



**Brian Riendeau, Executive Director
Dare to Care Food Bank**

**Testimony before the Senate Agriculture Committee
On Perspectives for the 2018 Farm Bill
September 14, 2017**

Dear Chairman Roberts, Ranking Member Stabenow and members of the committee:

Thank you for inviting me here today. My name is Brian Riendeau and I am the Executive Director of Dare to Care Food Bank in Louisville, Kentucky. I am honored to represent Feeding America's network of food banks and agencies that work every day to address hunger across our country. Our mission, and that of the Feeding America network, is to not only provide emergency food assistance to those in need today, but to engage the country in the fight to end hunger, so that we can reduce the number of families that must rely on charitable food assistance tomorrow.

My testimony today is especially timely as my colleagues at food banks in Texas and now Florida work around the clock to address the emergency food assistance needs from Hurricanes Harvey and Irma. Food banks across the country and Feeding America have sent additional food, supplies, and equipment to assist in the recovery, and will be there long after the shelters close to address the food insecurity needs arising in the communities impacted. Our thoughts are with everyone that has been impacted by these storms and are facing a long road to recover from the damage.

Dare to Care Food Bank is one of 200 food banks in Feeding America's network that helps combat hunger and food insecurity across the United States. Together, we serve more than 46 million people in need, including 12 million children, through 58,000 food programs including food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, afterschool and summer feeding sites for children, and other programs.¹ Dare to Care Food Bank partners with almost 300 non-profit agencies across a service covering 13 counties in North Central Kentucky and Southern Indiana traditionally known as Kentuckiana. Our service area spans nearly 4,000 square miles and includes urban, suburban and rural areas and includes 181,000 food insecure individuals.

I am honored to testify before the committee on the work of our food bank to address hunger, and the impact that nutrition programs authorized by the farm bill have on those facing hunger.

¹ Feeding America, *Hunger in America 2014*, National Report. August 2014.

As shown in Feeding America's annual *Map the Meal Gap* study and as we witness in our daily work, food insecurity exists in every county in the nation but can look different from one community to the next. In Dare to Care's service area, which includes both urban and rural counties, there are 181,000 food insecure individuals, including nearly 50,000 children. Hunger, particularly, child hunger, is pervasive in all of our counties, presenting unique challenges to our operational model. Although many rural areas may experience child hunger at a higher rate, urban areas can be home to larger numbers of hungry children and may face challenges addressing the sheer number of children in need of assistance.² For Dare to Care Food Bank, Jefferson County alone – which includes Louisville, Kentucky – accounts for nearly 60 percent of the food insecure children across our 13 county service area.

Our Impact in Kentuckiana

Last year Dare to Care Food Bank distributed 19,121,000 meals, or over 22 million pounds of food, to 134,000 in need in Kentuckiana. That included 7.2 million pounds of fresh produce and 3.8 million pounds of food from TEFAP. Dare to Care operates numerous programs to achieve our vision of a hunger-free Kentuckiana. Last year, we distributed nearly 300,000 hot nutritious meals through our Community Kitchen's Kids Café program to children in need, expanded our Backpack Buddy program to provide backpacks of nutritious food to 2,715 food insecure children each Friday of the school year, launched a prescription pantry program with six pediatric and health clinics to reach food insecure families through a medical setting, and offered nutritional education through our Cooking Matters program.

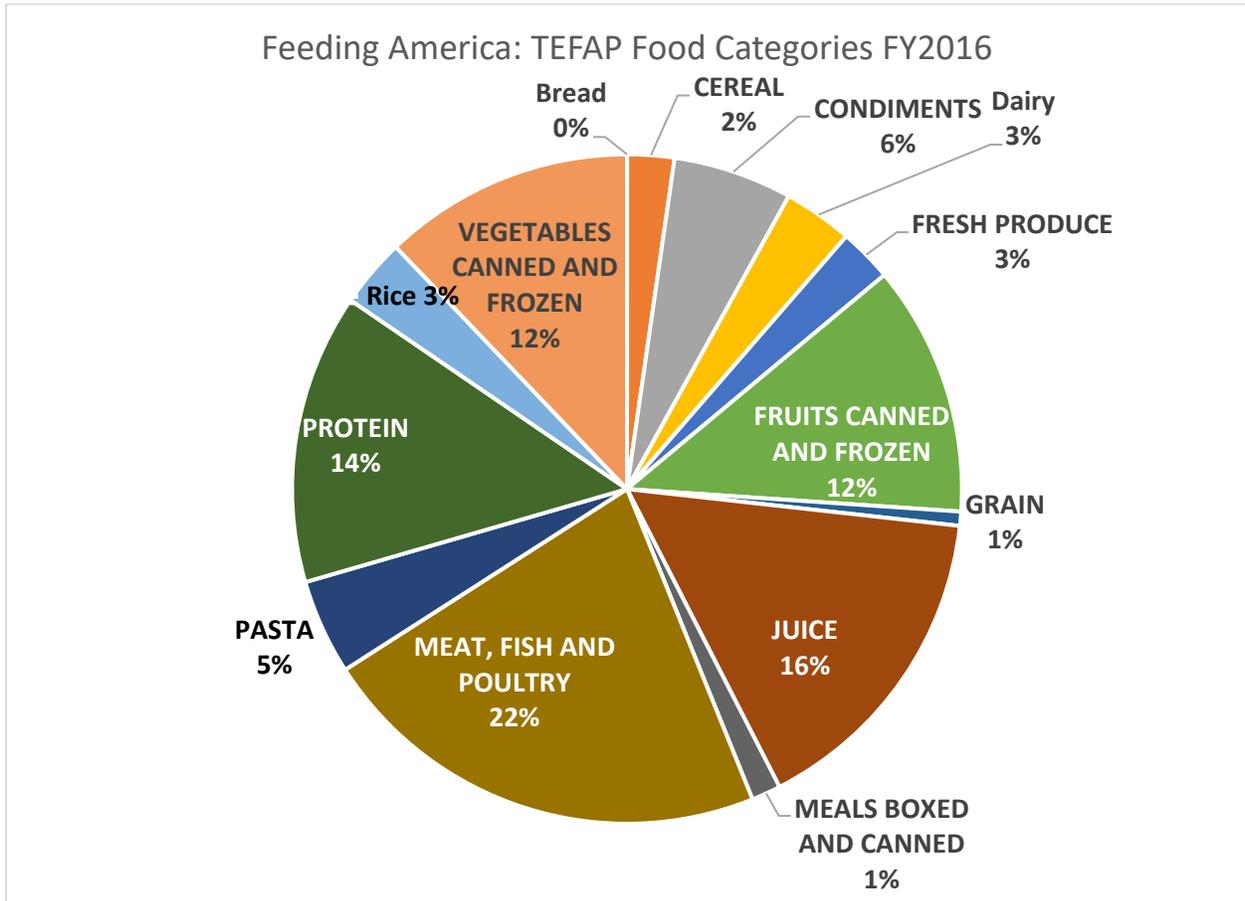
The support provided by the 2014 Farm Bill has been key to helping us do our work. TEFAP provides nutritious food to our food bank and other charitable organizations nationwide while supporting US grown commodities. The program provides critical support, helping us ensure a nutritious balance of food is distributed to families in need by allowing us to combine TEFAP with our other sources of food, including food donated through partnerships with thousands of growers, manufacturers, retailers, and food service companies in our community, as well as food that we purchase.

TEFAP works by directly supplying nutritious food purchased by USDA to charities, such as Feeding America food banks. In addition to food, USDA also provides funding to defray some of the storage and distribution costs of getting the food to communities nationwide. As you can see from the pie chart, the foods provided through TEFAP are highly nutritious and represent household pantry staples, foods that you would find in your kitchen. Our food bank combines TEFAP foods with other donated and purchased food to give food insecure Americans access to a nutritionally well-balanced grocery package.

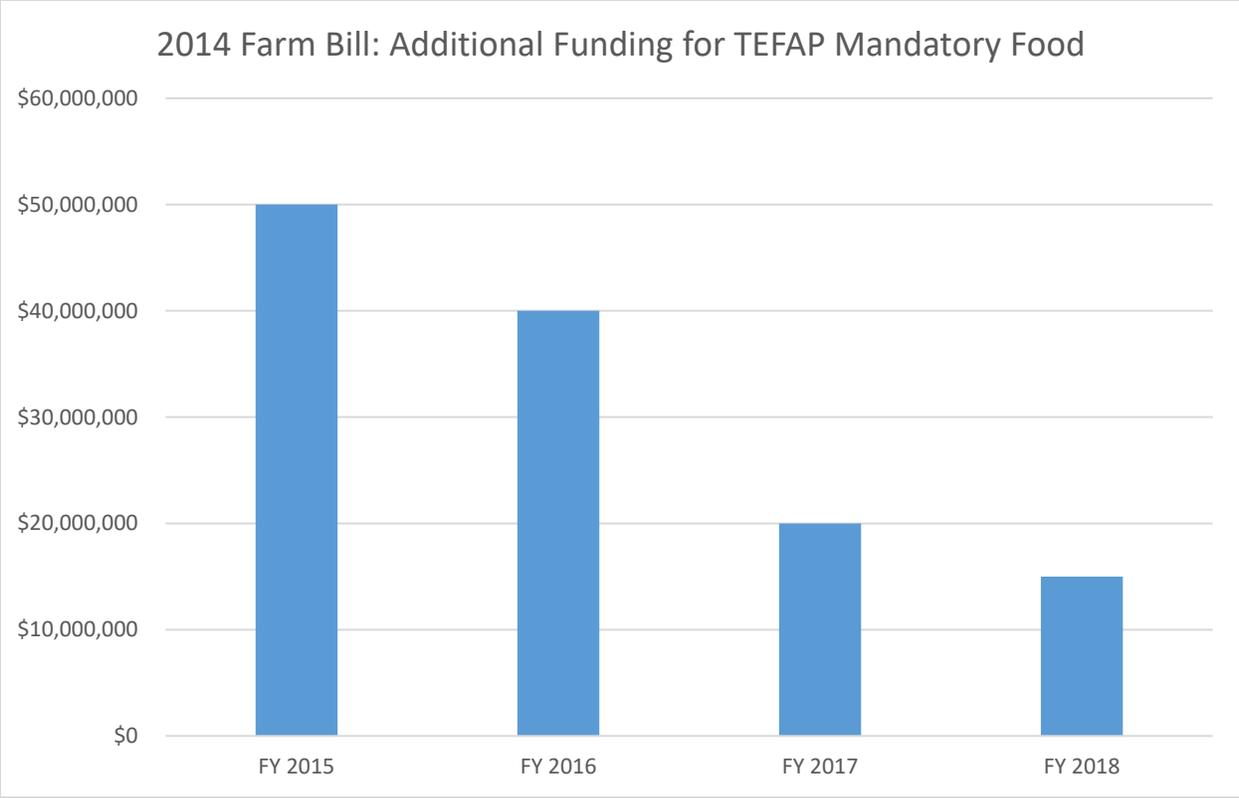
These are meals that go straight into the effort to fight hunger and relieve food insecurity, but should be viewed as part of an integral array of federal nutrition programs. We know the community members we help are also often relying on SNAP, school lunch, WIC, or senior meals to meet their families' needs. Our work would not be possible without the continued strong support of federal nutrition programs. We know from Feeding America's Hunger in

² Ibid.

America 2014 report that although 55% of the people we serve participate at some time in the SNAP program, another 45% do not. In my service area, 49% of our food insecure neighbors are above the SNAP threshold of 130% of poverty. In fact, 32% are above the threshold for all nutrition programs of 185%. For these folks, the food we provide is often all that is available to offset hunger. This is where strong funding for programs like TEFAP and Farm to Food Bank is essential to our ability to fulfill our mission.



The 2014 Farm Bill provided additional funding for TEFAP, and that additional support has been critical to our food bank as we have seen a protracted recovery from the economic downturn. Although unemployment is down, food insecurity has remained high, and has not returned to pre-recession levels yet. For our food bank and the Feeding America network, the increase in TEFAP has provided additional food assistance at a time when we needed it most; but as the amount goes down we worry that once the one time increases cease our food bank will be left with a significant decline in food. I urge the Committee to commit to ensuring food banks do not see a decline in TEFAP from the 2018 Farm Bill and that this highly cost effective source of nutritious food continues to provide assistance to those who need it most.



Kentucky’s Farm to Food Bank Program

Dare to Care Food Bank has also benefited from the growth of a successful statewide program in Kentucky called Farm to Food Banks. The program increases access to healthful food among struggling Kentuckians through the distribution of surplus and Number 2-grade fresh produce, which is fresh and edible but not saleable because of minor blemishes or size discrepancies. With grant funds, the Kentucky Association of Food Banks helps cover farmers’ costs to pick, package and deliver their unmarketable produce to food banks. The program provides crucial support to farmers who are in the midst of a shift from a stable tobacco cash crop while reducing the amount of wasted food in Kentucky.

Since the statewide launch of the Farms to Food Banks program in 2011, over 15 million pounds of Kentucky-grown produce has been distributed to those at risk of hunger in all 120 counties in Kentucky. That’s the equivalent of filling half a plate full of fresh fruits and vegetables for over 25 million meals. The produce came from more than 500 Kentucky farmers who benefitted from increased cash flow for produce that would otherwise likely have been plowed under in the field.

The program is an example of an effective public/private partnership. Financial support has been provided by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture through an appropriation from the Kentucky General Assembly thanks to support from Governor Matt Bevin and Commissioner of Agriculture Ryan Quarles. State income taxpayers can donate a portion of their tax refund to the program because of legislation enacted by the General Assembly in 2012. Other private sources of financial support include Farm Credit Mid-America and the Lift a Life Foundation.

This is a model that I am proud to say other states have implemented as well, including Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Georgia and Texas. I would urge the committee to look at successful models like the one in Kentucky to identify how this can be scaled nationwide. With 41 million food insecure people, and an astonishing amount of food that is not making it to their plates each year that could, we must ensure we are doing all we can to connect excess nutritious food with struggling families. Although the produce might not always look picture perfect, there is nothing ugly about the price or the impact of this nutritious food – with an average reimbursement of 20 cents per pound, it is hard to imagine a more affordable model. I believe this is a program that can be scaled nationwide in an extremely cost effective way that provides a triple benefit – to food insecure individuals, to the growers, and to our resources and land.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I firmly believe that hunger is a solvable problem in our country. Dare to Care Food Bank and our colleagues and neighbors are dedicated to this fight and will continue to work together – with government and private stakeholders – to support the needs the community in Kentucky and Indiana. We urge Congress to prioritize investments in the next farm bill that increase access to nutritious foods through federal nutrition programs like TEFAP and through innovative models like Farm to Food Bank, and to protect SNAP to ensure our most vulnerable do not lose access to much needed food.

On behalf of the Dare to Care Food Bank, Feeding America, our partner agencies and the people we serve, I thank you for your time and attention. I encourage you to visit your local food bank this September during Hunger Action Month to learn more about the great work they do, and engage in a discussion about how the next farm bill can build upon the work we are doing to reduce hunger. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Brian Riendeau
Executive Director
Dare to Care Food Bank