



building the bridge

Linking
Food Banking
and Community
Food Security

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There is a great, but often overlooked calamity in America today—it is hunger in our midst. In the world's most food abundant nation, an estimated 36 million needy Americans are hungry or at risk of hunger. Many of those at risk, or going hungry, are our nation's most vulnerable people—seniors, children and the disabled. Their needs call out for our attention.

America's Second Harvest—The Nation's Food Bank Network, is pleased to support the *Building the Bridge* document by World Hunger Year and the Community Food Security Coalition. For more than 25 years, America's food banks and their partner local agencies have helped provide billions of pounds of food and other support to our nation's most vulnerable people. An estimated 23 million low-income people—including 9 million children and nearly 3 million seniors—turned to the America's Second Harvest network for emergency food assistance last year.

In many communities, as the *Building the Bridge* document highlights, America's Second Harvest member food banks have embraced a broader strategy of providing food assistance beyond our historical food aid activities to include efforts in community building, sustainability, and supporting self-reliance activities among our recipients. We strongly encourage the type of collaborations and innovations recommended in this document.

The *Building the Bridge* document helps to highlight public and private partnerships that are springing up all around the country. Government and charities, farmers and ranchers, food makers and processors, community groups and faith-based organizations are all working together to help each of their needy neighbors—today with food assistance, and tomorrow with self-sufficiency. A hunger-free America is possible, but only through greater collaboration and mutual support at all levels of American life. We hope you, the reader, will find the *Building the Bridge* document as useful and hopeful as we do.

Sincerely,

Robert Forney
President & CEO

Foreword

— Bill Ayres, Executive Director, World Hunger Year

Everybody knows what food banks do. They provide millions of tons of food each year that serve millions of people. That's what they have always done. That's what they will always do. WRONG! Food banks do more, much more. Many of them are on the cutting edge of a grassroots movement that can provide the basic components to ending hunger in our country. Here are some of the most important breakthroughs in food banking that I have seen that make food bankers a dynamic partner in community food security initiatives - resulting in one of the most exciting movements in America.

Food bankers know that for hunger to end, people must be empowered to achieve self-reliance. They realize that government hunger and poverty programs are a critical tool for making this happen. Many food banks have become leading advocates for federal and state hunger and poverty programs and many conduct outreach for food stamps, WIC, and Earned Income Tax Credit. They realize the power of their networks and the importance of their advocacy in fighting hunger. To further foster self-reliance, many food bankers have also expanded their services to include job training, mentoring, nutrition education, and more. In other words, food banks are still doing what they do best - providing food for hungry people—but they are also providing many of the tools for economic justice and self-reliance.

Food bankers have always seen themselves as a part of the community as a whole. During the past decade, as the Community Food Security movement has grown, food bankers have joined its efforts to ensure that every community has access to safe, nutritious, affordable food and that as much food as possible is grown and purchased locally to support local farmers. Many food banks today have their own gardens, farms, or farm stands, and many more partner with CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture) and independent community gardens and farms. The results are more fresh food for hungry people and stronger, more economically viable farms and gardens.

Over the years, food bankers have been enormously creative in finding new sources of food and delivering it more efficiently. More food bankers are using that same creativity in incorporating community food security initiatives, advocacy, and other self-reliance building programs into their work. Significant breakthroughs have already happened in many individual food banks. The purpose of this report is to share some of the creative programs we already know of and to encourage the sharing of the most effective food banking models in these relatively new areas of community food security, advocacy, and promoting self-reliance.

Yes, food banking is primarily about getting food to hungry people, but it is becoming much more. Let us strengthen the partnerships that will continue to help more and more people become self-reliant and to ensure a healthy, thriving food system for all.

Part I: Introduction

It is clear that food banks play a vital role in meeting the immediate food needs of millions of people in hunger. Addressing the immediate needs of the food insecure while also developing longer-term solutions is a very tall order, especially in a context of growing needs and declining government support for the poor. Yet innovative food banks are stepping up to the plate and finding ways to address both goals simultaneously. Many food banks are at the vanguard of food security work in their communities, and are using food distributions as “a principal, magical tool to build a healthier community,” as Kathy Palumbo from the Atlanta Community Food Bank states so eloquently in the Profile below.

In my decade at the Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC), I have had the opportunity to become acquainted with many pioneering food banks. In 1999, CFSC profiled some of these efforts in a mini resource guide. In the last year, a number of circumstances converged to lead CFSC to develop another publication highlighting the leadership role of select food banks. In the spring of 2004, leaders from a prominent anti-hunger funder invited me to meet with them. They had been receiving proposals from various community food security groups, and weren't sure how to analyze them. They wanted to know more about the relationship between community food security projects and fighting hunger.

This interest dovetailed with a focus on linking community food security and anti-hunger work in CFSC's on-going partnership with World Hunger Year (WHY), in particular through their USDA-funded Food Security Learning Center. Since the 1970s, WHY has been a leader in promoting greater sustainability and self-reliance among the anti-hunger community. Their Reinvesting in America program and replication manuals and workshops, like this document, highlight innovative model programs.

Thus was born *Building the Bridge*. Its broader aim is to foster greater understanding among food banks of the community food security approach, as well as greater understanding among the community food security movement of the leadership role that numerous food banks are playing to build a healthy and just food system.

The second purpose of this document is to encourage other food banks to promote greater sustainability and self-reliance, while gaining more support for these types of initiatives. In that sense, *Building the Bridge* also targets secular, religious and government funders, for as Lynn Brantley from the Capital Area Food Bank stated, “Passions go where the money flows.” The potential impact of a greater role

of America's Second Harvest in supporting and publicizing these innovative food bank projects should not be underestimated.

In highlighting these model projects, CFSC is aware that a much broader approach is needed to create long-term solutions, and that food banks should not bear this responsibility alone. In her well-researched and passionately written *Sweet Charity*, Jan Poppendieck advocates for food banks to put more emphasis on policy advocacy to bolster government anti-poverty and anti-hunger programs. Similarly, many of the food bankers interviewed here talk about the need to work with many other partners to develop lasting solutions to hunger and poverty.

I welcome your feedback on this document, especially from food bankers undertaking similar projects.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to all of those who participated in this project, including all of the food bankers who gave of their time to be interviewed; intern Natalie Tun who helped with the interviews; Noreen Springstead, who was an active partner in its development, along with funding from USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension; Kai Siedenburg who edited the document; Peter Mann and Christina Schiavoni of WHY for additional editing; Val Echavarría, who designed the booklet, and Mark Winne, who generously allowed us to use a shortened and adapted version of his paper for the UPS Foundation for Part II of this document. We realize that this document highlights just a few of the food banks doing excellent work. We hope to have the opportunity to profile additional efforts in the future and we encourage food banks and emergency food providers to share their innovations with us.

Andy Fisher
Executive Director
Community Food Security Coalition

Part II: Connecting Anti-Hunger and Community Food Security: The Role of Food Banks

Those of us engaged in alleviating hunger and food insecurity are facing ever mounting challenges. The demand for emergency food has skyrocketed to the point that emergency food providers meant to serve those in crisis situations are themselves undergoing crises due to a lack of food and resources. At the same time, income support programs and other components of the government safety net are facing budget cuts, threatening to further aggravate the already entrenched problem of food insecurity. An increasingly globalized economy has caused numerous economic dislocations. For example, in rural communities, the weakening of the agricultural sector means more farm foreclosures and more farm families passing into the ranks of the food insecure.

These challenges require a more comprehensive and dynamic approach to the problem of entrenched food insecurity than providing food handouts can provide. Community food security is such an approach that many food banks and other groups have implemented. The value of incorporating community food security measures into the work of food banks is that it can increase their capacity to address multiple needs and problems and provide a valuable tool for community building that fosters self-reliance. One common aspect of community food security is to encourage gardening and increased connections with local farmers. Growing food or linking directly with a local farmer provides a transformative experience for clients, volunteers, and the community at large. It also creates a wealth of opportunity to implement innovative solutions that address the root causes of hunger and move people out of poverty. Embodying these practices into a food banking operation establishes a more dynamic system that fosters social change and directly challenges dependence.

Food banks, with their access to food and multiple community relationships, have a special role in building the bridge between anti-hunger work and community food security. Many anti-hunger networks and groups have long supported policies that address the root causes of hunger—poverty, joblessness, homelessness, lack of health care, and the like. Increasingly, groups such as food banks, shelters, and churches, while continuing to feed people in hunger and house the homeless, are sponsoring food security related programs that include food sector job training, nutrition education, healthier food choices, community gardens, links to local farms, and economic development. *Building the Bridge* will focus on food banks that—from an anti-hunger base—are implementing key aspects of community food security.

What is Community Food Security?

Community Food Security (CFS) is both a goal and a method that embraces the full range of food chain activities—natural resources and agriculture, processing and distribution, nutrition and health, public policy—and promotes a systems approach to food problems. While the goal of CFS is the same as other approaches—to end hunger and food insecurity—its method is different. CFS, in its fullest expression, draws on a range of community food system resources, invites the participation of many individuals and sectors, and promotes solutions that reduce food insecurity and build the health and well being of the wider community. For example, From the Ground Up, the Capital Area Food Bank's farm project profiled here, is based on a mission "to educate, enlighten, and empower as well as provide food." The Food Bank farm describes its work as "a more holistic way to address hunger."

Community food security is an extension of food security, which occurs when all households have available to them nutritionally adequate and safe food, or the ability to acquire food in socially acceptable ways. CFS places the concept of individual or household food security directly in a community context, which implicitly recognizes the important role that the larger food system must play to ensure food security. The most commonly used definition of community food security is a "condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance, social justice, and democratic decision-making (Hamm and Bellows, 2002)." This definition comes to life in the interview with Bill Bolling, Executive Director of Atlanta Community Food Bank: "My interest is in transformation: using food to transform lives and bring people together."

Building Community

For CFS, the community is the unit of analysis. This is why CFS assigns such importance to developing community-based resources that improve access to quality, affordable food, particularly in lower-income neighborhoods. CFS addresses a broad range of problems such as the lack of quality, affordable food outlets, especially in urban and rural areas, loss of small and medium size family farms and the farmland base needed to support food production, diet-related health problems including the local food environments (prevalence of healthy versus unhealthy food choices), and the overall vitality of the local food economy and its ability to generate additional community wealth. CFS supports the work of the anti-hunger community to address

inadequately funded and staffed food assistance programs (food stamps, WIC.) In addition, community food security models integrate food stamps and other government nutrition programs into model farmers' markets and community supported agriculture programs.

The profile of Alameda County Community Food Bank shows a food bank developing an integrated set of programs for learning, advocacy, and the development of alternative food systems. Judy Lenthall, Executive Director of the Kauai Food Bank in Lihue, Hawaii, describes the food bank's mission as ending hunger "through community economic development and community food security."

Three other components of the CFS definition—sustainability, social justice, and democratic decision-making—are important for building connections with anti-hunger groups. Since CFS is concerned with the viability of the natural resource base that produces our food as well as the food system's current dependence on non-renewable energy sources (e.g. fossil fuels), it promotes sustainable farming practices. Likewise, CFS supports strong marketing channels between consumers and farmers that are in the same region to decrease the distance that food must travel (food travels an average of 1,500 miles before it reaches its final destination). Food banks profiled below such as the South Plains Food Bank in Lubbock, Texas and the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank, are examples of food banks with strong links to agriculture and local farmers.

Social justice refers to the injustice of hunger and food insecurity in a country as affluent as the U.S., but it also refers to the need for adequate wages and working conditions for all who earn their livelihoods from the food system. This includes farmers, farm workers, food processing workers, and food service workers. Food Banks are uniquely positioned to shift the prevailing model of food charity to one that promotes food justice. Currently, many working families are dependent on emergency sources of food to meet their very basic food needs. Actions to move toward food justice would include exposing the growing inequality in income and in access to food.

Democratic decision-making, a key principle of the community food security movement, means that all participants in the food system have the right to participate in decisions that affect the availability, cost, price, quality, and attributes of their food. Many of the food banks profiled are already making a shift in empowering those involved in emergency food programs to be active participants in their local food systems as opposed to passive recipients of aid. This is significant in that it promotes self reliance and brings people together to solve problems in their own communities.

A Focus on Long-Term Planning

In contrast to approaches that primarily focus on federal food assistance programs or emergency food distribution, CFS encourages progressive planning that addresses the underlying causes of hunger and food insecurity. Planning itself encourages community-based problem-solving strategies and promotes collaborative, multi-sector processes. And finally, while CFS embraces all approaches, even if their primary purpose is short-term hunger relief, it places special emphasis on finding long-term, system-based solutions. The challenges faced by food banks to distribute more food to those in hunger and support local food systems are apparent in the profile of the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts. This is another reason why innovative food banks are moving into the challenging area of advocacy: see the interview below with Kim Thomas, Director of Advocacy and Agency Relations for the Oregon Food Bank.

With most domestic anti-hunger models, the key indicators of food security/insecurity are the size of the need (usually defined by the area's poverty statistics and pool of eligible federal food program participants), and the number of program participants as a percentage of those who are eligible. For emergency food providers, the primary indicator is the number of people who request food and the units of food distributed.

From a CFS perspective, a broader set of indicators would be examined to determine the relative food insecurity/security of a given community or region. For example, a typical community food assessment—a common planning tool of CFS—might evaluate indicators such as whether people have adequate income to afford healthy, nutritious food; access to affordable retail food stores; diet-related health problems; nutrition education in schools; the viability of local and regional farms; whether emergency food providers can meet demands; and much more.

Several food banks profiled in this publication are already taking steps in this direction, such as examining the root causes of hunger (Atlanta Community Food Bank's Hunger IOI) and providing nutrition education and cooking skills (Alameda County Community Food Bank's Kids Can Cook classes.) These food bank profiles and interviews provide examples of numerous food banks that are providing leadership in fighting hunger, building community food security, and working towards a just and sustainable food system. They can inspire the vast network of food banks to transform their operations and awaken our greater societal responsibility to address the root causes of poverty.

Part III: Food Bank Profiles and Interviews

In this section, we present profiles of five food banks undertaking community food security-related projects, and interviews with five food bank leaders. Both of these groups were selected in consultation with key food bank and anti-hunger leaders. We sought geographic balance—although we recognize that the Midwest is not covered—as well as diversity in the types of projects implemented.

Atlanta Community Food Bank Atlanta, GA Building Community Through Food

Amassing monopolies. Conquering the world. Vanquishing bad guys. This is the stuff of traditional board games. Feeding your family on a tight budget is not, except in Atlanta, where the Atlanta Community Food Bank plays “Feast or Famine” with thousands of kids and adults every year. Started by a group of interns from the Emory University School of Public Health, Feast or Famine is a part of the Hunger IOI program that asks the basic question of why there is hunger in a nation as rich as ours. Food Bank staff takes this “class”, to schools, community groups, and others willing to spend the 90 minutes to consider this question. Girl Scouts can earn a patch in exchange for participating in a Hunger IOI class.

In a state as conservative as Georgia, the inherent political message of Hunger IOI has the potential to alienate numerous people. Yet, Food Bank staff have become expert at sizing people up and knowing when to push and when not to. Their message is simple: the reason there is hunger is because of an unequal distribution of resources. By allowing participants to reach this conclusion on their own, they foster critical thinking and deeper learning in an era in which such discussions are woefully lacking.

Many groups have entered into Hunger IOI uncomfortable with this topic. And some have made huge leaps of consciousness in an hour and a half. Kathy Palumbo, Community Services Director, notes the benefits of Hunger IOI for the Food Bank: “It has evolved into much more than an educational session. It can be an amazing organizing opportunity. We’re creating a constituency for political change. We used to be satisfied when people offered to do food drives (after going through Hunger IOI). Now we encourage them to make another specific action-step commitment.” For example, the Food Bank has been able to mobilize some Hunger IOI participants to support state anti-poverty and anti-hunger legislation. With 3,000 people attending over 100 sessions in 2003, this group could provide a significant base for grassroots organizing.



Atlanta Community Food Bank volunteers working in a community garden

Hunger IOI is not the only way the Food Bank educates the Atlanta community. They also provide technical assistance to more than 150 community gardens in the metropolitan area, through a dedicated staff person, Fred Conrad. The Food Bank leverages volunteers to help gardens get established and keep running smoothly. With support from Heifer Project, Fred also raises earthworms, and sells their castings at farmers’ markets, donating them as well to the gardens. One of the challenges Fred and the Food Bank face in recruiting gardeners, especially in African American neighborhoods, is the legacy of Jim Crow and unfair farm labor practices many of them have spent generations avoiding.

Hunger IOI, like the community gardening program, has become central to the Food Bank’s mission of ending hunger through educating, engaging and empowering the community. In fact, community building seems to be the *raison d’être* of the Food Bank. Kathy Palumbo concludes, “For us, food is a principal, magical tool to build a healthier community.”

Atlanta Community Food Bank, Atlanta, GA

Bill Bolling

Q. What was the impetus behind your Hunger IOI and community gardening work?

A. When we started the Food Bank in 1979, we not only wanted to fight hunger, but we wanted to use food as a tool to engage, educate and empower the community. That has been our mission ever since and through the years we have initiated new projects to expand this mission. We have always seen food as more than a meal or a bag of groceries for a family.

Years before Hunger IOI and the Community Gardening Initiative were even in their conceptual stages, we ventured into a relationship with the hospitality industry to glean prepared and perishable food from restaurants, hotels, caterers, conventions...great food that otherwise would have been thrown away. To this day, the Atlanta's Table project ensures that this food goes to those who need it. The thinking was to engage one of our city's major industries, an industry that revolves around feeding, welcoming and hosting people. It really made no sense to fight hunger and not have these folks involved.

From this point, we were able to expand our horizons. When we started Hunger IOI, we wanted to inform people about the realities of living in poverty. We knew we needed a systemic process to provide this type of ongoing educational service. The interest from the community was there, but there wasn't a curriculum. So we called on the faculty and students at Emory (University) Public Health School to help. Emory students worked on it for a whole semester and we ended up with a quality curriculum that is now being used to educate hundreds of groups every year.

With regards to community gardening, we wanted to engage people where they live, and build relationships at the neighborhood level. We don't go where we're not invited—but we get the word out that we have certain resources for those interested in gardening in their communities. Many have jumped at the opportunity and we have been able to help in the upstart and maintenance of over a hundred gardens—not only in town, but also in more rural areas.

Our most recent endeavor is The Atlanta Collaborative Kitchen with one of our partner agencies, Project Open Hand. This effort involves training individuals who are unemployed or underemployed for careers in the food service industry. Those chosen for participation are likely in a position of needing food assistance. And they are receiving training in the very industry that is of service to the Food Bank and its 750 agencies. We even pulled in the restaurant industry to develop the

curriculum. The Kitchen has maintained an 80% success rate with helping people secure jobs in food service.

Q. So you are really in the business of developing relationships?

Actually, a better way to say it is that developing sustainable relationships is a way to create trust and get the job done. The key to developing sustainable relationships is to be a good listener and find common self-interests.

Q. Most food banks measure their success in terms of pounds of food moved. With your emphasis on partnerships, how does that affect your own self-evaluation?

It's true that the general public and corporations are always interested in the pounds of food collected and distributed. They always want to see growth. But these same people understand that there wouldn't be growth without the collaborative efforts and partnerships. Building relationships that garner excellent results – that's really what keeps me in the work after 25 years.

We've truly created a reputation for ourselves as an organization that can handle the surplus and get it into the right hands. We now have a project called Kids in Need that began when the School, Home and Office Supply convention came to town. The vendors had millions of items to leave behind and we were able to handle it. So, now we're providing school supplies each year for kids whose parents don't have the money to buy a new backpack—these are the same kids who don't get enough to eat. We have served 195 different schools, 3,500 teachers and 200,000 kids. It puts me into a relationship with schools I could only dream of before. Principals and school officials will return my phone calls. This gives me an opportunity to do Hunger IOI, get kids to volunteer or place kids in youth garden programs.

Q. How does it fit into your model of food banking? How does that differ from the average food bank?

A. My interest is in transformation: using food to transform lives and bring people together. Community gardening and culinary training transform lives. Our Hunger Walk brings Christians, Jews and Muslims together. That's as important as the money we raise. One day we might not need food banks, but we will always need organizations to build, nurture and strengthen communities. That's the work that we hope will never end.



Bill Bolling

Alameda County Community Food Bank, Oakland, California Organizing through Nutrition

“Supplemental food provides assistance for today and is critical in our community; advocacy provides hope for tomorrow, and that’s why it is part of our mission as well,” states Suzan Bateson, Executive Director. “Our Food Bank strives to distribute 75 percent nutritious food and we are focusing on promoting good nutrition in our community.”

While the Alameda County Community Food Bank (ACCFB) distributed an impressive 12 million pounds of food last year, they have also developed an integrated set of programs that create opportunities for learning, advocacy, and the use of alternative food systems. In 2003, the Food Bank included a policy focus in their education programs. “We wanted open conversation around diet related diseases—perhaps they were not solely the result of personal responsibility—we thought we could talk about access issues and structural causes to nutrition-related public health crises affecting low-income communities,” Bateson continues.

A nutrition educator presents monthly classes for 300 children, showing them how to cook healthy recipes in the Food Bank’s innovative “Kids Can Cook” classes. “With the growing concerns regarding diet-related chronic diseases, we’ve adjusted the curriculum to engage children in a dialogue about the larger societal issues that affect their health, like lack of access to healthy foods, and how advertising affects consumer choices,” Bateson notes.

The Food Bank’s partnership with Full Belly Farm, a flagship organic farm two hours northeast of Oakland, is another example of how ACCFB programs do more than feed hungry people. With grant

funds from Goldman Foundation and the City of Oakland, ACCFB purchased vegetables from Full Belly Farm and had it delivered directly to low-income senior centers as well as domestic violence shelters, transitional housing facilities, and shelters for men coming out of jail.



According to Judith Redmond, co-owner of Full Belly Farm, Oakland seniors have been wildly excited about the program. “At the East Oakland Senior Center, they are lined up waiting for us and literally swarm the truck as it arrives. We have had to ask them not to jump up on the truck to help us unload, for fear that they may trip in the pallet spaces and hurt themselves... The directors of the seniors programs have called us up and said that they want to order directly from the farm if the

contract runs out and that they will raise the money to do so. The seniors grew up with farm fresh vegetables, they know how to cook them and they know the health benefits of eating them.”

In the immediate future, the Food Bank has ambitious plans to build on its successes, through greater involvement in local and state policy coalitions, by providing formats like the annual nutrition conference, and allocating resources to link more low-income children and adults to fresh produce. Alameda County Community Food Bank’s commitment to providing nutritious food and connections to tens of thousands of people to address the structural issues that lead to poor nutrition and poverty is notable for a sector that has been criticized for the tendency to use a band-aid approach to hunger.

Foodshare, Hartford, CT Gloria McAdam

Q. Could you explain to me what Foodshare does in the food security arena?

A. We don't do a lot directly because we have the Hartford Food System (HFS) in our community. Our focus in this area is less programmatic and more philosophical. The work we do tends to be more collaborative with HFS and End Hunger Connecticut. We have dedicated staff resources to help these groups. I'm a founding member of the City of Hartford Food Policy Commission and of the state Food Policy Council. I have chaired both of these councils. Foodshare also housed End Hunger Connecticut at no cost for their first year of operation.

We also like to facilitate community collaboration. We started a community kitchen with another agency. We didn't want to run it ourselves since that is not what we're good at. We like to use our existing skill set to help others.

Q. How do you measure success at the food bank?

A. We do it by our product mix. In 1997, 10% of our food distributed was fresh food. Now, it's approaching 50%. This includes dairy, produce and frozen meats. We're definitely a leader in the food banking world in distributing produce. More than one third of what we distribute is fresh produce.

Q. How has the obesity issue affected your work?

A. It hasn't. Our mission talks about healthy nutritious food. We were always there to distribute healthy food. We believe in a client choice model. We do a lot of nutrition education to do classes in conjunction with the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program.



Gloria McAdam

Q. What do you see as your model of food banking?

A. I like the work of Bernie Boudreau who developed the hunger free community concept in Rhode Island. He talks about the role of the food bank being efficient and effective in creating a hunger free community.

We don't operate a lot of programs; we don't have an advocacy department like some food banks because of End Hunger Connecticut. Instead, since I don't run the office on a day-to-day basis, my time is freed up to spend on other issues. My time is split into thirds—public policy one third, fundraising one third and working with Board and committees one third. We have a staff person who oversees the day-to-day operations of the food bank.

The Food Bank Of Western Massachusetts, Hatfield, MA Support Local Food Systems and Economic Self-Sufficiency

Among the many things it does, The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts is in the business of farming. Well, sort of. Back in the late 1980s, The Food Bank wanted to create a controllable source of fresh produce because much of what was being donated was poor quality vegetables like “yellow broccoli.” Nearby Hampshire College offered to donate their organic tomatoes from a research farm. Soon The Food Bank had more tomatoes than they could efficiently distribute to those in need so they used the tomatoes to make vegetarian chili.

By 1992, the “Chili Project” had *mushroomed*, and they found themselves leasing 60 acres of very good land—Hadley Loam—a US geological category for soil with amazing farming qualities. Fast forward 12 years, and The Food Bank owns the land free and clear, and contracts with a group of farmers to run the operation. Six hundred shareholders pay between \$420–\$560 a year to receive a weekly portion of the harvest from the farm. The shareholders fees cover 100% of the operating cost of the farm’s expenses, while 50% of the produce is donated back into The Food Bank’s distribution stream to more than 400 local food pantries, shelters, meal sites and other social service agencies. In just one week last year, more than 70,000 pounds of winter squash was harvested and brought to The Food Bank’s warehouse to be distributed to those in need.

Despite this impressive track record, The Food Bank’s Executive Director David Sharken notes that the farm has its limitations, “It builds community, but does not necessarily ensure *food security* for low-income populations. Although we have created an amazing community center where hundreds of families come together to support organic, sustainable farming, this project is not creating food self-reliance among low income families.”

The farm is an example of a program that is economically self-sufficient which adds one slice to the community food security in the region. The farm also engages shareholders into The Food Bank as a whole, creating a natural constituency. For example, when The Food Bank put out an emergency alert for the need for food drives this fall, farm shareholders brought in over 2,000 pounds of peanut butter, soup and other non-perishable meals. While shareholders often see their farm share check as their monetary donation to The Food Bank and do not necessarily contribute more, the farm does create awareness of hunger and of the role and mission of the entire organization.



Harvest Time at the Western Massachusetts Food Bank Farm

Right now, The Food Bank is totally maxed out in its capacity to move food, and is in the middle of a capital campaign to increase their facility in order to efficiently move more food to those in need. However, David knows that food distribution is only one method of solving the problem of hunger. David continues, “Like the Greek myth of Sisyphus, the man who rolled the boulder up the hill each day, only to have it roll back down each night, we can’t possibly get the food that is needed to feed everyone who needs food assistance.”

Does David see a contradiction between a capital campaign for a new building and the need to stop rolling that stone up the hill every day? “It’s going to be a long time before there is no hunger. We must work in collaboration with many issues to effectively *reduce* hunger, and at the same time, keep working hard to get our neighbors the nutritious food they need today.”

Capital Area Food Bank, Washington, DC Lynn Brantley

Q: Tell me a bit about your farm project, From the Ground Up?

A. From The Ground Up is unique in that it is located on a land trust with a mandate for environmental education just outside Washington. Michael Heller's brother (the director of the Chesapeake Land Trust which owns the land) is my son-in-law. He came to me with the land and suggested that we farm it. It started in 1994 as an organic growing operation, with homeless persons from DC brought in to help farm. We started it because agencies weren't taking fresh vegetables, and this was an entrepreneurial way to get those vegetables into the agencies. It's grown to more than 30 acres, up from five originally. The CSA (community supported agriculture) now supports 50% of the costs of the farm. About half of the food goes into the CSA, while the rest is sold at the farm stands (in Southeast Washington) or placed into the Food Bank's donation stream. The project has evolved to include issues of food access in Southeast Washington. We have branched out to do more than the original farm stands (in Southeast Washington) to set up a farmers market in Anacostia, which now has four farmers. The market has moved around some, and has finally found a great location in Peace Park, and is beginning to grow.

Q. How have the farm stands and farmers market benefited the community?

A. The food bank received a grant from USDA to provide farmers with a small subsidy, which guaranteed the farmers a minimum income. This provided the means for the food bank to increase the number of small farmers. The community, which has only one major supermarket to serve over 200,000 residents, benefited by gaining access to nutritious foods that could be more expensive, with less variety and poorer quality in the smaller corner stores. They were also able to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables with their Farmers Market Coupons or food stamps. The market also provided nutrition education venues at the farm stands and through other demonstration activities for children and the community as a whole.



Lynn Brantley

Q. So, why does the Food Bank undertake this program? What is your model for food banking?

A. Our mission is to educate, enlighten, and empower as well as provide food. The Food Bank farm is a more holistic way to address hunger. We have gone from distributing 100,000 lbs of fresh produce to six million lbs now. Because food banks are dependent upon donated foods, which may not always be as nutritious as is needed, this effort compliments the work done with donated foods. These efforts also begin the process of educating the community to the relationship of food systems, food security, the environment, farming and their significant importance to ending hunger.

Q. You sound like an environmentalist.

A. I'm both a food banker and an environmentalist.

Q. What needs to happen so that other food banks take on similar projects?

A. Not all food banks have the capability of taking on similar projects. Through Second Harvest exists the means to promote successful efforts. This also provides the means of informing the network of "best practices" and providing the internal connections for expansion. Getting a revenue strategy established would go a long way to getting other food banks involved. The Second Harvest national funding network could also help to channel funds to local efforts. Where the money flows is where people's passions go.

Kauai Food Bank, Lihue, HI

Putting Ourselves Out of Business Through Economic Development

“We’re just one shipping strike away from disaster,” warns Judy Lenthall, Executive Director of Kauai Food Bank. Being on a small island 2,500 miles

from the mainland US presents its unique set of problems and opportunities for a food bank. To address this basic food security concern, in 1997 the Food Bank applied for and was awarded by USDA one of the first Community Food Project grants, to establish the Anahola farm training site. Anahola was about training new farmers in growing and marketing their produce to the tourist industry. It was moderately successful, but resulted in backlash from locals, who saw the tourists getting all of the great produce, with little directed to them.

So, the Food Bank rethought and re-tooled their project. With help from the state economic development agency, they created a new local foods brokerage, using the Kauai Fresh label. Kauai Fresh now buys from 70 farmers on Kauai and 30 more on the island of Hawaii, who market their Grade A produce to the tourist hotels and donate their smaller and less cosmetically perfect items to the Food Bank. Over the past few years, their sales have skyrocketed from \$7,000 to \$600,000. For an operation working out of a shipping container in the food bank’s back lot, this is a remarkable accomplishment.

The Marriott Hotel in Lihue has been one of the primary purchasers of Kauai Fresh produce. According to its website, the resort purchases about 25% of its produce from the Kauai Food Bank’s training program, which “provides a livelihood for individuals in a depressed local economy with few job opportunities.”

Apart from supporting local farmers, Kauai Fresh has helped the nutritional status of the Food Bank’s clients, as 40% of the Food Bank’s 1.3 million lbs of distributed food is locally grown. It has also

helped low-income seniors eat better.

The Food Bank set up the only Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program on the island in 2001. Instead of working through the state bureaucracy, which would have been painfully slow to reimburse farmers, they set up their own programs at senior centers with food sourced from Kauai Fresh farmers. With a weekly distribution to 3,000 seniors, the program has been enthusiastically welcomed by the participants.

So, why is a food bank in the business of brokering local produce? What does this have to do with alleviating hunger? Judy responds very clearly, “Since day one, we have wanted to provide a hand up as well as a handout. Our mission is to end hunger. We are doing so through community eco-

economic development and community food security. We measure our success not by an increasing number of people that we serve, like other food banks. Instead, we measure it by a declining number of people that need our services. We want to put ourselves out of business.”

Ending hunger through economic development and ensuring that the island can survive catastrophes are not the only goals of Kauai Fresh. It also is a health promotion strategy. Native Hawaiians, like many indigenous peoples, have proven to be very susceptible to diabetes. With an average diet comprised of 50% calories from fat, and with 90% of their food imported and very costly, increasing availability of produce through supporting local farming is a linchpin of any nutrition education strategy on the island.



Seniors receive Kauai Fresh foods

South Plains Food Bank, Lubbock, TX David Weaver

Q. You have a strong agricultural component to the Food Bank.

Can you tell me about it?

A. We have had a farm for the past 16 or 17 years. It grows five acres of produce for the Food Bank to distribute. We also have a 2500 tree orchard that produces apples for the Food Bank. More recently, we developed community gardens as a way to help the farm's volunteers become more self-sufficient. People are growing enough that they don't have to come back to the Food Bank. We have five community gardens that are active now. The city of Lubbock used to provide free water, but they stopped. We were able to get a grant from United Supermarkets for \$5000 to pay for the water, so it doesn't come out of the Food Bank budget. Our growing season is mid April to October.

These community gardens led to the creation of market gardens, so that gardeners could sell commercially. This was funded by the Presbyterian Hunger Program. Out of the market and community gardens came GRUB, modeled after the work being done in San Francisco by SF League of Urban Gardeners. It was about helping people to become more self-sufficient.

With GRUB, we developed a curriculum for youth about the garden. We found money to give stipends to about 18-20 youth 13 to 15 years of age. They participate in a summer program and an after school program tending the farm and growing shares for the CSA and for the Food Bank. Through this program, we provide life skills and education on staying away from drugs to at risk kids who came to us through counselors.

Q. How is it all funded?

A. The kids get a stipend of \$1800 for the summer program. The money comes from Texas Work Source, a jobs training program that the state operates. We also got money from the USDA Community Food Projects, which was supplemented by the Texas Governor's Office

Juvenile Justice program. This goes to the city of Lubbock, and we subcontract through them. And finally, we receive funding through a couple of local foundations and individual donations.

The CSA also helps to cover many of the costs of the program.

We have 50 participants - some get half shares and others full shares. The half share is seven to ten lbs of produce per week.

Q. Why has the food bank taken on these programs? Why does it have such a strong farming program?

A. Our broader role is to work with the community to receive food that is appropriate and healthy. Many people do rely on the food bank for food chronically. It's important that we have so much produce distributed so that this food is healthy. We also need to educate people on how to use the produce. We do a "Cooking with

Class" class, where we talk about nutrition based on the contents of the food distributed by the food bank. Our vision has evolved based on where we're located. We're not in a food manufacturing area. Breedlove (their dehydrator plant) is an attempt to take resources available and preserve them for the entire year. Because of our isolation, we have had to supplement the food from Second Harvest by utilizing our own resources.

Q. What are the lessons other food banks can learn from your work?

A. You have to have the right circumstances. Our programs come from the questions we ask and the dreams we have. The interesting thing is that we all have the same questions, but we come up with different solutions based on our circumstances.



David Weaver

Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank, Pittsburgh, PA Healthy Harvest for Healthy Communities

“What amazes me is the generosity of local farmers,” states Lisa Scales, Chief Program Officer for the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank. The Food Bank’s Healthy Harvest program, which Lisa used to manage, is a model food system project linking local farms and low-income communities in need of access to healthy food. Central to this project is an impressive web of relationships with numerous farms in Southwestern Pennsylvania that the Food Bank has established.

The Food Bank initiated their connection to local farms through farmers’ offers to donate gleaned produce. For the past eleven years, they have been bringing volunteers to the fields to pick kale, collards, tomatoes, green beans, corn, apples, and zucchini.

Then four years ago, a local woman approached the Food Bank with an offer to buy a farm and pay for the entire food production, if the Food Bank would supply volunteers and take the produce. They jumped at the opportunity, and in the past three years have integrated 100,000 pounds of organic fresh produce into their donation stream.

But what really makes the Food Bank unique is that they have created a successful network of farm stands that have improved access to fresh produce in low-income neighborhoods. Pittsburgh is built on several hills, which creates isolated communities, many of which don’t have adequate food stores, much less farmers’ markets where Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) coupons could be redeemed. To address this food access problem, the Food Bank has partnered with community groups to run neighborhood farm stands for the past eleven years. The food comes from local growers and from a local farmer cooperative, who sell to the

Food Bank at prices between wholesale and retail. The Food Bank passes the food on to the farm stands at cost, and urges them not to mark up their prices more than 10%. The farm stands employ community residents, who gain numerous business skills that prepare them for the workforce. Many of these individuals have gone on to get jobs in supermarkets and other retail outlets. Last year these ten farm stands served almost 10,000 customers.

Lisa sees the farm stands as an avenue to promoting self-reliance and better health for their clients. She notes that the quality of the produce from local farmers is far better than anything else they receive. For an institution very concerned about health and obesity—they have seven nutrition educators on staff—the health benefits of the produce are very important. But of equal or greater importance are the relationships they have built between local farmers and consumers. Lisa continues: “These benefits from our community building strategy are invaluable.”



Youth purchases food at a farm-stand sponsored by the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank



Harvesting kale at a local farm for the Pittsburgh Food Bank

Oregon Food Bank, Portland, OR

Kim Thomas

Q. How long have you been doing advocacy work?

A. Under Rachel's (Bristol, the Executive Director) leadership, we started undertaking advocacy. I joined the Food Bank in 1990 to do public relations and in 1991 the FoodResearch and Action Center started the Campaign to End Childhood Hunger. At that point the light bulb went off in my head to use advocacy as a way to impact the problem at a more systematic level. We can have more of an impact that way than by only distributing cans of food. In 1991, we solidified our work into more than just the emergency food system. In 10 years, we went from advocacy being a one part-time position to having three full-time public policy advocates under my direction.



Kim Thomas

Q. Was there resistance in working on advocacy issues from your Board?

A. The Board now has an advocacy committee, but it was a slow process. It has taken 10 years to get advocacy into the vernacular of the organization. Slowly, we have integrated advocacy into the Food Bank's mission, which is now "to eliminate hunger and its root causes." One bump along the way we had was with some food industry donors, who didn't support our efforts to increase the minimum wage and index it for inflation. Some food retailers and processors weren't happy with us signing onto this statewide campaign. We held firm on our position, but also allowed them to come before our board committee and air their views.

Q. What kind of advocacy do you do?

A. We have worked fairly broadly on the root causes of hunger, such as on the minimum wage and Earned Income Tax Credit. We have taken positions on ballot measures affecting state budget and tax issues. A lot of food banks support federal food programs. Most food banks don't get into income issues like we have. We have a checklist of criteria that we use to determine if we can sign on to a piece of legislation. We contract with a lobbyist in Salem. We helped pass a state bill—Parents of Scholars—which enables welfare recipients to count going to college as work. Economic issues, poverty and hunger have to stay at the forefront of our policy advocacy.

Q. How much does the Food Bank spend on your program? And what is your next big focus?

A. Our organizational budget is \$7 million and the advocacy component of that is about 5%. Community food security is the next frontier for us. I see a real interest among community members in it. We'd like to help link community food security to hunger. Community food assessments have taken hold—even in some of the more conservative communities.

Q. So how do you measure success for the food bank? Is it still in pounds distributed?

A. We still measure success in poundage. Once you institutionalize, it's hard to change. The community is dependent on us. That's why Sharon's (Thornberry, the Community Food Security Program Advocate) work is so important to us. There is always that dilemma of transitioning to long-term change when people are suffering right now.

We find that individual donors are having a large impact on our work. Many of them are interested in us doing more than moving food. One donor told us: "We're so glad to be giving money to an organization that isn't just moving food."

Q. What about the obesity issue? How has that influenced your work?

A. We owe it to the people we serve to consider the nutritional quality of the food we distribute. But it isn't just our responsibility to control the nutritional quality of the food system. We're a donated food system, which reflects the larger food system, and obesity affects all Americans, not just low-income Americans. So I think we need to be part of the solution but can't shoulder the responsibility for the whole solution for low-income people.

Q. What can be done at the national level to support your work?

A. We'd like to see more leadership at the national level on broader issues. Second Harvest and FRAC have focused on federal food programs, primarily food stamps and child nutrition programs. Only Bread for the World has talked about Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). We'd like to see more focus nationally on income support programs and some national statements about growing income inequality, which really is the root cause of hunger.

Part IV: Common Threads

At a very basic level, these nine food banks are all maintaining and in most cases are expanding their core food distribution systems, some even building new facilities. In other words, they continue to go about their business of being a food bank. Yet, they have found additional resources to operate programs that take a more systemic approach to addressing hunger. Their challenge lies in ensuring that these programs do not end up isolated from the rest of the food bank's operations, or become add-ons. Thus, they have integrated these programs with their core distribution focus, for example by including more fresh produce into their donation stream while also connecting their client base to programs with broader social purposes, such as policy advocacy, gardening, or discussion circles. The synergy between food distribution and more systemic programs enables food banks to more effectively address the needs of the clients and communities they serve.

What lessons can we learn from these ten food bank and food banker profiles? Are there common themes that emerge from reviewing their disparate activities? What common challenges do they face?

Moving food is only part of the answer

First and foremost, all of the food bankers profiled here recognize that moving donated food is only part of the solution to ending hunger. They know that food banking like Sisyphus' struggle to roll the stone up the hill often seems like a never-ending labor, so they look for opportunities to address the hunger problem at its roots. They develop more comprehensive and integrated programs, making use of their food resources as an entry point.

Focusing on broad-based policy change

Thanks to Mazon's funding, Jan Poppendieck's advocacy, and the efforts of Doug O'Brien at America's Second Harvest, numerous food banks now have advocacy departments that work on federal food programs, such as food stamps. Some of the food banks profiled in *Building the Bridge* take a more comprehensive approach to advocacy, seeking to address the root causes of hunger and food insecurity. The Oregon Food Bank focuses on health and poverty-related programs. Foodshare's Executive Director participates in city and state food policy councils that work on a broad set of food system issues. The Alameda County Community Food Bank plays a lead role in various state coalitions that work on nutrition and food security issues. These food banks expand their advocacy beyond the traditional confines of food assis-

tance programs to address issues of housing, minimum wage, welfare, health care, food access, and farmland preservation. They recognize that their connections with thousands of clients and their direct knowledge of the plight of the poor give them the opportunity to play a powerful lead role in advocating for policy changes that improve the lives of the poor. In fact, their connections with their agencies and clients often make them a formidable advocate.

Food is a tool for organizing

Every food bank reaches thousands of households annually with their food distributions. They partner with dozens of churches, social service agencies, and educational institutions. Many of them work intensively with smaller groups, through nutrition education or other programs. This incredible web of relationships can provide enormous potential for organizing to address broader goals beyond distribution of food.

Some of the food bankers profiled here have begun to use their food distributions as tools for organizing. Bill Bolling of Atlanta is a master of this approach. To him, the value of donating school supplies to tens of thousands of students transcends the utility of the materials themselves. It helps the Food Bank to engage these students in broader educational and training activities. In Oakland, the Alameda County Community Food Bank also has taken advantage of its food donations to organize recipients around policy campaigns.

To improve nutrition and health, improve food quality

Diet-related diseases, such as cancer, diabetes, and obesity, impact low-income persons at a higher rate than middle-income individuals. Many food banks are now recognizing that their role is more holistic than just fighting hunger, and includes a focus on improving the nutritional and health status of their clients. They are including nutrition educators on staff, analyzing the nutritional content of the food they distribute, and seeking ways to increase their distribution of fresh produce.

In Washington, Pittsburgh, Atlanta, and Lubbock, the food banks have recognized that the lack of access to healthy food in many low-income communities has significantly impacted the health of their clients. In DC and Pittsburgh, they have responded by setting up farm stands. In Lubbock and Atlanta, the food banks have helped start and maintain community gardens where individuals can grow some of their own vegetables. These food banks realize that food is more than calories; it is the basis for health.

Geography matters

Food banking in isolated or rural areas presents unique challenges yet also opportunities to foster self-reliance. In Lubbock, the lack of food processors in the vicinity led the South Plains Food Bank to develop its own sources of food, through local farms and the Breedlove Dehydrator. In Kauai, separated from the mainland and most of its food sources by 2500 miles of ocean, the Food Bank has supported farming initiatives to augment both its own donation stream, as well as the entire island's food supply. These food banks adapted to their own geographical context and built on indigenous needs and resources.

Making use of local assets and connections

Those food banks with farming projects in particular, such as Pittsburgh, South Plains, Western Massachusetts, and Capital Area, made the best of their community's assets, such as in Western Massachusetts, where they built the community supported agriculture (CSA) project around a highly educated and progressive community interested in local food. In DC, the Capital Area Food Bank was able to parlay personal connections to a land trust farm on the outskirts of the city into an opportunity to address food access issues in the inner city. These food banks strategically built on their community's resources.

Challenges

The "Root Causes" Challenge

Food bank boards often include conservative members, many from the food industry. Board and staff can find themselves at odds over the direction of their organization, especially with respect to broader food system and social change. For example, the Atlanta Community Food Bank profile noted that "the inherent political message of Hunger IOI has the potential to alienate numerous people." Education and advocacy on the root causes of hunger is a priority of several food banks featured in Building the Bridge with the need to educate volunteers, funders and board members. Oregon Food Bank mentions the 10 years needed to educate its Board.

The "Growth at all Costs" Challenge

Food banks in the U.S. have expanded from 13 in 1979 to more than 200 in 2004, yet—with 35.8 million people below the poverty line in 2003 -they cannot keep up with the rising demand for emergency food. Food bankers mention the pressure to move more and more food, to build larger warehouses and infrastructure. Critics of food banking see this growth as a way of institutionalizing a system that was

never meant to be permanent. Food banks, like the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, often find themselves in a paradoxical situation when challenged to meet the increasing food demand while trying to work on long-term solutions.

The "Putting Ourselves Out Of Business" Challenge

Kauai Food Bank measures their success as not "how many people we serve" but by "the declining number of people that need our services. We want to put ourselves out of business." Bill Bolling of the Atlanta Food Bank foresees the eventual transformation of food banks. "One day we may not need food banks, but we will always need organizations to build, nurture and strengthen communities. That's the work that we hope will never end."

The "Role of Corporations" Challenge

Many food banks rely on food donations from corporate food companies. The companies profit from these donations through tax write-offs, a public relations windfall as hunger fighters, and the diversion of attention from negative corporate practices in regard to food safety, family farms, and food worker rights. Food banks argue that they have to work within the limitations of the existing food system, and can't be expected to change the entire food system by themselves. Some food banks are building small but alternative food sources, such as Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank's network of relationships with regional farms.

"Doing the Government's Job" Challenge

Food banks receive substantial subsidies from the federal government. Tax breaks, grants, and millions of pounds of surplus food per year all go to support the emergency food system. The government provides this support even as it cuts anti-poverty programs, which in turn creates more demand on food banks. Some critics argue that the government should be ensuring a better safety net and reduced poverty rather than fostering a charitable approach to addressing hunger.

The "Feeling Overwhelmed" Challenge

The challenge of providing emergency food and building community food security can seem overwhelming. How can an organization do all this by itself? It does not need to. Foodshare, in Hartford CT, is an example of a food bank partnering with local community food security organizations, while using its existing skill set to help others. In addition, the CFSC and WHY's Reinvesting in America program and Food Security Learning Center can connect you to local partners engaged in community food security.

Part V: Recommendations

Building the Bridge has highlighted examples of several food banks and food bank leaders that have integrated a community food security approach into their work. Many other food banks, through advocacy, education, and organizing around the root causes of hunger, have taken steps along the continuum of food security. If the hundreds of food banks in the US and Canada were to incorporate this expansive vision, it could lead to a reinvigoration and reframing of the food banking movement.

Such a dramatic shift needs resources, information, and leadership. A partnership between the food banking community, the community food security movement, funders, and legislators will be necessary. The following are recommendations to make this expansion a reality:



Hunger 101 participants play Feast or Famine Board game

National Networks Should Support Replication Of Community Food Security Projects Within Food Bank Networks

Food banks need information on CFS-related practices among food banks and mentoring to develop new approaches and projects. *Building the Bridge* is an initial step toward engaging the food banking community in this topic, and will need to be followed up in a much more detailed and coordinated fashion. CFSC, World Hunger Year and America's Second Harvest, as the nation's food banking network, can and should provide leadership in this area by:

- Establishing a joint committee of food bank leaders and program staff to coordinate organizational policy and strategies to increase the numbers of food banks undertaking policy, nutrition, community development, and food access projects. (*CFSC and America's Second Harvest*)
- Disseminating information on CFS-related food bank projects through holding a track of workshops at the 2005 conference, creating an electronic clearinghouse of reports, evaluations, and other relevant information from individual food banks, and through highlighting successful projects on the website. (*America's Second Harvest*)

- Highlighting CFS practices at food banks through the Food Security Learning Center and the National Hunger Clearinghouse (*World Hunger Year*)
- Disseminating information on CFS-related food bank projects highlighted at the anti-hunger track of workshops at the 2004 CFSC annual conference - co-sponsored by WHY.
- Playing a lead role in educating their funders about the benefits and importance of food bank-related community food security projects (*America's Second Harvest with support from WHY and CFSC*)

Promote Legislation for Food Justice

Food bankers and community food security advocates agree that the emergency feeding system is a necessary yet *short-term response* to America's hunger problem. A *mid-term response* within the continuum of food security includes food stamps and federal feeding programs, and we can unite behind legislation to strengthen this essential social safety net. A *long-term solution* must include economic justice; jobs and a living wage to provide access to food; sustainable agriculture and thriving local and regional food systems. We can rebuild a movement around an inclusive vision of fairness and economic security, including comprehensive food security. We can get behind federal and state legislation to

support economic justice, family farms, urban agriculture, community gardens and kitchens, regional food within schools, hospitals and other institutions including food banks, and wholesale or subsidized food outlets and alternative buying clubs.

Develop Dedicated Sources of Funding for Community Food Security Projects at Food Banks

All of the food banks profiled here have been quite entrepreneurial in their fundraising, in large measure because there are no dedicated sources of grants for this purpose. The development of such a stable and dedicated funding base would facilitate numerous other food banks to undertake community food security projects. Ideally, the “pie” could be made larger as new funding streams emerge (see below for two ideas on how to make this happen). Until this expansion occurs, however, existing anti-hunger funders could re-tool a portion of their grant making to support community food security approaches. While this re-framing could be perceived as being in competition for scarce dollars, it could also be viewed as seed money for research and development of new and innovative projects. The emerging focus on public health and nutritious food shows the time is ripe.

Community Foundations and Private Donors

A variety of funders could play a larger role in supporting food security efforts. Community foundations and private donors are important supporters, and they will need to be informed about the benefits of a community food security approach. Materials, such as this booklet, combined with personal outreach and trial funding can help to pave the way for this process. World Hunger Year, CFSC, and America's Second Harvest can all play key roles in this area.

National Anti-Hunger Funders

Another important resource for food banks are national anti-hunger funders, including religious, corporate and foundation grant makers. These funders can play a key role in establishing a dedicated and sta-

ble source of funding for community food security approaches within the food banking community. Many religious funders have at least partially moved in this direction, including Mazon with its emphasis on funding policy advocacy, the Presbyterian Hunger Program and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America through its community development focus. Among corporate donors, UPS Foundation is virtually alone in starting to support community food security and anti-hunger policy advocacy.

Food System, Public Health, and Sustainable Agriculture Funders

Outside of the anti-hunger funding box, foundations committed to food systems, public health, and sustainable agriculture can play an important role in expanding the total number of dollars available to food banks for food security projects. These grant makers should consider food banks as a new constituency, with significant outreach potential and organizational capacity, which can help them meet their program goals.

Government Grants

Government grants have largely been untapped for food security projects at food banks. The USDA-administered Community Food Projects (CFP) program is one such source with substantial potential for this purpose. To date, numerous food banks have applied for funding from the CFP, yet few have succeeded, in part because their applications did not meet the program criteria. Kauai, Pittsburgh, South Plains are three of the five food banks funded since 1996. With a better understanding of the purposes of the CFP, food banks would be well positioned to compete successfully for funding, given their organizational capacity and established relationship with low-income communities. Additional outreach and technical assistance is needed from USDA and the Community Food Security Coalition to help food banks understand the purposes of the Program and prepare successful applications.

For More Information

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10 Ways Food Banks Can 'Build the Bridge' Between Anti-Hunger and Community Food Security Efforts

Ideas from WHY's Food Security Learning Center

- 1) **Educate the general public** on the root causes of hunger and food insecurity, such as economic disparities and inequitable food access. Engage the public in contributing to long-term solutions to these systemic problems while addressing short-term needs of the food insecure through can drives and other emergency measures.
- 2) **Take part in advocacy at the local, state, and/or federal levels.** Identify the underlying issues perpetuating hunger and food insecurity in the communities you serve and the structural barriers that you face to addressing these issues. Organize your constituents to inform policy-makers and advocate for change.
- 3) **Connect program participants to government nutrition programs** such as food stamps and WIC. Help to lessen dependency on emergency food through involvement in government nutrition programs. Promote use of government benefits to access fresh, local food (e.g., through using food stamps and WIC/Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program coupons at local farmers markets).
- 4) **Conduct nutrition education.** Empower program participants to make healthy eating choices for themselves and their families. Culinary skills training can promote healthy cooking and eating while providing participants with valuable job training.
- 5) **Lead a community food assessment.** Work with your partners at the community level to identify community assets and needs as well as opportunities for collaboration to strengthen your local food system.
- 6) **Connect with local farmers.** From field gleaning initiatives to community supported agriculture (CSA) arrangements, create win-win opportunities to access fresh, healthy food for your food bank and member agencies while promoting local agriculture.
- 7) **Get involved in growing food.** Start gardening or farming initiative to supply your food bank with fresh produce or partner with existing community gardeners and backyard gardeners who can donate their extra produce. Help community members in food insecure areas start their own community gardens.
- 8) **Engage youth in the food system.** In addition to ensuring that emergency food services reflect the needs of food insecure youth, educate young people in your area on issues related to hunger, nutrition, and food access. Support youth gardening programs, farm to cafeteria initiatives, and other community food security efforts geared towards youth.
- 9) **Participate in your local or state Food Policy Council** or work with others to initiate one. Collaborate with other stakeholders in your food system to set a common policy agenda for holistic improvements across the food system.
- 10) **Promote community economic development through farmers markets.** Keep food dollars circulating within the community. Help create markets for local food producers and vendors while creating vibrant community spaces and providing access to healthy food in under-served communities.

For information related to the 10 points above, go to WHY's Food Security Learning Center at www.worldbungeryear.org/fslc. The Food Security Learning Center is a web-based educational tool that pulls together diverse topics related to food, farming, hunger, and nutrition. The goal is to provide a broad overview for visitors unfamiliar with these topics, while providing extensive resources for those seeking to learn more, to keep updated on current programs and policy initiatives, and to get active. Another goal of the FSLC is to highlight the interconnections between the anti-hunger and community food security movements and to serve as a communication vehicle for innovative partnerships occurring within these movements.

Who We Are:



The **Community Food Security Coalition** is a North American organization of social and economic justice, environmental, nutrition, sustainable agriculture, community development, labor, and anti-poverty and anti-hunger groups. We are dedicated to building strong, sustainable, local and regional food systems that ensure access to affordable, nutritious and culturally affordable food to all people at all times. We seek to develop self-reliance among all communities in obtaining their food and to create a system of growing, manufacturing, processing, distributing, and selling food that is regionally based and grounded in the principles of justice, democracy, and sustainability. For more information, visit our website at www.foodsecurity.org, or call 310-822-5410.



World Hunger Year (WHY) advances community-based solutions to hunger and poverty that empower people and build self-reliance. WHY established the Food Security Learning Center to arm local hunger activists, government officials, the media, teachers and students, and the general public with information and action. The Food Security Learning Center (www.worldhungeryear.org/fslc) is a dynamic web-based vehicle that explores innovations that address common community problems and are the seeds of good social policy.

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