

**Testimony submitted to the
National Commission on Hunger**

Submitted by Forgotten Harvest
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Forgotten Harvest is honored to submit policy recommendations to the National Commission on Hunger and offers to work with the Commission on policies that will successfully address and end hunger.

As a non-profit food *rescue* organization serving the tri-county Metro Detroit area, Forgotten Harvest has twenty-five years of experience securing donated nutritious, surplus food and delivering that healthy food free-of-charge to over 280 partner agencies for distribution to people facing food insecurity. Last year, Forgotten Harvest distributed nearly 49 million pounds of food – primarily perishable, fresh and prepared foods -- for people in need. Based on our experience, we offer the following priorities to the National Commission on Hunger as near-term and long-term priorities to address hunger effectively.

- **Change societal tolerance for food waste through effective policy incentives so that U.S. society assures that surplus, safe, edible nutritious food across the food supply chain is donated for distribution to people facing hunger.**

According to U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) most recent annual food security report¹, over 49 million people in the U.S. face food insecurity. A study² conducted by United Way reports that nearly 40% of Michiganders face hunger – both people living below the federal poverty level plus people working *and* slightly above the poverty level yet still unable to meet “basic survival needs,” including “housing, child care, food, health care, and transportation.” (ALICE studies in other states report similarly dire conditions regarding basic needs and hunger.)

At the same time, the USDA, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and Feeding America estimate the nation destroys annually about 70 billion pounds of food. While not all of that wasted food is edible, much of the wasted food is nutritious, safe, and edible *and* could be rescued safely for distribution to people facing hunger.

Forgotten Harvest urges the Commission to place a high priority on policies to urge food businesses – from growers and ranchers to distributors, wholesalers, manufacturers, processors, retailers, industrial food consumers (e.g., schools, hospitals, and congregate living sites), and high quality entertainment venues -- to donate their surplus food for charitable purposes. Today's wasted food

¹ “Household Food Security in the United States in 2013,” USDA, Economic Research Report Number 173, published September 2014.

² “ALICE: Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed – Study of Financial Hardship,” published 2014

is destroyed on a massive scale yet individual perceptions often focus on table scraps, spoiled food in home refrigerators, and reception buffet tables.

Helping educate people across the nation on the scale of wasted food which otherwise could feed millions of their neighbors facing hunger would have both hunger relief and environmental benefits. By changing society's attitude and behaviors toward surplus food waste, the nation would have a plentiful source of safe, nutritious emergency food for people facing need while reducing the volume of municipal waste and the production of methane, a greenhouse gas. (The EPA reports that food waste continues to be the second largest generator of waste to municipal landfills³ and that waste decaying in anaerobic conditions is a major producer⁴ of methane gas.)

Forgotten Harvest has proven that rescuing perishable fresh and prepared foods – the nutritious food often hardest for low-income people to access -- can be accomplished safely and effectively on a large scale. Forgotten Harvest would be honored to join the Commission in an education effort to urge food businesses and communities to make donation of surplus food a community and national priority.

Also, Forgotten Harvest actively supports public policies that are effective in encouraging food donation across the agriculture / food sector and works enthusiastically to share its business model across the hunger relief sector – and will gladly join the Commission in support of these types of actions. Some of the proven policies that support food donation include: a) tax incentives to encourage charitable food donation; b) the State of Michigan's "Michigan Agricultural Surplus System" (MASS) to support local growers and producers unable to harvest or transport surplus nutritious food, particularly safe healthy food considered to be unmarketable; and c) "Good Samaritan" liability protection laws to reinforce donations from all food businesses.

– **Reauthorize and increase flexibility for children's nutrition programs to improve access and participation, particularly in the summer meal programs.**

The federal statute authorizing school meals, children's summer meals, WIC, and other critical children's nutrition programs will expire in September 2015. Programs to help feed children through schools are effective and should be reauthorized, including the effective Community Eligible Program (CEP).

Sadly, about 82% of the children who receive free and reduced-cost school meals cannot access summer meals sites. Forgotten Harvest believes that Congress has the opportunity now with reauthorization to address this status and urges the following key policy recommendations. (The attachment, prepared by the major hunger relief organizations in Michigan including Forgotten Harvest, includes details for each example.)

- Implement flexibility to improve access and participation in the summer meal programs.
- Increase flexibility to waive congregate eating requirements for children's summer meals.
- Implement flexibility to provide families with a grocery/EBT card in situations when accessing congregate eating is not a reasonable option.

³ "Advancing Sustainable Materials Management: 2013 Fact Sheet," – Assessing Trends in Materials Generation, Recycling And Disposal in the United States," EPA, published June 2015.

⁴ "Overview of Greenhouse Gases: Methane Emissions." U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

- Streamline the oversight and monitoring of sites for sponsors and for state-administering agencies; also, integrate summer and afterschool feeding programs.

– **Strengthen USDA’s “The Emergency Food Assistance Program” (TEFAP).**

TEFAP is one of the primary sources of nutritious emergency food across the nation’s hunger relief sector. In Michigan, TEFAP is distributed through the state’s food bank / food rescue network, including Forgotten Harvest, and also through “Community Assistance Program” organizations.

Forgotten Harvest urges the Commission to encourage Congress to fully fund TEFAP to the maximum limits authorized in the Farm Bill, including the TEFAP Transportation and Storage budget, to assure that distributing organizations have sufficient resources. Also, the Commission should urge USDA to purchase TEFAP using its “Bonus” opportunities to further expand the availability of nutritious food for people facing need.

– **Address the growing incidence of food insecurity among seniors.**

National data shows that the incidence of seniors facing hunger is increasing. Seniors often lack options to return to the labor market to increase their household incomes and also face increasing basic costs, as they address transportation, health, and assisted living support needs associated with aging.

Forgotten Harvest urges the Commission to pursue policies that benefit seniors, including nutrition programs and SNAP outreach to reach seniors effectively. While helping many seniors apply for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Forgotten learned valuable lessons: reaching seniors successfully requires different actions due to their caution, living situations, reduced mobility, and, for some, physical and cognitive challenges. Forgotten Harvest urges the Commission to pursue public policies and programs that are sensitive to the unique needs of seniors to address food insecurity effectively among this growing vulnerable population.

– **Work collaboratively across all sectors -- private, public, and non-profit sectors -- to define and implement policies that solve hunger.**

While Forgotten Harvest’s mission is “dedicated to relieving hunger in metro-Detroit and preventing nutritious food waste,” its vision is “to envision communities that work together to end hunger ... creating individual, neighborhood, economic, and environmental health.”

To successfully end hunger, Forgotten Harvest urges the Commission to evaluate and pursue proven policies and to support meaningful research to address and solve the multiple reasons that 49 million people in the U.S. today face food insecurity. Food security is a basic human right. Achieving a food secure nation requires comprehensive, collaborative partnerships to address the complex and highly varied reasons that people face hunger. Forgotten Harvest supports positive progress toward the goal to effectively solve hunger.

Forgotten Harvest would gladly meet with the Commission and welcomes any questions.

ATTACHMENT

Priorities for Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR) June 2015

Key goal: To strengthen, improve, and streamline child nutrition programs so that our nation's children in low-income households may access summer meals so they may thrive and succeed.

The Richard B Russell National School Lunch Act (amended; enacted Feb 7, 2014) enacted multiple programs to provide child nutrition with the following objectives:

*“ ... as a measure of national security, **to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation's children** and to encourage the domestic consumption of nutritious agricultural commodities and other food, by assisting the States, through grants-in-aid and other means, in providing an adequate supply of foods and other facilities for the establishment, maintenance, operation, and expansion of nonprofit school lunch programs.”*

We recommend implementing CNR program flexibility to improve access and participation in summer meal programs. Our recommended priorities are founded on the belief that far too few eligible children access summer meals.

- Over the past 3 years, even with major efforts under the current Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) structure and with support of MI Department of Education, the percentage of eligible Michigan children who eat free and reduced-cost meals during the school year and also receive summer meals has grown very little: from 15% (2012) to 16% (2013) to 18% (2014).
- Almost 30% (28%) of low-income Michigan kids live in areas ineligible for “open” sites in the summer meal programs.

We believe incremental changes are insufficient to minimize food insecurity among our nation's children. The programs were enacted during another era and are not effective in today's environment. We believe the following revisions are appropriate and achievable to benefit all children facing food insecurity by providing program structure changes for *today's* families living in rural, suburban, *and* urban communities.

We offer these recommendations acknowledging that they will help streamline the CNR summer programs to make more efficient use of taxpayer funds used to run the programs.

Finally, our recommendations are founded on our broad experiences providing summer, snack, breakfast, backpack, dinner, and school year children's meals using various methods to reach food insecure children effectively.

We recommend increasing flexibility to waive congregate eating for SFSP in these situations:

- **For households in which children must stay at home**
 - Challenging summer logistics for families demonstrate that non-congregate options are necessary.
 - *Working parents* often require children old enough to stay home to remain in the home and not leave for any reason, including accessing meal sites.
 - In some situations, older children are caretakers for younger children, who are required to remain at home.
 - Homes are safe places for children in this situation; children eating together at home represent a high priority for a healthy, safe family.
 - The option for children to eat at home also provides an excellent opportunity for meal providers to send nutritional information home to parents.
- **For low-income families forced to pay for latchkey programs in order to have their children qualify for nutrition programs**
 - For a working parent whose work schedule restricts the timing to drop-off and pick-up children for summer meals, the parent may be forced to pay for latchkey programs – an irony for a low-income parent whose children are eligible for free summer meals.
- **In inclement weather, in addition to heat**
 - Many sites lack shelter to protect children from rain, storms, or cold, putting children at risk in severe weather and chilly conditions.
 - Enabling children to eat at home is a healthier alternative.
 - The current congregate waiver for severe heat should be retained.
- **When a site lacks infrastructure**
 - Children deserve shelter from inclement weather; seating for healthy, safe food consumption; clean bathrooms with hand-washing provisions; and trash pickup.
- **For a child with disabilities**
 - Transporting a disabled child, particularly in heat or inclement weather, may be challenging or harmful, particularly if the caregiver must walk the children to a site.
 - Without a waiver, if the parent believes the child cannot tolerate the weather, then the child does not receive a meal.
- **When children must travel an unreasonable distance**
 - The safety and security of children travelling to a site is critical at any location.
 - The CNR programs are intended “to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation’s children” so they may thrive and succeed.
 - Forcing children eligible for nutritious meals to travel through unsafe conditions is not acceptable and not aligned the program’s fundamental goals.
- **With lack of safe, affordable, or convenient transportation**
 - Accessing a site, particularly in summer and during other times when school busses are not in service, is a challenge for children in rural, suburban, and urban locations.

We believe these options will increase the rates of children accessing nutritious meals, will increase the alternatives for sponsors to provide meals safely and efficiently, and will result in healthier children and stronger communities. While congregate eating may provide

enrichment and community benefits for many children, we also believe the wide variability in the quality of “enrichment” at sites is not a sufficient reason to restrict the greater benefits resulting from flexibility from congregate eating in certain circumstances to increase children’s access and participation in summer meals.

We recommend flexibility in providing EBT in situations when accessing congregate eating is not a reasonable option.

- We encourage continued expansion of the use of summer EBT to provide funding to a child’s family when accessing a site is impossible due to program regulations and guidelines, or highly impractical, or where no site is available.
- We understand broad use of EBT at this time may be challenging given likely fiscal constraints.

We recommend streamlining the oversight and monitoring of sites for sponsors and for state-administering agencies and integrating summer and afterschool feeding programs.

- Removing duplicative administrative processes and aligning inconsistent program requirements will allow non-profit sponsors to focus on feeding hungry children.
- Eliminating duplicative SFSP and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) requirements will encourage more sponsors and programs.