as personal protective equipment, refrigeration, storage and transportation costs. In later rounds, F2F last mile groups were merged into the USDA solicitation process. Once solicitations were awarded by USDA, CityServe and other last mile organizations could commit resources in advance of distributions, reaching even farther into America’s food-insecure populations.

Despite the good which the F2F program has performed, Round Five has presented new challenges for which CityServe requests the Committee assist USDA in addressing. In the design of Rounds Four and Five, many vendors structured their business to rely on last mile organizations and food banks to ensure the delivery of boxes across the nation to those truly in need. Based on this reliance, CityServe and its last mile partners have made significant investments for last mile deliveries based on financial assurances from USDA vendors who were awarded a contract. Unfortunately, many of these agreements have not been honored or they have been canceled because the contractors claim their margins are too thin. The goodwill and community expectation has pressured faith-based organizations to continue deliveries to locations serviced in previous rounds forcing nonprofits to assume the complete costs of last mile deliveries. The parameters of the programs for the latter rounds forced contractors to cut the delivery cost from their calculation in order to provide the government with a low-price bid. This activity was observed in Round Four but has dramatically increased in Round Five.

The solution to this problem for future iterations of the program is to remove the low-price program mandate and restore the value proposition that was included in previous rounds. This coupled with a separate and verifiable administrative funding payment for last mile nonprofit organizations would cure the current programmatic malfunctions. For the program’s current operation (F2F—Round Five), Congress should direct USDA to operationalize the authority given to it under Section 751 of the COVID Stimulus Package, included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021. Specifically, Congress provided:

*“Provided further, that from the amounts provided in this section, the Secretary of Agriculture shall use not less than \$1,500,000,000 to purchase food and agricultural products, including seafood, to purchase **and distribute agricultural products** (including fresh produce, dairy, and meat products) to individuals in need, **including through delivery to nonprofit organizations** that can receive, store, and distribute food items . . .”*

CityServe recommends USDA provide \$2 per box through this existing authority for all deliveries. This would continue to bolster the distribution of boxes to vulnerable seniors, shut-ins and at-risk children not receiving proper nutrition. This action could be performed at the conclusion of Round Five of F2F and would assist in covering PPE costs, the cost of trucks, coolers, forklifts, lift gates, *etc.*, all of which is already being performed. The cost of the policy starting from January 19 through April 30 would be a maximum of approximately \$60 million or roughly four percent of Congress’s designated minimum expenditure of \$1.5 billion. We would note that the \$60 million assumes every box in Round Five of F2F would receive \$2 for safety, administration, and transportation costs to the last mile. We expect, however, that

his number would be roughly half the maximum possible expenditure. In addition, in many USDA food distribution programs Federal dollars for this type of administration is provided.

Post-Pandemic

With the deployment of COVID-19 vaccines, we fervently believe the pandemic will soon end. That said, while we are hopeful for a quick return of jobs to all sectors of our economy, we believe a lag economically could continue making the F2F program necessary for the next several months. When the pandemic concludes, a lesson learned from it is that the distribution of food and nutrition assistance generally can be performed in ways that were not previously contemplated and tested. F2F has proven that the Federal Government can utilize the efficiencies and seasonality of food in the free market to purchase and deliver high quality, fresh and highly nutritious food at reasonable prices and place that food directly in the hands of the food-insecure population. Such a program, if maintained, could cure food deserts, assist in curbing health issues that are prevalent among low income and food-insecure populations, and further the goal of ending hunger in America. CityServe highly encourages Congress to fund and specifically direct USDA to maintain the program.

Conclusion

As stated above, CityServe has assisted in the delivery of 14 million USDA food boxes to the “hardest-to-reach” communities. Generally, however, CityServe’s work represents a community of nonprofit organizations that have proven that their assistance is needed and that we will continue to be a critical member of the nutrition assistance community to respond to that need. The reach of our organization has found food-insecure populations in both urban and rural areas and among some in Tribal Nations. In addition, we submit that in recent comments Secretary Vilsack has stated that he likes the program and aspects of what it has been able to do. That said, it is clear that he will need the support of Congress to maintain the program and ensure last mile organizations continue to be involved. We further submit that Congress should encourage USDA to include the last mile concept in other programs where opportunities exist to address America’s hunger issues.

CityServe takes seriously the work of feeding the needy, but in addition it also works to investigate and solve the underlining conditions associated with Americans who are food-insecure. For this reason, we have developed a network and skill set to reach and maintain the connection with families and individuals who are often lost within Federal and state social programs. We will continue to perform this mission and request that the recommendations above be considered and incorporated in the Committee’s ongoing work.

SUBMITTED REPORT BY HON. RODNEY DAVIS, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM ILLINOIS



Wallace Center
AT WINROCK INTERNATIONAL



Farmers To Families Food Box Research Findings
January 2021



Executive Summary

In April 2020, when the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) rolled out the Farmers to Families Food Box program (FFFB) in response to supply chain dis-

ruptions and spikes in food insecurity caused by COVID-19, the Wallace Center at Winrock International sprang into action to ensure participation by the local and regional food businesses and organizations we serve. Over the course of 5 months, we provided direct technical assistance to farmers, food hubs, and distributors whose locally focused markets had disappeared due to the pandemic. These farmers and local food businesses looked to the program to replace lost markets for the healthy foods they had growing in their fields and sitting in their coolers, to maintain their staff and operations, and to provide hunger relief in their communities.

AMS estimates that approximately 55 of the organizations selected as contractors in the first two rounds of the FFFB program were working with and sourcing from local and regional farms. Collectively these contracts were an investment of over \$84M in local farms, regional businesses, and communities. For context, that is over three times the total amount invested in local and regional food systems by USDA-AMS through the FMLFPP program in 2020. The Wallace Center conducted research with about half of these locally-sourcing contractors to understand the program's impact on their work, gather information that could inform the implementation of emergency nutrition and farmer-support efforts, and help shape future programs that leverage USDA direct procurements.

The Wallace Center received responses to surveys from 21 of the 55 local-sourcing contractors from rounds one and two and conducted formal, follow-up interviews with seven of these respondents. The research and data in this report reflects the program implementation and input from those 21 contractors, whose responses we chose to anonymize to ensure that they would be comfortable openly sharing their feedback with the Wallace Center, our research partners, and the USDA.



The research indicates that the local and regional contractors were overwhelmingly successful in implementing the program, which provided a critically important outlet for small to midsize producers whose markets disappeared in the spring of 2020. It shored up regional supply chains, and it provided fresh, healthy, culturally appropriate foods to emergency nutrition operations and the people they serve in urban and rural communities across the country.

The program's early flexibility enabled organizations and businesses that had never been able to participate in USDA commodity programs demonstrate the strength and responsiveness of their enterprises and networks. For example, flexibility in the kinds of boxes contractors could provide and the contents of these boxes allowed contractors to concentrate on the products they know best, adapt to

seasonality during the year, and provide culturally appropriate foods to different communities at a fair and competitive price. The willingness of AMS to provide small contracts enabled small companies to stay solvent and to source from small farms, serve a diverse set of small emergency food relief organizations, and reach rural and remote communities that large companies can't or won't serve. Assessing applicants on their ability to provide high quality, appropriate foods in household sizes rather than on low cost boxes meant AMS' support went to small and mid-sized specialty crop producers who could serve their communities effectively with no food waste.

The FFFB contractor selection criteria shifted to a primary focus on low-price in rounds three and four of the program. These contractors could not compete while still providing farmers and workers a fair price and wages. The result: the producers these contractors purchased from lost a market channel that had provided prices commensurate with their pre-COVID customers. Further, the small emergency nutrition organizations they served in urban and rural communities—many of which operate outside of food bank networks—lost access to healthy, appropriate fresh food. Jobs that had been created to meet increasing community food needs were lost and some contractors had to lay off permanent staff when they did not receive contracts in rounds three and four.

We recognize that AMS had to create the FFFB quickly and it is remarkable how well the process worked considering the immense pressures the agency was under. We understand the complexity of the task they were given and appreciate how responsive staff leadership has been and their willingness to engage with us directly about the feedback and questions we gathered from local contractors. While the program has been criticized and there have been missteps, it is evident that many aspects of this program worked very well and that the impact of the FFFB program had on the local contractors we worked with, the farmers that they source from, and the communities that they serve has been profound. Furthermore, this program provided a model not only for another round of COVID relief in 2021, but also for the local and regional food sector to participate in USDA commodity purchasing in the future. This program proved the concept that the dual goals of hunger relief and supporting small farmers don't have to be at odds and can in fact be systematically achieved in concert.



The Contractors

After the original contracts were awarded, AMS identified 55 contractors that were sourcing from local and regional farms and helped Wallace Center connect with them. Contracts awarded to these organizations ranged from \$3,600 to over \$27M. The Wallace Center surveyed 21 of these FFFB contractors and conducted in-depth interviews with seven of those surveyed. The organizations surveyed are based in 15 states and received a total of \$41 million in contracts in the first two rounds of this program, \$28 million of which was paid to producers. Collectively, they delivered 1,760,596 boxes of fresh, healthy food to families in need. These contractors received contracts for rounds one and two. Some received Basic Ordering

Agreements (BOAs) and applied for rounds three and four, but none received contracts in those final rounds.

The contractors we surveyed are diverse but share a common focus: working with small and mid-sized producers using sustainable production methods, serving local and regional markets, supporting a diverse farming sector, and advancing healthy and resilient food systems. About half the contractors are businesses including farms and food hubs, half are nonprofit organizations, one is a school district, and one a consumer grocery coop. The business and nonprofit organizations vary in size, but all qualify as small businesses/operations.

Fresh Approach

Concord, CA

Total Contract Value: \$1.8m

Fresh Approach, which is a nonprofit organization operating multiple food security and nutrition education programs in the Bay Area, took a value chain coordination approach to their contract, and created a web of food hubs, BIPOC farmers, and community-based organizations working together to build and distribute boxes. A decentralized program allowed the nonprofits that Fresh Approach partnered with to tailor their offerings to the communities they work in. Fresh Approach took a coordination role, aligning supply and demand and distributing funding to multiple small organizations, including farmers' market associations, farms, nonprofit farms, and urban farms, who could best navigate the assets and needs of their communities. Andy Ollove of Fresh Approach noted: "We used the model of recruiting small organizations. We could get into invisible communities with really high touch. In some cases, we were getting food to people 1 mile from where it was grown. To do that most effectively, you think of it as a network rather than an individual nonprofit."

Growfood Carolina

Charleston, SC

Total Contract Value: \$51,000

GrowFood Carolina is a nonprofit food hub that primarily served restaurants in coastal South Carolina. Many of the small farmers that GrowFood served had very few market opportunities when COVID hit, as restaurants and farmers markets closed. GrowFood's FFFB contract allowed them to supply food banks, food pantries, and community-based nonprofits who they had previously been in touch with but had never had the impetus to engage in a meaningful partnership. They also worked with a local nutritionist to create recipes and demonstrate them at pickup locations to show families how to use the food they were receiving. The need for this type of support was so great GrowFood worked to raise over \$200,000 to continue their program when they weren't awarded a contract in round 3. They hope to continue serving their neighbors in this capacity in the long term.

Existing relationships with local producers and farm groups helped the contractors quickly source products to meet their contractual commitments to USDA AMS, including when it meant scaling up operations substantially. Contractors were able to reconfigure existing local and regional distribution networks to deliver boxes efficiently. Experience with Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) aggregation and distribution equipped the contractors with the knowledge necessary to right-size products for household use. Most contractors are deeply embedded in the communities in which they operate so they were able to fill boxes with culturally appropriate foods, deliver them to those most in need, and minimize waste.

USDA AMS stood up the FFFB program quickly in order to address the urgent needs of farmers and communities in the early stages of the pandemic. The application process was new to all the contractors. Preparing a bid and complying with Federal contract reporting required a significant amount of time, expertise, and training. New logistics systems had to be designed that met the needs of the producers and worked with the contractors' capacity. Contractors also had to identify and organize a distribution system adapted to local needs and the resources of the agencies providing emergency feeding. In a matter of a few weeks, boxes and other materials had to be sourced, and staff had to be hired and trained to pack and deliver boxes.



Eastern Market Corporation

Detroit, MI

Total Contract Value: \$1.25m

Eastern Market is a farmers' market and regional food hub based in Downtown Detroit. They used funding from USDA to provide food to 12 community-based nonprofits on the front line of food insecurity, housing insecurity, and serving seniors, sourcing from 15 farms in the region. They also directly delivered boxes to some community members and created pickup options at their market as well. Eastern Market also rolled out a non-subsidized direct to consumer box program which allowed them to increase their financial viability while maximizing the impact of their logistical expertise. The market demand from the Farmers to Families Food Box also allowed Eastern Market to achieve GAP certification and to support GAP certification for two small farmers.

Even within these constraints, these contractors focused their sourcing locally (USDA's criteria of within 400 miles or the same state) from producers using sustainable, regenerative, and organic production practices and from Black, Indigenous and People of Color-owned farms. They bought from a total of 420 producers who were paid fair market prices. Many contractors reported working closely with farmers to identify a mutually agreed upon price, which was usually above wholesale rates. The contractors played a critical and complex role in making the FFFB program work for the communities they served and passed about 69% of what they received from USDA to the producers they bought from. They used the remainder of the funds to retain staff, keep the regional supply chain intact, and create 203 new jobs.

Most contractors were paid between \$25 and \$38 per box. Materials and transportation were most commonly listed as the primary non-food costs. The range of prices can be attributed to the contractors' focus on setting a price with growers that met their needs, different labor costs across regions, the range of product included in the boxes (seasonality), and the true cost of last mile distribution, particularly in hard-to-reach areas.

The locally-focused contractors were able to quickly and successfully implement this program due to their operational focus on local and regional supply chains and longstanding, trusting relationships across the value chain that are built on the shared values of local and regional cooperation. The contractors' models are inherently adaptable and built to be flexible to respond to changing market and supply demands. It is worth noting that many of the food hubs and nonprofits surveyed had been able to build the capacity of their operations and programs through investments of previous AMS-administered grant programs, such as the Local Foods Promotion Program.

A&H Farm*Manhattan, KS*

Total Contract Value: \$1.3m

A&H Farm is a fourth-generation diversified farm that also runs a CSA and multiple agritourism programs in rural Kansas. The FFFB contract was a life-line for them when the local farmers market closed in March. They worked with other, small neighboring farms to provide produce to regional food banks, some as far as Denver and St Louis, and smaller food pantries that were too small to receive support from larger distributors. They also delivered directly to many individuals in their communities. Andrea DeJesus, who runs the farm with her husband, noted “I am my farm. This program was life-changing, not just for us, but for our partners as well.”

Zone 7*Ringoes, NJ*

Total Contract Value: \$146,000

Zone 7 connected with their network of local produce growers in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New York to source and pack boxes of delicious, nutritious produce items for distribution as a part of the USDA Farmers to Families program. By working closely with Rolling Harvest, their nonprofit partner which focuses on gleaning and linking local producers with food-insecure communities, Zone 7 was able to reach over 7,000 individuals and families experiencing food insecurity in central New Jersey with the food boxes.

Though the federally funded food box programs have ended for these contractors, the problems the FFFB program sought to alleviate have not. Though some restaurants have reopened, their demand is considerably lower. Similarly, some school systems and universities are feeding their students through prepared meals or other limited in-person options, though at a much lower capacity than prior to the pandemic. Many of the contractors the Wallace Center spoke with continue to provide food boxes and emergency food relief through programs funded by local governments, foundations, and nonprofit groups. Many contractors expressed their desire to keep feeding their communities and providing a fair market for their local producers.

These 21 Contractors Represent:

-  **1,760,596** boxes delivered
-  **420** farms
-  **203** jobs created
-  **\$28M** paid to producers
-  **443** partner organizations



In Their Own Words

Nearly all the contractors noted that this program was a critical lifeline for the farmers they purchased from, with many saying that this program saved farmers, and contractors, from going under.

“Small and mid-size family producers told us that the existence of this program helped ensure the survival of their business in 2020. For many, their only sales were coming from the food box.”

“Every single farmer we worked with mentioned how we ‘saved them.’ For example, a berry farmer we purchased from was able to buy back a piece of equipment he had been forced to sell, and we prevented 45,000 cases of summer squash from being thrown away.”

“It was life-changing. Not just for us, but our partners as well. Our farm went from not knowing if we would survive to making payments and getting some money in the bank.”

“First thing I looked at: They’re closing the schools. We’re dead. 35–40% of our yogurts at this time were 5 lb. tubs of yogurt going into schools [at the onset of the pandemic]. The USDA contract is an amazing investment—it’s helped us establish a local dairy.”

“This program allowed us to meet the needs of thousands in our small, rural county when very little assistance was available.”

“The network that was built up has helped keep many producers viable. By sharing resources, we built strong partnerships that allowed us to scale to 3,500 boxes per week. Individually that would not have happened.”

“It is an absolute shame that I have producers dumping produce now because there is not enough demand for their products, while at the same time our partnering agencies are seeing record numbers of clients. The number of boxes we were providing daily dropped from an average of 700,000 in round two to 80,000 in our foundation-funded program.”



Food Distribution Partners

The 21 Contractors we surveyed delivered boxes to a total of 443 organizations as well as to individual homes. Many worked with their local food bank, either providing boxes to them for subsequent redistribution or by relieving the food bank's load by delivering directly to pantries, shelters, and other nonprofits they served. The contractors connected with a diverse network of public and private organizations in their communities beyond food banks and pantries, some of which were distributing food for the first time. For example, Riverside Unified School District served as the aggregator, distributor, and last-mile partner and fed its student community with healthy food boxes prepared by school food service staff from products sourced in its region.

Much of the success of locally focused contractors was the result of a system of mission-aligned businesses coming together to solve supply chain and distribution challenges. Pre-existing relationships allowed these contractors to identify emergency relief partners quickly and serve both large and small food distributors in urban and rural communities. Even when they had not previously worked together, distribution and nonprofit partners already knew and respected each other and came to the partnership with aligned values and goals. GrowFood Carolina noted that, prior to the pandemic, they had been aware of the nonprofit who ended up being their last-mile distribution partner through the FFFB program but had not been able to find the right occasion to work together. This funding created that opportunity. Furthermore, the contractors' agility allowed some to provide home delivery in hard to reach rural communities and directly to vulnerable households. For example, Fresh Approach in California partnered with a neighborhood-level mutual aid effort that packed boxes at an urban farm and delivered them to families within a mile of the farm.

Contractors were able to turn relationships they held across the value chain into avenues for food box delivery. For example, Common Market sold to regional hospitals and then started delivering boxes that hospital staff provided to patients who screened for food insecurity and to uninsured diabetic patients. Another contractor pivoted from selling to a university's cafeterias to supplying boxes for the school's student food pantry. Community networks connected the contractors to churches, neighborhood associations, public and private schools, community health clinics, urban gardens, and farms that were very well situated to handle last mile distribution. One contractor estimated that at least 26 of the organizations they provided healthy food boxes to are not connected to the larger emergency food distribution network and are no longer receiving FFFB boxes.

In 2020 the established food bank system was stretched almost beyond the breaking point. The contractors Wallace Center spoke with emphasized that their efforts were a necessary supplement to the work being done by regional food banks. They also pointed out that their ability to provide pre-packed, household-sized boxes permitted small organizations without staff or volunteers or a secure cold chain to safely provide healthy, fresh food to their communities.

In Their Own Words

“Most of our nonprofit partners were known to me by virtue of (an) existing network of farm markets in our rural area. The nonprofits we worked with were too small to receive a drop from any of the larger distributors.”

“Food hubs like ourselves were able to take pressure off the food bank and food pantries because we were able to work with other community-led nonprofit partners on the front lines of food insecurity in our city. Many of our recipients do not have reliable transportation or access to food banks and pantries, making our neighborhood partnerships critical for 2,000 individuals and families every week. I am worried about the folks we served.”

“[We were] consistently asked to increase production and in many cases were able to do so. We ended up running 24/7 with three shifts to try and meet demand.”

“People requested more on a regular basis.”

“Almost all of the food pantries that we were delivering to were small. Our average delivery was 125 boxes and under Round 3, they are not getting deliveries because they are being told that they will need a dock and pallet jack to unload and need to take an entire semi-load. Some are being told there isn’t enough money in the contract to send small trucks and deliveries out to them.”

“We were able to customize boxes to be culturally appropriate for different communities in Chicago. For example, we worked with rabbis to source kosher foods and then distribute them to the right people.”

“Thank you so much for the fresh and beautiful food. Everyone is so appreciative because you guys gave us the best, and not spoil scrap. I feel so much better eating such quality foods.”

Box Recipient.

The Farms

The food box program in rounds 1 and 2 provided a crucial outlet for small and mid-sized producers whose markets dried up overnight with the outbreak of COVID-19. Many of the contractors’ customers were public and private institutions (colleges, hospitals, schools) and restaurants, all of which scaled back drastically or ended purchases completely in the spring of 2020. The farmers they served faced plowing food under and both they and their distributors faced layoffs and bankruptcy.

Surveyed contractors purchased from a diverse range of farms. Data from one contractor showed that 30% were less than 100 acres and 70% were less than 1,000 acres. Many of the farms were also small, local (within 400 miles), and owned by people of color. Most but not all of the contractors we surveyed concentrated on fresh produce boxes but some also provided dairy products.

The FFFB program required GAP certified produce, which was a barrier for some farms that traditionally work with food hubs. Though this requirement, in some cases, limited the farms that locally-focused contractors could source from, it helped motivate GAP-ready farms who hadn’t previously had an economic incentive to attain certification become GAP certified this year. Contractors reported that multiple farmers received certification as a result of the market opportunity that the contract afforded them. It similarly created an incentive for the hubs themselves to seek additional food safety certifications. Some growers were ready to continue their certification process but were unable to access the appropriate technical assistance quickly enough within the short timeline of the contract. It is clear that a guaranteed economic opportunity is a critical motivator for farms seeking food safety certification.

In Their Own Words

“We grew quite a bit on our farm and supplemented that with product sourced primarily from other smaller, diversified farms within 20 to 30 miles of our farm.”

“We touched around 50 farms and several were able to obtain GAP Certification. Three were urban farms and most partners emphasized smaller farms, those owned by people of color, and reflected our values in doing so. All of the farms were relatively small.”

“Our vendor base consisted of small-scale family farms, including minority owned, organic, and beginning farmers. Most of our market was restaurants and there were limited alternatives because the farmers['] markets were closed in many cases.”

“[Under S]ecretary Ibach visited our farm and saw our produce boxes. He said we had some of the best he had seen, yet we were denied for the 3rd

round. I felt the 3rd round was all about cheap food versus high quality local food.”

Lessons Learned

Congress, USDA AMS, and the contractors we worked with performed above and beyond what could have been expected in an unprecedented, chaotic situation with multiple needs and sometimes conflicting demands. AMS's initial FFFB contracts represented a massive investment in local food systems that had positive impacts on small to midsize farms, local economies, and food security in communities across the country. Food hubs, farm-based businesses, community nonprofits and others were able to provide high quality fresh food distribution at a fair price and meet the USDA AMS contractor criteria, without any reported instances of food waste. The format in the first two rounds worked well for the contractors we spoke with and they would like the program to continue and to be included in future rounds.

The twin goals of hunger relief and farm and supply-chain support should not be in conflict. Investment in programs that develop and enhance resilient local supply chains can also effectively address community food insecurity and have the added benefit of contributing to stronger regional economies.

Locally focused contractors are uniquely positioned to successfully implement a box program. The flexibility of shorter supply chains, the connection to their communities, expertise in last mile logistics, and ability to scale up quickly made these contractors particularly effective at meeting the requirements of the program. These contractors believe that their successful experience with the food box program demonstrates their potential to sell fresh, healthy, regionally-produced foods through AMS's established commodity procurement systems in the future.

Values-alignment and relationships between contractors and non-profit partners allowed for efficient service delivery. Many of the locally-focused contractors had existing relationships with the nonprofits they partnered with to deliver food to families in need. They also tended to have similar values which allowed them to work together quickly to meet the needs of the farmers and community members simultaneously.

Market-based programs drive development of supply chains. Opening AMS's commodity procurement markets and directing money to these farms and supply chain organizations allowed them to achieve a scale that has not been available to them before. A clear market incentive also motivated farmers to seek GAP certification. Grant programs from USDA AMS have been critical to this sector for years but these contracts represent a significantly larger, direct investment in local food supply chains which allowed for much faster innovation, job creation, and supply chain development.

AMS's various grant programs provided crucial seed funding to many of the locally-focused contractors. Those prior investments from USDA helped them launch and grow so they were able to meet the extraordinary needs the country faced this year. Prior investments in the individual distributors, and also the networks of businesses and organizations that participated in this program, was critical to their success.

Recommendations

Based on our research and consultation with contractors, we have a series of recommendations that will ideally support USDA in designing and implementing future programs like the Farmers to Families Food Box Program. Contractors that were sourcing from local and regional producers, such as food hubs and local distributors, were uniquely positioned to excel in this program due to their strong relationships on both ends of the value chain, and their ability to nimbly pivot their sourcing, operations, and distribution models to accommodate this program. Recognizing that there were many things that were outside of AMS's control, we encourage consideration of the following recommendations in future rounds and for AMS fresh commodity contracting in general:

Keep what works: Many contractors are fighting for the continuation of this program because of its overall effectiveness. One of the key factors that made this program so innovative was that the contracts went to intermediaries. This allowed food hubs and other supply chain entities to align the needs of farmers and their distribution partners and think creatively about building supply chains that worked for producers and consumers. Furthermore, the flexibility and focus on applicants' ability to meet the goals of the program in the first two rounds, rather than strictly the lowest price, was critical in creating opportunity for locally-focused contractors. This allowed for contractors to increase

sourcing from small and BIPOC owned farms, and to pay them fairly. Contractors also applauded the ease of the invoicing system, the speed of payments, and USDA's communication with them in the early rounds. The BOA system also has potential to be a useful tool in future versions of this program given its longer-term contracts and its adaptability.

Eliminate price as the determining factor in awarding bids: The success of local contractors in the first two rounds of this program demonstrated that the twin goals of hunger relief and small- and mid-sized farm and local supply-chain support should not be in conflict. However, focusing exclusively on low price in subsequent rounds undercuts support for key segments of the U.S. farm and food system during this emergency. Further, focusing on scale has completely deprived access to food for many of the organizations providing emergency food to the highest need communities through small, last-mile distributors that are not connected to larger scale food banks or food pantries.

Contract decisions should support producers and supply chain organizations of all sizes, including support for small and very small businesses. We suggest a scoring criteria matrix that reflects the following priorities:

Contractors that identify as or source from:

- Black, Indigenous and People of Color owned businesses,
- Veteran owned businesses,
- Women owned businesses, [and]
- Small and very small businesses.

Demonstrated relationships with producers in the region.

Past track record of performance with the program.

Demonstrated relationships with community organizations.

Commitment to fair prices for producers documented through pricing criteria.

Commitment to high quality food products.

Ability to tailor boxes to food needs of community (*i.e.*, cultural appropriateness).

Ability to include appropriate, household size/quantity of products.

Ability to serve rural and other hard-to-reach communities.

Ability to distribute to small organizations.

Ability to distribute food in the region in which it was produced.

Technical capacity based on connections to last mile distribution partners.

Demonstrated commitment to minimizing food waste.

Allow for category-only boxes: Many local contractors excelled in providing category-specific boxes, such as produce-only boxes, in the first two rounds. The preference for combination boxes in the third round made re-application unfeasible for many of these contractors, who were unable to reorient their operations to accommodate sourcing and separate cold chains for dairy, meat, and produce.

Permit multiple contracts in the same jurisdiction and multiple contract sizes: Sourcing from multiple contractors of different sizes that are partnering with different distribution partners within a region will help the program reach more beneficiaries.

Extend the contract period of performance: Two month contracts with contractors do not provide an adequate time horizon for producers to plan production and harvest. Providing longer contracts will provide stability for producers, workforce, and uninterrupted food delivery. We recommend contracts cover at least a 6 month period and ideally up to a year.

Eliminate pre-cooked requirement for meat: The "pre-cooked" requirement for meat products included in the box limits sourcing options from local ranchers and meat-producers that do not provide pre-cooked SKUs. Allowing for different meat product options, including healthy and safe dried meats like jerky, will give contractors and producers the amount of flexibility that will lead to innovation in providing high-quality, locally-produced meat to box recipients.

Provide clear and consistent communications and right-sized technical assistance to applicants and contractors: Many potential contractors who are well positioned to excel in this program may have no familiarity with USDA contracting systems or processes. Providing clear guidance to contractors throughout the bid process and implementation is critical for their success. It is evident that a lot of effort went into FAQs, webinars, and the WBSCM devel-

oped in the first rounds of this program. We encourage AMS to make use of and build upon those systems for providing information and technical assistance. USDA webinars and all written guidance should be aware of language barriers that may exclude certain eligible contractors. New potential contractors could also benefit from support through a system like NRCS's Technical Service Providers (TSP) to supplement AMS' staff capacity. USDA may also consider how to engage technical assistance providers beyond AMS such as Extension and State Departments of Agriculture to maximize access to this program.

Continue using the BOA: AMS's willingness to use the BOA system is a positive innovation that could be applied in future instances to increase consistency and access to a broad range of commodity procurement programs. The BOA solicitation process should have resulted in contracts in rounds three and four for locally-sourcing contractors who were awarded in earlier rounds. However, this was not the case because the BOA was rolled out in concert with a shift toward prioritizing lower price contracts. In future iterations, the BOA process can provide additional stability for approved contractors because of its flexibility, longer timeline, and adaptability. BOAs allow Commodity Procurement to tailor the product specification to the needs of the recipients. The BOA approval process allows approved suppliers to access more opportunities seamlessly, which could increase the amount of locally-produced food purchased by USDA Commodity Procurement.

Coordinate with technical service providers and state agencies to provide food safety and GAP certification technical assistance and auditing services to contractors working to bring GAP-ready small- and mid-sized producers into their supply chains. The program's food safety requirement that all contracted suppliers demonstrate GAP certification creates a strong incentive for farmers who have been considering certification to accelerate their process and receive a USDA GAP audit. GAP certification not only allows farmers to participate in this program but has the potential to unlock other wholesale markets that require GAP Certification.



Conclusion

Based on our research, it is clear that USDA has a unique opportunity to simultaneously support small- and mid-sized farms, invest in local food supply chains, and address hunger. The FFFB program, conceived as a way to both support farm income and meet emergency food needs, was successful in those aims in the first two rounds for the businesses and organizations the Wallace Center interviewed. The program provided a 'proof of concept' that AMS Commodity Procurement can successfully transact with businesses in the local and regional food sector. The Farmers to Families Food Box Program demonstrated many tools and characteristics that can make similar programs resoundingly successful.

There is significant untapped potential for positive impact within the local food sector, and with support and partnership from USDA, programs like the Farmers to Families Food Box can help activate it. We are extremely grateful for the partner-

ship and guidance that the Agency has provided the Wallace Center as we've supported and analyzed this program and look forward to continuing to explore the possibilities.

About the Wallace Center

The Wallace Center at Winrock International is a national nonprofit that brings together diverse people and ideas to co-create solutions that build healthy farms, equitable economies, and resilient food systems. Wallace has been a leader in the development of healthy regional food and farming systems for over 35 years, working to scale up the supply and positive environmental, social, and economic benefits of regional, sustainably produced food. We seek to affect systems change to bring benefits to the environment, to communities, and to the farmers and food businesses that are the building blocks of a healthy and equitable food system. For more information, reach out to Co-Director Susan Lightfoot Schempf, susan.schempf@winrock.org.

Acknowledgements

We'd like to offer our gratitude to USDA staff, in the Commodity Procurement and Transportation and Marketing divisions of AMS in particular, for both their extraordinary effort in creating and implementing this program, and their continual support of Wallace Center as we worked with the contractors and compiled this report. We are so grateful for your partnership. Secondly, this research and technical assistance would have been impossible without the commitment and brilliance of our external partners, Evan Smith of Alden Services and Kate Fitzgerald of Fitzgerald Canepa. Finally, and most importantly, we are eternally grateful for and so deeply inspired by the contractors who shared their stories, ideas, time, and dedication to making the food system work better for all of us. You all are heroes and we hope we did you justice!

Surveyed Contractors

Willing Hands Norwich, VT
Zone 7, LLC Ringoes, NJ
Aggrigator, Inc. Watsonville, CA
North Alabama Agriplex Cullman, AL
GrowFood Carolina Charleston SC
A & H Farm Manhattan, KS
Eastern Market Partnership Detroit, MI
Juniper Hill Farms LLC Lawrence, KS
North Coast Opportunities/MendoLake Food Hub Ukiah, CA
ALL Holding Company, LLC. Souderton, PA
Riverside Unified School District Food Hub Riverside, CA

Fresh Approach Oakland, CA
Malama Kaua'i Lihue, HI
Lake County Community Development Corp Ronan, MT
Cecarellis Harrison Hill Farm, LLC. Northford, CT
Mycoterra Farm South Deerfield, MA
Willimantic Food Coop Willimantic, CT
The Berry Man, Inc. Santa Barbara, CA
Inland Northwest Farmers Market Association Spokane, WA
Fossil Creek Farms, LLC. Fort Collins, CO
The Common Market Philadelphia, PA
Gourmet Gorilla Chicago, IL



Wallace Center

AT WINROCK INTERNATIONAL

wallacecenter.org

LETTER SUBMITTED BY HON. TRACEY MANN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM KANSAS; ON BEHALF OF BARRY FEAKER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, TOPEKA RESCUE MISSION MINISTRIES

March 11, 2020

Hon. DAVID SCOTT,
Chairman,
House Committee on Agriculture,
Washington, D.C.;

Hon. GLENN THOMPSON,
Ranking Minority Member,
House Committee on Agriculture,
Washington, D.C.

Dear Chairman Scott and Ranking Member Thompson:

Thank you for holding a hearing on food insecurity in America. The times we are living in are far from normal, leaving millions of Americans struggling, with the demand for food assistance outpacing existing systems that address hunger. As a nonprofit organization on the frontlines of this tremendous challenge, we are encouraged to see Congressional leaders prioritizing this pressing issue.

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, the Topeka Rescue Mission rapidly developed Operation Food Secure—a powerful network of 90+ civic and faith-based groups distributing Farmers to Families Food Boxes “the last mile” into neighbor-

hoods and rural communities across eight Kansas counties. This week, our program reaches an important milestone: delivering our 100,000th food box to a family in need.

There are countless stories of ways that these food boxes have been leveraged to strengthen neighborhoods and communities. Placing these resources in the hands of capable and empowered nonprofits has the potential to address root causes of food insecurity.

For instance, one of our sites is a church in a small town of 1,300. The volunteer leaders received a call from an elementary school guidance counselor about a single mom who was new in town and needed food for her children. Members from the church delivered a food box to the mom and through the interaction learned that her car was having mechanical issues and not running properly. The church members teamed up together to take her car into the shop and get it fixed for her.

Another site is a Neighborhood Improvement Association in a low-income neighborhood. The volunteers noticed that a man who regularly comes to get a food box was missing. They asked around and found out he had a stroke. Their team checked in with him and began delivering the food boxes to his home and meeting other physical needs as he recovers. He said, "I'm so thankful, this food has been so helpful to offset the incurring medical bills from my stroke."

Another site in a Topeka food desert delivers to a senior citizen in their neighborhood. The gentleman thanked our volunteers for the food and said they could take him off their list. His finances have stabilized and over the last couple of deliveries he has been sharing the food with coworkers in need. This is a great story of a senior who needed the food for a time, shared what he didn't need, and then asked to be taken off the list so someone else could receive the food.

We are grateful that Farmers to Families fits perfectly at the nexus of so many vital issues: supporting American farmers and the food supply chain, preventing food waste and loss, reducing barriers to nutritious foods for vulnerable populations, and leveraging the potential of local communities to step up and meet the needs of their neighbors. **Our team urges you to continue the Farmers to Families Food Box Program as a nimble and innovative way to address food insecurity in concert with existing Federal nutrition programs.**

Sincerely,



BARRY FEAKER,
Executive Director, Topeka Rescue Mission Ministries.

Operation Food Secure Site Partners

The following list represents the social service organizations, churches, Tribes, and other community groups who have hosted Farmers to Families Food Box distributions under Operation Food Secure.

Douglas County

Anchor Church
Boys and Girls Club Lawrence

Jackson County

Mayetta United Methodist Church
Nueva Vida/Evangel United Methodist Church

Jefferson County

Jefferson Assembly of God
Valley Falls Fire Department

Morris County

Morris County Care & Share
Alta Vista Christian Church
Community Christian Church
Council Grove Christian Church
Council Grove Senior Citizen Center
Dunlap Council Grove United Methodist Church
Flint Hills Apostle Church
Wilsey Christian Church

Osage County

Cross Road Community Church
ECAT (Ecumenical Christian Action Team) Osage City
Grace Community Church Overbrook
Heritage Country Church
Lyndon United Methodist Church
Valley View Apartments

Riley County

Ebenezer Baptist Church
El Encuentro Iglesia
El Shaddai Templo De Alabanza
First Baptist Church of Silver Lake
First Presbyterian Church
Gametime Living Facility
Grace Episcopal Cathedral
Grace Point Church
Habitat for Humanity
Hospitality Incubator Program
JayHawk Area Agency on Aging
Kansas Avenue United Methodist Church
Kansas Children's Service League
Let's Help
Light of the World Church
Likins Foster Neighborhood Improvement Association
LULAC Senior Center
Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist Church
New Beginnings Baptist Church
New Life Baptist Church
New Mount Zion Baptist Church
Northland Christian Church
Oakland United Methodist Church
Old Town Neighborhood Improvement Association
Omni Circle Group
Pioneer Motive Power Place Apartments
Prince of Peace
Remember to Remember
Rossville Christian Church
Salvation Army
Seaman Community Church
Second Baptist Church
Shiloh Baptist Church
Silver Lake United Methodist Church
St. John's African Methodist Episcopal Church

Remnant Church
Rock Hills Church

Shawnee County

Asbury Mount Olive United Methodist Church
Boys and Girls Club of Topeka
Bread of Life
Burgess Court Mobile Home Communities
Central Park Christian Church
Christian Neighbor Center
Church of God Fellowship
Citizen Potawatomi Nation
College Hill Neighborhood Improvement Association
Communities in Schools: Ross Elementary School, State Street Elementary School
Community Action
Cowboy Church
East Topeka Senior Center

St. John's Lutheran Church
Sunshine Connection
Tables of Blessing Community Food Drive
The Woods Church
Topeka Black Lives Matter
Topeka City Union Mission
Topeka Family Friends Juneteenth
Topeka First Assembly Oakland
Topeka Housing Authority
Topeka North Outreach
Trinity Lutheran Church
Trinity Presbyterian Church
True Vine Missionary Baptist Church
Valeo Behavioral Health
Valley Park Neighborhood Improvement Association

Wabaunsee County

Cheryl Christiansen—St. Mary's, Kansas
Maple Hill Church

SUBMITTED QUESTIONS

Response from Kyle Waide, President and Chief Executive Officer, Atlanta Community Food Bank

Question Submitted by Hon. Jimmy Panetta, a Representative in Congress from California

Question. Mr. Waide, many active duty military families were already experiencing food insecurity before the COVID-19 pandemic, and we know that the number of these families has only increased since March of 2020. Food banks operate on or near every military installation, and one out of every three children attending a Department of Defense-run school is eligible for free or reduced price meals. Given the high rate of food insecurity among our military families, do you believe that the Federal Government should develop and support targeted solutions to help end food insecurity among those currently serving and alleviate the burden this inaction places on food banks?

Answer. Feeding America is advocating for the inclusion of a Military Family Basic Needs Allowance in the FY 22 National Defense Authorization Act to provide a monthly allowance for service members whose income is less than 130% of poverty level. The Military Family Basic Needs Allowance would need to be reauthorized yearly, as the NDAA establishes annual policy and spending policies. Based on data about service member's pay and family sizes, the Congressional Budget Office has estimated that approximately 10,200 service members would receive an average allowance of \$400 per month.

Questions Submitted by Hon. Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan, a Delegate in Congress from Northern Mariana Islands

Question 1. We know that food access can be more difficult in rural and remote areas like the Northern Mariana Islands. What can you tell us about how rural and remote food banks like Karidat, Empty Vessel, Grace Christian, or the Salvation Army on Saipan are meeting the needs of their communities?

Answer. Food access to rural communities continues to be a struggle throughout the country and territories. We've seen innovation through mobile markets that travel throughout rural communities or partnering with local schools to distribute food to children. Another innovation is food banks will partner with food retail partners, such as grocery stores or restaurants, to get excess food to those in need across a community.

Question 2. Mr. Waide, your testimony touches on your efforts to ensure that you are serving people equitably. Can you expand on what you are doing to reach racial and ethnic minority groups and veterans who face food insecurity at much higher rates?

Answer. We know that there are certain characteristics that make a household more likely to experience food insecurity. Households that include members of a minority ethnicity, children, a veteran of a recent war or a household member with a disability are all more likely to experience food insecurity. Latino households are two times more likely to be food-insecure than white households. Black households are 2.2 times more likely to be food-insecure. As we try to respond to these realities in our service area we take two primary strategies. We utilize data on the demographics and characteristics of the communities we serve to help us determine if we are doing a good enough job in distributing our resources—food, dollars and attention—equitably across those communities. If we see gaps in areas where there is elevated need driven by these social characteristics we take steps to bring more re-

sources to bear in those communities. Second we work very hard to develop strong collaborative partner relationships with organizations that are trusted and known in communities of elevated need. Intentionally establishing these organizations as partners with the food bank allows us to bring the core resource of food to an organization that is already working directly with individuals and communities that are experiencing higher rates of food insecurity. One example of this in our pandemic response has been the partnerships we have established to respond to the elevated need within the Latino community. Early in our response we began a partnership with Telemundo Atlanta and Plaza Fiesta, a Latino owned central shopping center, to establish regular food distributions that were promoted, staffed and supported by trusted Latino led organizations. This has allowed us to fill a key gap in our ability to meet need in that community.

Question 3. Mr. Waide, your testimony talks about how vitally important SNAP is as the nation's first line of defense against hunger. The Northern Mariana Islands does not participate in SNAP and receives a block grant instead. What would the cost to charities and nonprofits be to fill in the gaps if SNAP benefits were reduced or capped?

Answer. For every meal one of the 200 Feeding America food bank provides, SNAP provides nine. Block granting of the program would mean that they would have a fixed annual funding that would render the programs unable to automatically respond to increased need, as they do today. As need increases, states would have to cut eligibility or benefits or establish waiting lists to stay within capped funding. The charitable sector simply would not be able to fill in the gap that capping SNAP benefits would create.

Response from Zippy Duvall, President, American Farm Bureau Federation

Questions Submitted by Hon. Troy Balderson, a Representative in Congress from Ohio

Question 1. An issue I've been paying especially close attention to, as I believe we all have, is the ability of producers to deliver their goods to consumers throughout this pandemic. In your testimony, you mentioned the long food lines many of us saw that were a result of the supply chain disruption. Was there a measurable change between the ability to provide for the food-insecure before the establishment of the Farmers to Families Food Box Program, and after?

Answer. There was absolutely positive measurable change in farmers' ability to deliver goods to food banks due to the Farmers to Families Food Box Program. Giving back and supporting local communities has long been a priority for farmers and ranchers, and the pandemic only strengthened that desire to help our neighbors. However, due to donation requirements for stability and shelf life, it was difficult for farmers to find outlets to get their products straight from the farm to the local food bank. But once COVID-19 hit, and the overall food supply chain broke down, the need to move farm-fresh food through local food banks to match supply with demand became imperative, and it was the Farmers to Families Food Box Program that helped connect those dots

Question 2. As we approach the 1 year anniversary of the first COVID relief package passing, what are the most significant obstacles American farmers, processors, and distributors continue to face when trying to provide the most for those in need?

Answer. Access to labor was an issue prior to the pandemic and has continued to be a top issue for farmers and ranchers. We continue to advocate for reforms to the guest worker program to ensure it is economical, user-friendly, and available to all agricultural industries, not just seasonal and temporary work. We also advocate for our existing workforce to have an opportunity to achieve legal status.

The pandemic emphasized the areas in which the H-2A program is in dire need of reform. Early on, consulates throughout the globe were closed or operating at minimal capacity, putting the timely arrival of H-2A workers in jeopardy and potentially delaying the planting and harvesting of American crops. Thanks to the efforts of Farm Bureau and other agriculture groups, these workers were deemed essential and granted waivers. Yet, even before the pandemic, it was not unusual for farmers to face weeks, even months, of delays in paperwork processing to get the workers they need.

Additionally, at a time when farmers saw their revenues plummet due to sudden shifts in the supply chain, farmers using the H-2A program saw their labor costs increase on average 6% compared to the previous year due to the H-2A program requirement to pay H-2A employees the adverse effect wage rate. American agriculture desperately needs H-2A wage reform if these farms are going to remain viable and continue to play a role in protecting our national food supply.

Finally, as COVID-19 vaccine availability increases, farmworkers who lack proper documentation continue to face challenges accessing vaccines in states where IDs are required for inoculation. Situations like this further emphasize the need to provide stability for our longstanding employees, while continuing their work in agriculture, alongside reforms to the H-2A guestworker program.

Response from Eric Hodel, Chief Operating Officer and Chief Financial Officer, Midwest Food Bank

Question Submitted by Hon. Troy Balderson, a Representative in Congress from Ohio

Question. Your methods for distributing food to those in need is less reliant on government control than many others. The Farmers to Families Food Box Program does the same thing—unleashing the power and innovation of the private-sector. In your experiences, has greater government control of food distribution been a positive or has it produced more issues than solutions?

Answer. Our experience at Midwest Food Bank is to leverage entrepreneurial spirit with heart to serve those in need and to work efficiently and effectively to source food and distribute it to our agencies. The Farmers to Families Food Box Program had just enough structure to ensure food was going to agencies and pantries but did not require significant reporting which would have added administrative burden and cost. Yes, we support government support and access to help fight food insecurity but recommend not burdening the process with heavy regulations or control.

Response from Ron Edenfield, President and Chief Executive Officer, Wayfield Foods, Inc.

Questions Submitted by Hon. Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan, a Delegate in Congress from Northern Mariana Islands

Question 1. Mr. Edenfield, you testified on the importance of SNAP as an economic stimulator. How does SNAP stimulate local economies?

Answer. SNAP is a unique government program. Participants are given benefits that they can redeem in their local grocery store for food purchases. The grocery store is often a cornerstone in communities, serving as both a major employer and economic generator for other businesses. By having participants redeem their benefits in a store, those funds function like any other tender from in-store, going to pay employees wages and benefits. Additionally, with SNAP benefits targeted directly toward food, families are not faced with the decision on whether to buy groceries or pay rent. Instead, they can use their SNAP benefits to help pay for the grocery bills while allocating funds to also pay for rent and other necessities that drive a local economy. Our partners in the hunger community often share that for every \$1 spent on SNAP benefits, the local community sees \$1.80 in economic impact. A 2018 study commissioned by the National Grocers Association provides data on the economic impact of the independent grocery industry and underscores the importance of SNAP. Together with warehouse stores, chain supermarkets and department stores, food retailers currently provide almost four million jobs specifically dedicated to selling food products available via SNAP. These retailers together sell almost \$459 billion worth of food products, including \$57 billion to SNAP recipients, helping to ensure that families have the food they need. These sales alone create over 529,000 jobs in the United States.

Question 2. The Northern Mariana Islands currently does not participate in the SNAP program. Instead, the Marianas receives the Nutritional Assistance program which is a capped block grant. Can you explain why Block Grants lead to less access to needed food benefits?

Answer. SNAP enjoys true ubiquity amongst the states and therefore significant administrative cost containment due to the economies of scale. The same laws, regulations, technology and licensing requirements apply across the fifty states and Washington, D.C. Due to this, grocers' participation is much more streamlined and our payment service providers can implement the program and its requirements into our systems rather seamlessly.

Grocers and their SNAP customers both rely on this ubiquity and standardization as do the states and the Federal Government. Because the program is so streamlined, over 95% of SNAP funding goes directly to benefits. In short, the government cost to administer is incredibly low when you consider the size and scope of the program. As we work in other Federal feeding programs such as WIC, we often point to the ubiquity of SNAP as a gold standard for efficiencies. Because WIC is administered uniquely in each state, the licensing and compliance process for grocers is much more complicated and costly. Therefore, not all grocers participate in WIC, and that lack of participation can certainly create access issues for participants. I appreciate how the challenges of the capped block grant do not allow the Northern

Mariana Islands to enjoy the efficiencies of scale and ability for SNAP to respond quickly to increased need in the community. The grocery industry operates on the slimmest of margins and if compliance costs are too high, it can certainly impact its ability to participate in the program and provide that service to a local community.

Thank you for your time and concern about this issue. It was my pleasure to answer and provide more explanation about the SNAP program.

