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Good morning. My name is Mark Quandt, and I am the Executive Director of the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York. It is an honor to be here, and I thank the Commission for giving me the opportunity to speak. I hope I can add something of value to your deliberations as you discuss opportunities to more effectively address the problem of hunger in our country.

The materials I received to help prepare my testimony encouraged me to talk about my own experiences with hunger and our overall community's experiences with food insecurity. Personally, I am one of the lucky ones. I have never experienced hunger. I have never gone to bed hungry, and never had to worry about my children being hungry or even being properly nourished. In fact, although I have worked in human services my entire career, hunger was not an issue that strongly captured my attention until I was hired for a job with the Regional Food Bank in 1983. I have thought and learned a lot about hunger since that day.

I had quite a bit of experience working with poor children before I took the job with the Food Bank. While I was in college, a fellow student (who is now my wife) and I literally adopted six poverty-stricken kids as our little brothers and sisters. We spent a lot of time in their homes, experienced their deep poverty firsthand, knew they were not getting enough good food to eat, and realized the many disadvantages they faced affected their growth and development and would severely limit their opportunities in life. Once a week, we brought our little friends up to campus to eat dinner in the dining hall. We didn't think much of it at the time, but as I thought about it over the years I realized the reason they always ate so heartily was most likely because it was the best meal they had all week. After college, I worked as a Child Care Worker in a home for emotional disturbed children, where I continued to witness the devastation poverty and malnutrition have on children of all ages.

During many of my years at the Food Bank, my wife has been the Social Worker at our local, small town elementary school. Her work involves her with most of the poor families in the district. She provides many special services for them, and it has always been her requirement that the entire Quandt family be part of this work, which has connected me directly with many of these families. I see how they live, I know how hard they try, yet despite their efforts I see how difficult it often is for the parents to provide

the basic necessities of life for their children. One day, my wife told me an 11 year old boy in one of these families (who I knew well because he was on my Little League team) and his younger sister were both diagnosed with diabetes, which his doctor concluded resulted from a lack of proper nutrition. They will suffer their whole lives because of childhood malnutrition, and we will also pay for it as a society in lost opportunities and higher medical costs.

I have heard hundreds of stories about hunger in my years with the Food Bank. One that always stood out for me was when I visited a company to pick up a financial donation they were giving the Food Bank. While I was waiting, one of their employees came up to me and quietly said, "I really appreciate the work you do. A couple years ago, I was going through a tough time and often did not have enough food for my family. I never would have made it without the help I received from a food pantry. They helped me get back on my feet. I'm doing well now, and I want to thank you."

Last week, one of our truck drivers told me people were lining up at 4:30 in the morning for the mobile pantry food delivery he made to Gloversville that day. Another staff told me how grateful the 400 people were who got food from a Food Bank Farm Stand in Newburgh. When I hear stories like that, one conclusion is obvious. No one would show up at 4:30 in the morning, or stand in line for more than an hour to get a package of food unless it was desperately needed.

I could go on with many similar stories, but my point is simple. Although some would deny hunger exists or dismiss it as not a serious problem, it is real and has serious, long-lasting, detrimental effects on people's lives. It affects children, adults, and seniors. It impacts people we might guess are in need, and increasingly others we would never imagine are hungry.

As I began preparing my testimony, I wondered what I could possibly say that you have not already heard or might hear today from the other presenters. I am sure I have not broken new ground for you, but I wanted to start with a reminder that hunger is personal and you have a great opportunity to make a real, positive impact on the lives of millions of hungry people throughout our great country.

My experience with providing food assistance to people in need is more closely aligned with direct emergency feeding programs than government anti-hunger programs. I have been with the Regional Food Bank for 32 years, 31 as Executive Director. The Regional Food Bank, as do all food banks in the national Feeding America network, collects large donations of food from the food industry and provides it to food pantries, soup kitchens, emergency shelters, and other programs feeding hungry people. Our donated food is supplemented with food provided by the federal government through TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program), and purchased food that agencies can partly afford because of the New York State Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance

Program (HPNAP). We provided 32 million pounds of food to 1,000 agencies in 23 counties last year, and these programs in turn help feed 325,000 people a year. Nationally, the Feeding America network serves more than 46 million people through 58,000 programs, and provided nearly four billion pounds of food to these programs last year.

Our Food Bank's distribution has increased 60% since 2008, largely because of the increased need after the recession, but also due to the generosity of the food industry and changes we have made to accommodate more fresh produce and other perishable food. Our relationships with our member agencies inform us about the level of need they are experiencing in their communities, their challenges, and the challenges faced by the people they serve. We and food banks throughout the country have created many new programs in the last 10 years, such as Mobile Pantries and BackPack Programs, to get more nutritious food into the hands of people who are hungry or at risk of hunger. Food Banks are also involved with government programs like SNAP Outreach, Summer Feeding, After School Feeding Programs, and others.

Given my experiences working on the issue of hunger, my first and perhaps strongest recommendation to you to reduce food insecurity is to encourage Congress to do no harm. Congress is currently debating ideas like block granting SNAP. It is inconceivable to me that anyone could possibly think such a change would be beneficial for hungry people. Instead, it is basically a cost cutting measure. SNAP is widely recognized as a proven, effective program as currently structured. The federal government and our legislators should be proud of it. Please encourage Congress to leave it alone or strive to make it even better. Do not begin dismantling a program the government designed to help the hungry that is actually working as it was intended.

I know this is beyond the scope of this Commission, but I would be remiss if I did not also encourage you to do whatever you can to push Congress to increase the minimum wage. One of your stated objectives is to reduce the need for government nutrition assistance programs. There is no better way to reduce that need than by ensuring working people earn a wage that can adequately sustain them and provide the basic necessities of life.

I would like to focus my remaining time on recommendations in the following areas: TEFAP, the Summer Food Service Program, tax incentives for the donation of food, and efforts USDA can and should expand to facilitate the donation of fresh produce.

TEFAP is a great program. It provides a nice variety of good quality food. Since the food goes to our member agencies free of charge, it is extremely beneficial to them. Unfortunately, the TEFAP food supply is very inconsistent, sometimes due to federal budget issues and other times for reasons never made clear to us. This inconsistency makes it hard for food banks and food pantries to plan, and leads to gaps in service and

more costly operations for all of our programs. Food banks typically administer TEFAP in their states, but often there is such an abundance of food many of them cannot store it all in their warehouses and either have to turn some of it down or rent off-site storage at a premium cost to accept it. Just as often, there is hardly any food available and agencies have to cut back on the food they provide their guests or purchase food at retail prices to meet the need. It would be very helpful if Congress could keep funding more stable and consistent, and USDA maintain a steadier flow of food.

The Summer Food Service Program is another great federal hunger relief program focused specifically on children. We have administered it at our Food Bank with great success. We would love to expand it into other neighborhoods and communities, but the USDA mandate that all summer meals must be consumed on-site under the supervision of an adult makes it impossible to do so. Modification or elimination of that one requirement would enable program administrators to find new and creative ways to get meals to children in need, especially in rural areas where the program is vastly underrepresented.

Feeding America and its network of food banks have made increasing the amount of fresh produce distributed to the people we serve a key part of our strategic plans over the last decade. Our network currently provides about one billion pounds of produce annually, about 600 million pounds of which is donated from produce farmers, packers, and shippers. Getting fresh fruits and vegetables to the hungry people who need it is a huge focus for us. We have set an aggressive goal of closing the national meal gap, which consists of distributing enough meals so every individual in the United States in need of a meal has access to one. Increasing produce donations is a key to achieving that goal. Produce is abundantly available, and in a recent research study, 55% of the people we serve said fresh fruits and vegetables were the most desired items not received.

However, there are challenges to obtaining more fresh produce, some of which are logistic in nature. But in many cases, the decision to donate or not is made before a discussion of logistics even starts. Thousands of farmers donate each year to help those in need, but their donations account for only a small fraction of the available produce to donate. There is a real financial impact on donors to pack and prepare excess food for donation, a cost not all donors can bear. Many farmers are not eligible for the federal food donation tax deduction that lets qualified donors take an enhanced tax deduction when they donate nutritious food to non-profits. More specifically, most farmers use cash basis accounting, and the food donation tax deduction requires a donor to know their cost to produce the item. Farmers using cash basis accounting are not able to do so. That is a key reason why Feeding America is championing federal legislation that would fix this problem so all donors, regardless of accounting method or business size, can take the food donation tax deduction.

Feeding America and its network food banks have been working with supporters in Congress and throughout the food industry to enact the America Gives More Act (H.R.644 and its companion bill S.930, the Good Samaritan Hunger Relief Tax Incentive Act). These bills would improve and expand federal tax incentives so all donors, large or small, can take an enhanced tax deduction when they donate excess food to a non-profit.

Congress passed a special food donation tax deduction in 1976, but the provision was available to C corporation taxpayers only. While the provision had a powerful impact on food donations, it left out significant segments of the food industry, including many farmers and growers that are not eligible for the incentive. In 2006, as part of the Pension Protection Act, Congress enacted a two year provision expanding the food donation tax deduction to include all business taxpayers as eligible donors, not just C corporations. This temporary provision has been consistently extended, yet the provision could provide a greater incentive to encourage food donations if it were made permanent. The temporary nature of the deduction is a disincentive to small businesses that want to establish or expand a food donation program. It should not cost a business more to donate excess food than it does to landfill it, yet that is the exact situation small businesses and farmers face each day.

We have seen a 137% increase in the amount of food donations from non C corporations since the temporary provision was enacted in 2006. However, the temporary nature of this provision makes it very difficult for small businesses to incorporate food donations into a long term business plan and reduces the amount of businesses willing to donate food. We strongly believe enactment of the America Gives More Act would help encourage increased donations of excess produce as well as food inventory across the food industry spectrum.

Finally, tax incentives are only one part of the solution to making more donated produce available to hungry Americans. There are many costly logistical challenges that impede the ability of food banks to acquire and distribute more produce, packing and shipping costs chief among them. It can cost our Food Bank \$6,000-\$7,000 to ship one trailer load of produce from major growing regions like Texas and California. It is very difficult for us and most food banks to cover such high costs on a consistent basis. Feeding America food banks have started to work with USDA to fund pilot grant programs that will increase promotion of fresh produce and help us get more donations of produce for the people we serve. We would love to expand this work with USDA and Congress to identify how we could maximize the impact of these grants.

That sums up my testimony. On behalf of the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York, Feeding America, our partner agencies, and the people we serve, thank you for this opportunity to discuss how together we can reduce hunger in our nation.

