



Nutrition Programs in the Farm Bill

Hosted By:

U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
Subcommittee on Food and Nutrition, Specialty Crops, Organics, and Research

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Introduction

Good afternoon, Chairman Fetterman, Ranking Member Braun, and all members of the Subcommittee on Food and Nutrition, Specialty Crops, Organics, and Research. Thank you for inviting me to speak about the issue of food insecurity in our region and the importance of the Farm Bill and its nutrition programs.

I am Loree Jones Brown, Chief Executive Officer of Philabundance, a hunger relief organization serving five counties in southeastern Pennsylvania and four counties in southern New Jersey.

Every day I wake up not worrying about what I will eat for breakfast or dinner later in the day. I imagine many of you in this room never worry about where your next meal will come from. We plan our days around lunch meetings and coffee breaks knowing we can easily make those purchases. We don't wait in long lines hoping the pantry or cupboard will have the items we need or food that our kids like. We don't miss meals to make sure our kids have something to eat and don't go to bed on an empty stomach. When I am in the community visiting our partners, I see firsthand the long lines, the worry, and the stress that people in all of our communities are facing daily. While my team and our partners are steadfast in our efforts to end hunger, we know that charitable food organizations, like Philabundance, alone cannot meet the need. It is in our nation's interest that we have well-nourished communities so they can thrive. That is why I am here before you today asking that you work together to pass a strong bipartisan Farm Bill that ensures equitable and consistent access to food.

Access is paramount to our work at Philabundance. As a member of Feeding America's national network of over 200 food banks, our mission is to drive hunger from our communities today while we work to end hunger for good. We are dedicated not only to meeting the immediate need through emergency food provision, but also to addressing the root causes of hunger. We understand that the charitable food network alone is not going to solve hunger or poverty, but we are one piece of a much larger puzzle.

I began my time at Philabundance in 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, which exacerbated existing disparities and revealed the pervasiveness of hunger. The pandemic brought into full view what we already knew: that it's our neighbors and the kids down the street who are food insecure. I have seen firsthand the dedication of our staff, partners, volunteers, and donors as we have all worked together to address the increased need for food. I have seen firsthand the impact of Congress' bipartisan leadership to avert a national hunger crisis. Thanks to your leadership and your support of the federal nutrition programs in 2020, Philabundance doubled the amount of food we distributed when compared to 2019. Since then, the demand for food assistance has consistently remained above pre-pandemic levels as a result of inflation causing the price of food and other basic needs to soar.

Food banks like Philabundance have been able to keep up with high demand through these challenging years due in large part to the aid provided during the Public Health Emergency and the generous support of our donors. Now, most temporary federal support has come to an end and the influx of donations we received throughout the pandemic have slowed, at a time when food costs remain stubbornly high and supply chain disruptions continue. Food banks are experiencing a continued increase in demand for food assistance as the lines continue to grow.

Although our network helps many people avoid hunger, we cannot truly end hunger in our communities without government support. Federal nutrition programs like The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) work hand in hand with food banks to help families put nutritious food on the table. Food banks know that a strong Farm Bill is critical to ensuring the people we serve have the food they need.

Philabundance Background

At Philabundance we strive to ensure equitable and broad access to nutritious food and resources to help all our neighbors lead healthy, active lives so they can thrive. Philabundance was founded in 1984 with the simple belief that no one should go hungry while healthy food goes to waste. Our mission is to drive hunger from our communities today while we work to end hunger for good.

In partnership with more than 600 community organizations, we provide nutritious food to those in need in our service area, which includes Philadelphia, Montgomery, Bucks, Chester, and Delaware counties in Pennsylvania and Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, and Salem counties in New Jersey. In no area, no county, do we not see a need for food – and in every county our partners continue to see an increased need at this time.

Our Programs

To achieve our mission, Philabundance works to combat hunger in a number of ways. We distribute millions of pounds of food to our partners primarily using three methods:

- **Produce Deliveries** – Philabundance delivers large amounts of produce and perishable goods directly to our community partners each week.
- **Perishable Food Hubs** – Philabundance provides multiple pick-up locations in our service area where our community partners can pick up perishable products each week.
- **Agency Express** – Philabundance has an online system where our community partners can order non-perishable products to either pick up or be delivered.

In addition to providing items to our partner network through these mechanisms, Philabundance also provides food to our partners through specially targeted programs. We tailor or create programs based on the needs of the communities we serve. These programs include:

- **BackPack** – Philabundance provides free, nutritious, and easy-to-prepare supplemental meals for families with kids at community partner sites.
- **Lunchbox** – Philabundance provides ready to eat meals for kids who may rely on school meals during the school year. This summertime program focuses on giving kid-friendly nutritious lunches at sites across our area.
- **Let's Eat** – To address the summer hunger gap, Philabundance did a meal kit program that provided families with all of the ingredients they would need to create delicious and nutritious meals at home. Over the summer, Philabundance and our partners distributed these meal kits at 20 sites across our service area.

Improving Community Health with Our Partners

Philabundance works with a wide range of incredibly dedicated partners and supporters to distribute food.

In our **600 plus community partner network**, Philabundance works with a wide range of partners that include religious institutions, schools, community organizations, and others who are committed to addressing hunger. We are able to reach this many partners through direct distribution and by working with a few organizations who help us redistribute food to additional partners. **This network reaches over 135,000 people each week with a wide range of products.** To give that context, that is enough people to fill Lincoln Financial Field, where the Philadelphia Eagles play, twice.

Philabundance encourages our partners to provide the people they serve with options, creating an experience where they operate as close to a grocery store as possible so people can shop with dignity and select the items they want and need. Research has shown that when people have a choice in what they get at a pantry, they make healthier choices and have a better diet that can lead to improved health outcomes.

To support this effort, Philabundance has been investing in our partners by granting over \$5 million in support of their infrastructure over the last 3 years. We know that if we want to distribute more food that is healthy, including fresh vegetables and fruits, we need to ensure that our partners have the refrigeration, transportation, and space to store and distribute the food safely. That is why we are asking Congress to support our request to increase funding for TEFAP Storage and Distribution and Infrastructure grants.

As we consider the health and well-being of the people coming to our pantries, we are also working directly with healthcare partners to address the nutritional needs of their customers directly. We have been doing a number of projects with health care providers in Pennsylvania. Thanks to support from the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, Managed Care Organizations are required to partner with community-based organizations to address the social determinates of health. Philabundance has been working to provide home delivered meals, produce, and other staples to people identified by providers as in need of food resources. We know the strong connection between nutritious food and health outcomes, and partnerships like these allow us to reach people in need of nutritious food directly in their homes.

Below is an overview of some of our projects:

Partner	Project
Jefferson Health/Health Partners Plans	Health Partner Plans is funding this project and Jefferson is referring members. Philabundance will provide produce every other week for 6 months. Philabundance will conduct phone surveys with participants to learn the impact of the program while Jefferson will measure health outcomes.
Jefferson Health/Keystone First	Keystone First is funding the project and Jefferson is referring members. Philabundance will provide grocery boxes for 12-weeks and refer participants to receive medical nutrition therapy. Philabundance will conduct phone surveys with

	participants to learn the impact of the program while Keystone First will measure health outcomes.
Health Partners Plans	Health Partners Plans is funding and referring members to this program. Each household receives 3 meals made by Philabundance Community Kitchen (PCK) per person and a box with produce every other week for 12-weeks. Health Partners Plan has already contracted with Philabundance for a second round of this program that will include Philabundance conducting phone surveys to understand the program’s impact.
University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC)	UPMC is funding and referring members to this program. Working with MANNA, Philabundance will provide produce to households who previously received medically tailored meals from MANNA. Along with nutrition education, Philabundance will provide the produce as a step down to the program provided by MANNA. Participants will receive produce every other week for the year-long program. Philabundance will conduct phone surveys with participants to learn the impact of the program while UPMC and MANNA measure health outcomes.
Einstein Medical Center	Einstein Medical Center is a community partner of Philabundance. The partnership began in 2018, with Philabundance providing loose produce for distribution. Last year, we formed a partnership with Einstein to provide produce boxes for weekly distribution. Between July 2021 and June 30, 2021, Philabundance provided Einstein with more than 2,000 pounds of produce boxes weekly.
Hospital of University of Pennsylvania (HUP)	The Hospital of University of Pennsylvania's food pantry is a community partner of Philabundance. Since June 2022, the HUP food pantry has received approximately 650 pounds of dry and frozen food per week. The food pantry has participated in our retail rescue program and has previously received produce boxes for distribution.

Later this year, Philabundance, in conjunction with several managed care organizations, local grocery stores, food service providers, and health care providers, is launching a wrap-around pilot program to provide tailored nutritional supports for patients with gestational diabetes in North Philadelphia, called the Philadelphia Partnership for Nutrition and Health. This project aims to establish a real-world evidence base to demonstrate impact with an overall goal to scale to additional patient populations and become a replicable model that will set a new standard of care around benefits and services. By leveraging our connections with food, Philabundance is able to work with these partners to fill a need for their patients and clients so they can focus on their health and well-being. We believe that Congress should support these pilot programs through the Department of Health and Human Services and in coordination with USDA.

Our Kitchen and SNAP Employment and Training

Philabundance is a recipient of the SNAP Employment and Training funding for our Philabundance Community Kitchen (PCK). PCK began over 20 years ago and is a free culinary arts training program that

provides the participants with knife skills and life skills. PCK is a part of the Catalyst Kitchen, a national network of non-profit organizations with teaching kitchens leading a movement to end joblessness through foodservice job training and social enterprise. This free 16-week program is available for people who meet the SNAP eligibility guidelines for Pennsylvania. They learn the skills they would need to work in a professional kitchen while also being provided with career training and support.

Our work with PCK has demonstrated there is no quick fix or easy solution to addressing the root causes of hunger and poverty. Our students are successful in securing positions with restaurants and institutions with the goal of them becoming independently financially stable as they transition from social supports, but it is a long process. While the students are in the PCK program, we help connect them to wrap-around supports and pay a stipend for the work they complete for our vendor contracts.

The team at PCK meets the students where they are in life while providing them with the stability and structure they need to help them find and sustain employment. SNAP Employment and Training participants receive transportation, childcare, and clothing allowances so they can make it to class prepared. We believe that work is one pathway out of poverty and Congress should invest in work programs that have a track record of success, like PCK, versus policies such as restrictive work requirements that impede work.

Eric, a current student noted that, “When I started this program, I didn’t have any money. I didn’t know how I was going to make it to school every day. I didn’t know how I was going to have the tools and resources needed for me to complete the program. SNAP really was the program that assisted with all of that. I don’t feel like I would be here if it wasn’t for SNAP. When you are unable to generate your own income and you are required to be at a place 5 days a week, 16-weeks in a row, how do you get there without some assistance?”

What our PCK students, and anyone struggling to make ends meet, need is relevant assistance and the opportunity to be successful. The SNAP Employment and Training dollars are an investment in students like Eric, enabling them to get the training they need to find a job that can lead to financial stability and mobility. Work requirements only increase hunger and impede work, while investments like these are proven policy solutions that support work and help people create the path to self-sufficiency. We are asking Congress to continue to support and invest in the SNAP Employment and Training program.

Food Distribution and Government Support

Philabundance receives food in the following ways: donations, purchasing, and government programs. Each of these sources is key to ensuring we have the right quantity, quality, and mix of food to provide to the people we serve.

Philabundance participates in the following government programs that provide food:

- The **Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)** provides USDA-donated food to low-income seniors through monthly senior boxes. Philabundance packs and distributes these boxes to strategically chosen locations. Boxes contain approximately 30 pounds of canned and boxed

food including vegetables, fruit, juice, pasta, milk, cereal, canned meat, and a non-meat protein. We provide 3,500 boxes per month.

- **The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)** provides Philabundance with access to commodity food purchased by the USDA that we make available to eligible households.
- The **State Food Purchase Program (SFPP)** and the **Pennsylvania Agriculture Surplus System (PASS)** are two Pennsylvania specific nutrition programs that provide organizations like Philabundance with funding to purchase food. The PASS program also supports PA farmers as the funds are used to reimburse them for donated products.

The chart below shows the amount of food we have distributed by how we acquired it:

Food Acquired for our Neighbors (in pounds)					
Calendar Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023 - YTD*
Donations	22,605,012	25,693,104	22,267,609	24,835,912	6,659,550
Government	3,065,610	19,679,973	12,561,087	4,534,525	1,187,251
Purchasing	4,947,820	12,050,359	19,058,003	24,570,424	4,417,597
TOTAL	30,618,442	57,423,437	53,886,699	53,940,861	12,264,398

*March 2023

With increased government support in 2020 and 2021 Philabundance was able to more readily meet the need of the people we serve. We saw a sharp decline in that support in 2022 and were able to make up the difference by purchasing food. **However, as the cost of food increases and the financial and food donations decrease, it is simply not possible for Philabundance to continue purchasing food at this level in the long term.** As a result, we will need to make tough decisions moving forward if this gap continues.

Providing Good Food to the Communities We Serve

The food that we provide now falls under a Good Food Policy we instituted in 2022. While we want to continue to provide food at a high volume, we must prioritize food that falls into the following categories:

- **Nutritious:** providing all people, regardless of income, with access to the food necessary for an active, healthy life.
- **Culturally Responsive:** offering connections to families, cultures, and communities through familiar and beloved foods.
- **Equitably Sourced:** intentionally choosing to purchase food from businesses that reflect our values and represent a diverse blend of local, minority, and women-owned businesses.

- **Accessible:** partnering with organizations that can help us ensure the right food reaches the right people at the right time.

At Philabundance, we are committed to centering our work on the people we serve. To us, that means it is not enough to say we distributed over 50 million pounds of food this past year. We must understand whether those pounds were the food people wanted and were distributed in a way that truly works for them. “Right food, right time, right way,” we say. We are committed to adjusting to meet the needs of people and are engaging our agency partners in discussions about how we can better serve people at times that work for them, in ways that are dignified, and with foods they want to eat.

Food Insecurity

Hunger by the Numbers

Often referred to as hunger, food insecurity is a pervasive issue that impacts the health, well-being, and success of those who face it. Food insecurity is defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) as a lack of regular access to enough food for a healthy and active life. It is an economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food. Above all, food insecurity is a solvable problem.

Nationally, nearly 34 million people – that’s over 1 in 10 people – in the United States are food insecure.¹ There is no county, no zip code, no community in the United States that hunger doesn’t touch. Food insecurity disproportionately affects children. Nationally, 1 in 8 children experience food insecurity.

Measurement	2019	2020	2021
Overall Food Insecurity	10.5% of households (13.7 million households, with 35.2 million people living in food insecure households)	10.5% of households (13.8 million households, with 38.3 million people living in food insecure households)	10.2% of households (13.5 million households, with 33.8 million people living in food insecure households)
Food Insecurity in Households with Children <i>*means anyone in the household is food insecure</i>	13.6% of households with children	14.8% of households with children	12.5% of households with children
Food Insecurity among Children <i>*means a child in the household is food insecure</i>	6.5% of households with children	7.6% of households with children	6.2% of households with children

Source: USDA Report Economic Research Service

¹ USDA Economic Research Service, Household Food Security in the United States in 2021, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/104656/err-309.pdf?v=4640.9>

In Pennsylvania, nearly 10% of residents are food insecure, including over 13% of children and 5% of seniors. In New Jersey, 8.4% of the population is food insecure, including 9.0% of children and 6.1% of seniors.² These numbers are unacceptable. In a country with so much farming, agriculture, and resources, no one should go hungry.

County	2019 Food Insecurity	2020 Food Insecurity	2019 Child Food Insecurity	2020 Child Food Insecurity
Pennsylvania				
Bucks	7.2%	7.3%	8.5%	8.7%
Chester	6.3%	6%	6.8%	6.3%
Delaware	8.5%	9.1%	12.8%	15.9%
Montgomery	6.9%	7%	8%	8.9%
Philadelphia	14.4%	15.8%	24.2%	30.9%
New Jersey				
Burlington	6.6%	7.1%	8.8%	9.7%
Camden	9.5%	10.9%	13%	16.6%
Gloucester	7.5%	8.2%	8.9%	9.3%
Salem	10.7%	11.7%	15.5%	17.6%

Source: Feeding America Map the Meal Gap³

While we did not see a huge spike in reported national food insecurity rates at the height of the pandemic, we do know that more people were in need of food assistance. **Over 60 million people (1 in 5 people) turned to food banks, food pantries, and other private food assistance programs in 2020 – 50% more than in 2019.**⁴ Food banks like Philabundance were able to do more to meet the need, lessening food insecurity, thanks to the incredible amount of government support.

Both in our service area and nationally, people of color also disproportionately face food insecurity.

Demographic	2019	2020	2021
Black Households	19.1%	21.7%	19.8%
Hispanic Households	15.6%	17.2%	16.2%
White non-Hispanic Households	7.9%	7.1%	7.0%

Source: USDA Report Economic Research Service

² Feeding America, State-by-State Resource: How Food Banks and the Farm Bill’s Nutrition Programs Address Hunger in the United States, <https://feedingamericaaction.org/resources/state-by-state-food-banks-and-farm-bill/>

³ Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap, <https://map.feedingamerica.org/>

⁴ Feeding America, Charitable Food Assistance Participation in 2020, <https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/Charitable%20Food%20Assistance%20Participation%20in%202020.pdf>

People of color in our service area are facing hunger at more than double or triple the rate of white people. We all, government and non-profits, have to do more to address the needs of all communities but we have to focus on communities of color and children.

County	2020 Food Insecurity Overall	2020 Food Insecurity Black Persons	2020 Food Insecurity Hispanic Persons	2020 Food Insecurity White non-Hispanic Persons
Pennsylvania				
Bucks	7.3%	15%	17%	4%
Chester	6%	19%	16%	4%
Delaware	9.1%	20%	18%	6%
Montgomery	7%	15%	16%	4%
Philadelphia	15.8%	23%	25%	10%
New Jersey				
Burlington	7.1%	10%	16%	3%
Camden	10.9%	17%	21%	4%
Gloucester	8.2%	13%	16%	3%
Salem	11.7%	22%	24%	5%

Source: Feeding America Map the Meal Gap

Causes and Consequences

We know that the high rates of hunger are directly linked to high rates of poverty. Hunger is an issue of resources and access, worsened by the many existing obstacles people face: low-wage jobs, part-time hours, transportation challenges, the high cost of childcare and housing, and language barriers. When wages are too low or jobs are hard to find, it becomes impossible for families to meet the ever-rising costs of living and put food on the table.

Access to affordable nutritious foods is critical to the health and well-being of our communities and it is widely accepted as a key social determinant of health, while research shows food insecurity has a negative and detrimental impact on individuals at all ages. Food insecurity can damage children’s health and brain development before they enter school. By kindergarten, food-insecure children often are cognitively, emotionally, and physically behind food-secure peers.⁵ As children get older, not having a balanced breakfast or lunch can lead to an inability to focus in school, health consequences, and even an increase in suicidal ideation.⁶ Food insecure adults have a greater likelihood of depression, diabetes, hypertension, and overall report being in poor or fair health.⁷ We must ensure that kids have food at school and at home so they can reach their full potential.

⁵ Children’s HealthWatch, Too Hungry to Learn: Food Insecurity and School Readiness, https://www.childrenshealthwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/toohungrytolearn_report.pdf

⁶ Health Affairs, Food Insecurity and Health Outcomes, <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/pdf/10.1377/hlthaff.2015.0645>

⁷ Gucciardi et Al., The Intersection between Food Insecurity and Diabetes, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4218969/#CR32>

Among seniors, food insecurity contributes to malnutrition, which exacerbates disease, increases disability, decreases resistance to infection, and extends hospital stays.⁸ Malnutrition increases caregiving demands and inflates health-care costs associated with premature or extended hospital or nursing home stays. A pre-pandemic national report estimated that hunger costs our country over \$160 billion in increased health care costs, lost productivity, lost educational attainment.⁹ Hunger is costly and critical investment are required to address the need and underlying impacts. We can choose to pay for it in health care and other costs or instead invest in programs like SNAP, TEFAP, and others that we know can keep people healthy and allow them to thrive. We urge Congress to strengthen and expand the reach of the federal nutrition programs to meet the nutritional needs of families, seniors, children and veterans.

New Challenges, Less Support

From 2020 through today, Philabundance has been distributing food to more people in need than we ever thought possible. The demand for food assistance has consistently remained above pre-pandemic levels as the pandemic’s economic fallout and supply chain issues have continued, and new challenges like inflation have emerged – particularly historically high food inflation.

Rising Cost of Commonly Purchased Grocery Items in our Region			
Food Item	2019 Average	January 2023	Increase
Large Eggs	\$1.98/dozen	\$5.27/dozen	↑ 166.2%
Whole Milk	\$3.59/gallon	\$4.51/gallon	↑ 25.6%
White Bread	\$1.18/loaf	\$1.76/loaf	↑ 49.2%
Ground Beef	\$3.72/pound	\$4.81/pound	↑ 29.3%
Chicken Breast	\$3.27/pound	\$4.16/pound	↑ 27.2%

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Consumer Price Index, Northeast Region

Overall food costs have risen by over 10% in the last year, with many food staples increasing much more than that. But inflation isn't felt equally - like many other hardships, inflation is often felt mostly by people with lower incomes. Low-income households spend over 20% of their income on food and have less wiggle room in their budget when prices rise. Our neighbors who had already been working to overcome the hardships exacerbated by the pandemic are now faced with the rising cost of living. When difficult times hit, food is often the first thing people forego to make ends meet. For many, a daily meal is a simple choice of what to eat. But for people facing hunger, a daily meal poses a very different type of choice. It’s often an impossible choice between food and other crucial needs, such as electricity, childcare or medicine.

⁸ Food Research & Action Center, Hunger, Poverty, and Health During COVID-19, https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/HPH_Older-Adults_2021.pdf

⁹ Bread for the World, The Cost of Hunger, <http://www.hungerreport.org/costofhunger/>.

COMMENTS ON FOOD COSTS FROM OUR COMMUNITY MEMBERS

"I'm paying my bills and I can't even afford to buy food. Things are so expensive. I'm just barely making it."

"In order to meet other needs - medical needs, dental needs - sometimes I have to cut back even more on grocery shopping. It may sound a little strange, but food is one of the first things we have a tendency to cut back on. You shop different. You eat different."

"Fresh fruits and vegetables that used to be a lower price are now high. It's just been really, really hard for me to navigate what to get. I take certain medicines...I know I need certain nutrition to go along with all the medicines that I take. Sometimes that's not easy when you're on a fixed income you need to pay your rent, pay your utilities, and buy medicines too - that's costly! So you're gonna cut back on some of the food that's good for you."

"Everything's going up except your paycheck...it's hard."

These challenges affect the people we serve – keeping demand high – as well as food banks. Beyond the sustained demand, these new challenges continue to put a strain on food banks' operations and services. Inflation soared over the past year and is at its highest rate in four decades, hammering American consumers but also cutting into the limited resources with which food banks must operate. There are few signs that inflation will slow significantly anytime soon. The same applies to supply chain disruptions. Major alterations to the food supply chain have compounded the challenges food banks face accessing products that had previously been donated but are no longer available. This means organizations like ours must use money allocated to meet other outstanding operational expenses to instead purchase more costly products to meet demand. **For example, last year a truck load of chicken would cost us \$60,000 whereas today it costs us \$120,000 for that same amount.** Acquiring the food is only part of the equation - distributing food has also been a challenge amid increased gas prices.

While it has been a challenge, food banks have been able to keep up with high demand in the past few difficult years thanks to robust federal pandemic aid and the generous support of donors. Now most of the additional federal support has come to an end and donations have slowed, while groceries remain historically expensive and supply chain disruptions continue. Temporary government relief made available in recent years has ended, including:

- Federal stimulus checks
- Expanded Child Tax Credit
- Farmers to Families food boxes and added TEFAP support
- Free school and summer meals for all children
- Greater flexibilities for programs like CSFP and WIC

The people we serve are now facing another loss of federal temporary support – nationally, about \$2.5 billion each month with the sunset of SNAP Emergency Allotments. Our states of Pennsylvania and New Jersey lost over \$200 million per month and \$75 million per month, respectively. This loss, coupled with historically high food inflation, has created a hunger cliff. Our food banks are already seeing an increase in demand, and struggling to fill the hole the end of SNAP Emergency Allotments has torn in the safety net at a time when we already have less federal support. Food banks alone cannot meet the elevated demand for food assistance. We cannot food bank our way out of this crisis.

We have seen the results when the government invests in anti-hunger programs, we can clearly see that it works. Not only can we say “government works” when it comes to addressing hunger, but we have concrete examples of *how* it can work. To address hunger long-term, Congress must build upon these proven solutions by permanently codifying the enhancements, flexibilities, and investments temporarily made to these critical nutrition and safety net programs.

We Can’t Do It Alone

While food banks play a necessary role in the fight against hunger, the charitable food network cannot meet the need alone. SNAP is the most effective anti-hunger program in the United States and is the cornerstone of our nation’s nutrition and food security safety net. In 2022, SNAP helped over 41 million people put food on the table.¹⁰ These benefits improve the food security, financial security, and health of recipients while providing a high level of dignity and autonomy to recipients. SNAP serves our most vulnerable. 44% of SNAP recipients are children, 33% seniors and people with disabilities, and the majority of SNAP recipients who can work do work.^{11,12} Additionally, SNAP infuses money into local economies. SNAP is an economic multiplier – for every \$1 invested into SNAP, \$1.50-1.80 is generated in economic activity.¹³

SNAP is the nation’s first line of defense against hunger. Research prior to the pandemic found that for every one meal the Feeding America national network of food banks provides, SNAP provides nine. Additionally, SNAP relieves pressure on food banks. SNAP “shortens the line” so that we can do our job of “feeding the line” more effectively. Without strong SNAP benefits, food banks and pantries become overburdened and unable to meet the need.

Before SNAP Emergency Allotments, SNAP’s biggest shortcoming had long been inadequate benefit amounts. Regular SNAP benefits have not been enough to get most families through the month.

¹⁰ Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, The Basics: The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/the-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>

¹¹ Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, Most Working-Age SNAP Participants Work, But Often in Unstable Jobs, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/most-working-age-snap-participants-work-but-often-in-unstable-jobs>

¹² Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, SNAP Helps Millions of Children, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-helps-millions-of-children>

¹³ Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, The Case for Boosting SNAP Benefits, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/the-case-for-boosting-snap-benefits-in-next-major-economic-response>

Without SNAP Emergency Allotment, the average SNAP benefit is now only about \$6 per person per day.¹⁴ Though still insufficient, it is a meaningful improvement from the prior average of \$4.20 per person per day before the Thrifty Food Plan was updated to better reflect the cost of a healthy diet based on today's nutrition standards and consumption patterns. While we understand that SNAP Emergency Allotments were intended as temporary relief, the devastating impact of their loss is a testament to the need to protect and strengthen SNAP in the Farm Bill – such as protecting and expanding upon the recent increase to the Thrifty Food Plan.

On average, SNAP recipients lost \$82 per person per month when SNAP Emergency Allotments ended.¹⁵ Many people lost much more. For example, many seniors and people with disabilities only qualify for the minimum SNAP benefit – just \$23 per month. Our neighbors are already struggling to make ends meet after a loss of this magnitude, forced to make impossible tradeoffs between food and other necessities like rent, bills, and medication. Any further cuts to SNAP would be catastrophic. Allow me to share our community members' experiences in their own words:

“We now have to choose between bills and food even more than before. Prices are rising and we can't keep up. We shouldn't have to decide if we can eat or have heat, buy groceries or pay the rent.” – Anonymous

“My wife and I are greatly affected by the loss of the extra SNAP income. My wife is a cancer patient with the expenses that creates, like prescriptions not covered or copays through the roof...and I'm at 76 years old with a quadruple heart bypass operation and a carotid artery operation and other illnesses along with that. I am no longer able to hold a job, part-time or full. The extra income for food was a Godsent as we could afford to eat something besides peanut butter and crackers, which we're now back on as \$23 a month does not even cover eggs, milk, and butter now.” – Ronald

“It's really scary when you have to worry about whether you're going to pay your rent or feed your kid. And not to mention my rent went up in January as well so it was already getting tougher. I live in a two-person household – it's myself and my 13-year-old autistic son. I was struggling since January but at least I knew I was getting the [extra SNAP] so I didn't worry about food but when they took it away my life and my son's life was turned upside down.” – Anonymous

¹⁴ Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, Temporary Pandemic SNAP Benefits Will End in Remaining 35 States in March 2023, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/temporary-pandemic-snap-benefits-will-end-in-remaining-35-states-in-march>

¹⁵ Food Research & Action Center, SNAP Emergency Allotments and Public Health Emergency: Preparing for the Hunger Cliff, <https://frac.org/programs/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap/emergency-allotments>

"I am 93 years old and live on my Social Security with no savings. They have just taken \$200 a month away from my food buying. How can I live on \$78 a month for food? I buy no nonessentials and I can't afford to go to the dentist. I am really concerned." – Olive

"Having the extra benefits allowed us to eat like normal people. Now going to \$23 a month will be extremely hard on us. My wife and I have medical issues and eating decent should be a given, not a luxury. In my 73 years I never thought I would be living like this: from a two-income household to poverty. I am a Vietnam vet, gave my all to my country, and yet a decent meal is far and few between." – Jim

"I work full time and rent a house with no utilities included so by the time I pay \$775 rent, \$300 electric, \$135 water, internet and phones, car payments, and insurance...I have nothing left. I don't make a lot and [without SNAP Emergency Allotments] I am only eligible for \$90 [in SNAP benefits]. The additional [SNAP benefits] helped my family so much to be able to eat and I don't know what we will do...I don't know how we will make it without paying our basic bills." – Anonymous

Our partners, including faith-based and community pantries, are already experiencing extreme increases in demand as a result:

"We're noticing an incredible influx of new clients. We're serving 120 to 150 people per day. There's a sense of desperation that's heightened. People are lining up earlier. There's a feeling of scarcity that didn't exist before. People are panicked. Our guests are now constantly asking for other services, other financial assistance. They're having a hard time paying rent. One woman, she goes to the pantry every week to meet her family's needs, she told me, 'Without these services, I wouldn't survive.' We're just not getting enough in-kind donations. We're spending about \$2,000 a week shopping for food. Before, we could shop once or twice a week. Now we're shopping pretty much every day. The people need help *and* the pantries need help." – Margaux, Founder, Sunday Love Project (Philadelphia, PA)

"The SNAP changes really impact people because we have noticed within the past month, more people are coming to the pantry, more families, people that have children, and older adults. During the pandemic, we had a lot of people. Then when jobs started opening, people went back to work so we were not getting that crowd. But now that the SNAP benefits have been cut off, we are noticing that some of those people are coming back plus we are getting a lot of new people. We are serving these people the best that we can. [In addition to serving more people]...we are not getting as much food as we used to. We have to cut back on what we can give them so that everyone can get something." – Elaine, Food Pantry Volunteer, Willow Grove SDA Church (Willow Grove, PA)

“Before March, we were seeing about 60-70 families coming to the pantry on a distribution day. And then all of a sudden, it zoomed up and we had 141 families on a Tuesday. We were just shocked. And it’s been consistently in the 100s since then. That’s like a Thanksgiving distribution. We normally see 130 families on Thanksgiving which is our biggest day of the year. So, for a normal Tuesday to see 141? That was just off the charts. We’re really just starting to see the reality of what people are losing. It’s significant.” – LeeAnn, Executive Director, Patrician Society (Norristown, PA)

Additionally, it is important to note that many people who are food insecure do not qualify for SNAP benefits. Food banks are key to filling the gap and meeting the need. Nationally, nearly 50% of food insecure households are above the income limit for SNAP – meaning they make too much to qualify for SNAP but not enough to make ends meet.¹⁶ For these households, food banks are a critical source of food.

To truly end hunger in our country, we need a comprehensive approach. Different programs address different needs and must work in tandem. We need bold investments in programs that help food banks serve our communities – like TEFAP and CSFP, as well as programs that directly benefit people in need – like SNAP – to address our nation’s hunger crisis. Without these investments we will end up paying more in health care related expenses and losing income that could be spent in communities.

Policy Recommendations

Hunger is a solvable issue. As a nation we have enough food to feed everyone, but too many people lack the resources to be able to access that food. We need the political will to make policies and systemic changes that remove barriers and help people get the food they need. The Farm Bill provides a key opportunity to apply the lessons learned from the past few challenging years and address the hunger crisis by permanently improving critical federal nutrition programs like SNAP, TEFAP, and CSFP.

As Congress works to reauthorize the Farm Bill, Philabundance, along with our Feeding America network, urges lawmakers to strengthen the federal nutrition programs — programs that work in tandem with food banks across the country to provide food assistance to families and individuals facing hunger. Now is not the time to cut or weaken federal nutrition programs; now is the time to be bold and build on the bipartisan leadership we saw during the pandemic that averted a national hunger crisis and contained the rate of food insecurity. We are requesting the Committee to strengthen our nation’s commitment to ending hunger by enacting the following policy recommendations in the 2023 Farm Bill.

Our nation’s food banks, and programs like **TEFAP** and **CSFP** that support them, are lifelines for families who struggle to put food on the table. Charitable donations alone can’t ensure that families get enough to eat. To ensure food bank shelves are full, Congress must:

¹⁶ Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap, <https://map.feedingamerica.org/>

- **Strengthen 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, food pantries, soup kitchens, and emergency shelters. As demand for food remains high at food banks, a reliable and continuous stream of TEFAP foods is essential. TEFAP also has a strong impact on the farm economy. TEFAP purchases give U.S. growers and producers an average of 27 cents per dollar. By contrast, just around 16 cents of every retail food dollar go back to farmers.

- Congress should reauthorize and increase to \$500 million per year mandatory funding for **TEFAP food purchases**, adjusted for inflation. This would double the annual amount of funding for TEFAP entitlement commodities set by the Farm Bill. This level of investment will ensure the flow of TEFAP foods remains steady throughout the food assistance network and support the U.S. agricultural economy.
- Congress should reauthorize and increase to \$200 million per year discretionary funding for **TEFAP storage and distribution** and reauthorize \$15 million per year in discretionary funding for **TEFAP infrastructure grants**. These funds will help food banks offset the cost of storing and transporting USDA foods, especially in rural communities. They will help cover expenses like refrigeration and fuel.

- **Reauthorize, Streamline and Expand Access for CSFP**

Every month, CSFP provides nutritious food boxes to around 760,000 seniors who are low-income and aged 60 years and older. CSFP helps to combat the poor health conditions often found in seniors who are experiencing food insecurity and who are at risk for hunger. In a pulse survey of Feeding America food bank members, they shared that the certification length for seniors was too short, the waitlists were very long, and the reporting requirements are too burdensome, costing more to administer the program versus the actual return. In addition to the administrative hurdles within CSFP, seniors face eligibility barriers when their Medicare payments for health services are included in income determination. Adding a healthcare deduction will increase access to CSFP for any in-need seniors that do not meet requirements under current income eligibility provisions.

- **Support Partnerships with Growers and Producers**

Annually, around 70 billion pounds of food in the U.S. does not make it from farm to plate. Congress should increase funding and streamline state participation in the TEFAP Farm to Food Bank program by removing the state match and allowing states to prioritize projects for donated food or food purchased at low cost from local growers and producers. This will help increase food donations from farmers to food banks to communities in need.

Congress must protect SNAP's funding and structure while addressing systemic barriers to benefits. Our **SNAP priorities** for the Farm Bill include:

- **Improve Benefit Adequacy**

Congress should increase SNAP benefits to an adequate level. While we celebrate and seek to protect the increase to the Thrifty Food Plan, it is still not sufficient. Basing SNAP benefits on the Low-Cost Food Plan (rather than the current Thrifty Food Plan) would increase SNAP's purchasing

power and bring benefit amounts in line with grocery prices and need. SNAP benefits must keep up with the actual cost of food, and they should taper more gradually until participants truly have enough income to support themselves without feeling like they are being pushed off the “benefits cliff.” Increasing SNAP benefits would also help seniors, people with disabilities, people working low-wage jobs, and others who are most likely to qualify for the minimum benefit. Additionally, Congress should eliminate the cap on the SNAP Excess Shelter Deduction and streamline SNAP Standard Excess Medical Deductions for older adults and people with disabilities.

- **Expand SNAP Eligibility and Streamline Enrollment Processes**

Current eligibility rules and enrollment processes can be complicated, confusing, and restrictive – creating red tape and blocking access among vulnerable populations. Congress should improve SNAP access for seniors, college students, immigrants, and others who do not qualify for or are unable to participate in SNAP due to eligibility barriers. Congress should also simplify application processes and remove administrative barriers to make it easier to apply for or renew benefits.

- **Strengthen Pathways to Economic Mobility**

Congress should end SNAP's three-month time limit for able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs). This harsh policy that ceases food assistance after only three months results in increased food insecurity with no correlation to increased employment. Instead of inflexible penalties that provide an error-prone one-size-fits-all approach, Congress can better support SNAP participants in finding work by removing the time limit on benefits, as well as improving and adequately funding state employment and training programs. Additionally, earnings generated from participation in work-based learning programs like SNAP Employment and Training should be excluded from SNAP eligibility and benefit determinations. This will help ensure people have the food *and* opportunities they need to get back on their feet.

- **Congress must ensure equity within the nutrition programs by:**

- Improving data collection to further inform policy solutions,
- **Centering the participant experience in the design and implementation of the federal nutrition programs,**
- Ensuring access to culturally appropriate foods in the nutrition programs such as Halal and Kosher foods,
- Providing food sovereignty and parity for tribal communities and the US territories,
- And repealing the lifetime ban on individuals with past felony drug convictions from receiving SNAP.

Conclusion

“Eating decent should be a given, not a luxury,” said Jim from Pennsylvania.

We all get to go home to a full refrigerator and stocked shelves. Food is a basic staple. Something we don't have to think about beyond simply what we are craving today. But for 34 million people in this country, they question that very necessity. They do not ask, “what's for dinner tonight?” but instead,

“do I have anything to eat for dinner tonight?” It is a heartbreaking reality for far too many individuals, children, and seniors.

My incredible team at Philabundance, including our donors, partners, and supporters and the entire Feeding America network are working so hard to do something about that. But we cannot do this alone, especially as it keeps getting harder. I implore each of you to think tonight when you have your dinner about what it would feel like if that food was not available to you. If you could not just throw open the fridge or order whatever you wanted.

The Farm Bill is a pivotal opportunity to make a difference in the lives of so many so that they too can know they have the resources to consume the food they need. During COVID, the federal government chose to invest in programs that ensured people were fed. It showed how government can work to address hunger. The overall well-being of our nation is dependent on a well-nourished society.

I often quote Martin Luther King Jr. and he said, "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'" With this Farm Bill we can do something – we can feed people.