



Elevating Voices to End Hunger Together: Feeding America’s Policy Recommendations for the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health

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A Letter from Feeding America CEO Claire Babineaux-Fontenot

To the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health:

Food is foundational to strong families and a strong country.

Feeding America, the nation's largest hunger-relief network of 200 food banks, 21 statewide associations and 60,000 partner faith-based and charitable food pantries and meal programs, applauds the Biden-Harris administration's bold vision to end hunger in America by 2030. The convening of the first White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health in more than 50 years provides an opportunity for policymakers, nonprofits, private companies and community members with lived experience to come together and co-create solutions to end hunger in America.

Last year, **1 in 6 people** in the U.S.—53 million people—sought help from the charitable food sector. We urge the administration to keep hunger and food insecurity at the forefront of its conference goals by focusing on policies that provide the most support and opportunity for people in communities throughout our country—our neighbors—who are facing the greatest hardships. Through this approach, we will lift up all other issues connected to food insecurity, including health, well-being, education, and workforce development. We believe much of the conversation should examine ways to increase the effectiveness and reach of federal nutrition programs. These programs are a proven and essential way to help ensure everyone in the U.S., no matter their background or ZIP code, can access the food and resources they say they need to thrive.

In the pages that follow, Feeding America outlines key anti-hunger policy recommendations—a new playbook for ending hunger in America. We focus on ways to provide nourishing food today and help our neighbors build a path to a brighter, food-secure future. These solutions are grounded in science and data and informed by the experiences of people facing hunger. The Feeding America network connects with tens of millions of people each year in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico, and we have seen how vital the voices and experiences of people facing hunger are to devising better solutions and how essential their insights are toward building an America where no one is hungry. That is why the Feeding America network is connecting directly with individuals and families with living or lived experience of food insecurity through 100 listening sessions, 10,000 questionnaires and 100,000 text message conversations. The valuable insights gleaned through these conversations are reflected in these policy recommendations.

We are grateful for the opportunity to share our expertise, amplify the voices of neighbors facing hunger, and support a robust cross-sector approach to ending hunger in our country. By ensuring every person in America has access to an adequate supply of nutritious food, we can create a stronger future for individuals, families, and our nation.

Your partner in fighting hunger,



Claire Babineaux-Fontenot
Chief Executive Officer
Feeding America



INTRODUCTION

The White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health is an opportunity to catalyze a broad and inclusive anti-hunger movement with the goal of ending hunger in America by 2030. With this call to action from Congress and the administration, we are on the precipice of real and lasting change to improve the lives and health of millions of people throughout the nation.

Feeding America shares the White House's commitment to this ambitious 2030 goal. We also recognize that centering the voices of people facing hunger and advancing racial equity are the most consequential steps we can take to sustainably end hunger in America. We are committed to long-term, systemic change to eliminate economic, social, and structural inequities by race—as well as location, or “place”—that contribute to food insecurity for individuals and communities, informed by people with lived experience.

As the largest hunger-relief organization in the U.S., Feeding America is leading the domestic fight to end hunger. Through a network of more than 200 food banks, 21 statewide food bank associations, and over 60,000 faith-based and charitable partner agencies, food pantries and meal programs, we helped provide 6.6 billion meals to tens of millions of people in need last fiscal year. Feeding America also works to raise awareness about food insecurity in our nation, advocates for policies to protect people in need, and conducts in-depth research to find solutions.

To help inform our recommendations for the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health, Feeding America launched the *Elevating Voices to End Hunger Together* initiative to collect input from people facing food insecurity. This effort's [guiding principles](#) put people facing hunger at the center of the work, with solutions grounded in preserving their dignity and agency. We urge our partners to also adopt these principles as we approach anti-hunger work collectively. Through *Elevating Voices to End Hunger Together*, we are engaged in a variety of activities to reach people in the community, listening and learning with the goal of co-creating solutions. Through 100 listening sessions, 10,000 questionnaires and 100,000 text message conversations, we are connecting with individuals and families with living or lived experience of food insecurity. Feeding America also commissioned a survey of 1,317 adults who have experienced food insecurity in the last two years for their feedback on challenges and potential solutions. We will publish the full survey data and findings later this summer; early insights are included throughout this document.

OVERVIEW: THE STATE OF HUNGER IN AMERICA

Feeding America is committed to a future where every person can access the food and resources they say they need to thrive. Today, many people in America do not have the resources to meet their basic needs, which increases their risk of food insecurity. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food insecurity as a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life.

Even before the pandemic, disparate access to economic opportunity meant that families with low incomes still faced the threat of hunger, despite a growing economy. More than 35 million people in the U.S., including more than 10 million children and 5 million seniors, experienced food insecurity in 2019. Then COVID hit.

Feeding America estimates at least 60 million people sought charitable food assistance in 2020, many for the first time. During the first year of the pandemic, food banks reported the level of increased demand was about 55% higher compared to the year prior to the pandemic. We are moving from a pandemic crisis to a hunger crisis. According to the most recent data from the USDA, 38.3 million

people in America experienced food insecurity in 2020. And in May 2022, around 45% of food banks reported serving more people in April 2022 compared to March 2022.

The pandemic and ensuing economic fallout also worsened the preexisting racial and gender disparities of hunger. Decades of underinvestment in disadvantaged neighborhoods, institutional barriers and discriminatory policies have led to staggering rates of food insecurity and low economic mobility for millions of Americans, especially for Black, Latino and Native American communities. Pre-COVID, Black, Latino, and Native American individuals were two to three times as likely to experience food insecurity as compared to white, non-Hispanic individuals.

Gender disparities also exist in hunger. According to a 2020 USDA report, single-parent, female-headed households are significantly more likely to be food-insecure than single-parent, male-headed households (27.7% to 16.3%). LGBTQ individuals often experience food insecurity or other food-related challenges at higher rates than the overall population. For example, a study based on data from 2013-2018 showed that households with a lesbian, gay or bisexual adult were more likely to be food insecure than households without a sexual minority adult. Transgender people are three times more likely than cisgender people to not have enough to eat.

Short-term emergency measures will not solve these long-term structural inequities. We must dismantle these systems by advancing new solutions, and people with living or lived experience of hunger must lead the solutions to end it. Feeding America's *Elevating Voices to End Hunger Together* research provided important insights. The leading causes of hunger cited by respondents include inflation/rising food costs (77%), high rents/mortgages (65%), job loss (58%) and low-wage jobs (53%). Other respondents indicated that having a chronic illness or disability (47%), lack of access to affordable health care (41%) and living in food deserts (38%) contributed to hunger.

As the Feeding America network works to end hunger in our country, we are guided by the principle of keeping people facing hunger at the center of all we do in order to address racial disparities in equitable food access. Our goals are to connect more people to nutritious food, work together to make sure all food banks have the nutritious and cultural foods their communities need, and identify ways to make it easier for people to gain access to food assistance and pathways to financial stability. To achieve these goals, we must come together—policymakers, the private sector, nonprofits and communities across the country—and decide to implement policies that will end hunger.

POLICY SOLUTIONS TO END HUNGER IN AMERICA BY 2030

We propose a range of strategies to meet the needs of people experiencing hunger and address the root causes of food insecurity so we can end hunger permanently.

Food banks are intended to be an emergency food system, providing temporary help to families in distress. But in recent years, food banks have become part of a regular monthly budget solution for millions of families and individuals in America. This is not sustainable. Food banks can help families with short-term food assistance during the transition to economic security. But to end hunger, we must build a robust federal safety net of food security programs. These programs can directly alleviate hunger *and* improve nutrition and health for families. It is equally important that these policies address the leading causes of food insecurity and advance equity.

Many of the recommendations below reflect what we have learned from our neighbors facing hunger about how to improve access to food and financial resources.

Recommendations

Strengthen Federal Commodities Programs

Our nation's food banks and programs like The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) that support them are lifelines for families facing hunger. Last year, 53 million people accessed the charitable food system. But charitable donations alone cannot ensure families get enough to eat. We need the government to do its part to keep food bank shelves stocked.

Increase TEFAP Funding

TEFAP is a means-tested federal program that provides food at no cost to individuals in need through organizations such as food banks, faith-based and charitable food pantries, soup kitchens and emergency shelters. As demand for food remains high at food banks, a continuous stream of TEFAP foods is essential. TEFAP also has a strong, positive impact on the farm economy. According to the USDA's Economic Research Service, TEFAP purchases give U.S. growers and producers an average of 27 cents per dollar, compared to approximately 16 cents per dollar from retail.

Congress should increase TEFAP funding for food purchases as well as storage and distribution costs. This will ensure TEFAP food levels remain steady throughout the food assistance network, continue to help households facing hunger, support the U.S. agricultural economy, and reduce food waste. Historically, Congress has authorized \$100 million in TEFAP administrative grants to cover the storage and distribution costs of TEFAP entitlement food purchases. As USDA has increased the amount of commodity support purchases distributed through TEFAP, the storage and distribution funding has not kept up. Additional funding will help cover the cost of distributing TEFAP foods, especially in remote and rural communities.

Rural areas in the U.S. have faced disproportionately high rates of food insecurity. Rural communities also lack equitable access to grocery stores, which creates food deserts. Feeding America knows that TEFAP is essential to fighting hunger in rural areas. Last year, the Feeding America network distributed 1.2 billion pounds of food in rural communities, 465 million pounds of which was provided through USDA commodity programs, like TEFAP.

Additional policy recommendations for strengthening TEFAP:

- Congress should increase TEFAP entitlement funds in the 2023 Farm Bill.
- Congress should increase the authorization for TEFAP administrative grants for storage and distribution in the 2023 Farm Bill.
- USDA should improve the distribution of commodity support purchases through TEFAP and other USDA food distribution programs, including in low-food-access, rural and tribal areas. This can be done by allocating funds for food distribution as part of commodity support purchases funded through Section 32, Commodity Credit Corporation, or other sources.

Improve TEFAP Administrative Processes

TEFAP state agencies should work with distributors of TEFAP foods, like food banks, to use policy options that optimize distribution. The USDA should strongly encourage states to reduce program administrative barriers and reduce barriers to eligibility. Federal law specifies four key requirements for TEFAP eligibility: Local organizations must collect an individual's name, income eligibility, address and

the number of people in their household. However, numerous states require additional paperwork that reduces individual dignity and creates burdensome processes for food banks and state agencies.

Strengthen and Modernize the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SNAP is the nation's first line of defense against hunger and the most efficient tool to end it. We have an opportunity through this conference and over the next eight years to strengthen and modernize SNAP in ways that cement equity, dignity and guaranteed access to food for people experiencing economic hardship. As we work to build SNAP for the 21st century and beyond, we call on the White House to consider these policy ideas:

Increase SNAP's Purchasing Power

Congress should set SNAP benefits at an adequate level (i.e., based on the Low-Cost Food Plan) for families to purchase sufficient quantities of nutritious foods. Eighty-three percent of respondents to Feeding America's survey, made up of different demographics and political beliefs, support increasing the income limits for SNAP and increasing the amount of benefits a family receives to reflect the real cost of living and buying groceries. Increasing SNAP benefits will also help seniors, people with disabilities, people working low-wage jobs, and others who are most likely to qualify for the minimum benefit. Further, it will decrease strain on food banks, which frequently serve people receiving SNAP benefits during the latter half of each month, after their SNAP dollars run out. Additionally, to reduce the "benefits cliff," Congress should adjust SNAP's structure to further improve on the gradual phase-out from benefits to income.

Maintain Dignity of Choice for People Receiving SNAP Benefits

We believe individuals receiving SNAP benefits should have the autonomy to choose foods that are culturally and demographically right for their families. Eighty-eight percent of survey respondents agreed it was very important or somewhat important to support people's dignity and choices in what they feed their families, regardless of whether they receive food assistance. Further, 78% of respondents want SNAP to make it easier to access healthy foods, not restrict food choices. There is widespread agreement on this approach. To increase access to healthy food, Congress should increase SNAP benefits through incentives like the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP), SNAP nutrition education efforts, and other proven approaches that expand options instead of limiting them.

Simplify and Streamline Eligibility Processes

Current SNAP eligibility rules and enrollment processes can be complicated and confusing. For households with seniors or people with disabilities, enrollment criteria vary widely in implementation and do not reflect mobility and transportation challenges. The USDA and Congress should improve and simplify SNAP access, particularly for seniors, college students, immigrants and others who do not qualify for or are unable to participate in SNAP due to eligibility and enrollment barriers.

Improve Enrollment Processes

Families in need face a variety of barriers to applying for SNAP, including the inability to take off work, lack of transportation, or lack of child care. Of those surveyed by Feeding America, 82% of respondents support modernizing the SNAP enrollment process and reducing the impact of time limits and work requirements. To address these issues, Congress should give states and counties (where SNAP is administered at the county level) sufficient resources to administer the program and update data and

technology systems as well as the human capital needed to provide dignified service to families facing food insecurity. This should also include efforts to make it easier for people to apply for SNAP, like making applications available online, allowing telephonic signatures, waiving in-person interviews, and extending office hours to include some evenings or weekend days. State implementing agencies should also remove the ban on accessing SNAP for individuals who have served felonies, simplify and extend reporting requirements, and expand categorical eligibility for the program to ease administrative burdens on families and state agencies. Where needed, states should also partner with trusted nonprofits to provide educational information, resources and support to help ensure anyone eligible for SNAP has access to the program and receives their maximum benefit amount.

Provide Better Support for Individuals Seeking Employment

In 2020, 39.9 million families participated in SNAP. Close to 70% of these were families with children, and more than one-quarter were households with seniors or people with disabilities. Most people on SNAP who can work, do work. For people who are temporarily unemployed, SNAP is one of the few resources available for receiving food support during a job search. Currently, food assistance ends after only three months for certain adults who are not able to find work or a qualifying job training program for at least 20 hours per week. This policy is complex and error-prone. This policy has increased food insecurity, and it has not been proven to positively impact employment. Without expanding current work requirements, Congress can better support SNAP participants seeking employment by removing the time limit on benefits and alleviating one source of pressure during the job-search process. States should improve their employment and training programs and ensure recipients are offered training opportunities that align with best practices. Federal agencies should also better align to support workforce and training needs.

Enhance Federal Child Nutrition Programs

The number of children facing hunger in the U.S. rose during the pandemic from more than 10 million children in 2019 to nearly 12 million children in 2020. Families with children are more likely to face hunger than those without children. Black and Latino children are more than twice as likely to face hunger as white children because of systemic racial injustice. A full 90% of respondents to Feeding America's survey shared the belief that every child in America should have the food they need to thrive and grow. Kids who do not get enough to eat—especially during their first three years—begin life at a serious disadvantage. Children facing hunger are more likely to be hospitalized, and they face higher risks of health conditions like anemia and asthma. As they grow up, kids who missed meals are more likely to have problems in school and other social situations.

To end child hunger, we must address the inequalities that make it more difficult for families of color to put food on the table. Federal nutrition programs play an essential role in ensuring all children have enough nutritious food to eat.

Extend and Expand the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer Program (Summer EBT)

When schools are closed, millions of children are locked out of their only reliable source of nutritious meals. During the pandemic, the Pandemic-EBT program allowed states to provide funding on an EBT card to participants in free and reduced-price lunch programs when child nutrition programs were not operating. For the same reasons, this critical program should be extended as a permanent Summer EBT program to boost families' food budgets during summer breaks and when youth meals are not otherwise available through school and child care settings.

Allow Flexibility for Summer Feeding Sites

Site-based models for summer meal programs are not always accessible for children who are dispersed across a community when school is not in session. Some children are at day camps and enrichment programs, but others are at home and harder to reach through a single, site-based delivery model. Kids should be allowed to consume meals off-site. This enables communities to adopt innovative program models to reach all children. During the pandemic, Congress allowed non-school food providers to use alternative delivery models to serve kids in hard-to-reach areas—a pragmatic change we should continue permanently.

Congress should also streamline the regulations and rules for community-based providers so that these organizations can feed children through a single program year-round. Right now, community-based organizations, like food banks and other nonprofits, must switch between operating the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) to provide meals during the summer and after school. This needless bureaucracy increases costs and reduces access to meals. Organizations should be allowed to operate SFSP all year to eliminate duplicative administrative processes and maintain their focus on providing meals to kids.

Additionally, Congress should expand the area eligibility requirement for summer feeding sites. The area eligibility test works best in population-dense areas. In suburban and rural areas where children travel greater distances to get to school, or in areas with greater socioeconomic diversity, communities may fail to meet the area eligibility test even though they have many children in need. Expanding area eligibility proved effective during COVID and would reduce sponsors' paperwork, increasing their likelihood of participation and allowing them to focus on site enrichment activities and nutritious meals. Allowing more programs to offer meals in the summer means more children can receive meals without having to travel too far from home.

Improve Access to and Quality of School Meals

The National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs play an important role in reducing child hunger, improving nutrition and health, and supporting learning. Congress should improve and simplify access to these programs, allowing more schools to offer free meals to all students by expanding community eligibility and increasing opportunities to directly certify children for free meals. Congress must also continue to support schools as they strive to improve the nutritional quality of meals by providing support, equipment and training to meet guidelines set in past Child Nutrition Reauthorization legislation. When asked, Feeding America's survey respondents placed high value on the National School Lunch Program (96%) as an important food assistance program that works to reduce hunger.

Increase Participation of Eligible Families in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

WIC provides pregnant and postpartum mothers and young children who are low-income with health and social service referrals and nutritious food. Fewer than half of eligible children ages 1 to 4 participate in WIC. By expanding eligibility, streamlining and extending certification, and supporting the continued integration of technology to modernize service delivery, Congress can ensure all qualified families have access to WIC benefits.

Increase Food Recovery and Food Access

In the U.S., an estimated 72 billion pounds of edible food goes to waste each year while the painful reality of hunger persists for tens of millions of people. It is unacceptable that 40% of the food grown,

processed and transported in this country annually goes to waste while millions of our neighbors experience food insecurity. Reducing food waste is a powerful opportunity to help not only end hunger but increase the sustainability of our food system.

The loss of food occurs at every stage of the food production and distribution system—from farmers to packers and shippers, from manufacturers to retailers to consumers. As the largest food rescue organization in the U.S., Feeding America is uniquely positioned to expand its food rescue programs at each of these stages and help provide even more nutritious food to families facing hunger.

Food banks work with food manufacturers, retailers, restaurants and growers to recover surplus nutritious food and distribute it to people in need. Feeding America is innovating and deploying new technologies to increase our food rescue capabilities and improve food access. To amplify traditional food rescue efforts, we launched [MealConnect](#), a free food donation app that connects potential food donors with our network of food banks, pantries and meal programs. Through this system, food donors have the certainty of knowing that donations go to a proven food rescue partner with stringent food safety guidelines and a commitment to equitable food distribution, while food banks and agency partners can see in real time what donations are available.

Feeding America is using technology to remove other barriers to food access and increase meals distributed to the communities we serve, which is critically important in communities of color and rural communities that have lower food access.

To help people access the food bank network, we developed OrderAhead, a tool to help reduce stigma and scheduling challenges. OrderAhead enables neighbors facing hunger to order food items from a food bank or partner agency and receive a home delivery or pick up food at a convenient community location, drive-thru distribution or delivery locker. Not only is this option easy, convenient and safe, but it also supports diverse no-contact distribution models and is locally customizable with national scale and support. As a new way to partner with community institutions, OrderAhead provides a foundation for expanding food access to people facing hunger.

To increase the amount of food rescued and increase food access, the USDA and Congress should:

- Increase technical support and education about the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act, to reduce donor concern about potential liability.
- Increase storage and distribution funding for food rescue efforts. The 2018 Farm Bill funded food waste pilots that USDA has implemented to focus on composting at the municipal level; this should be expanded to include food rescue support by food banks and others.
- Standardize food donation guidelines to allow the donation of safe, nutritious food beyond the “sell-by” date. Currently, 20 states do not allow the donation of food if it is beyond a “sell-by” date, even when the food is known to be safe and nutritious.
- Simplify food labels by providing a uniform national standard to reduce confusion around what terms like “sell-by,” “best-by,” “use-by,” and “best before” dates mean.
- Provide resources to innovative food rescue programs, including offsetting the cost to harvest, pack and transport donated food.
- Increase tax incentives for food donation and provide tax incentives for donations of transportation to 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations or grant dollars to support transportation and distribution of recovered food.
- Increase access to donated foods for Native American communities by allowing tribal organizations to receive donated food, along with 501(c)(3) organizations, under Internal Revenue Code Section 170(e)(3).

The USDA should support the increased use of Rural Development grants and funds to boost food access and distribution in rural communities. The administration should explore how to support mobile food pantries and grocery stores in low-food-access areas. Many food banks have started mobile grocery stores to provide opportunities for the people they serve to purchase foods using SNAP EBT cards.

The administration should also examine how to support innovative efforts to address food access and transportation challenges in food deserts, including funding for food delivery interventions, food lockers and mobile food distributions. Feeding America's OrderAhead pilot shows these interventions work to increase food access and are well received by community members.

Congress and the USDA should revise statutes and regulations to ensure that programs targeting rural communities are available to food banks and pantries which serve rural communities, even when those organizations are headquartered or have receiving docks in adjacent communities that do not meet the current definition of rural.

Expand Access to Nutritious Foods and Reduce Diet-Related Diseases

Just as nutrition and good health go hand in hand, so too do nutrition and food security. Food insecurity may be long-term or temporary for individuals and families, but the resulting health impacts can endure. Chronic conditions, like diabetes and high blood pressure, among others, disproportionately affect Black, Latino and Native American populations. Mental health conditions are worsened by food insecurity, while food insecurity can be exacerbated by mental health conditions. Feeding America is committed to addressing the social determinants of health and meeting the food needs and preferences of our neighbors facing hunger.

To help support partnerships among food banks, food pantries and health care providers, Feeding America launched a [website focused on hunger and health](#). The website provides resources on food insecurity as well as healthy recipes. It also offers toolkits to support healthy food choices at pantries, help strengthen health care partnerships at the community level, and more.

Support Interventions to Improve Health Outcomes by Increasing Nutritious Food Access, Including 'Food Is Medicine' Programs

Another way to improve nutrition is to develop health care interventions to increase healthy food access and knowledge, sometimes referred to as "Food Is Medicine" programs. Offering produce prescriptions and other tested, food-focused interventions to individuals with medically indicated need will improve our collective health as a country and reduce the need for other, costlier medical services and procedures. Feeding America encourages the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to support solutions such as this. In our survey of people with lived expertise, 92% of respondents agreed that "food is medicine – if you have regular access to healthy foods, you feel better physically, emotionally, and mentally."

Feeding America has been testing and incorporating Food Is Medicine programs within our network of food banks and pantries around the country. These interventions have a strong foundation in improving health-related outcomes for people facing hunger. Feeding America also conducted a trial, the Feeding America Intervention Trial for Health – Diabetes Mellitus ([FAITH-DM](#)), which examined how food bank interventions can effectively promote the health of adults living with uncontrolled Type 2 diabetes and experiencing food insecurity.

Partnerships between food banks and health systems also enable health care staff to conduct food insecurity screenings and provide food assistance. The Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle Tennessee (Nashville, Tennessee) has such a partnership with Nashville General Hospital. The hospital's on-site Food Pharmacy is staffed by trained SNAP application assistors who provide additional food resources to patients. The food bank also provided flyers and recipe cards to the Food Pharmacy that included information about how to access SNAP application assistance.

Additional policy recommendations to increase access to nutritious foods and reduce diet-related diseases include:

Support and Provide Funding for Produce Prescription Initiatives Through HHS Programs

The Feeding America network is providing low-cost produce and other goods to hospitals and federally qualified health centers to run produce prescription programs. Produce prescription programs allow physicians to immediately provide patients with diet-related diseases—as well as those facing hunger—with fresh produce and other nutritious foods to improve these patients' health outcomes. HHS should explore ways to work with Medicare and Medicaid to expand coverage for produce prescription programs in hospitals, federally qualified health centers, grocery stores and farmers markets, as well as to provide technical assistance and other guidance.

Support and Provide Funding for On-Site Food Pantries in Health Care Settings

Feeding America food banks work with hospitals to help stock and run on-site pantries. These pantries help medical staff immediately provide healthy food to patients facing hunger who are also at risk of readmission for food-related reasons. We call on HHS and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to provide technical assistance and guidance to hospitals and federally qualified health centers that would benefit from on-site food pantries.

Maintain Local Control of Food Box Programs

The charitable food system distributed food to 53 million people last year, including in food boxes where appropriate to the people we are serving. The boxes are typically assembled at food bank warehouses with stringent safety guidelines using existing equipment and the over 3 million volunteers who assist in our work. The boxes are populated with a mix of food products, which are tailored to the cultural, dietary and demographic needs of the recipients. Many times, these boxes are created in partnership with medical providers to accommodate medically indicated dietary requirements. In other instances, the boxes contain food types that are relevant only to unhoused individuals, seniors, victims of natural disasters or other specialized purposes.

To ensure the lowest cost and the maximum benefit, food box programs should continue to be administered by local food banks in response to local needs. Congress should not attempt to re-create a national food box program because of the extraordinary cost, the lack of client choice leading to increased food waste, and the inherent disconnection from the localized community expertise of Feeding America's 60,000 faith-based and charitable hunger relief partners and other charitable food providers. Many of these providers would have to unpack the boxes and throw away the cardboard to accommodate the more appropriate and client-centered meal distribution methodology for the population they are serving, whether it be a church pantry, senior home with congregate feeding, client choice pantry, school backpack program or other distribution methodology. During the height of the pandemic, food banks were forced by safety concerns to utilize food boxes as a "one-size-fits-all" food distribution solution. But moving forward, Congress and the USDA should control costs, decrease food

waste, and better serve our neighbors facing hunger by deferring to local charitable food organizations on appropriate food distribution methods for the communities they serve.

Address Economic Barriers to Food Security

A thriving economy with well-paying jobs is the most effective long-term solution to fight hunger. Even before the pandemic, millions of working individuals and families faced challenges putting food on the table, in part due to stagnant wages for lower-paid workers. The federal government should pursue economic and fiscal policies to support a strong and sustainable economic recovery that creates jobs and equitable economic growth. This is the path to ensuring everyone in America can meet their basic needs and build a strong future for their children.

Strengthen the Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit

The American Rescue Plan increased the value of the Child Tax Credit and, importantly, made the credit fully refundable. This ensured families with lower incomes saw a greater increase in the amount received and made the credit available to many extremely low-income families for the first time. Of those surveyed by Feeding America, 77% of respondents agreed that Congress should bring back the expanded Child Tax Credit because it significantly reduces child poverty and prevents food insecurity among children. Congress also expanded the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) during COVID, with the additional benefits targeted to younger taxpayers without dependents. The current Child Tax Credit and EITC together lift more children above the poverty line than any other economic support program. Congress should permanently expand these programs to support work and reduce poverty.

Advance Equity

Feeding America encourages policies to directly address challenges faced by communities of color and groups who experience disproportionately high rates of food insecurity because of systemic inequity. It is critical that such policies are developed by and with individuals and organizations already leading anti-hunger work in these communities. By addressing racial equity, we can help create positive and necessary change for people who have been marginalized and systemically oppressed.

In June 2022, Feeding America distributed \$5 million in equity-focused grants to several member food banks that serve communities of color known to be disproportionately impacted by food insecurity and the pandemic. This investment is part of Feeding America's focus on addressing the root causes of hunger and food insecurity. Creating and deepening community partnerships and centering people with lived experiences of hunger are two crucial steps to creating a more equitable food system.

Ensure Sovereignty for Native Communities

Native Americans experience food insecurity at a much higher rate than white people. The administration and Congress should work with tribal stakeholders to strengthen food security in Native communities. This should include allowing tribal governments the flexibility to administer federal programs as decided by the tribe. Congress should allow SNAP participants to also receive Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) benefits.

Provide Equitable Access to Food Assistance Programs

People residing in Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands are excluded from SNAP. The capped Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP) block grant

available in those territories has highly restrictive eligibility requirements, lower monthly benefits and greater nutrition aid instability compared to SNAP. In consultation with the territories, Congress should provide a pathway to successfully transition from NAP to full participation in SNAP.

Address Military and Veteran Hunger

As many as 160,000 active-duty enlisted service members experience difficulty putting food on the table for themselves and their loved ones. Approximately half of Feeding America food banks serve active-duty military members and their families, according to a recent survey. Many factors contribute to military food insecurity, including occupational licensing issues for military spouses, low pay for enlisted members, and other financial commitments, such as student loans or child care costs. Food insecurity in the military ranks can cause health issues and negatively impact military readiness.

Congress should provide military families with equitable eligibility for SNAP by removing the basic housing allowance from the SNAP calculation and strengthening the basic needs allowance for military families. Military family members should also be supported by improving military spouse workforce issues, such as job placement assistance post-move and ensuring E-6 and below military families are screened for SNAP and WIC eligibility.

To better support veterans facing hunger, Congress should create a transitional SNAP benefit for service members who are separating from the military. Policymakers should also bolster food security efforts based at Veterans Affairs (VA) hospitals. Many food banks within our network have longstanding partnerships for on-site pantries within VA hospitals and clinics. Additionally, we urge Congress to focus on the root causes of hunger among veterans by reviewing job training and placement programs, programs to support veterans experiencing homelessness, and post-service education accrediting efforts. Lastly, improving the data collection across relevant departments and agencies, such as the VA, Department of Defense and USDA, will help identify the need and gauge progress.

CONCLUSION

To end hunger in America, we need a whole-of-government approach. Eighty-seven percent of respondents to Feeding America's survey agree that the government has the capability and resources to significantly reduce hunger in America, if we have the resolve to do so. But cross-sector collaboration is crucial, too. Of those surveyed, 92% agree that to actually reduce hunger and food insecurity in America, we need government, the private sector, the nonprofit sector, local institutions like schools and faith-based institutions, and communities to all work together.

With the partnership of the White House and Congress, and with community, charitable and corporate resources, we can end hunger in America and build thriving, equitable communities. When people have agency over the decisions and resources needed to live a life of dignity, they can fully participate in achieving a just society that dismantles structural racism and social inequities like food insecurity.

When we achieve our vision, people experiencing food insecurity will move beyond simply having reliable access to healthy food: they will secure the fundamental right to have a say in their own destiny. We welcome your partnership.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Feeding America Statement of Principles on the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health

<https://www.feedingamerica.org/about-us/press-room/principles-white-house-conference>

Feeding America Issues Statement of Principles on the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health

May 26, 2022

The White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health, to be held this September, provides an opportunity to build upon the strong foundation of federal nutrition programs to increase effectiveness and deepen the programs' reach so that everyone in the U.S., no matter their background or zip code, can have access to the food and resources they need to thrive.

The Feeding America network of 200 food banks, 21 statewide associations and 60,000 partner food pantries and meal programs believes that centering the voices of people facing hunger is critical to the Conference's work. As the Feeding America network connects with tens of millions of people each year in all 50 states, Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico, we have seen how vital the voices and experiences of people facing hunger are to devising better solutions and how essential their insights are toward building an America where no one is hungry.

Feeding America is guided by several principles that we urge the White House and federal elected officials keep front and center, as we approach this crucial work collectively:

- The conference and the solutions identified should be grounded by and reflect the voices of people facing hunger.
- The conference and the solutions identified should be grounded in preserving the dignity and agency of people facing hunger to make their own choices of what foods help their families thrive. People experiencing food insecurity need more choices, not less.
- New programs and approaches must be implemented which end the racially and geographically disparate outcomes perpetuated by the current system, solving for "race and place" inequities.
- We must keep hunger and food insecurity at the forefront of the conference goals by doing the most good for our nation's most vulnerable. By doing so, we will lift up all other issues connected to food insecurity – including health, wellbeing, education, and workforce development.
- We must continue to expand access to nutritious food through charitable food access and nutrition programs for people facing hunger and marginalized communities, particularly for people facing hunger impacted by diet-related disease.
- Bold solutions require broad support – we cannot harness the power of a nation to end hunger without engaging every citizen, elected official, and organization that we can. To do this, the

policy solutions put forth to end hunger should be nonpartisan and grounded in science and data.

Feeding America is committed to elevating the voices of the tens of millions of people who turn to the charitable food sector for help. We also believe that the very solutions to the problems communities face lie within them, and we will listen and support communities in whatever ways they need us to bring those issues to light. Through this approach, then together, we can achieve our vision where no one goes hungry, everyone has access to nutritious food, and all communities across America thrive.

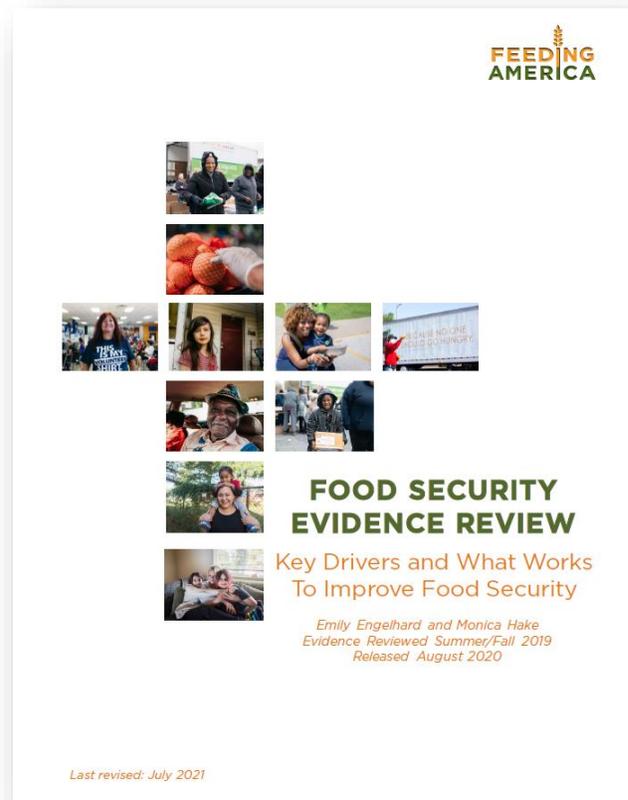
Appendix B: Feeding America Food Insecurity Evidence Review

Engelhard, E. & M. Hake (2020). Food Security Evidence Review: Key Drivers and What Works To Improve Food Security. Available from Feeding America. For full report, <https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/Food%20Security%20Evidence%20Review%20August%202020.pdf>

Over the last 10 years, public attention around the issue of food insecurity and the literature on effective interventions have grown substantially. This increased attention likely reflects:

1. Stubbornly high food insecurity rates, even after the end of the Great Recession.
2. Mounting evidence of negative health consequences related to food insecurity.
3. Increasing recognition that food insecurity is an important, and well-validated, indicator of well-being.
4. Commitment by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (USDA FNS) to funding research on very low food security among children, which brought many new researchers into the field.

Despite these influencing factors, much more is known about what drives people into food insecurity than what effectively brings people out of it. This memo consolidates the findings around the drivers of food insecurity, provides a high-level outline of interventions shown to reduce food insecurity, and highlights gaps in the literature where additional evaluation is needed.



Appendix C: Preliminary Neighbors Survey and Listening Sessions Analytics and Insights



Goals of the 'Elevating Voices to End Hunger Together' Initiative



- Ground our policy recommendations with the input of our neighbors experiencing food insecurity.
- Blend qualitative and quantitative analysis while centering people with lived experience of food insecurity and providing nuance around the individual experience.
- Provide insight into what our neighbors need to thrive in the future:
 - What do they need to provide food for themselves and their families?
 - What barriers do they face?



For the purposes of this initiative, 'neighbors' are defined as people who have experienced food insecurity within the last two years and those who may be at risk of experiencing food insecurity.

2

**Elevating the Voices of the Neighbors We Serve:
Project in Process
Data as of 7/11/22**



100+ Listening Sessions

In Progress
30 Listening Sessions Complete



~10,000 Questionnaires

In Progress
1.2K Questionnaires Submitted



~100,000 Texts

In Progress
Preliminary Data Not Yet Available



PerryUndem Poll

Preliminary Data
n=1.3K

3

This analysis will provide insights into neighbors' priorities across states, demographics and communities



The Feeding America web survey and listening session participants are from all over the U.S. Currently, **Alaska, California, Texas** and **New York** are some of the most common states.



The **PerryUndem** survey reached **1,317 adults**, 18+, who have **experienced food insecurity** in the last **two years**.

49% are **enrolled** in some type of **SNAP/EBT** program.

60% are **white**, **27%** are of **Hispanic** or **Latino** background, and **19%** are **Black**.



Quotes from the **listening sessions** and **open-ended survey** questions are detailed throughout the project to ensure **neighbors' thoughts and experiences** regarding **food insecurity** and **current conditions** are **prioritized** in the analysis.



4

Key Takeaways



- **Hunger has never been such an urgent problem**
 - Food costs are up, but assistance programs have not expanded accordingly.
 - Money is tight across the board; neighbors see gas prices and inflation as the biggest drivers of underlying financial insecurity.
- **Healthy options are even less accessible**
 - Food pantries and grocery stores in low-income areas do not have the adequate fresh, healthy food supply (or price point, in the case of grocery stores) to meet demand.
 - Limited public transportation options compound these problems.
- **Neighbors are frustrated by the complicated rules, administrative apathy and bureaucratic processes to access assistance programs**
 - Neighbors find the rules confusing and are frustrated by all the technicalities that can disqualify them from the aid they are eligible for.
 - Neighbors feel belittled by administrators and the unforgiving process.
- **Neighbors cite myriad root causes—beyond high costs—and no single root issue emerges**
 - Neighbors admit they must frequently cut or miss housing, child care, health care and transportation payments in order to put food on the table.
 - Neighbors also cite frustration with the structure of the employment market.
 - The squeeze on resources forces challenging prioritization.

5

Hunger has never been such an urgent problem



Attitude Among Neighbors

Preliminary polling results show neighbors are very concerned about hunger, the state of the country and their personal situation.

82% Say food insecurity has increased some or a lot in the past year

63% Say the country is headed in the wrong direction

52% Say they are just getting by, not thriving

”

“Harsh, really bad. The pandemic made it hard even with food stamps. Rent keeps getting raised across the board. **I get by on social security income and it’s not enough.** I don’t know what we would do without the Food Bank.” – Listening session participant from Duquesne, PA

“I’m a Senior of 73yrs. Food cost are So high, My SS is fixed so that it makes it **very hard to get ahead**” – Survey respondent from San Jose, CA

“I have not bought groceries in months to make sure I have money for gas to get to work.” – Survey respondent from Ellis County, TX

“El remplazo de mi tarjeta verde está en proceso y no aceptan mis documentos. migración aún no la entrega después de 7 meses de esperar... Pudiera ganar el triple o más y no puedo” – Survey respondent from Hidalgo County, TX

“My green card’s replacement request is processing, and workplaces don’t accept my current documents; immigration services hasn’t given me the card and it’s been 7 months, I would be able to get triple my current wage and I am unable.”

Source: PerryUndem Poll – n=1,317 – May 27 - June 21 – PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

Source: Web Survey – June 15 - July 11 – n=1.2K | Listening Session – June 24 – July 11 – n=30

6

With food costs up, neighbors want assistance programs to expand accordingly

Across data sets, neighbors support expanding SNAP as a key solution to food insecurity.



89% Strongly or somewhat agree in initial listening sessions that increasing SNAP benefits is a key solution and oppose restrictions on what SNAP/EBT can purchase.



78% Strongly or somewhat agree in preliminary polling results that increasing SNAP benefits is a key solution and oppose restrictions on what SNAP/EBT can purchase.

”*Make **snap/ebt allotments for seniors and disabled adults higher** and do not count them as income for housing.*” – Survey respondent from Fresno County, CA

”*I frequently apply for food stamps and time and time again have been told I’m barely over income. Last time, I was told **I’m over by \$2 per month. My children going hungry because of \$2 per month is insane.** Something needs to **drastically change** with the EBT program. Especially because groceries have doubled in cost and the **income limits have stayed the same**”* – Survey respondent from Tulsa County, OK

”***More funding to our local food bank**, so they can help with more than just food”* – Survey respondent from Tazewell County, VA

Source: PerryUndem Poll – n=1,317 – May 27 - June 21 – PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

Source: Web Survey – June 15 - July 11 – n=1.2K | Listening Session – June 24 – July 11 – n=30

7

Healthy options are even less accessible, further underscoring the need for expansion

Have you frequently bought less expensive – and less healthy food – in order to save money?



4 in 10 (43%) neighbors say they want to eat healthier but cannot afford to. SNAP enrollees are among those most likely to say they cannot afford to eat healthier right now (50%).



Source: PerryUndem Poll – n=1,317 – May 27 - June 21 – PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

”*Mi **comunidad necesita aprender a comer sano**; Que sean más baratas las frutas, verduras, leche etc.*” – Survey respondent from Riverside County, CA
– “My community needs to learn how to eat healthy; fruits, veggies and milk need to be cheaper”

”***More nutritious options** and more access to food options **with low barrier sign up**”* – Survey respondent from Montgomery County, PA

”*We do utilize the food bank when we need too but **I have health issues and that makes it difficult to find nutritious and healthy foods I need.***” – Listening session participants from Urbana, OH

”*Being able to afford healthy foods and strengthen my body, spirit and soul to **thrive during retirement and not be unhealthy during my golden years***” – Survey respondent from Harris County, TX

”***More food banks or places with healthy yet cheaper food options.***” – Survey respondent from Douglas County, NE

Source: Web Survey – June 15 - July 11 – n=1.2K | Listening Session – June 24 – July 11 – n=30

8

Neighbors cite high cost as the biggest driver of food insecurity



Across data sets, neighbors consistently identify inflation and the rising cost of food as the driving root cause of hunger.



77% of respondents in preliminary poll results* cited inflation as a root cause of hunger

77%



77% of listening session participants indicated inflation was one of the *top three* root causes of hunger.

77%



62% of web survey respondents indicated inflation was one of the *top three* root causes of hunger.

62%

”

*“With these **prices going up, \$ dont last!** I want to have food in my house like reg normal people, and the \$ you do have don't last” – Survey respondent from Charleston County, SC*

*“I want the ability to financially afford to retire but with **the high cost of food, gas, medication,** etc., I'll never be able to retire” – Survey respondent from Charleston County, SC*

*“[Getting] **inflation under control** and a thriving economy is going to what is needed for me to be thriving in the future.” – Survey respondent from Matanuska Susitna County, AK*

*“Higher paying jobs are not enough because **inflation is growing faster than wages** so we **Ultimately just become more and more poor as time goes on.** I need rent that isn't 65% of my total net income. I need groceries to feed my family of 3 that don't cost \$300/week. We need continued access to quality health care” – Survey respondent in Tulsa County, OK*

*Source: PerryUndem Poll – n=1,317 – May 27 - June 21-- PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

Source: Web Survey – June 15 - July 11 – n=1.2K | Listening Session – June 24 – July 11 – n=30

9

Stigma and bureaucratic processes further complicate access to assistance programs



In both the web survey results and the listening sessions, stigma, logistical hurdles and complex rules converged to choke access and create feelings of shame.

”

*“More **opportunities for food stamps** and helping out quickly. I don't have time to go through this whole process.” – Survey respondent from Dakota County, MN*

*“**Being judged** for working hard and when thing goes wrong or like with me my health. **Now I'm falling between the cracks.** Don't make enough and then make too much. Now what do I do? broke down and can't work right now and need assistant and get very little.” – Survey respondent from Dallas County, TX*

*“To be able to **call someone when you need help and not be judged**” – Survey respondent from San Mateo County, CA*

*“Mas locaciones donde uno puede ir y **pedir ayuda** – Survey respondent from Maricopa County, AZ*

“We need more locations where one can go ask for help”.

*“[I wish there were] **no judgement or Bias at Interviews**” – Survey respondent from Champaign County, IL*



From a moderator's notes from a listening session in Harrisburg, PA:

*[One goal should be] **reducing stigma of hunger and accessing public benefits.***

*4/5 participants are enrolled in SNAP and all 4 said **they've felt judged** when using their EBT card.*

*[They experienced] **comments such as “there go my taxpayer dollars” or “how is she buying so much food with the EBT card” make them feel less than.***

*[They] **said it has prevented other people they know from enrolling in SNAP or accessing other benefits they are entitled to.***

Source: Web Survey – June 15 - July 11 – n=1.2K | Listening Session – June 24 – July 11 – n=30

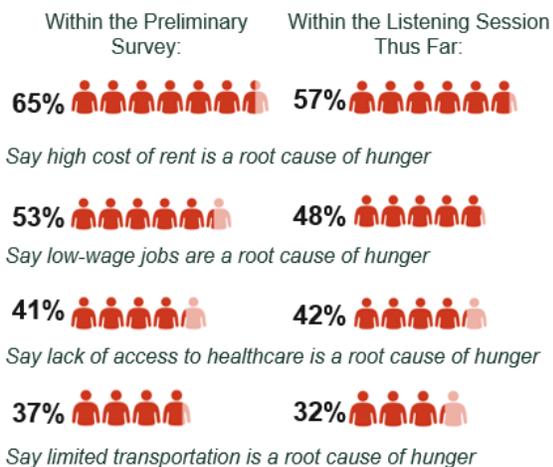
10

Beyond costs, neighbors cite myriad underlying causes of food insecurity: rent, low-wage jobs, health care and transportation



Rent, low-wage jobs, health care and transportation were often cited as the primary root causes of hunger.

”



“**Lack of childcare funding** which forces families to have single incomes. This is especially hard for single parents.” – Listening session participant from San Francisco, CA

“In many cases, **SNAP benefits barely cover one meal**. Lack of transportation in rural areas is a hinderance also. **Many people wind up buying food at quick stops**, because they have no way to drive to town. The nearest grocery store to me is about 15 miles away. There are basically only 5 grocery stores in our entire county. Quick stops do not stock fresh vegetables. The only meat available is usually frozen fast food. **This type of food is unhealthy and leads to major medical problems, including diabetes...** Meanwhile, there is **little or no affordable rental housing available in our county**. People are streaming in thinking there are jobs here due to the influx of tourists. But most of the jobs are minimum wage jobs and **no one can afford to pay rent on a low salary**. There are a couple of low-income housing areas, **but violence and gang activity are prevalent**. – Survey respondent

“We need **more resources for the people who don't have transportation** our community is a **long way from grocery store**.” – Survey respondent from Tunica County, MS

Source: PerryUndem Poll – n=1,317 – May 27 - June 21 – PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS | Listening Session – June 24 – July 11 – n=30

Source: Web Survey – June 15 - July 11 – n=1.2K

11

Neighbors are supportive of a broad set of policy solutions, including expanding access across categories



87%

Agree in preliminary polling that big, bold ideas are needed to reduce hunger in America

Source: PerryUndem Poll – n=1,317 – May 27 - June 21 – PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

”

“**Food banks could have more of a selection at the pantry** to live a healthier life. Would be nice to have a **Technical School** in our own area to help get people advanced to get higher paying jobs” – Survey respondent from Nome County, AK

“I wish there was a **program for people over 50 (I'm 58)** and not just retirement jobs where you are there to do jobs where you don't have to think...**I need more help getting, preferably, a professional job** - or any job where I won't have to stand all day and I can pay my bills based on a 40 hour week.” – Survey respondent from Cuyahoga County, OH

“I think a little bit of everything, **transportation** should be more useful to people in need that really needs help getting where they need to be at. **More volunteers at local places** where they donate such as food, **clothing for people in needed of help**” – Survey respondent from Dallas County, TX

“**Todo lo que pueda ayudar a la Comunidad como por ejemplo que sea más justo el pago de todo lo que es la electricidad, renta, gas, etc...**” -- Survey respondent from Clute County, TX
 “Anything that can help the community, for example, **fair bills** for electricity, rent and gas”



From a moderator's notes from a listening session in Madison, IL:

The participants want a **recreation center**, somewhere within their community where **people can congregate, a place for kids to go that is safe** and where they could continue to learn and grow.

We talked a lot about coming together to raise the next generation and neighbors taking care of neighbors. **Right now, a lot of the people in their community have to travel for work, work for long hours and they had a feeling that people just did not commune with each other the same way because they did not have the time, the ability or the place to come together.**”

Source: Web Survey – June 15 - July 11 – n=1.2K | Listening Session – June 24 – July 11 – n=30

12

Several policy proposals emerge as consensus solutions



- **Expand Programs: Federal policy programs must expand** to meet the current demand.
 - **Additional funding is needed:** Inflation and price hikes have made the hunger crisis worse and have made healthy options less accessible than ever. The public overwhelmingly agrees increasing SNAP benefits is a key solution and opposes restrictions on what SNAP/EBT can purchase.
 - Among the community within the web survey and the listening sessions, increasing SNAP benefits was the most the popular solution to address the hunger crisis.
 - The community was also eager for expanded funding for nonprofits that fight hunger within their communities. This was a top solution within the listening sessions, and preliminary polling results show organizations like Feeding America and No Kid Hungry and their partners are the most trusted institutions to handle the current crisis among the impacted community.
 - **Accessibility barriers must be minimized:** Qualification and application requirements are limiting and confusing for many who need federal programs to provide food for their families.
 - Among the community within the web survey and the listening sessions, making SNAP/EBT cards easier to get, keep and use (getting rid of in-person interviews, allowing more time before recertification, minimizing work requirements) was the second most popular solution to address the hunger crisis.
 - Making breakfast and lunch meals free and available year-round to all children who need them and making it possible for people who make more than \$40,000 for a family of four to qualify for food assistance when struggling were also very popular policy solutions within the community.
- **Address Perceptions: Reducing the stigma around using EBT/SNAP** is also necessary for broadening access and combating hunger.
 - Stigma, administrative apathy and shame were frequently cited as issues and barriers within open-ended responses and listening session discussions.
- **Be Bold, Think Bigger: Broader policy solutions** focused on **eliminating homelessness, creating jobs** within under-resourced communities, **broadening access to health care, and building robust public transit** are necessary to completely **eradicate hunger and food insecurity**.
 - We can address hunger with current programs, but only by seeing hunger through the lens of larger systemic failures can we truly hope to end it once and for all.

13

Appendix D: Written Report for Network Convenings Hosted by Feeding America for the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health

This conference is a chance to connect the dots and to accomplish something real. Imagine what a hunger-free future looks like: a future where families don't need to rely on emergency food assistance to eat dinner on any given night, a future where all people have continued access to nutritious food for every meal, every day, every year. - U.S. Rep. Jim McGovern

We always need to be prepared. As food banks, that's our work. - Iowa Food Bank Association

Listening Session and Report Overview

Feeding America invited 200 member food banks and 21 partner state associations nationwide to participate in listening sessions to inform the urgent need to address food insecurity in the United States ahead of the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health. The first session was hosted on June 29, 2022, with 31 member food banks or partner state associations attending, and the second session was hosted on July 7, 2022, with 42 member food banks or partner state associations participating; totaling 73 attendees from across the country. Listening session participants were welcomed by U.S. Rep. Jim McGovern (June 29) and U.S. Rep. Shontel Brown (July 7).

Detailed Results

Listening session participants selected from five different breakout sessions to share detailed input about their experiences leading major hunger-relief organizations in their communities. Each of the breakout session participants were asked the following question: *As we all know, the goal of the conference is to create a road map to end hunger by 2030. In some ways this is a huge task. In others, this is a question of political will to enact the change we all know is needed to close the hunger gap. In your view and based on your work, what one change do you believe is needed - and perhaps even achievable - in the near term to begin reducing food insecurity? And as you think about ending hunger by 2030, what larger policy or systems change is needed to end hunger for the people you serve?*

The five breakout session topics are below, accompanied by the additional question posed to each group.

Connecting more people to federal nutrition programs	The Feeding America food bank network is the largest organization connecting neighbors in need of food assistance with federal nutrition programs. We are experts in how federal nutrition programs work, which provides us with unique insights on how to strengthen the programs. As you think about ending hunger by 2030, what are some key policy priorities we must advance and advocate for to expand and improve access, benefit levels, and eligibility for programs?
Securing more food for neighbors struggling with hunger	Our network has connected neighbors with record amounts of food during the pandemic, incorporating innovative programs and partnerships along the way to increase our impact in communities and with neighbors in need. What programs and funding do we need to pursue as a network to increase the amount of food that we can provide to help end hunger in the next eight years in your service area?

Creating economic wellbeing for neighbors	We all know that - at the heart of the hunger problem - is the inability of people to afford and access the food they need to live the life they deserve. As you consider the economic issues that impact the people and communities you serve, what investments or policy changes are needed to build an economy that works for and includes everyone?
Cutting food insecurity for neighbors by race and place by 50%	Before the Conference announcement earlier this year, Feeding America and our network committed to a bold goal of cutting food insecurity in half by race and place. As we think about the hardest-to-reach among our clients, what are some key policy changes we need to advance the change we want?
Strengthening access to nutritious food for underserved communities	Some public health experts recommend restricting SNAP purchases to only nutritious food as the best solution to reduce diet-related disease. Feeding America believes the neighbors we serve need more choices in identifying the right nutritious food for their families. What concerns do you have with restrictions on SNAP purchases? What would you suggest to help increase access to nutritious foods and end hunger based on the solutions you have seen work in your community?

Throughout the five sessions, six common themes were identified in participant responses. Those six themes are listed below along with the food banks that mentioned the theme in their sessions.

Theme	Food Bank Responses	
Expand federal program eligibility and simplify related processes		
Increase funding for TEFAP and develop long-term plan for program stability and viability (increase reimbursement rates, storage and distribution funds, variety of foods)	Central Texas Food Bank Feeding Louisiana Feeding Indiana's Hungry Feeding Southwest Virginia Feeding Wisconsin Food Bank of Alaska Food Finders Food Bank Great Plains Food Bank	Greater Boston Food Bank Iowa Food Bank Association Maryland Food Bank North Texas Food Bank Second Harvest FB of Central Florida Southeast Ohio Food Bank Virginia Peninsula Food Bank West Texas Food Bank
Provide universal school meals	Alameda County Community FB Blue Ridge Area Food Bank California Association of Food Banks Feeding Colorado Feeding Indiana's Hungry Feeding Wisconsin Food Lifeline	Foodlink, Inc. Idaho Food Bank Good Shepherd Food Bank River Bend Food Bank Second Harvest FB of Orange County Virginia Peninsula Food Bank Lowcountry Food Bank

Limit state flexibility for operation, administration and access to federal nutrition programs	Blue Ridge Area FB California Association of Food Banks Feeding Colorado Feeding the Gulf Coast Feeding Indiana's Hungry Food Bank Council of Michigan Freestore Food Bank	Good Shepherd Food Bank Greater Cleveland Food Bank Mid-Ohio Food Bank North Texas Food Bank Oregon Food Bank Philabundance
Codify permanence of pandemic-related waivers and program flexibilities that improved access and benefits, and simplified administration	California Association of Food Banks Feeding Colorado Feeding Wisconsin Food Bank of South Jersey Foodlink, Inc. Good Shepherd Food Bank	Greater Boston Food Bank Idaho Food Bank Mid-Ohio Food Bank Philabundance River Bend Food Bank Virginia Peninsula Food Bank
Reduce SNAP purchasing restrictions, incentivize healthy choices	Central Pennsylvania Food Bank City Harvest Federation of Virginia Food Banks Feeding Tampa Bay Food Bank of Northern Nevada Food Bank for Western Massachusetts	Fredericksburg Regional Food Bank Greater Boston Food Bank Greater Pittsburgh Community FB North Texas Food Bank Philabundance
Streamline and collapse federal nutrition programs, there are too many	Blue Ridge Area Food Bank California Association of Food Banks Central Pennsylvania Food Bank Feeding Colorado Feeding Indiana's Hungry	Feeding Wisconsin Greater Boston Food Bank North Texas Food Bank Philabundance
Ease benefits cliff for federal programs	Community Food Bank of NJ Feeding Southwest Virginia Freestore Food Bank Greater Pittsburgh Community FB	Iowa Food Bank Association Mid-Ohio Food Bank Southeast Ohio Food Bank
Increase investment in CFSP and SNAP	Feeding Louisiana Maryland Food Bank North Texas Food Bank	Philabundance Virginia Peninsula Food Bank
Allow hot food purchases with SNAP	California Association of Food Banks City Harvest	Feeding Louisiana Second Harvest FB of Orange County
Pair policy with technology for program outreach and application processes, support translation services	Central Pennsylvania Food Bank Feeding Wisconsin	Greater Boston Food Bank Philabundance

Ensure nutrition programs are effective and efficient to promote trust and transparency	Iowa Food Bank Association	Southeast Ohio Food Bank
Repeal ABAWD	California Association of Food Banks	Second Harvest FB of NE Tennessee
Streamline authorization and funding for all federal nutrition programs under one piece of legislation	God's Pantry Food Bank	

We can eradicate food insecurity in the school system. And then move on to the next system. There are clear pathways for addressing food insecurity within systems, and universal school lunch is critical. - Alameda County Community Food Bank

If you're pregnant or have a young kid, it's this program. If it's 7 in the morning and you're not in school yet, it's this program. If it's 8 in the morning and you're at school, it's a different program. And then lunch is a different program. And then after school is yet another program. And then school is out for Christmas break and it's still another program. - Feeding Colorado

Why does each state have to negotiate their own contract and waste millions of tax dollars on administering the same federal programs? - Philabundance

The truck can get there but private dollars have to pay to get it back. Why does TEFAP not cover the actual cost for food banks? - Feeding Indiana's Hungry

We are facing the most severe food shortage we've seen in a decade. If you walked into our warehouse right now, our racks are literally empty. We've made drastic reductions in services including canceling all of our direct distribution for the foreseeable future because our food supply is so low. We are in a very poor and under-resourced area, so state and federal commodities are basically all of our product. We have ceased to be able to operate. - Southeast Ohio Food Bank

(The federal government should require states to have) minimum rates of participation. It is not okay for some states to allow thousands upon thousands of people not to have enough to eat, while other states are doing a good job. - Blue Ridge Area Food Bank

The government is spending tens of millions of dollars on CSFP to choose what food seniors can eat, with a limited array of items that do not address the health needs that seniors have, (food banks) gather up dozens and dozens of volunteers to pack this food into boxes, and then we drive these boxes somewhere once a month that requires the senior to travel to pick up a heavy 25 pound box and take it. You think about the costs to the government on commodities and administration, our costs on storing and handling the food, recruiting all these volunteers, to provide food that seniors didn't choose, may not be able to eat, may not be able to prepare, and have to travel some distance to go pick up once a month, and if they can't make it, you're out of luck. (They should be) aligning the food selection to more closely pair with the nutritional needs of older Americans, more variety of options, and most importantly, what would happen if we spent that money on SNAP instead? When they could go any time to the grocery store and choose the food they want. SNAP would be a much better way of making sure they have access to good nutrition. - Blue Ridge Area Food Bank

These programs have existed since the 1960s. They are authorized in the Farm Bill but not funded in the Farm Bill. Wouldn't it be nice if the Farm Bill not only authorized but also funded these programs in one set of actions where we didn't have to talk about it every single year? - God's Pantry Food Bank

Theme	Food Bank Responses	
Focus efforts on underserved populations to promote equity		
Increase access and funding to purchase local and/or culturally appropriate foods	Atlanta Community Food Bank Central Texas Food Bank Feeding Southwest Virginia Feeding Wisconsin Food Share of Ventura County	Food Bank for Western Massachusetts Greater Boston Food Bank Lowcountry Food Bank North Texas Food Bank Philabundance
Consider unique needs of rural areas	Central California Food Bank Central Pennsylvania Food Bank Feeding Wisconsin Food Finders Food Bank	Great Plains Food Bank San Antonio Food Bank Southeast Ohio Food Bank
Increase federal assistance with CSFP and SNAP outreach for seniors, increase SNAP benefits for senior population, improve CSFP nutrition quality	Blue Ridge Area Food Bank Central Pennsylvania Food Bank Feeding Louisiana Food Finders Food Bank	Great Plains Food Bank Los Angeles Regional Food Bank Southeast Ohio Food Bank
Increase focus on and access to healthy foods in terms of cost and knowledge	City Harvest El Pasoans Fighting Hunger Food Bank of Western Massachusetts	Greater Pittsburgh Community FB Northwest Arkansas Food Bank
Increase access for college students	California Association of Food Banks Feeding Louisiana	Southeast Ohio Food Bank
Consider regional differences for SNAP deductions and cost of living	California Association of Food Banks	Oregon Food Bank
Expand immigrant access to SNAP	California Association of Food Banks	Oregon Food Bank
Invest in communities of color	Central California Food Bank	Oregon Food Bank
Address food insecurity on reservations	Great Plains Food Bank	Feeding Wisconsin
Expand program access to all in the U.S.: Puerto Rico and territories	Oregon Food Bank	

I hear people say all the time “let’s go back to normal.” My response is that normal isn’t good enough, it meant that nearly 40 million of our fellow Americans went to bed without enough food. It simply doesn’t have to be this way. - Rep. Jim McGovern

We have a food bank where the lines are wrapped around the corner. The same is true at my own church, where we receive tons of calls, a lot of requests, on where people can go to get help. I’ve visited multiple food banks and the need has only increased since the pandemic. We have seen how sound policy can stave off unnecessary hunger. We must apply this lesson to the present. - Rep. Brown

The single biggest reason an adult ends up in poverty is that they were a child in poverty. - Oregon Food Bank

People served by food pantries in our state are reporting that the two years of the pandemic were the most food secure they’ve ever been in their lives. Because they finally had the money on their SNAP card to buy enough food, and to buy it when it’s on sale or when they need it. - Good Shepherd Food Bank

Can we at least agree that hunger is not good for our citizens? Regardless of who they are or who they vote for? - Greater Cleveland Food Bank

Theme	Food Bank Responses	
Address social determinants of health that impact hunger		
Address social determinants of health (child care, access to transit, criminal justice reform, health care access, housing, employment training)	Alameda County Community FB Central Pennsylvania Food Bank City Harvest Federation of VA Food Banks Feeding Colorado Freestore Food Bank Great Plains Food Bank Greater Boston Food Bank Iowa Food Bank Association	Long Island Cares Mid-Ohio Food Bank Montana Food Bank Network North Texas Food Bank Oregon Food Bank Philabundance Southeast Ohio Food Bank Virginia Peninsula Food Bank Lowcountry Food Bank
Raise minimum wage and/or implement Universal Basic Income (UBI)	Central California Food Bank City Harvest Community Food Bank of New Jersey Feeding America West Michigan Feeding the Gulf Coast Feeding Westchester Feeding Wisconsin Freestore Food Bank	Forgotten Harvest Greater Boston Food Bank Greater Cleveland Food Bank Houston Food Bank Long Island Cares Maryland Food Bank Mid-Ohio Food Bank Oregon Food Bank
Address food deserts	Food Finders Food Bank Great Plains Food Bank Iowa Food Bank Association Long Island Cares	Los Angeles Regional Food Bank Second Harvest Food Bank of Northeast Tennessee

Integrate and increase neighbor-led education on health and nutrition	Blue Ridge Area Food Bank City Harvest Greater Pittsburgh Community FB	Lowcountry Food Bank El Pasoans Fighting Hunger
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We need infrastructure, we need things like refrigerated trucks to get food to people in need. The transportation department has a role to play. Stable housing is a challenge for people in poverty, the lack of refrigerators and stoves prevent people from cooking nutritious food for themselves and their families. We need the expertise of HUD to help address these issues. And for far too long, our military has ignored that too many men and women who fight for our country are struggling for food themselves. The Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs have to be at the table. This is fixable. - Rep. Jim McGovern

Theme	Food Bank Responses	
Build partnerships to fight hunger		
Incentivize private sector to participate in efforts to eliminate hunger	City Harvest Federation of VA Food Banks Food Bank for Western Massachusetts Food Share of Ventura County Fredericksburg Regional Food Bank	Freestore Food Bank Greater Boston Food Bank North Texas Food Bank Virginia Peninsula Food Bank
Support local farmers and producers (Farm to Food Bank, Farm to School funding), make it easier for producers to access USDA programs like TEFAP	Central Pennsylvania Food Bank Feeding Wisconsin Food Bank for Western Massachusetts Great Plains Food Bank Greater Boston Food Bank	Greater Pittsburgh Community FB Iowa Food Bank Association North Texas Food Bank Philabundance
Work with external partners to build wraparound services	Feeding Wisconsin Freestore Food Bank Food Finders Food Bank Idaho Food Bank	Iowa Food Bank Association Los Angeles Regional Food Bank Southeast Ohio Food Bank
Involve communities that food banks serve in policymaking	Federation of VA Food Banks Feeding Indiana's Hungry Food Bank of Northern Nevada Food Bank for Western Massachusetts	Food Lifeline Foodlink, Inc. Long Island Cares
Support health care partnerships (Rx food boxes, food security screenings)	Feeding Tampa Bay Food Bank of Northern Nevada	Food Bank for Western Massachusetts Fredericksburg Regional Food Bank

Require more collaboration with TEFAP-qualified organizations for USDA funds	Feeding Wisconsin	Greater Boston Food Bank
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When I think about local innovations that are having an impact, I'm reminded of food bank farms, that help the food bank's food distribution efforts, they provide local farmers with access to arable land and protect that land from development, they help schools offer more nutritious locally grown food to students, and they strengthen our regional economy. - Rep. Jim McGovern

People who have never struggled with hunger before are turning to food banks for the first time, and this increased demand is not wavering. That is why I proudly led a FY22 letter to appropriators asking for additional food purchases through TEFAP. Federal dollars should continue to be used to support these critical, on-the-ground operations, in any way they can. - Rep. Shontel Brown

Theme	Food Bank Responses	
Consider systems-level approaches to policies		
Change poverty rate to represent different communities, regionalize Federal Poverty Level	Central Pennsylvania Food Bank City Harvest Feeding Indiana's Hungry Feeding Louisiana Food Bank Council of Michigan	Forgotten Harvest Greater Cleveland Food Bank Long Island Cares Second Harvest FB of NE Tennessee
Expand Child Tax Credit, make permanent and refundable	California Association of Food Banks Feeding Colorado Good Shepherd Food Bank Greater Cleveland Food Bank	Idaho Food Bank Oregon Food Bank Southeast Ohio Food Bank
Address myths regarding inappropriate benefits use	Greater Cleveland Food Bank Greater Lansing Food Bank	Iowa Food Bank Association Southeast Ohio Food Bank
Consider how corporations are taxed and use public dollars for programs	City Harvest Feeding Indiana's Hungry	Feeding Washington
Consider self-sufficiency standard	Food Bank Council of Michigan	Long Island Cares
Democracy reforms: end the filibuster, increase voter registration and access	Alameda County Community FB Feeding Indiana's Hungry	Food Lifeline

Make Earned Income Tax Credit available to workers who use an individual taxpayer identification number and increase eligibility for people without kids	Oregon Food Bank
Improve sustainability of food systems	Second Harvest Inland Northwest

Theme	Food Bank Responses	
Address food bank-specific needs		
Support food banks more as their responsibilities continue to increase, especially in the face of food shortages	Atlanta Community Food Bank Central Texas Food Bank Eastern Illinois Food Bank Iowa Food Bank Association	Southeast Ohio Food Bank Virginia Peninsula Food Bank West Texas Food Bank
Expand and innovate transportation options for food banks	Atlanta Community Food Bank Central Pennsylvania Food Bank Feeding Indiana's Hungry Food Bank of Alaska	Great Plains Food Bank Greater Pittsburgh Community FB Southeast Ohio Food Bank
Maintain a steady food bank workforce	Atlanta Community Food Bank Forgotten Harvest	Philabundance
Increase advocacy staff at food banks	Food Finders Food Bank Great Plains Food Bank	Southeast Ohio Food Bank
Increase pay for food bank employees	Feeding Wisconsin	Long Island Cares
Leverage food bank buying power	Forgotten Harvest	Philabundance
Capacity building for partner agencies	Food Bank of Northern Nevada	

You are on the front lines in the fight against hunger. The Feeding America network provides a jaw-dropping 6.6 billion meals each year. Beyond emergency food assistance, food banks are local conveners and collaborators. Each of you are connecting the dots for people struggling with hunger. - Rep. Jim McGovern

We are not covering emergencies. We are part of people's monthly planning. - Northwest Arkansas Food Bank

Closing

Feeding America is grateful for the administration's dedication to fighting hunger, improving nutrition, and addressing nutrition-related disease and appreciative of the effort to include input from stakeholders in the planning and execution of the upcoming White House Conference. As the nation's largest domestic hunger relief organization, we understand this is a rare opportunity to make meaningful strides toward ending hunger in America and appreciate the opportunity to share our thoughts.

If you have questions about this summary report or Feeding America's policy priorities, please contact Chief Government Relations Officer Vince Hall at vince.hall@feedingamerica.org.