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Food Politics in the US: A Case Study of Civil Society Discourses around the Right to Food

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## ABSTRACT

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Food is fundamental to survival, and is also a basic human right. Notwithstanding, the politics of food distribution are steep in inequality both domestically and abroad. A nongovernmental response to food insecurity is charitable food banks. Today, they are on the front line of distributing food to food insecure population and subsequently occupy a vast degree of ideological, organizational and institutional influence over food security outcomes. Previous research has argued that while food banks have a sociopolitical platform to advocate for social reform, it might not actually be in their best interest to do so. From a long term perspective, it is proposed that the presence of food banks ultimately distracts from being able to amend the policy shortfalls involving socioeconomic rights protections. From a human rights perspective, this paper explores the extent to which charitable food organizations [1] utilize human rights frameworks in their organizational mission/value/purpose statements, [2] advocate for progressive social policy reform through their organization apparatus; and [3] whether food organizations of similar ideological backgrounds network with regard to rights orientation? To do so, I qualitatively code the mission statements of 52 food organizations in the US, using manifest content from their webpages applying one of the following three rights designations: no rights, limited rights and human rights. Then, I compare the extent to which charitable food organizations network with other charitable organizations to achieve their organizational mission based on these categories.

**KEYWORDS:** Food insecurity, human rights, food rights, civil society, food bank

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## Dedication

This work is dedicated two-fold: Foremost, to the food insecure population. Particularly, with heartfelt empathy to the defenseless child will to go bed at night confronted by the agony of hunger, despaired by hopeless, and burdened by the uncertainty and sheer enormity posed by the question: where will my next meal come from? May your future hold the right to food, as well as offer unwavering protection to all other international human rights statutes. Second, to my family, particularly my nieces, Aaliyah and Amelia, you bring light into the world, thank you for being you.

## I. Introduction

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), in 2016, the most recent year of available data, an alarming 41.2 million people in the United States were food insecure which aggregately comprised 16.5 percent of the total population.<sup>1</sup> In comparison, Feeding America, which is the largest network of food organization in the US, currently comprises a complex of more than 200 food banks and over 60,000 food pantries (2017).<sup>2</sup> Collectively, Feeding America's food organizations network of distributed 4 billion meals to the food insecure population in 2015. Furthermore, 59 percent of households who received charitable food services by Feeding America's network in the 2015 survey responded that within the last month, they had too participated in at least one governmental food assistance program. In contrast, 41 percent of food insecure households who had utilized services *did not* receive any governmental assistance in the month prior to obtaining charitable food assistance.

Graham Riches claims the first food bank in North America was established in Phoenix, Arizona in 1967 (2002b).<sup>3</sup> "Its philosophy was 'simply to marry the interests of the food industry

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<sup>1</sup> United States Department of Agriculture delineates four categories around food procurement: high food security, marginal food security, low food insecurity and very low food insecurity. The term 'food insecure' comprises the condition of both low food insecurity and very low food insecurity. "High food security: no reported indications of food-access problems or limitations. Marginal food security: one or two reported indications—typically of anxiety over food sufficiency or shortage of food in the house. Little or no indication of changes in diets or food intake....Low food security: reports of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet. Little or no indication of reduced food intake. Very low food security: Reports of multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake," 2017, page last updated October 4, 2017. See <<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security/>>.

<sup>2</sup> Feeding America, "Hunger and Poverty Facts," 2017. See <<http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/hunger-and-poverty-facts.html>>.

<sup>3</sup> Webpages from various food organizations in the US, provide organizational histories that date back further than 1967. Though, it is not altogether clear whether these organizations provided food in earlier periods, or if they instead were operational but in a different capacity than presently.

to cope effectively with surplus, unsaleable [sic] food with those of grass roots poverty organizations.”<sup>4</sup> While there are certainly historical examples of charitable food giving by entities in society, the significance of a food bank is that it provided a general prototype for charitable food organizations to be instituted and overtime, appear to society as rationalized response to food insecurity. In essence, “the idea was that a modern, wasteful society could act as one that provides a resource to others.”<sup>5</sup> Since the 1980s, the institutional presence of food charities across in the US has increased substantively, while at the same time, the proportion of the food insecure population has increased as well.<sup>6</sup> This paradox arouses peculiar interest since it sheds light on potential intrinsic limitations of relying on the industrial complex of food donating organizations to resolve or even satisfactorily mitigate the pervasiveness of food insecurity.<sup>7</sup> Graham Riches further argues that “food banks are an inadequate response to the complex issue of social exclusion and the state’s failure to ‘respect, protect and fulfill’ the right to food” (2002b:650).<sup>8</sup> Therefore, this project uses Riches perspective to test whether charitable food organization offer an appropriate civic response to food insecurity in the US, which is measured by their orientation towards rights framework.

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<sup>4</sup> Graham Riches, “Food Banks and Food Security,” 2002b, 651.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Gandhi Raj Bhattarai, Patricia A. Duffy, and Jennie Raymond. "Use of food pantries and food stamps in low-income households in the United States." *Journal of Consumer Affairs* 39, no. 2 (2005). Yet, in the context of the US, there is not a complete list of food organizations in the US, so it difficult to capture the extent to which they are relied on aggregately.

<sup>7</sup> Booth & Whelan, “Hunger for Change,” 2014; Riches & Silvasti, “Hunger in the Rich World,” 2014; Williams et. al., “Contested Space,” 2016; and Walker, Keane and Burke, “Disparities and Access,” 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Riches, Graham. "Food banks and food security: welfare reform, human rights and social policy. Lessons from Canada?." *Social Policy & Administration* 36, no. 6 (2002b): 648-663.



Before I delve into the specific details driving this analysis, however, I will first paint the theoretical landscape grounding the present project. Accordingly, an overarching premise of this project relates to the framework underscored by Jack Donnelly's proposition of 'the possession paradox,' which extends that "'having' a right is of most value precisely when one does not 'have' (the object of) the right" (2013: 9). In other words, when rights are absent (such as the right to food), but an effect is present (such as food insecurity), the application of the right is of most value to the right holder. Since food insecurity does exist, the need for open, constructive dialogue around economic rights protections therefore becomes ever more essential. Further theoretical assumptions henceforth relate to how this project views human rights discourses, civil society and the state interacting to form social policy. Integral to this perspective the understanding that "human rights—and the idea of human rights itself—is historically specific and contingent."<sup>9</sup> In the broadest sense, therefore, human rights are viewed as a legal framework that is internationally 'agreed upon,'<sup>10</sup> though nationally, the specifics of these rights are thought to emerge through open, deliberative, historically confined and interactive dialogue between state actors and civil society. Simultaneously, local rights discourse goes on to shape and is shaped by debate that is transpiring in the international arena on overlapping topics.<sup>11</sup> That is to

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<sup>9</sup> Donnelly, Jack. *Universal human rights in theory and practice*. (Cornell University Press, 2013), 9.

<sup>10</sup> In the sense that Dembour, 2010, discusses. See, Dembour, Marie-Bénédicte. "What are human rights? Four schools of thought." *Human Rights Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (2010): 1-20.

<sup>11</sup> This perspective was influenced by the perspective of Hafner-Burton, Emilie M., and Kiyoteru Tsutsui. "Human rights in a globalizing world: The paradox of empty promises." *American journal of sociology* 110, no. 5 (2005): 1373-411, which was first read during my undergraduate degree in a graduate-level human rights course instructed Daniel Levy. This larger historical process can be understood best through models such as offered by Markoff's "Waves of Democracy," 1996. From this perspective, 'democracy' is rooted in conceptualizations of how power is and/or should be distributed between the state and society. Specifically, democracy is grounded in "claims about what sorts of powers governments have and should have, as well as claims about who has a say (and what sort of say) in the making of decisions" (Markoff 1996: 13). Processes of power struggles, and ultimately, incidents of social change are elicited by agents of elite power holders and social movements. Discourse around the meaning of

say, states will vary on their terms of rights protections but this variation in turn creates space for civil actors to advocate for domestic and/or international rights reform. Hence, norms governing the US political-legal realm should not impede—whether in theory or in practice—members of civil society from advocating for and/or utilizing a human right framework on any ethical issue, including but not limited to, food rights. Charitable food donating organizations are conceived as a collective body of institutions capable of harnessing the visionary potential of moving the topic of food insecurity beyond a statistic represented on their organizational webpage and into the political/legal realm of being identified and approached as a human rights violation.

Conceptually, the next set of assumptions expressed in this paper relate to food donation organizations: *First*, due to the fact that so many people in the US population are food insecure—despite there being numerous governmental food assistance programs, my research foremost views food donating organizations in the US as presently occupying a structurally integral role in fulfilling food rights for individuals who are unable to achieve food security (i.e., economic security) on their own; *second*, it is assumed that “[f]ood bank utilization is generally thought to be indicative of household food insecurity (popularly termed ‘hunger’) and to denote nutritional vulnerability.”<sup>12</sup> For this reason, the very act of going to a food bank is sufficient

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democracy is continually being defined and redefined by power-holders and social movements in a transnational context. Markoff (1996) argues social movements borrow from each other transnationally: 1) broad ideas; 2) forms of public action; 3) organizational vehicles; 4) symbols or slogan. It is also shown that social institutions also have a tendency mimic each other. Accordingly, democracy is not a set of definable objective terms or conditions to be achieved but rather is a ‘continual process’ of invention and reinvention of rooted in historical time and place. Moreover, discourses pertaining to the meaning of democracy are occurring at the both the national and international level which is constantly changing. In other words, “[m]ovements and elites interact: movements pushing elites and elites opening opportunities for movements. When these processes come together in a great multinational convergence, the result is a wave of democratization (or a wave of antidemocracy)” (Markoff 1996: 36). The reason waves of democracy occur, therefore, is because of the fact that the meaning of democracy is continually changing.

<sup>12</sup> Tarasuk & Beaton, "Household food insecurity and hunger among families using food banks, "Household food insecurity and hunger," *Canadian Journal of Public Health* 20, 109.

enough to suggest individual and/or household level food insecurity. So while the exact extent and severity of food insecurity is difficult to gauge between and among recipients of food donation services, the act of turning to a food organization in the first place is perceived as being due to there being some degree of food insecurity of persons. In congruence, food insecurity of persons is conceptualized as being a human rights violation because it a priori breaches the established criterion involving economic accessibility of food since food is not guaranteed through food banks. At the most basic level, therefore, the logical proposition is that the complete nutritional needs of the food insecure population is not guaranteed by food donation services because there is not uniform policy and practices between food organizations in terms of the type of food, the amount of food and the frequency in which food is offered and similarly, there is not a consistent institutional presence of food donating organizations across the nation; *third*, since charitable food organizations in the US represent the largest nongovernmental body of institutional support for those who are food insecure, they are conceptualized as a decent proxy of civic actors around food insecurity. In short, therefore, food banks are both integral to helping provide food rights by distributing food to food insecure households, but they are, or at the very least, have the potential to be, strong civil advocates for the food insecure population.<sup>13</sup>

On one hand, charitable food organizations have been endowed with an enormous breadth of autonomy in public affairs which the public assumes they have the most destitute members of society interest at heart. On the other hand, they also have the potential to decouple food rights from policy solutions involving food insecurity. Therefore, incongruent organizational messages with regard to institutional practices can help move the topic of food

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<sup>13</sup>Williams et al., “Contested Space,” 2016.

insecurity into the appropriate sphere of being viewed as a public policy failure. Riches (2002b) frames his analysis on food banks, through the perspective of ‘the charitable food box,’ which presumes that charitable food organizations distract from addressing the array of policy shortfalls around economic rights protections in all economically developed countries. The objective of this project, therefore, is to place human rights at the heart of my analysis from the perspective of the ‘charitable food box’ In the next section, I engage in a literature review of approaches towards food insecurity as well as insights around charitable food organizations. After which, I present my research methods, which ultimately seek to understand the extent to which charitable food organizations utilize human rights frameworks and/or advocate progressive social reform through the organizational apparatus? Yet, before I delve into the specifics of my research method, I would first like to situate the analysis within the broader social, economic, civil and political context from which they occur, so the next section formulates a brief historical background on topics foundational to present project.

## **II. Background**

At the international level, the right to food is well an established basic human right. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was the first instrument to promote food as an inherent right as declared in Article 25, although Article 11 of the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) persists as the most commonly cited international rights document for food rights in part because the latter offers a more expansive interpretation of the right.<sup>14</sup> From an international rights perspective, fulfilling food

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<sup>14</sup> Article 11 of the ICESCR, 1966. Furthermore, see the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights General Comment No. 12: The Right to Adequate Food (Art. 11) 12 41999.

rights hinges on satisfying three key elements: *availability*, *accessibility* and *adequacy* of food.<sup>15</sup> Globally, there is enough food 'available' (the first criterion) to feed the entire global population 'adequately' (the third criterion)<sup>16</sup> Domestically, this point is true as well as, as it is estimated that between 30-40 % of all food in the country eventually goes to waste.<sup>17</sup> Considering food security in the US is not due to there being too little food available to feed the domestic population, the principle of *accessibility* should be looked at more closely.

According to international human rights standards, both 'economic' and 'physical' accessibility of food should be guaranteed through the state's legal and political infrastructure.<sup>18</sup> *Economic access* entails that individuals should be able to afford enough food to maintain an adequate diet without compromising on any other basic need related to housing, education, or health care.<sup>19</sup> *Physical access*, on the other hand, has to do with limiting and/or accounting for the barriers that would otherwise prevent an individual from physically being able to access food. For instance, a prisoner should be provided nutritionally food because they are physically unable to access the food system on their own accord. The same logic follows for a physically or

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<sup>15</sup> See UN General Assembly, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter," (January 2014): A/HRC/25/57. <[http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/19session/A-HRC-19-59-Add2\\_en.pdf](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/19session/A-HRC-19-59-Add2_en.pdf)>. As well as, De Schutter, Olivier. "UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food." *Report on agroecology and the right to food* (2014).

<sup>16</sup> As most notably proposed by Amartya Sen in 1981 as well as more recently, affirmed in FAO's Zero Hunger Challenge. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2017, Zero Hunger Challenge. See <<http://www.fao.org/state-of-food-security-nutrition/en/>>.

<sup>17</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, 'Definitions of Food Security,' Last updated, Wednesday, October 04, 2017. See <<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security/>>.

<sup>18</sup>As described in Fact Sheet 34, the Right to Adequate Food, published by the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, 2010. <<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FactSheet34en.pdf>>.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, U.N. Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, 2010.

mentally handicapped person who is unable to secure food due to a debilitating factor. Yet, able bodied persons too, even those who do not face physical limitations to food securement per se, also have the inherent and inalienable right for nutritional food to be economically accessible in a manner that does not infringe on other basic living conditions and/or standards essential to survival and dignity—that is, unwaveringly in periods of political and environmental stability.

For the better part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the condition of food insecurity was attributed to there being too little food in the world to feed the global population.<sup>20</sup> Thus the presence of malnourishment, famine and starvation in society was framed, as well as approached as being due to an aggregate shortage in food. As a result, development approaches, both domestic and abroad, were devised and improvised around increasing agricultural production to grow outputs.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, food insecurity persisted, while in the institutional backdrop, charitable food organizations emerged on the horizon. Swiftly leading way to producing a rapid degree of legitimacy as an appropriate response to incidents of food insecurity. Then, internationally, a paradigm shift was eventually initiated regarding views on food insecurity and economic development. Research conducted by Sen, most notably, analyzed causal factors underscoring the Bengal famine of 1943, the Ethiopian famine of 1973, and the Bangladesh famine of 1974, while considering distributive politics confining food and poverty outcomes (1981b). In the process, concluded that “[s]tarvation is the characteristic of some people not having enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there not being enough food to eat” (Ibid., 198). While at face

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<sup>20</sup> See the National Research Council (2006). Food Insecurity and Hunger in the United States, particularly chapter two, ‘History of the Development of Food Insecurity and Hunger Measures,’ Provided online by the National Academics of Science, Engineering and Medicine.<<http://nap.edu/11578>>.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., th National Research Council (2006).

value it makes not seem remarkable, this position was a bold departure from dominant discourse at the time. Maxwell and Slater argue that “similar ideas, perhaps less elegantly expressed, could be found in the nutrition literature (for example, Berg, 1973; Levinson, 1974; Kielman et al., 1977), and, indeed, in the contributions in food policy to the debate about safety nets (see for example, Timmer et al., 1981: 269ff)” (2003:532). Then, finally concede by making the remark, “[w]hatever the source, the primary concern of the international discourse did shift quite rapidly, from food supply to food demand. Entitlement, vulnerability and risk became the new watchwords: this was the emergent language of food security” (as cited in Maxwell and Slater 2003: 532). Though, these approaches remain confined predominantly to applications intended to aid persons of the developing world.

Nevertheless, domestically governmental agencies in the US adapted methodological strategies aimed at composing expert bodies to familiarize state representatives and policy approaches around incidents of food insecurity. In 1992, for example, the Federal government commissioned a body of researchers to form an advisory committee entitled the Federal Food Security Measurement Project.<sup>22</sup> The objective was “to carry out a key task assigned by the Ten-Year Comprehensive Plan, namely, to develop a standard measure of food insecurity and hunger for the United States for use at the national, state, and local levels.”<sup>23</sup> Ergo, there was not even an appropriate indicator to measure food insecurity due to strategies being acclimated around growth. Since 2006, moreover, the USDA has annually produced governmental reports detailing

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<sup>22</sup> See the National Research Council, “Food Insecurity and Hunger in the United States,” (2006:40). <<http://nap.edu/11578>>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

manifestations of food insecurity consistently using data from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS).<sup>24</sup> The survey is said to be a demographically representative sample of 45,000 individuals, obtained from interviews of individuals from across the country.<sup>25</sup>

That is to say, although the US does not have comprehensive social and economic rights protections around food, as best evidenced by household food insecurity rates, there are nevertheless manifestations of food rights and protections from existing policy measures, governmental strategies and Federal advisory agencies. In fact, US protectionism has been noted elsewhere. Prasad, for instance, argues that in many ways the United States was more interventionist than Europe [i.e., who is often presented as the Zenith of success regarding respecting and protecting economic rights statutes] during the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century (2012). In fact, Prasad teaches us that farmers were fundamental to laying the foundation of US interventionism: in “the redefinition of trade policy; the creation of an income tax; a new, publicly controlled banking and currency system; antitrust policy; the regulation of agriculture marketing networks....” (Prasad 2010: 10). Thus, social/economic entitlements have long been.

Additionally, there are several governmental food programs for impoverished individuals and/or households to help overcome the economic barriers low income individuals face around food procurement. In the US, the three largest governmental assistance programs are the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP),<sup>26</sup> the National School Lunch Program

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<sup>24</sup> The USDA's webpage establishes that the “The CPS provides data for the Nation's monthly unemployment statistics and annual income and poverty statistics” (October 2017). See <<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/measurement.aspx#measurement>>.

<sup>25</sup> USDA's measure on household food insecurity is based on the results of 10 questions if your household is childless and 18 of which 8 specifically assess persons under the age of 18.

<sup>26</sup> See the Department of Agriculture, “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP),” 2018. <<https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>> .



(NSLP),<sup>27</sup> and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).<sup>28</sup> Yet, among other things, income requirements for governmental safety net programs are extremely low<sup>29</sup> which render many food insecure households ineligible to receive benefits of these services and second, the degree of economic protections provided through these programs often fall short of meeting the dietary needs of individuals and/or households who has utilized the entitlement. There are both Federal and State regulatory laws and agencies aimed at protecting adequacy of food such as the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA),<sup>30</sup> United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)<sup>31</sup> and the Surgeon General of the United States Department of Health Services.<sup>32</sup> As of December 29, 2017, the FDA’s website described their function as being “responsible for protecting the public health by ensuring the safety, efficacy, and security of human and veterinary drugs, biological products, and medical devices; and by ensuring the safety of our nation’s food supply, cosmetics, and products that emit radiation.”<sup>33</sup> Additionally, a branch of the USDA is the Economic Research Service (ERS), which “plays a leading role in Federal research on food security and food security measurement in U.S. households and communities and provides data access and technical support to social science

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<sup>27</sup>Department of Agriculture, “The National School Lunch Program (NSLP),” 2008. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp/national-school-lunch-program-nslp>.

<sup>28</sup> See the Department of Agriculture, “Women, Infants & Children,” . <https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/women-infants-and-children-wic>.

<sup>30</sup> United States Food and Drug Administration, “About,” 2018. < <https://www.fda.gov/>>.

<sup>31</sup>United States Department of Agriculture, “About the U.S. Department of Agriculture,” 2017 <https://www.usda.gov/our-agency/about-usda>.

<sup>32</sup>National Prevention Strategy Healthy Eating. <https://www.surgeongeneral.gov/priorities/prevention/strategy/healthy-eating.pdf>

<sup>33</sup>United States Department of Agriculture, “What We Do,” last modified December 29, 2017. <https://www.fda.gov/AboutFDA/WhatWeDo/default.htm>.

scholars to facilitate their research on food security.”<sup>34</sup> There are also a multitude of agencies and programs around agricultural production (USDA), food distribution (FDA) and food security (USDA, SNAP, NSLP and WIC) all in some regard provide rights protections around food. entail food assistance programs designed for impoverished individuals and/or households.<sup>35</sup>

### III. Literature Review on Food Insecurity, Food Organizations & Human Rights

‘To *respect* the right to food is to not interfere with one's ability to acquire food. To *protect* the right to food is to make sure that others do not interfere with access to food. To *fulfill* the right to food has 2 components: to facilitate or create social and economic environments that foster human development, and to provide food to people in an emergency or in circumstances when self-provisioning is beyond their control’<sup>36</sup>

‘Respect,’ ‘protect’ and ‘fulfill’ are core principles of human rights. Charitable food organizations exist in every state in the country and offer a range of services. Since the meaning and application of the term ‘food bank’ varies within and across countries regarding “their aims and objectives, their size and scope and in their [administrative] roles and [organizational] functions,”<sup>37</sup> comparative leverage is limited. Though, generally the concept “can reasonably be defined ‘as centralized warehouses or clearing houses registered as non-profit organizations for the purpose of collecting, storing and distributing surplus food (donated/shared), free of charge either directly to hungry people or to front line social agencies which provide supplementary

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<sup>34</sup>United States Department of Agriculture, “Overview,” last modified September 06, 2017. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/>.

<sup>36</sup> Chilton M, Rose D. A Rights-Based Approach to Food Insecurity in the United States. *American Journal of Public Health*. 2009; 99 (7):1203-1211. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2007.130229.

<sup>37</sup> Graham Riches, “Food Banks and Food Security,” *Social Policy & Administration* 36, no. 6 (December 2002b): 650.

food and meals.”<sup>38</sup> In the US, disaggregated data on food insecurity suggests a stark picture around the number of individuals who are subjected to the mercy of food donating organizations to ameliorate the immediate presence of food insecurity. Recent data published by the USDA detailing the prevalence of food insecurity in US households from 1995-2016, indicates annual food insecurity rates in the US have comfortably hovered around 12% of the population (+/- 3) throughout the entire time period.<sup>39</sup> Since 2007, there has been an increase in the proportion of food insecure. Figure 1., illustrates that in 1995, approximately 12 percent of the population was food insecure, and in the time period since 2007, the proportion of food insecure population swelled beyond 12 percent. This data should be contextualized by the reality that the population has grown over the past two decades, so the absolute number of food insecure persons is far greater today than in 1995. That is because proportions standardize demographic trends, such as population growth, so the percentage of food insecure in any given population can blur magnitude of the particular problem. The website of the US Census Bureau (2017), for example, maintains that the total population in 1995, was 266.3 million while in 2016 the population rose to an estimated 323.1 million. Markedly, there was a 56.8 million population increase over the 20 year period. So even if the total rate of food insecurity remained constant, the implication is that more persons today are plagued by food insecurity today than yesterday.

**Figure 1:** Trends in Prevalence Rates of Food Low Security and Very Low Food Security in U.S. Households, 1995-2016<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Riches, 2002b, pg. 650.

<sup>39</sup> The United States Department of Agriculture, Key Statistics & Graphics, Page last modified October 4, 2017. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/key-statistics-graphics.aspx>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

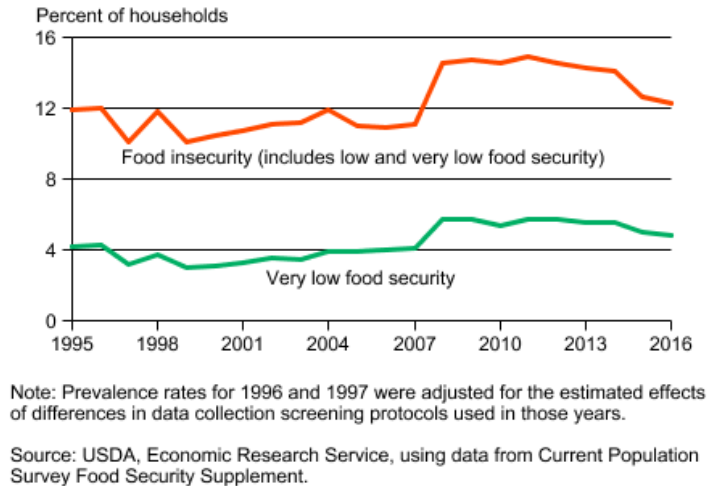


Figure 1. also demonstrates that persons who had very low food security is greater today than was in 1995, both in proportion and in real terms. Another trend worth noting is the condition of ‘very low food insecurity,’ whereby very low food insecurity moves relatively proportional to the fluctuations in the broader category of food insecure. This is an interesting point since it indicates that outcomes in both groups, very low food security and low food security, are affected by similar causal variable(s). Likewise, reductions in rates of both very low food security and low food security around the turn of the 21st Century, demonstrates food insecurity can be reduced. Last, this information signifies an urgency in which food insecurity ought to be addressed

To contextualize food insecurity and charitable food organizations in the US, a good place to start are to mention that the Federal minimum wage has remained unchanged since 2009 at \$7.25 an hour.<sup>41</sup> In 2015, for example, the US Census indicates that the population was at 319,958,045. The Federal Poverty line was established that year at \$11,770 for a household of 1

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<sup>41</sup>The United States Department of Labor, “Wage and Hour Division,” 2017. <<https://www.dol.gov/whd/minwage/america.htm>>.

and \$24,250 for a household of 4. Accordingly, Table. 1., illustrates that in 2015, 86.5% of the population had a household income above the Federal poverty line whereas 13.5% had a household income below. When considering poverty level to food security outcomes, naturally we would expect that below income category to comprise a greater percent of individual in the food insecure population. Yet, data suggests this is not the case. For example, the USDA cites that 12.7% of the population was food insecure in 2015. The report further states that 38% of persons below the poverty line were food insecure. Thus, what proportion does the ‘food insecure’ and ‘below poverty’ line represent within the larger population? Table. 1. shows that statistically, ‘in 2015, if you are food insecure, then you were more likely to have a household income *above* Federal Poverty Level (\$11,770 hh1/ \$24,250 hh4).

**Table 1:** Distribution of ‘Food Insecure’ & ‘Food Secure’ populations disaggregated by Above/Below Household Poverty Level, 2015<sup>42</sup>

% of US population ‘Above Federal Poverty Level’ (AFPL)	(86.5)	% Food Secure & AFPL	(79.0)
		% Food Insecure & AFPL	(7.5)
% of US population ‘Below Federal Poverty Level’ (BFPL)	(13.5)	% Food Secure & BFPL	(8.3)
		% Food Insecure & BFPL	(5.2)
Total US Population in 2015	319,958,045	Total % Food Insecure	12.7%

*Notes:* Proportions rounded to the nearest tenth. The left side of Table 1., provides statistical distributions of US households above and below the Federal Poverty Line. On the right side of the table, the percentage of household food secure-insecure is illustrated for each category. *Source:* Food security data was obtained by the USDA (2016) and population information reflects estimates of the US Census’s (2016) population and poverty estimates for 2015.

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<sup>42</sup> United States Census Bureau, “Income and Poverty in the United States,” electronically published on September 12, 2017. See <https://census.gov/library/publications/2017/demo/p60-259.html>. See also Table 14 in the United States Department of Agriculture, “Household Food Security in the United States in 2015,” (September 2016) <<https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/79761/err-215.pdf?v=42636>>.

Overall, there are many directions that can potentially be taken to study the topic of food insecurity, and literature has done just that. Inquiry has focused on agricultural policy, trade policy, agriculture production, urban vs. rural divide, health disparities, food politics of social movements and the list goes on and on. Research considered useful for this analysis looks at the topic of food insecurity by exploring organizational approaches and/or institutional causes of food insecurity. One approach looks at the subject of food deserts in relation to food insecurity, which views food insecurity as being bound to geographical pretenses of environmental conditions produced by space and place. For example, Walker, Keane & Burke look at “[r]esults of the review of the literature produced 31 empirical studies that focus on food deserts in the U.S....Four major statements emerged from summarizing the research findings of the included articles. These statements are: (1) access to supermarkets (10 articles); (2) racial/ethnic disparities in food deserts (11 articles); (3) income/socioeconomic status in food deserts (11 articles); and (4) differences in chain versus non-chain stores (14 articles). The fourth statement encompasses factors associated with cost (6 articles), availability of food items (4 articles) and store type (4 articles)” (2010: 878). While topics such as these can help researchers, policy-makers and activist alike identify areas physically deprived by nutritional food accessibility and/or availability of healthy food choices, this approach is too narrow to identify the causal factors underscoring food insecurity. This is because food insecurity persists in areas where there are no food deserts which indicate that the concept of a food desert overlooks the causal mechanism underlying food insecurity outcomes. Put differently, the existence of food deserts might in some fashion mediate food insecurity outcomes, yet they are not the primary determinants of the phenomenon. The logic of a food desert is that physical conditions around food inaccessibility cause outcomes food insecurity. In food desert areas, this approach seeks to

obtain more healthy and nutritional food in these neighborhoods. Yet, binding both time and physical locations are economic conditions. To demonstrate, in theory both more time and more money can resolve the problem of food insecurity caused by food deserts as well. Therefore, it appears that the very concept of there being a food desert negates the fact that there is an overwhelming abundance of food available in the country.<sup>43</sup> Thus, frameworks embodied by the term food deserts ignores the reality that food can be obtained from any corner of the country, that is, if economic conditions permit.

Accordingly, another option, among others, is to look at food insecurity through the lens of food banking. From a social perspective food banks are generally viewed in a positive light though in practice they occupy a relatively opaque place in civil society. From a cross-sectional perspective, food banks might appear as a 'devoted' civil agents motivated by the best interest of their clients. Yet, longitudinally, there is various types of credible evidence to question their practical import.<sup>44</sup> Further complicating lines of inquiry relates to there being no measure detailing how much food insecurity is alleviated by charitable food organizations, how much food is wasted internally due to expanded operational models and so forth. Not a uniform method or standard for reporting around amount of food donated or amount the distribution to individual-level by food banks. Individual level organizational data can be reported in terms of the number of pounds of food received or served, or the absolute number of meals provided within any given timeframe. Methodologically, inconsistent measures and data, more broadly, obstructs researchers from have a vivid understanding of population wide food bank utilization. For

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<sup>43</sup> See the National Research Council. Food insecurity and hunger in the United States: An assessment of the measure. National Academies Press, 2006. <https://www.nap.edu/read/11578/chapter/1>.

<sup>44</sup> See Riches 1982, Silvasti & Riches 2014, Tarasuk & Beaton 1999, van der Horst et al. 2014, as well as Williams et. al 2016, for instance.

example: Feeding America, the largest food organization in the US currently, represents network of over 200 food banks and over 60,000 food pantries. In 2016, they purport to have collectively provided 4 billion meals to the food insecure . Correspondingly, Grasky, Morton & Greder’s research states “America’s Second Harvest—the Nation’s largest organization of emergency food providers [at the time]—served 23.3 million people in 2001” (2004: 41). In consideration of these points, there are several issues with the current availability of data. First, therefore, the ‘number of pounds of food served’ and the ‘number of meals provided’ are not comparable metrics or indicators where meaningful standardizations can be made. Second, neither ‘pounds of food’ or ‘number of meals served,’ can illustrate the capacity and/or extent to which individuals utilize charitable food donations at the national level and, similarly, this information is unable to identify how many people in the population had their complete nutritional needs met by food banks. Due to these reasons, it is challenging to formulate meaningful comparisons across time, space and place around the institutional embeddedness of charitable food organizations. This limitation is not only present in the availability of data in the US, but has been noted by researchers in other countries as well. In particular, Lambie-Mumford & Dowler point out “interpreting these numbers [regarding the number of meals served or food parcels offered] and understanding the relationship they have to wider socio-economic and political shifts is therefore a key challenge facing researchers in the UK” (2014: 1418).

Despite these limitations, food insecurity rates alone provide strong evidence to support the claim that the complete nutritional needs of the food insecure population is not guaranteed by food donation services. Nor is there is not a set of uniform policies or practices between food organizations in terms of the type of food, the amount of food and the frequency in which food is offered and similarly, there is not a consistent institutional presence of food donating



organizations across the nation. Applied research on food banks generally focus on the operator or the recipient of food banks as the unit of analysis. Approaching the topic of food banks through the perspectives of employees or food bank precipitants can potentially overlook the larger institutional, social and political role food organizations play in society. On the other hand, strength to analyzing both perspectives of employees and recipients of charitable food organization comes from insight that “food banks represent a highly ambiguous political space still in the making and open to contestation.”<sup>45</sup> Research on distributive aspects of food organizations can also help shed light on the contradictions imbued within practices of charitable food organizations. Survey and interview research that examines perspectives of food bank operators, consistently identify that food bank employees believe food recipients should be grateful and/or appreciative for the services supplied by the organization<sup>46</sup> and viewed the services of the bank as fulfilling a slight gap in the food needs of clients but notably, not as a food source to be completely relied upon.<sup>47</sup> For instance, Tarsus & Eakin engaged in an ethnographic study of 15 food banks in Ontario, Canada, and found that workers within the food bank system understood that they provided the services as either “(i) as a supplement to clients’ existing resources; [or] (ii) as immediate relief from the physical sensation of hunger” (2003:1519).

Using similar research methods, though adopting a relatively more biased sampling technique, van der Horst, Pascucci & Bol interviewed five food bank volunteers in Amsterdam, Netherlands, who had worked in food banks for more than a year, as well as other actors in the

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<sup>45</sup> Williams et. al, (2016: 2291).

<sup>47</sup> Tarasuk & Eakin, (2003).

food bank system, to juxtapose the perceptions around the individuals offering food services to individuals who receive them (2014). One finding from this study was that the volunteers of the food banks consistently provided that “everything in the food parcel should be appreciated” and questioned the neediness of recipients who complained about the food options available (van der Horst et. al., 2014: 1511). The interviews further yielded that the distribution practices of the food banks were limited in scope and application. Likewise, Tarasuk & Eakin’s analysis indicates limits were placed on the number of visits a food recipient could make in a month, the type of food to be given out as well as the amount of food offered at the bank (2003). Finally, restrictions of these sorts were said to ebb and flow as freely as the amount of food the bank had access. Limited supply of food among charitable organizations also emerged as a common theme within scholarly literature. Yet, the researchers do not locate the causal mechanism underlying the variable nature leading to charitable food organizations tenuous food supply. to pinpoint the nature of variability. All things considered, therefore, this research provides invaluable insight into perspectives of food bank employees, but theoretically it raises questions around the organizational food banking system than it is unable to address.

Thus, perceptions of food bank employees shed light on the discorded practices between food bank organizations in comparison to the principles they advocate. For instance, in a survey that was completed by thirty three of the fifty food pantries to which it was administered, all of whom are associated with the Food bank Inc. of Dayton Ohio, Sangye found that “[s]eventy percent of food pantries reported encouraging clients to eat healthier meals but only 41% encouraged donation of healthier food items” (2013: 4). This indicates a dissonance between food organizations ability to adjust their organizational operations as to address the nutritional needs of their clients. In a similar manor, Akobundu et al. assessed the foods bags of 133 pantry

clients from 19 distribution sites, which were then quantified by analyzing nutritional content, and found that “[f]oods distributed were of adequate or high nutrient density for protein, fiber, iron, and foliate, but were of low nutrient density for calcium, vitamin A, and vitamin C” (2004: 811). Although, in the short term it is important to understand the ways in which charitable food organizations meet, or fail to meet, the nutritional needs of the recipients they serve, looking at nutritional aspects of donated food products does not help move forward human rights discourse around food. Instead, this research at best, provides avenues for food banks to marginally modify the quality of food distributed since their vitality depends on appearing legitimate in their organizational arrangement. All things considered, therefore, from a long term perspective, this research approach is not attune to the structural forces propagating economic inequality to begin with. In other words, it is unable to identify the mechanism underscoring the institutionalization of charitable food banks in the first place. For these reasons, this research approach cannot satisfactorily advance human rights policy or promote such practices. In contrast, the act of surveying caloric properties of food provided by food organizations is rooted in the logic that ‘it is the type of food provided by the bank that is the problematic aspect of the food banking industry,’ not the presence of food banks to start with.

This finding raises question marks around the institutional necessity of charitable food organizations, and forces one to be concerned with whether charitable food organizations have the ability to progressively reduce food insecurity in the US. Interviews with food bank volunteers or lower-level employees of food banks offer invaluable insight into perspectives workers possess around the services food donating organizations provide as well as help explain some distributive challenges faced by food banks, from a human rights perspective, though there are many limitations regarding the applicability of this work. First, this body of research fails to

explain the reason why food organization operated in the first place? Charities are based on some principle of altruism, so the question of why the organization was developed to help that in need in the first place should be addressed before looking at the individual narratives of the employees who operate them. Second, the studies that identify those food bank employees' believe that recipients should be grateful for the services of the food banks have come to these conclusions using small sample frames in terms of the number of employees interviewed as well as the number of food organizations represented.<sup>48</sup> As a result, it is difficult to generalize these findings onto the entire industrial complex food banks in the West. Last, aside from the fact that the research was not done on food banks in the US, due to the ethnographic nature of the studies, we do not know the capacity to which employees drew on the organizational apparatus of the food bank to advocate for policy reform or whether food bank organizations networked with other food banks to build coalitions to further their 'cause'?

A similar limitation can be noted within research on food banks that focuses on the individual or 'recipient' as the unit of analysis. Going back to van der Horst et al. research on food banks in Amsterdam, the purpose of the study was to assess the self-esteem of participants engaged in the food banking system (2014). Their research argues that food bank recipients experience feelings of shame for having to rely on food donating services, and further provides that with introspection, recipients are able to contextualize their shame of having to turn to food banks as not necessary being due to their own fault, but rather go on to "blame 'society,' 'bad luck' or 'circumstances'" (van der Horst et. al., 2014: 1515). Yet, unfortunately, van der Horst et.

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<sup>48</sup> See Tarasuk & Eakin's, "Charitable Food Assistance as Symbolic Gesture," (2003) study on food banks in Canada as well as van der Horst, Pascucci & Bol's, "The 'Dark Side of Food Banks?'" (2014) which was conducted in the Netherlands.

al. (2014) does not inquire into these assertions further by attempting to address ‘why society is to blame,’ ‘what incidents occurred around bad luck’ or simply, seek to understand ‘what particular circumstances led the recipient to needing to turn to food banking services’? As a whole, this research does not ask the question of what underlying social factors contribute to the social stigmatization of food banks since, quite obviously, it seems self-evident that shame is likely to be accompanied with food bank usage in societies where there is an extensive need for food bank services, not because I believe using a food banks is shameful, but rather because the institutional basis of the organizations is de facto predicated off their being a lack of rights protections around food. On the other hand, if the researcher viewed food as a human right and correspondingly, food insecurity as a violation of the right to food, the researcher would seek to understand the recipient’s human rights perspective as well. Hence, an apt follow-up question to the recipient at the point of inquiry would seek to investigate perceptions involving whether their circumstances constitute a human rights violation, or probe into the ways, if any, the state may have failed the individual on food security measures.<sup>49</sup>

Very simply, researchers need to take the focal point away from the individual's circumstances and onto those around the duty-bearing responsibilities of the state to protect, respect and fulfill social and economic rights. Food bank approaches ought to be situated within the broader structural and institutional role they occupy in the larger system of food distribution. In contrast to these empirical studies conducted around food banking, there is a growing body of literature that problematize food banks and food insecurity from a social and economic rights perspective. As indicated by Riches (2002b) “[t]he international rise of food banks in first-world

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<sup>49</sup> Sue Booth and Jillian Whelan. "Hungry for change: the food banking industry in Australia." *British Food Journal* 116, no. 9 (2014).

societies raises important questions not only for food security and how best to achieve it, but also for debates about the current direction of welfare reform and social policy” (649). This perspective situates the institutional existence of food charities at the heart of their analysis of food insecurity. Comparatively, whereas the former studies tend to take a cross sectional perspective to study food insecurity (i.e., looking at food insecurity from one period of time), the latter approach adopts a broader, historical perspective to understand the topic of food insecurity through longitudinal analysis. Booth & Whelan, for example, argue that food charities are “a neoliberal mechanism to deflect query, debate and structural action on food poverty and hunger” (2014:1392). Likewise, Riches (2002a) argues the rise of food banks in Canada undermines the government’s role in maintaining human rights obligations, and in the process illustrates the notion of a ‘charitable food box.’ to argue that the rise of food banks in Canada perpetuate human rights violations of Canadian citizens. The question at the heart of Riches (2002) theory essential is that charities/food banks serve those in need but is skeptical of whether they take the focus away from policy shortfalls that have created space for food banks to come into existence in the first place? Such that (1) food banks have a vested interest in there being a food insecure population and therefore, (2) in fact, might have an incentive to decouple food insecurity from object of food rights. So while food banks have a platform to advocate for reform, it is actually not necessarily in their best interest to do so?

Human rights explanations to food insecurity offers strong analytical power to understand inequitable economic outcomes. Empirically, however, research into and data available on the US’s charitable food system is remarkably sparse. Prominent researchers and research perspectives hail from Canada (Graham Riches, Valerie Tarasuk, Joan akin, Rachel Loopstra), the UK (Lambie-Mumford, Hannah, Elizabeth Dowler), and Austria, (Sue Booth and Jillian

Whelan).Second, human rights research perspectives regarding food charities tends to be abstract, which further hampers means of initiating social change. Third, scientific inquiry additionally confounded by the reality that there is not an elaborate system of measures and indicators to draw onto to study the topic further. Tarasuk & Eakin for example, premise the following analytical framework: food organizations are “made possible by the surfeit of unpaid labor in food banks, the neediness of food bank clients, and clients’ lack of rights in this system” (2005: 1977). Yet, in all practical sense, we are not provided the experimental tools necessary to construct an empirical analysis into any of the features described through Tarasuk & Eakin’s (2005) perspective on charitable giving. They even further go on to insist:

“The marshalling of volunteer labor to serve a corporate need might be construed as a ‘win-win’ situation because the work of salvaging edible foodstuffs from among industry ‘surplus’ helps to ‘feed the hungry’ while also diminishing the amount of refuse deposited in landfill sites, sparing corporations disposal costs and landfill tipping fees, and helping them forge an image of good corporate citizenship. However, the reliance of food banks on industry donations means that food assistance becomes defined as that which the corporate sector cannot retail. Moreover, the intertwining of food bank work with corporate needs may function to further entrench this ad hoc secondary food system and mitigate against initiatives to develop more effective responses to problems of hunger and food insecurity in our communities.”<sup>50</sup>

This quote demonstrates the abstract nature of the human right literature currently and nicely arranges the topic of charitable food distribution. Nevertheless, there are no measures and/or research technique that would allow researchers to replicate the procedures taken to lead to this conclusion. Provided that, although there have been tremendous philosophical developments within scholarly thought in this perspective, particularly around formulating a human rights

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<sup>50</sup> Valerie Tarasuk & Joan Eakin, “Charitable Food Assistance as Symbolic Gesture,” *Social Science & Medicine* 7. (2005:1977).

framework to understand food banking, this body of literature has yet to empirically demonstrate the tendency of food organizations in the US to disassociate core tenants of human rights from their organizational model. That is say, to show that in fact an organizational mission of charitable food banks is to decouple the topic of food rights from their organization approach to food insecurity. The question of why a charitable food organization operates theoretical can be assessed by looking at organizational mission/purpose statement.<sup>51</sup> Since every organization should have a coherent purpose and clear purpose, it is therefore important to understand the organizational goals of the organization before we can contextualize perspectives of employees who work at them. And similarly, empirical research has not probed at whether food banks have a long-term strategy for reducing levels of food insecurity and assessing elements of civil networking.

Thus, considering (1) the right to food is internationally agreed upon; (2) a robust civil society should be driven by progressive aspirations of what society ‘could be’ opposed to what society is presently; and (3) rights are of most value in the absence of the object of which that right would entail, the presence of food insecurity and the absence of food rights in the US are fundamentally an interrelated problem. Whereby, if food insecurity did not exist, then having the right to food would not be as essential for the right holder, but since food insecurity does exist, the need for dialogue on protection of the right to food is essential. Therefore, while charitable food organizations play an integral role in to helping provide the temporary relief of food

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<sup>51</sup> “A mission statement is a written, formal document which attempts to capture an organization's unique and enduring purpose and practices...In doing so it should answer some really fundamental questions such as ‘Why does this organization exist?’, and ‘What does this organization want to achieve?’ A mission statement should find itself central to every firm's strategy” (Bart & Tabone 1998:4-5).



insecurity by distributing food to the food insecure, they are, or at the very least have the potential to be, strong civil advocates for the food insecure population as well.<sup>52</sup> With this mind, my research is centered around two particular questions: 1) From a human rights perspective, in what ways do large-scale charitable food organizations in the US draw onto the right to food framework to motivate their organizational mission of engaging in food assistance; and 2) utilizing a network analysis, in what ways do large-scale charitable food organizations leverage capacity with other food organizations, both at the local and national level, in order to further the specific organizational mission of developing national food policy and/or in advocating for the continued support of existing governmental food programs? Overall, the project seeks to measure how large-capacity charitable food organizations in the US approach the topic of food insecurity as well as assessing the ways in which national food donation organizations in the US draw on the civic and/or institutional capacities at their disposal to network with other food donating organizations, if at all, in order to move food insecurity beyond the realm of ‘the charitable food box’ as identified by Graham Riches (2011) and into the political-legal sphere of being a (human) rights violation since civil society actors should not be stunted by normative suppositions of whether a state as endorsed an international treaty.

With this in mind, despite their long institutional presence in the country, history reveals a weak record of charitable food organizations ability to substantively lower the proportion and absolute value of food insecure persons in the population. In the context of Canada, Riches (2002b) shows us “that food banks in Canada have themselves become institutionalized”<sup>53</sup> The institutionalization of food banks is attributed to “three processes at work: [first] the creation and

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<sup>52</sup> Williams et al., 2016.

<sup>53</sup> Graham Riches, “Food Banks and Food Security,” *Social Policy & Administration* 36, no. 6 (2002b:651-652).

development of a strong national food bank organization and movement; [second] the corporatization of food banks through their partnerships with national food companies and the media support they receive; and [third] the increasingly significant roles they have come to play as charitable partners with governments in Canada's public safety net (social assistance), thereby contributing to the introduction and implementation of neo-conservative welfare reform" (Riches 2001:651-652).

#### **IV. Methodology**

The present research project is motivated by two research questions involving US food donation organizations: First, from a human rights perspective, I explore in what ways do multi-site food organizations draw on rights frameworks in order to motivate the organizational mission for engaging with food assistance and; Second, utilizing a network analysis, how do multi-site food organizations leverage capacity with other food organizations in order to develop broader national food policy and/or in terms of advocating for the continued governmental support of existing food assistance programs? Both questions were qualitatively assessed using discourse analysis of manifest content appearing on webpage's of multisite food donating organizations. For the first research question, I look at the manifest content of organizational mission/purpose statement(s) of multi-site food organizations in the US to examine the extent to which they leverage human rights frameworks around the right to food within their organizational apparatus. Then, for the second research question, I analyze networks among civil society actors of charitable food organizations as indicated through content of their website.

Methodologically, to be able to engage in content analysis of food organizations webpage's, procedurally there first needs to be a list of food organizations from which to sample. A sampling frame is necessary to compose an unbiased sample as well as to be able to access the entire (theoretical) population. Yet, no data exists on the total population of charitable food organizations in the US. As a result, there is not a source to randomly sample and congruently, the demographic information describing the entire population of food charities in the US is theoretically unknown. As a result, this limitation obstructs the ability to establish external validity on potential research measures. In light of these challenges, as a means to overcome an unknown sampling frame, I designed systematic, objective and comprehensive stage-based sampling procedures. Broadly, there were four stages which comprise the research design. Stage one involved devising clear operational definitions for concepts to be explored. Stage two involved creating, testing, revising and re-executing automated computer code using keywords aimed at capturing the largest and most representative sample of national/multisite food organization. Stage three involved qualitatively assessing webpage's from links on each website in order to determine whether it meets the inclusionary criterion of a multisite food organization. For the last stage, any organization which met the inclusionary criterion of an multisite food organizations, had their demographic information, organizational mission statement as well as other demographic details extracted and placed it into an excel sheet. In turn, this data was used to address both research questions.

*Key Concepts:*

A **food organization** in this research design is nongovernmental organization which actively engages in the charitable distribution of food at the individual level, and provides food services to all people; thus, not solely based on the needs of children, veterans, the disabled,

homeless, the elderly, etc. This is to say, an organization that only works with children, veterans, the disabled, etc. will have a client base too specific to compare across organization subtypes. Restrictions around income level, residency status and members of a household, however, may be applied and still be considered a charitable food organization. Additionally, these organizations may be faith and non faith based. A **multi-site food organization** meets the specification of a ‘charitable food organization,’ and further has 2 or more physical locations that distribute food at least once a month to members of the public. In terms of food distribution, multi-site food organizations ought to have two or more sites which distribute food directly to members of the public regularly occurring within a month, which can entail one physical site and at least one regularly occurring mobile pantry site. A food organization with irregular mobile pantry sites on a monthly basis or irregular distribution times does not qualify for this criterion.

**Human rights frameworks**, although vast and expansive in theory and practice, for this project this phrase operatively refers to civil society discourses, measured specifically through the web content of organizational mission statements of multistate food organizations. There are three exhaustive and mutually exclusive categories that comprise this measure. They are: *no rights*; *limited rights*; and *human rights*, respectively: **No rights** food organizations will identify food insecurity, or any variation therein as morally or socially wrong yet characteristically, they [1] do not make the initiative to advocate for expanding domestic economic policy; or [2] implicate food insecurity as a violation of a human right within the manifest content on their organizational mission statement. These organizations might endeavor to make the US hunger free or to reduce hunger, but as an organizational approach, they fail to the address larger, structural issues within the political economy which propagate food insecurity in the first place. Very simply, the goal of ‘feeding everyone,’ ‘serving those in need’ and/or ‘reducing hunger’ is

based on a very different organizational approach than it were to view food insecurity as a rights violation or policy failure; **Limited rights** food organizations operate from a limited (domestic) rights framework as they will identify food insecurity, or any variation therein, as being due to policy gaps within the manifest content on their organizational mission statement. These food organizations will advocate for domestic policy around food, or economic rights, but fail to identify food insecurity as a violation of an inherent human right which ought to be protected at all cost. These organizations might propose to increase income requirements for national food assistance programs, increase the minimum wage, develop innovative food policy but in the process, does not identify food insecurity as a violation of a ‘human right.’ Policy prescriptions which are self filling to charitable food organizations (such as tax breaks for donors, governmental funding for operations, etc.) does not fulfill this description; nor does providing services which assist individuals with obtaining governmental assistance; and the last category of organizational missions will be **human rights** orientated. Human rights food organizations will utilize an entitlement framework within the manifest content of their organizational mission statement. This will be explicitly measured by the direct mention of term ‘human right(s)’ I presume that not only will these organizational missions frame food insecurity as a human rights violation, but they will also use their institutional apparatus as device to move forward notions and applications to respect, protect and fulfill the right to food.

A **civil society network** is determined by whether a multisite food organization within the sample identifies organizational affiliate(s) on their webpage and (1) non-for-profit (civic);(2) non-governmental; and (3) works in the area of food. Therefore any organization appearing within the manifest content of a food organization’s webpage is assumed to be a voluntary and organic network of civic society members.

### *Sampling Procedures:*

Since there is not a comprehensive list of food organizations to sample in order to qualitatively assess their orientation towards human rights frameworks, the second stage of the research project involved developing computer code to automate a series of Google searches, using a range of key terms in order to compose a sampling frame of food organizations. A Selenium driver which is a web automation program,<sup>54</sup> was programmed to execute a series of web searches which included [1] a state name & [2] food charity search term.<sup>55</sup> In terms of state names, this included all 50 states, the District of Columbia and the term national was included. In conjunction, a state name was joined with each of the following food charity search terms: 1) food bank; 2) food charity; 3) food donation; 4) food assistance; 5) food outreach; 6) food advocacy; and 7) food insecurity. Overall, this phase involved testing, revising and re-executing automated software aimed at capturing food organizations with relatively large civic and institutional capacity in the US.

In addition to conducting extensive Google searches using key terms, the program also extracted pertinent details from each search and place them into an excel sheet to be qualitatively explored. In particular, excluding any advertisement that may have appeared, descriptive information was preserved from the first 3 pages of search results, regarding the (1) the search terms used to generate the results (i.e., state name + food search term); (2) the page number from

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<sup>54</sup> See Selenium HQ Browser Automation, 2017. <<http://www.seleniumhq.org/projects/webdriver/>>. Upon request, code can be made publically available.

<sup>55</sup> This was only possible with ninja warrior esk computer programming skills possessed by my dear friend Gogol, alias Aman Mangal. Thank you.

which the results appeared (i.e., 1, 2, or 3); (3) the order in which the link appeared within the page; (4) the title of the web domain;(5) a brief description of the website; and (6) the number of times the link appeared within that state. The search results from this section comprised my full-sampling frame. However, this data was in a raw form since not all search results met the inclusionary criterion established for multisite food organizations and similarly, many results may be duplicate particularly since similar variations of charity search terms were alternated. Next, I executed Python code to removed duplicate links within each state.<sup>56</sup>

In the third stage, I appraised webpage's contained in the entire list of search results that were not duplicated within each state applying inclusion criterion for multistate food organization. This allowed me to compose a preliminary sample frame of food organizations, and the final stage of the project involved coding sample frame using human rights orientation. From a research perspective, controlling for time and historical effects is an important factor to consider in evaluating the web content. Since electronic data can change overtime, I originally proposed to gather and backup all data in the shortest timeframe possible initially proposing to last no more than 5 consecutive days from start to finish. This time frame vastly underestimated the time and detail required for qualitative data analysis and was not achievable for this project. However, since the searches were run at the same time, in succession, the method controls for variation in search results which would arise if the searches were spread out over a period of days or weeks.

As food organizations webpage's were consulted, I also gathered demographic data around the number of locations, whether the organization is faith-based, whether there appears to

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<sup>56</sup> With the loving, kind and patient assistance of expert engineer.Mr. Kalpesh Singal, PhD.

be application procedures and the type of food donation programs offered to the public. To address the first question, mission statements of each multisite food organization will be used to understand why an entity operates in the capacity of providing food assistance to needy individuals/households? To address the second question, I engage in a network analysis around organizational capacity building in order to see whether food organizations operate independent of one another or whether they develop networks with other food organizations to further their organizational mission. All data gathered for the first question was used in this second. There are two parts to this section. First, whether food organizations work together to build capacity and second, whether an organization interacts with either local and national governments in the context of policy formation in order to see the extent to which food organizations operate independent of one another or whether they develop networks with other food organizations to further their organizational mission?

Finally, it was expected that ‘human rights’ orientated food organizations would be the least represented category of civic actors in the sample. In the same way, it was assumed that charitable food organizations would rarely advocate for progressive policy reform. Progressive policy relates to advocating for rights protections that widen the scope of an individual’s social and economic wellbeing beyond those already in place. Thus, differentiating ‘progressive policy’ from other policy approaches, such as is essential since food insecurity exists in the backdrop of their being social protections for limited income statuses already. Therefore, the status quo with respect to present governmental food approaches, thus far, has proven to be an insufficient method of combating food insecurity. Third, it was hypothesized that charitable food organizations would build coalitions with food organizations within the same rights category



they belong. In other words, food organizations from the ‘no rights’ category will be more likely to align themselves with other food organizations from the ‘no rights’ category.

## **V. Results**

The total number of links generated with browser automation using state name and food bank keywords was extensive (n= 15,565). Since multiple keywords around food charities were used in conjunction with each state name, duplicate links in each state were removed, which dropped the sample nearly by two-thirds (n=5,339). Then, I turned to this data and one-by-one, I assessed the web content of every link in my sample in order to assess whether the webpage contained information on charitable food organizations. In total, 52 multisite food organizations were qualitatively located by applying the inclusionary criterion of a multisite food organization (see Appendix A for the complete list of food banks).<sup>57</sup>

Table 2., indicates that of the 52 food organizations in the sample, there was a mean of 5.6 physical locations and a median of 3 physical locations (n=290). Three charitable food organizations had 1 physical location and monthly, a mean of 18 regularly occurring mobile pantry sites (n=54). The mode of physical pantry sites is 2 and the range is 1-44. In total, 13% of charitable food organizations had locations and/or distribution sites cross-states (n=7).

Aggregately, cross-state food organizations were conceptualized as having greater institutional capacity than single state food organizations. Yet, evidence does not confirm this supposition.

That is, if we were to use number of physical locations as a theoretical proxy for civic capacity, national food organizations had a comparable number of physical locations as multisite

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<sup>57</sup> Identities and other demographic details of charitable food organization have not been redacted from this analysis.

organizations. Whereas national food organizations had a mean 5.5 locations, multisite food organizations had 5.6. In other words, while conceptually the distinction between national and domestic food organization might seem to make theoretical sense, in practice, no notable distinctions between capacity of national and multisite organization. Nevertheless, it is difficult to measure relative organizational capacity or complete civic embeddedness of an organization by the number of physical locations a food organization has since locations vary in size, scope, distribution practices and social/political embeddedness. Similarly, if we were to use the operating budget of each food organization, capacity would be obscured by variation in cost of services, efficiency of working operations, the amount of food product donated, monies paid to employees, the amount of volunteers an organization has access and so forth.

**Table 2:** Sample Demographics of Charitable Food Organizations in the US with 2 or more Food Distribution Sites for Individuals (n=52)

Stated Income Requirements (%)	Indicated Civic Connection (%)	Faith Based (%)	Operated Cross-state (%)	Total n (%)
18 (.35)	37(.71)	26 (.50)	7(.13)	290(5.6) Physical 54(18.) Mobile

*Notes:* First, proportions rounded to the nearest tenth. Second, data pertaining to mobile pantries is not reflected in top row. *Physical locations* (N=52; n =290): mean 5.6, median 3, mode 2, range 1-44; and *Mobile locations* (N=3; n=54): mean 18, median 14, mode NA, range 13-27.

A demographic trend across ‘charitable food organizations’ is that they enforce income guidelines around the provision of food determinant to eligibility of services. That is, Table 2., additionally shows that 35% of food organizations in the sample explicitly stated household income level was a determinant to eligibility of resources (n=18). In comparison, 21% of webpage’s were not clear whether income was a determinant to eligibility (n=11). In some of these cases, organizations indicated a requirement of intake ‘an interview’ but details beyond that

were ambiguous. Nevertheless, intake interviews suggest there may be further weeding out of individuals seeking assistance either by income or other variables residency status, household size, ability to yield acceptable form(s) of identification, etc. Though because many vague details surround the intricacies of the intake process, future research should investigate this mechanism at play especially since data on food insecurity and poverty suggest that those living above the federal poverty level comprise the highest proportion of food insecure. In comparison, the largest group of food organizations in the sample do not monitor, inquire into and/or enforce distribution policies or parameters around recipients income 42% (n=22).

Additionally, food organizations were also categorized by whether they were based on religious precepts. In this regard, the sample was evenly distributed between faith and secular food organizations. That is, half the sample were based on the pretense of faith (n=26) and the other half was not (n=26). Within the category of secular food organizations, 52% indicated income requirements determined eligibility of services (n=14), whereas 41% did not have income requirements (n=11) and the other 4% did not clearly indicate whether there are income guidelines (n=1). Similar to secular food organizations, 42% faith based food organizations do not enforce income parameters (n=11). Varying from secular organizations, only 15% of faith based food organization explicitly mention income guidelines (n=4), while 42% were unclear about whether income level was a determinant of food donation (n=11). Considering that so many faith-based organizations are ambiguous around household income guidelines, if any, as well as other procedural requisites, it is difficult to judge two groups, human rights and limited rights, diverged in their procedural/organizational model.

**Table 3:** The Extent to which Human Rights and/or Social Policy Provisions Appeared within Mission Statements of Charitable Food Organizations (n=52)

No Rights (%)	Limited Rights (%)	Human Rights (%)	Total
46 (.88)	4 (.08)	2 (.04)	52

Notes: Proportions rounded to the nearest tenth. Source: See Appendix A for complete list of food organizations.

Next, drawing off of the manifest content obtained through organizational mission statements of charitable food organizations, I counted the number of to which the phrase ‘human rights’ and/or policy was considered. Table 3., illustrates that predominantly food organizations do not employ a human rights perspectives or policy-focused framework through their organizational apparatus, representing an overwhelming 88% of the total sample (n=46). Comparatively, 8% made limited rights statements around social policy (n=4) and only 4% of food organizations used a human rights framework in their organizational mission (n=2). For descriptive information regarding mission statements for the category of ‘human rights’ organizations see Appendix B, and for ‘limited rights’ organizations see Appendix C.

**Table 4:** Distribution of Cross State and Single State Food Organizations use of Human Rights and/or Policy Provisions within their Organizational Mission (n=52).

No Rights (%)	Limited Rights (%)	Human Rights (%)	Total
46(.88)	4(.08)	2(.04)	52
4(.57)	1(.14)	2(.29)	7 cross-state
42(.93)	3(.07)	0(.0)	45 single-state

Notes: Proportions rounded to the nearest tenth

Table 4., compares cross-state food organizations to single state food organizations in terms of their orientation towards human rights. Among the 7 cross-state food organizations, 57% of organizational mission statements exhibit no rights sentiments (n=4), whereas 14% maintain limited rights (n=1) and 29% use human rights frameworks (n=2). In comparison,

among the 45 single-state food organizations, the overwhelming majority of single state food organizations do not utilize a human rights framework 93% (n=42), while 7% use a limited rights orientation (n=3) and no single-state food organization in the sample use human rights frameworks in their organizational mission statements. Surprisingly, therefore, the only 2 human rights orientated food organizations in the entire sample had working operations across states.

Finally, I wanted to know ‘whether food organizations network with other food organizations; and if so, ‘whether civic associations are aligned in rights orientation.’ Of the 52 organizations of the sample, 29% websites did not identify another charitable food organizations (n=15), while the other 71% identified at least one other civic organizations on its webpage (n=37). Among the population of civic organizations mentioned as a civic connection, three civic organizations dominated the discourse: 43% United Way (n=16); 32% Feeding America (n=12); and 22% Catholic Charities (n=8); while the same percent exclusively stated another (n=8), which made the finding of the United Way, Feeding America and Catholic charities perhaps even more significant. Since social networks are not closed circuits, civic relations can be overlapping. For instance, one organization, the Catholic Charities of Southwestern Ohio (2017), which was coded as a ‘limited rights,’ identified all three dominant civic organizations on their website. Perhaps obvious, though not safe to assume, all mentions of the Catholic Charities came from faith based food organizations. Thus, faith based organizations identify the Catholic Charities as well as non faith food organizations as civic affiliates, although secular food organizations do not mention Catholic Charities as a civil tie. Among the 16 organizations that identify the United Way as an organizational association, 50% were secular food organization while the other half were faith orientated. The highest affinity of secular food organizations was t Feeding America. That is, 92% of the non

faith food organizations identified Feeding America as a civil association (n=11). This analysis indicates two points: 1) yes, charitable food organizations network with other food organizations; and 2) yes, civic associations are aligned in rights orientation, though other factors also foster civic relations (i.e., religious orientations as seems to be the case with the Catholic Charities).

Additionally, I looked more closely at ‘human right’ and ‘limited rights’ categories. There were two ‘human right’ food organizations: One, the Capital Area Food Bank (2017) and the other, Catholic Charities Dioceses of Wilmington (2017). The former is secularly orientated and mentions both the United Way and Feeding America as a civic network, while the other, Catholic Charities Dioceses of Wilmington (2017) only mentions the United Way. One human rights food organizations identified Feeding America, Capital Area Food Bank (2017), which has the following organizational values: “We believe that access to nutritious food is a basic human right. We are committed to responding to the needs of our community through food distribution and support services.”<sup>58</sup> Paradoxically, however, while this mission statement is coded as human rights orientated the same organization also imposes income limits around eligibility of services. Nevertheless mission statements from Catholic Charities. For example, Samaritan Community Center’s (2017) mission statement, which is faith-based national food organization, declares “...we are called by Scriptures to care for those in need throughout our community and to share Hope in what is often a dark world. *We choose to do this by providing a loving environment in which every person who enters our doors is treated with dignity and respect.*”<sup>59</sup> Therefore, while

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<sup>58</sup> Capital Area Food Bank, “Mission vision and values,” (2017). <<https://www.capitalareafoodbank.org/mission-vision-and-values/>>.

<sup>59</sup> Italics added for emphasis.

dignity and respect are core features of international human rights framework, the mission statement does not mention human rights or economic policy, which is why it was categorized as ‘no rights.’ Yet, Samaritan Community Center (2017) does not enforce income guidelines or other application requirements to receive services, which is complementary to the universal aspect of rights principles around food distribution to food insecure individuals. Similarly, the charity United Against Poverty (2017), which is a food organization with four locations in the state of Florida, indicates their purpose is “[t]o inspire and empower people living in poverty to lift themselves and their families to economic sufficiency,” which is based on the vision is see “[c]ommunities where every family has access to basic needs, nutritional food, crisis care, education and employment training, and where everyone has the opportunity to achieve a future filled with hope and possibilities.” Thus, despite both food charities exemplifying many key organizations features of human rights principles in their mission statement, since there was not an explicit mention of human rights or governmental policy, they are considered no rights oriented.

Next, Table 5., distributes the civil associations among the three most prominent charitable food civil organizations in the sample. In total, 56% charitable food organizations within the sample identified at least one of the following three civic connections (n=29): the United Way (n=16), Feeding America (n=12) & Catholic Charities (n=8), Other non governmental civic organizations appeared in web content however they were viewed as tertiary to these organizations since they were identified less two times aggregately. Interestingly, the Catholic Charities has zero civil ties which are human rights oriented.

**Table 5:** Food Organizations sorted by Rights Framework & Dominant Civil Society Networks (n=29)

No Rights (%)	Limited Rights (%)	Human Rights (%)	Total
13(44.8)	1(3.4)	2(6.9)	United Way (n=16)
8(27.6)	3(10.3)	1(3.4)	Feeding America (n=12)
7(24.1)	1(3.4)	0(0)	Catholic Charities (n=8)

*Notes:* Civil society networks are not closed circuits. Instead, they have intersecting and overlapping civil affiliations. To contextualize this point, the sample of food organizations with civil connections is 29 and the total number of times a dominant food organization was mentioned is 36.

Among one of the largest network of food organizations, the mission of Feeding America (2017) ought to be explored. That is, their mission “is to feed America’s hungry through a nationwide network of member food banks and engage our country in the fight to end hunger.”<sup>60</sup> It is common for ‘no rights’ food organizations to evoke the term ‘hunger’ in their organizational purpose. The noticeably commands a hearty degree of sympathy, that is, compared to the phrase food insecurity. Yet, in fact no empirical measure exists to capture the concept. As such, as of October 4, 2017, the USDA webpage states that “USDA does not have a measure of hunger or the number of hungry people.” Instead, “the food security status of each household lies somewhere along a continuum extending from high food security to very low food security.”<sup>61</sup> The Agricultural Department clearly states that “recognizing more explicitly that, although hunger is related to food insecurity, it is a different phenomenon. Food insecurity is a household-

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<sup>60</sup> Feeding America, “About us.” (2017). See <<http://www.feedingamerica.org/about-us/>>.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.



level economic and social condition of limited access to food, while hunger is an individual-level physiological condition that may result from food insecurity.”<sup>62</sup> Though, hunger does not cause the cause food insecurity, instead it is the result of it.

## **VI. Discussion**

Overall, these methods reveal invaluable insights around charitable food organizations in the US as well as offers revealing findings regarding my hypotheses. In terms of my first research question, they confirm that charitable food organizations in the US rarely adopt human rights orientations towards food insecurity through their organizational apparatus. Second, although limited rights are more common than human rights frameworks, charitable food organization seldomly advocate for progressive social policy reform through their institutional model as well. While faith based food organizations have an underlying motivation to engage in charitable food distribution, regardless of their orientation towards human rights. Yet, secular food organizations, on the other hand, purpose is less clear. As mentioned previously, charitable, food organizations are an eclectic body of civic institutions with various institutional arrangements, organizational functions and operational procedures. Program offerings are varied from one distribution site to the next, one organization to the next, and similarly, the type/kind/quality of food offered through charitable donation is wide. Food parcels offered can range from being exclusively non perishable food product (such as canned soup, veggies, etc.) to their being distribution sites regularly offering fresh fruits, fresh vegetables and/or dairy goods

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

such as cheese and/or milk. A handful of food organizations even provide meat product.

Confounding the analysis in to charitable food organizations further is the reality that even the names applied to identical programs are different. At the organizational level, food banks enforce a range of requisites around intake interviews, eligibility requirements, supporting documents required as well as other procedural aspects around food distribution.

The theoretical basis of this project was to measure charitable food organizations usage of human rights in their statement of purpose as a proxy for civil society advocacy for social change. At the same time, there was an implicit assumption that ideologies imbued within organizational mission statements of charitable food organizations correspond to some extent of food distribution practices of the same organization. Therefore, if an organizational mission statement used a human rights framework then it was assumed that to some extent that their institutional arrangement would be conducive to fulfilling human rights. The similarly assumption was held for limit rights and no rights charities as well. However, this assumption was not always confirmed. Rather, mission statements and food distribution guidelines were often discorded from one another. For instance, there were ‘no right’ coded organizations that used concepts central to human rights, such as *dignity* or *integrity*, within organizational mission statements without going as far as using the phrase ‘human rights,’ so the food organization was coded as no rights. These organizations may also provide services unbound by income or identification requisites which is closer to a human rights approach. In comparison, food organizations that use human rights framework in their mission statement yet enforce income limits around availability of services are more antithetical to human rights.

Next, assessing content around the ‘limited rights’ category was also complex and oftentimes, challenging. Limited rights organizations were conceptualized as advocating social

welfare programs beyond those currently in place. Policy was understood as social welfare programs. There were food organizations that advocated for policy that was retrograde to the endeavor of the right to food. For instance, organizations advocated for increased tax incentives to private/corporate food donors or continued protection of food organizations. Although, Feeding America was not included in the sample, information provided by organizations in the sample often referenced and was in support of Feeding America's approach to food insecurity. Thus, a reflection on their website provides that Feeding America (2017) organizationally "identifies and advances policy solutions that help struggling families *create a path* to healthy, hunger-free lives" and "supports a variety of federal food assistance programs that help feed Americans struggling with hunger. In addition to anti-hunger programs, Feeding America also works on federal tax policies that help get more food to food banks."<sup>63</sup> In other words, being in support for federal food assistance is not the same thing as being in support for *more* or *increased* federal assistance food programs. Next, supporting policy with the goal of getting more food to food banks (i.e., their pathway) is a far cry from help than getting more policy around food rights protection. Overall, it appeared as though charitable food organizations were engaging in intentional *rationalization* of the institutional basis of food charities, which is a finding complements the work that has been done by Tarasuk & Beaton (1999), Silvasti, Riches 2014, and Riches 2002a and 2002b. Thus, content with organizational mission statements were densely layered with emotive language and compelling discourse, they do not stratify a right to food or policy orientated framework.

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<sup>63</sup> See Feeding America (2017). <<http://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2014>>.

In sum, at first glance, many organizational mission statements appear rhetorically weak. For instance, 8 of the 13 organizations that note Feeding America as a civic network in their web content and also imposed income requirements on their services. Yet, work that was even published by Feeding America. (2017) provides “[f]ood insecurity exists in every county and congressional district in the country. *But not everyone struggling with hunger qualifies for federal nutrition assistance.* Learn more about local food insecurity and the food banks in your community by exploring data from Feeding America’s annual Map the Meal Gap project.”<sup>64</sup> Similarly, with regard to food to the food organizations that impose income restrictions around food provisions, surprisingly this criterion were based on falling below Federal poverty guidelines which are the same standards for which eligibility around governmental food assistance programs are applied. Paradoxically, then the person earning slightly above the poverty guidelines and in need of food security, exist in a social space where they do not qualify governmental social, which again sheds light on the contradictions between empirical evidence around food insecurity and the food banking model as an appropriate solution.

Likewise, endemic to the ‘no right’ category of food organizations is that they do not use their organizational apparatus to advocate for socio-political rights protections. In particular, as an organization they do not identify food insecurity as a violation of human right(s) or mention economic policy measures around improved coverage of government food programs. Yet, there were organizations that not only failed to advocate for rights reform, there were organizations who implicitly stigmatized the services they provide. The non-faith based organization, for example, Community Action in Southwestern Vermont (2017), provides around their services,

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., Feeding America (2017).

“[i]ncome eligible households can receive commodities on a monthly basis. Nutrition Education is offered, including one to one counseling. We use a curriculum called *‘Financial Fitness’* that emphasizes basic budgeting, family communication around spending decisions and smart shopping. This information and instruction is aimed at helping people more effectively meet their family's nutritional needs by using their financial resources carefully.”<sup>65</sup> The implication of teaching someone how to efficiently budget their expenses so they can spend their resources [more] carefully, shifts focus away from the state and the economy, and places blame on the individual-level. In effect, this orientation places the sheer duty-bearing responsibility of food insecurity on the very shoulders of the individuals plagued by the condition. In other words, this distracts from the structural inequalities built into the economy of food distribution. Moreover, from the perspective of social change, when dominant actors in civil society frame discourses of food insecurity as issue around balancing checkbooks, it’s hard to imagine a world where comprehensive economic policy is created, and human rights principles fulfilled, since there is a lack of respect and desire to protect to the right to food. Second, congruent with previous findings, limits on the amount of times a recipient can receive services indicates that organizationally food services are not intended to be relied on. This finding should be considered against approaches that have interviewed food bank employee’s perspectives of the services they provide. Since procedurally food there are often restrictions on the number of time food can be distributed could therefore explain why employees perceived their services around filling a slight

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<sup>65</sup> Community Action in Southwestern Vermont.(2017). <<http://www.broc.org/food-nutrition/community-food-shelf/19>>.

gap. , and similarly, food banks that use the Federal poverty to determine eligibility, exclude that many more individuals as well.

In addition to income requisites, food organizations may also require potential recipients to provide various forms documentation or partake in an interview in order to receive services. Items pertaining to photo IDs, proof of residency, birth certificates social security card, utility bill, phone bill, pay stub and Medicaid card were all mentioned by various organizations as materially necessary for intake purposes and eligibility of services. Thus, in practice we can see a departure from human rights practices in food distribution practice. From a human rights perspective, eligibility requirements are antithetical the rights principles since the act of going seeking help from a food organization is indicative of a violation of a human right, since structurally, foremost, they are intended to restrict persons from obtaining food security. Therefore, income requirements as well as other application requisites ultimate create distributive barriers for food insecure persons. Last, since food insecurity exists in the backdrop of there being national governmental food programs, using state established income guidelines suggest that food insecure households will persist. Thus, income guidelines run counter to the universality aspect of human rights since they will invariably obstruct food insecure persons from receiving food aid.

## **VII. Conclusion**

While there are numerous strengths to this research paper, there are notable limitations to my research methods. First, my research design is not able to capture whether charitable food organizations engaged within backdoor negotiations with governmental actors in relation to

promoting a right to food or recommending policy reform outside of what is presented on their webpage. Presumably, there is some degree of backdoor politicking among representatives of food organization and governmental officials. Second, these findings may not be generalizable, particularly in context outside the US. It could be the case that local food organizations in the US or outside the US use a rights based organizational lens greater or less than these organizations do. Furthermore, even this list, is likely not exhaustive of all multisite food organizations. Therefore, it is unknown whether this data is generalizable beyond the population it represents. Nevertheless, this research design can be replicated in any of these contexts to verify. Third, in terms of methodological limitations, I may have unintentionally omitted food organizations while I was coding, especially if an organization's webpage was disorganized and/or appearing incomplete. Finally, these results should be situated within the understanding there is an array of organizations that work on food in other capacities than charitable distribution to the general public. Accordingly, it may be the case that other types of food organizations employ human rights rhetoric and/or prescribe policy around rights protections to different extents than this sample.

However, despite these weaknesses, considering the growing body of literature on food banking has not produced empirical research has looked at why charitable food organizations functionally operate through their organizational mission statement, this project offers much value from a methodological standpoint, a theoretical one as well as advocacy perspective. The methodological strengths of this research design are as follows: First, content analysis is an unobtrusive research method which protects the data from reactivity. Second, all web searchers were automated which allowed me gathered preliminary list of food organizations in a short period. Finally, since my sample includes national and multi-site food organization, I am able to

enhance the generalizability the findings than if I were to just focus on national food organization. Likewise, theoretical strengths to this research project are derived from the fact that ‘rights’ categories that I devised were relatively exhaustive and mutually exclusive. Third, my project contains a content analysis of manifest content as well as briefly engages in semiotic analysis to discuss latent meanings of word used within organizational mission statements. Finally, since food insecurity is a pervasive across the US and there is a vast network of food organizations that provide food to those in need, my research design furthers gaps in knowledge around the processes and mechanisms by which food security is achieved, that is, not just in relation to the immediate relief of hunger but also with regard to how long term social policy is created.

Charitable food organizations undeniably play an influential role involving the immediate fulfillment of the right to food that is for a hearty amount of individuals. Yet, with respect to the currently population of ‘food insecure’ and in terms of long term incidents of food insecurity, institutionally, food banks do not offer the basis to implement social change. Food entitlements, fair wage statutes which sustain a dignifying standard of life, strong workers rights as well as social policy more generally, need to engender in order to remove structural barriers reinforcing economic inequality. Yet, despite the universality of the right to food framework, concepts such as ‘hunger’ and ‘food insecurity’ are almost exclusively associated with individuals habituating in the developing world or in other words, “little attention has been paid to how countries should meet their obligations to respect, protect and fulfill the right to food in developed countries.”<sup>66</sup> Ultimately, it appears charitable food organizations engage in ‘perverse advocacy,’ which can be

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<sup>66</sup> As cited in Dowler & O’Connor, “A Rights-based approach,” 2012, 44.



understood as prorogating the institutional basis of food charities in society as smoke screen of actively advocating for social change. Since charitable food organizations have an interest in rationalizing their organizational basis, maintain business confidence of donors as well as maintain social order, there is an autonomous rationalization of food banks. In this case, social order requires a convincing of the public that food organizations are capable, suitable, appropriate actors to deal with the 'hungry population,' in regards the legitimacy, they have an organizational incentive to appease to the values of their donors, and institutional incentive to promoting policy that protects their organizations rights, opposed to human rights.

The increase in charitable food organizations across the country and the continued existence of food insecurity indicates a failure of the government to develop comprehensive social policy fully capable of addressing elements of economic accessibility, which the right to food necessitates, as well as reveals the inability of charitable food organizations to do so ad hoc. Since first being recognized as a human right, international approaches towards food insecurity, have predominantly focused on the nutritional needs of persons in developing countries which has implicitly deprived inquiry, strategies and approaches to socio-economic rights protections of individuals in economically advanced nations. Therefore, active, continued and sustained dialogue is needed by members of civil society around social policy that takes into account and is also able to ameliorate food insecurity. Any civil society approach to food insecurity that overlooks the practical and theoretical import of applying human rights principles to food insecurity vastly undermines the validity, legitimacy and credibility derived by institutionalized, enforceable rights claims. Food insecurity and charitable food organizations are undoubtedly interrelated topic. The institutional role of charitable food organizations, therefore, needs to be situated within the broader societal topic around food insecurity.

There are many avenues forward for researchers to investigate. First, a governmental policy identified throughout the course of this project is the ‘Good Samaritan Act.’ This policy protects food donors from encountering legal trouble around the quality of food product provided through charitable donation, particularly if the food is tainted or expired so long as it’s not caused by intentional negligence, which is in this context very difficult to obtain. On one hand, this policy appears to incentivize large scale corporate donors to provide food to charitable food organizations, though on the other hand, it appears that it also provide perverse incentive to food organizations to advocate for social welfare reform. Particularly, because corporate donors receive monies, or tax breaks, for donating expired food product (i.e., food that cannot otherwise be legally sold), there is an incentive for corporations to engage in large scale donating and also encourages charitable food organizations to expand their organizational base in order to accommodate the growing quantity of food. Research, therefore, should investigate this process more thoroughly. In similar vein, future research should explore the intricacies of both models of ‘food banking’ more thoroughly (organization-to-organization & organization-to-individual), though particularly regarding the warehouse model. This organizational model is often comprised of an extensive body of ‘board of directors’ who also occupy high status positions in the corporate world, which raise many questions around possible of conflict of interests in regards to transparency and accountability. Moreover, this point is amplified by the fact that food banks using the organization-to-organization model are shielded from the scrutiny of the public-eye, which removes a potential oversight mechanism that would otherwise exist if they were to interact with individuals.

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APPENDIX A

**Table 6:** Complete List of Food Organizations & other Demographic Information (n=52)

<b>Number of Locations &amp; Name</b>	<b>Faith</b>	<b>Income</b>	<b>Link</b>
<b>Human Rights (n=2)</b>			
4 Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Wilmington	Yes	No	<a href="http://www.ccwilm.org">http://www.ccwilm.org</a>
2 Capital Area Food Bank	No	Yes	<a href="https://capitalareafoodbank.volunteermatrix.com">https://capitalareafoodbank.volunteermatrix.com</a>
<b>Limited Rights (n=4)</b>			
2 Food Bank of Delaware	No	No	<a href="http://www.fbd.org">http://www.fbd.org</a>
11 Philabundance	No	No	<a href="https://www.philabundance.org">https://www.philabundance.org</a>
44 Society of St. Vincent de Paul	Yes	No	<a href="http://svdpchicago.org">http://svdpchicago.org</a>
6 Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio	Yes	Yes	<a href="http://www.ccswoh.org">http://www.ccswoh.org</a>
<b>No Rights (n=46)</b>			
4 United Against Poverty	No	No	<a href="http://foodoutreachcenters.org">http://foodoutreachcenters.org</a>
2 Ecumenical Ministries Inc.	Yes	N.S.	<a href="http://www.baldwinemi.org">http://www.baldwinemi.org</a>
13 Fairbanks Community Food Bank	No	Yes	<a href="http://www.fairbanksfoodbank.org">http://www.fairbanksfoodbank.org</a>
2 Interfaith Community Services	Yes	N.S.	<a href="https://www.icstucson.org">https://www.icstucson.org</a>
2 Samaritan Community Center	Yes	No	<a href="http://samcc.org">http://samcc.org</a>
3 Catholic Charities Diocese of Fresno	Yes	Yes	<a href="http://www.ccdof.org">http://www.ccdof.org</a>
2 Food Bank of Contra Costa County and Solano	No	Yes	<a href="https://www.foodbankccs.org">https://www.foodbankccs.org</a>
2 Neighbor Outreach of Colorado	No	No	<a href="http://www.neighboroutreach.org">http://www.neighboroutreach.org</a>
2 Community Food Share	No	Yes	<a href="https://communityfoodshare.org">https://communityfoodshare.org</a>
3 Colorado River Food Bank	No	Yes	<a href="http://www.coloradoriverfb.com">http://www.coloradoriverfb.com</a>
2 Food Bank for Larimer County	No	Yes	<a href="http://foodbanklarimer.org">http://foodbanklarimer.org</a>
2 St. Timothy's Episcopal Church	Yes	N.S.	<a href="http://sttimchurch.org">http://sttimchurch.org</a>
3 Hillside Food Outreach	No	Yes	<a href="http://hillsidefoodoutreach.org">http://hillsidefoodoutreach.org</a>
8 New City Parish, Inc.	Yes	N.S.	<a href="http://www.newcityparish.org">http://www.newcityparish.org</a>
1 Northeast Iowa Food Bank*	No	No	<a href="https://www.Northeastiowafoodbank.org">https://www.Northeastiowafoodbank.org</a>



4	Metropolitan Ministries	Yes	N.S.	<a href="http://www.metromin.org">http://www.metromin.org</a>
3	Miami Rescue Mission	Yes	N.S.	<a href="http://www.miamirescuemission.com">http://www.miamirescuemission.com</a>
12	St. Ann's St Vincent de Paul Society	Yes	No	<a href="http://st-ann.org">http://st-ann.org</a>
5	Community Action Partnership	No	Yes	<a href="https://www.cap4action.org">https://www.cap4action.org</a>
2	Bonner Community Food Bank	No	Yes	<a href="http://foodbank83864.com">food bank83864.com</a>
9	United Way of Adams County, Inc.	No	Yes	<a href="http://www.unitedwayadamsco.org">http://www.unitedwayadamsco.org</a>
24	Catholic Charities Maine	Yes	No	<a href="https://www.ccmaine.org">https://www.ccmaine.org</a>
14	Community Action Council of Howard County	Yes	Yes	<a href="https://www.cac-hc.org">https://www.cac-hc.org</a>
7	Catholic Charities Western Michigan	Yes	No	<a href="https://ccwestmi.org">https://ccwestmi.org</a>
2	Catholic Social Services of South Nebraska	Yes	No	<a href="http://www.csisus.org">http://www.csisus.org</a>
2	Catholic Charities of Omaha	Yes	No	<a href="http://www.ccomaha.org">http://www.ccomaha.org</a>
4	Heartland Hope Mission	Yes	Yes	<a href="http://heartlandhopemission.org">http://heartlandhopemission.org</a>
7	Center for Food Action	No	N.S.	<a href="https://www.cfanj.org">https://www.cfanj.org</a>
2	Fulfill	No	No	<a href="http://fulfillnj.org">http://fulfillnj.org</a>
6	Catholic Charities of Camden	Yes	N.S.	<a href="http://catholiccharitiescamden.org">http://catholiccharitiescamden.org</a>
8	Catholic Charities of Buffalo	Yes	Yes	<a href="https://www.ccnny.org">https://www.ccnny.org</a>
2	North Carolina Poverty Coalition Inc.	Yes	N.S.	<a href="http://www.Northcarolinapovertycoalition.org">http://www.Northcarolinapovertycoalition.org</a>
3	Catholic Charities Diocese of Charlotte	Yes	N.S.	<a href="http://ccdoc.org">http://ccdoc.org</a>
2	Catholic Community Services of Lane County	Yes	No	<a href="http://www.ccslc.org">http://www.ccslc.org</a>
11	The Salvation Army - Western Pennsylvania	Yes	No	<a href="http://wpa.salvationarmy.org">http://wpa.salvationarmy.org</a>
3	East Bay Community Action Program	No	No	<a href="http://www.ebcap.org">http://www.ebcap.org</a>
2	The Banquet	No	No	<a href="https://thebanquetsf.org">https://thebanquetsf.org</a>
2	Nourish Food Bank	No	Yes	<a href="http://www.Nourishfoodbanks.org">http://www.Nourishfoodbanks.org</a>
4	Community Action Services and Food Bank	No	Yes	<a href="http://communityactionprovo.org">http://communityactionprovo.org</a>
2	Community Action in Southwestern Vermont	No	Yes	<a href="http://www.broc.org">http://www.broc.org</a>
6	Fairfax FISH Inc	Yes	N.S.	<a href="http://www.fairfaxfish.org">http://www.fairfaxfish.org</a>
2	Commonwealth Catholic Charities	Yes	No	<a href="http://cccovfa.org">http://cccovfa.org</a>

5	Hopelink	No	Yes	<a href="https://www.hopelink.org">https://www.hopelink.org</a>
4	Bellingham Food Bank	No	No	<a href="https://www.bellinghamfoodbank.org">https://www.bellinghamfoodbank.org</a>
1	Second Harvest Food bank of Southern Wisconsin*	No	No	<a href="https://www.secondharvestmadison.org">https://www.secondharvestmadison.org</a>
10	Family Pathways	No	No	<a href="http://familypathways.org">http://familypathways.org</a>

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Notes: \*Indicates that the food organization has 1 location and numerous. N.S. means 'none stated.'

APPENDIX B

**Table 7:** Demographic Information & Mission Statement of ‘Human Right’ Category of Food Organizations (n=2)

Name and # of Locations	Faith Based	Income Requirements	Organizational Mission Statement:
<p>Capital Area Food Bank</p> <p>2</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>“We envision a community in which everyone has access to sufficient nutritious food. Mission The mission of the Capital Area Food Bank is to create access to good, healthy food in every community. Values We believe that access to nutritious food is a basic <b>human right</b>. We are committed to responding to the needs of our community through food distribution and support services. Therefore, We value respect, compassion and honesty in all interactions and activities. We value actively listening and learning; appreciating the worth and diversity of each person. We value nutrition education and advocacy programs that lead toward self sufficiency and sustainable food systems. We value the wise use of resources, creating new ways to improve our services and effectively utilizing community support that sustains our work. We value our staff and volunteers and their diverse talents, backgrounds, passion and commitment to the community. We value excellence in leadership. Our role in the community is to be servant leaders and partners for social change. We value creativity, the pursuit of knowledge and the sharing of expertise that result in social justice.”</p>
<p>Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Wilmington</p> <p>4</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>“It is the mission of Catholic Charities to address human suffering and to promote and restore the wellbeing of people and society by: Providing, as a primary focus, caring service to families and persons in need; Coming together with members of the community to become informed about and to take action on critical social issues; and, Advocating publicly for social policies which enhance human dignity and safeguard basic <b>human rights</b>.”</p>

APPENDIX C:

**Table 8:** Demographic Information & Mission Statement of ‘Limited Right’ Food Organizations’ (n=4)

Name and # Locations	Faith Based	Income Guidelines	Organizational Mission Statement:
Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio  6	Yes	None stated	“FIVE WAYS TO FIGHT HUNGER: Volunteer at a food pantry. Call Julie at 513-672-3720 or email her at jpfeffer@ccswoh.org to get involved. Teach your children not to waste food. Set an empty plate at the table to remember those who go without food. Devote one day each month to fasting and prayer to end hunger. <b>Advocate. Contact Congress to ask your representative to visit a food pantry and support policies that aid hungry families.</b> Donate cash or stock to support programs that address food insecurity like Food for All and the Second Harvest Food Bank.”
Food Bank of Delaware  2	No	No	“The Policy and Advocacy arm of the Food Bank of Delaware raises awareness about <b>public policy issues on the state and national levels related to agriculture, food security and nutrition that directly affect the citizens we serve.</b> Our goal is to garner community support and educate community members on the importance and value of becoming involved in the political process. To support these efforts, we work with community members from all walks of life to empower and educate them on how to be an advocate. Our long-term vision is the collaborative development of an equitable, accessible, and just food system for the state of Delaware’s New Castle, Kent and Sussex counties.”
Philabundance  11  (National)	No	No	“EFFORTS 40% of food in the US goes to waste, while 1 in 8 Americans go hungry. We at Philabundance are confronted daily by the upsetting paradox of an abundance of food waste and the abundance of hungry people. As much as we are doing to rescue food in our communities, there is so much more that can be done. New legislation, regulations and clarifications of existing laws could go a long way towards increasing food donations and reducing unnecessary waste. <b>For this reason, we commissioned the Harvard Law School Food Law and Policy Clinic to create a report on this topic: “Moving Food Waste Forward: Policy Recommendations for Next Steps in Pennsylvania”.</b> Out of this, came Philabundance’s top 7 priorities. We hope that this report and accompanying materials will serve as educational resources and conversation-starters. If you are interested in joining our efforts to reduce food waste and fight for better food policies, please email sustainability”
Society of St. Vincent de Paul	Yes	No	“The Society of St. Vincent de Paul supports: • EMPOWERMENT. <b>We support adequate funding for health and nutrition programs that serve food insecure individuals and families.</b>

44			<p><b>While headway has been made, more is needed. ⇒ Strengthen the Food Stamp Program, now called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, to better assist the working poor and elderly. ⇒ Extend Food Stamp eligibility to more single adults and more working families. ⇒ Protect funding for essential food programs that serve low income families, such as The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP). ⇒ Base monthly benefits on an updated measure of what families need, such as options that provide access to more nutritious food. ⇒ Allow families to participate without forfeiting the opportunity to save. ⇒ Ensure that federal nutrition programs meet the unique needs of low income rural families. ⇒ Aid with simple sanitation basics, such as soap. (Personal cleanliness is important for health.) ⇒ End the five-year waiting period for adult legal immigrants who in a time of need would otherwise be eligible for food stamps. ⇒ Repeal the current provision penalizing low-income families headed by a parent (usually a single mother) with a past drug conviction. • ACCESS. Food assistance programs need to be easily accessible to those who qualify. This includes: ⇒ Outreach improvements that reduce the complexity and stigma in the application process. ⇒ Promote outreach efforts at national, state and local levels.”</b></p>
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