

July 14 National Commission on Hunger
Lisa Davis Oral Testimony
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Good afternoon Members of the National Commission on Hunger.

My name is Lisa Davis and I am the Senior Vice President of Government Relations at Feeding America. I appreciate the opportunity to share with you some of our recommendations to strengthen anti-hunger policy.

The Feeding America network of 198 food banks reaches every state and every county across our nation, providing about 3.4 billion meals to more than 46.5 million Americans each year, including 12 million children and 9 million seniors. While emergency food distribution is our network's core mission, many food banks are also developing programs and partnerships to "shorten the line" by helping clients achieve stability and get back on their feet.

Our goal is to end hunger. Achieving that goal requires a coordinated public-private response. While food banks and pantries are a critical supplement to fill the gaps in the nutrition safety-net, they cannot replace the strong nutrition programs operated by USDA, including SNAP, TEFAP, CSFP, WIC, CACFP, School Lunch and Breakfast and Summer Meals.

These programs are working well, yet gaps remain. With the right policy changes we can ensure that more families and children have access to the nutrition they need and reduce food insecurity.

One of the biggest opportunities is the Summer Food Service Program or SFSP. Nationally, only 18% of kids who receive free or reduced price meals during the school year are participating in the summer meals program. What are the challenges? The current model, which requires children to consume meals at a designated site, works well in those instances where children are already congregating for summer camp, tutoring or other activities. However, the majority of low-income children stay home during the summer and don't have access to summer programming and thus to meals.

During the school year, there is a busing system in place to get kids to and from school. In the summer this infrastructure goes away. Many children are too young to walk to sites or unable to travel across busy streets or through high crime areas while their parents are at work.

In rural communities the challenges are more pronounced.

There often simply are not sites where children can congregate and families are dispersed over large areas. For example, in Kansas there are 44 counties without a single summer feeding site.

There are several policy changes that would help reach more children during the summer.

First, we could significantly strengthen the site based model by allowing community providers to utilize one set of program guidelines for summer and afterschool meals. Currently they must operate two different federal programs- CACFP during the school year and SFSP in the summer- even if they are serving the same kids at the same sites all year round. This means duplicative applications, monitoring and training of staff. Moving to one program year round will allow community providers to focus on feeding kids- not pushing paperwork.

We also need to provide new program models tailored to hard to reach areas if we truly want to make progress in closing the summer gap.

Providing low-income families of children receiving free or reduced price school meals with an EBT card to purchase food during the summer has proven to be effective. The EBT demonstration projects that USDA tested at 14 sites were

extensively evaluated and the results were significant. Very low child food insecurity decreased by 33 percent among participating families.

We would like to see this program significantly expanded in communities that have high need and are difficult to reach.

Providing waivers from the congregate requirement to allow innovative program models in hard to reach areas will also help reach more kids. Allowing community providers to deliver meals to families, families to pick up several days-worth of meals for their children or sending meals home with children for days when the site isn't open or they cannot reach the site would minimize the transportation and logistical hurdles, complement the site-based model and allow food banks and other community providers to combine private funding with federal program support to effectively fill the gaps to ensure low-income children have access to the nutrition they need throughout the year.

Another area of opportunity I would like to focus on is the large amount of nutritious food wasted each year - 70 billion pounds by USDA estimates. Food waste exist all along the "Farm to Fork" continuum, and identifying food donation opportunities and creating the models to support those donations has been an area where food banks have focused their efforts.

We have identified several key areas where USDA could help improve our efforts to recover excess fresh produce from local farmers and producers and connect it with clients in need. Many of the USDA grants that exist are focused on funding specific needs in local communities but not on broader challenges. For instance, a food bank could receive a Community Facilities Grant through rural development to fund a mobile pantry to deliver food locally, but that grant does not include funding to help food banks establish partnerships with local growers to recover excess produce. While the USDA's Strikeforce Initiative does a wonderful job of connecting grants to help target low income areas, more could be done to provide additional economic support to local growers and food for those in need with greater coordination of USDA resources.

Federal tax incentives also play a critical role encouraging food donation, but again gaps remain. The current enhanced tax deduction for businesses that donate food is not available to the vast majority- about 95%- of farmers and local growers. Without the enhanced deduction, it costs them more money to donate excess crops than it does to dump them or leave them in the fields.

A third area of opportunity is in strengthening the TEFAP program. For Feeding America food banks, TEFAP food are the mainstay of nutritious food we have distributed to our clients. They compromise about 20% of the food we distribute to clients and provide a solid return on investment for America's agriculture community. Yet the amount of funding provided to store and distribute this TEFAP food has not kept pace. The farm bill authorizes \$100 million for TEFAP storage and distribution each year, yet it has only been funded at about \$49 million per year. This shortage in funding impacts food banks nationwide, especially those serving rural areas. For Feeding America food banks, in 2014 the TEFAP storage and distribution funds provided only about 21.9% of the cost necessary to get TEFAP food distributed to clients.

This means that food banks must redirect privately raised funds from other key local needs. Fully funding TEFAP storage and distribution would have a significant impact on the ability of food banks to continue investing in innovative programs and improve the amount of food we can distribute to Americans in need.

Finally, we must strengthen federal nutrition programs that serve seniors. Between 2001 and 2012, the number of food insecure seniors increased by 130%.

Expanding the Commodity Supplemental Food Program or CSFP, which currently reaches only about 590,000 seniors and is not available in every state is critical. Effective SNAP outreach strategies targeted to seniors are also an important lever for ensuring more of our nation's vulnerable seniors get the nutrition they need.

Together we have the ability to end hunger in the United States. Every day, our food banks are striving to do more in local communities- offering job training, programs for veterans, providing fresh produce in food deserts and ensuring that more children and seniors are being fed.

By strengthening federal nutrition programs, tax incentives to encourage donations and USDA grants to rural and high poverty areas, we can make significant progress toward ending hunger.

Thank you.