

**Testimony to the National Commission on Hunger, Little Rock, AR  
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Thank you--

It's an honor to have been invited here to spend some time with you today discussing the issue of hunger. In the interest of clarity, I should state that what I have to say today represents my personal perspective, not necessarily that of my employer, Tyson Foods. It is, however, informed by more than fifteen years of leading strategic corporate support for hunger relief efforts. I'm not a professional hunger fighter, but I have the honor and privilege of being associated with them every day, and I'm humbled and inspired by the passion, the creativity and selfless work of those directly involved in hunger relief, many of whom are here, represented on this commission, or presenting today. Let me first, on behalf of my employer and the 120 thousand Tyson Team Members, just say thanks to all who dedicate their lives to seeing that people don't go hungry.

I'm not a professional hunger fighter, but I am a professional communicator. For more than twenty years, I've assisted in managing communications for a Fortune 100 company, sometimes around some extremely complex issues. I do bring that skillset to the table, and some of what I'll be discussing today is about how we *communicate* to reach awareness, consensus and ultimately solutions.

Fifteen years ago, we at Tyson Foods began our support of hunger relief with the idea that we could engage resources readily available and have an impact in the fight against hunger. We feed people. We produce food. And our primary products, protein, are always in great need by food banks and other emergency feeding operations. We're not a high-margin business, but we are able to provide strategic funding support for hunger relief efforts. And finally—and I believe most importantly—in 2000, we had about 55,000 employees in around 60 U.S. communities. That number has grown to 120,000 employees in 115

communities. We believed then—and we still do—that engaging our team members in their own communities is perhaps the most valuable contribution we can make to hunger relief.

An interesting and concerning thing occurred as we began encouraging our own people to get involved in local hunger relief efforts. All too often we heard, “Well, we understand hunger is national problem—we get it—but when you look at our community—Springdale, Arkansas; Waterloo, Iowa; Pasco Washington; Wilkesboro, North Carolina—it’s really not such a big challenge here.” We all know that’s not accurate, no matter where you go. The implication was, “We have much more urgent local challenges to which we should direct our attention.” And we began to wonder just how widespread this perception is around the U.S. Because if people don’t consider this as a problem that’s close to home, they won’t give it the urgency and resources it might require to achieve solutions.

So in 2011, we worked with FRAC—the Food Research and Action Center—to commission a nationwide survey to determine knowledge, perceptions and attitudes toward hunger in the United States. The results were interesting, and somewhat concerning: Two thirds of the people surveyed believed hunger to be a serious *national* problem. But the same percentage, didn’t perceive it as a serious issue in their own community.

So at Tyson Foods, we began to focus a lot of our involvement around creating awareness about food insecurity. We created a campaign titled “KNOW Hunger,” with the belief that if we can help people—especially Tyson Team Members—understand that their own communities are directly affected by food insecurity, and that that food insecurity has a direct impact on their own lives, then they’ll be motivated to get involved.

It’s an approach that’s worked within our own communities. And we’ve seen some really good work being done by hunger advocates toward creating awareness. Feeding America’s Map the Meal Gap, and the focused, localized work being done by No Kid Hungry provide just two great examples. But we still have a long way to go. Last fall, we commissioned FRAC to repeat the original 2010 survey, and the results had not changed significantly. Almost two-thirds of respondents perceived hunger as a significant societal challenge. Just one that’s not so significant in their own community.

We believe we should all be striving for sustainable solutions that move people permanently out of food insecurity. And kudos to this commission for your work toward that direction. But we also recognize that meeting immediate needs is just as critical. And we know federal nutrition programs—SNAP, WIC, the Child Nutrition program—represent the best, perhaps the only way to do this on a scalable basis.

I'd like to point out in particular the great strides being made in child nutrition programs that feed kids at breakfast—particularly breakfast in the classroom—after school, and in the summer when they might not have access to school lunch programs. Our friends at Share Our Strength have taken us to visit several sites where this activity occurs, and the work never fails to impress. We see great enthusiasm from teachers, administrators and school foodservice management—some of whom initially approached the work apprehensively—about the benefits these programs bring to their schools and their communities.

Now a part of our KNOW Hunger Awareness campaign is focused on helping our own stakeholders understand that these federal nutrition programs are vitally needed.

We're concerned that discussion of these programs, especially their funding, has become politically divisive at times. We're concerned that there seems to be an unwarranted amount of opinion that there's widespread abuse, fraud and dependency, when we're told by people we trust that's far from the truth. When we discuss this issue with our friends who are hunger advocates, there seems to be a reluctance to create a public conversation that directly and assertively refutes the perceptions of fraud, for fear of giving credence to those making the accusations. We might suggest this approach is counterproductive.

Let me use an analogy from an issue we've had to manage at Tyson Foods: animal well-being. Farmers who grow livestock used in our production have every reason to treat animals humanely. It makes good business sense, and it's the right thing to do. Yet for years, detractors of the meat industry have been able to bring isolated examples of inhumane treatment to the public's attention, creating the impression we have systemic problems with mistreatment of animals. People on our side were hesitant to enter into a public debate because we knew accusations of widespread abuse were unfounded, and believed being drawn into

a debate would lend credibility to the accusers. We finally realized the detractors had greater control of the conversation, and if we were going to change perceptions, we'd need to be proactive. So we created a program, called FarmCheck, focused specifically on addressing animal well-being. We created a system of on-farm third-party auditing. We created an advisory board of third-party animal well-being experts to consider animal husbandry issues. And we committed resources to research into how animal husbandry could be continuously improved. And most importantly, we began communicating about what we're doing. And it's working. While we're not immune from criticism, and never will be, we proved that we have a shared value with those who are truly concerned about animal well-being.

We might suggest that a similar, proactive approach could be taken as funding for federal nutrition programs comes up for debate. We know there are already auditing programs in place. We might suggest advisory boards consisting of neutral third party experts. And finally, we know there's already a great story to tell regarding the management of these programs. It might be time to start more proactively telling that story. Only when we do that can we more effectively control the conversation. Because the shared value on all sides of this debate is that every single dollar invested in federal nutrition programs should be committed to those who are truly in need.

I'd like to close by applauding a trend being seen more and more across the country, and that's true collaboration among the public, private and non-profit sectors toward finding solutions to hunger. For the longest time, I believe we worked peripherally with each other, each striving toward our own worthy objectives, sometimes on parallel tracks. But more recently, these sectors have begun to establish common goals, communicate and collaborate. The best example is the work being done in Arkansas among No Kid Hungry, the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance, the food banks, private partners, and the resources the state of Arkansas has brought bear. There are measurable positive results which you've heard about or will hear about today. Our hats are off to those who have rolled up their sleeves and done the hard work to make great strides in fight against hunger.

Thank you again for the invitation to be here today. We appreciate your allowing us to provide our perspective.