

THE HUNGER AND FOOD SAFETY NET SYSTEM:

Best Practices and Opportunities For Pennsylvania and Montgomery County





Dear Neighbors,

The effects of food insecurity and hunger are often hidden in our community. It's a father skipping a meal so he can pay the rent. It's a mother going to bed without dinner so her children have enough to eat. It's a grandmother choosing between food and her medications.

The North Penn Community Health Foundation is committed to long-term improvements in health, welfare, and quality of life through innovative solutions to the complex challenges facing our health and human service systems. This report examines two safety net systems – Pennsylvania's State Food Purchase Program (SFPP) and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) – and model implementations of other state-funded emergency food initiatives. This comprehensive investigation offers a compelling blueprint for public and private consideration and action to maximize the scope and contributions of these programs to those facing the harshest realities of hunger.

Of equal importance and with urgency, we also aim to bring attention to the burden placed on these programs by the sheer number of those who struggle with hunger and food insecurity. New eligibility criteria at the state level and budgetary constraints at the federal level stand to further challenge the exemplary efforts of local food banks and pantries while jeopardizing the ability of vulnerable children, families, and seniors to access life-sustaining programs. In these times of fiscal deficit reduction, we must remain mindful of the community's most susceptible populations and ensure that a safety net of programs and services remains available so that the public health of our communities is not compromised.

As we envision a hunger-free Montgomery County, I hope you are informed and inspired: imagine what we can do together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Russell Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Russell Johnson
President & CEO
North Penn Community Health Foundation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents a comprehensive system review and outlines best practice opportunities of hunger prevention programs coordinated by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. As administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, these initiatives – Pennsylvania’s State Food Purchase Program (SFPP) and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) – form Pennsylvania’s final safety net to protect against food insecurity. Together, these programs have a significant impact on the food that is distributed in Montgomery County.

The most recent food insecurity data (2010) indicate that nearly 1.85 million Pennsylvanians are living in homes that have limited or uncertain access to food, and in Montgomery County, more than 83,000 residents live in food insecure households.¹ Despite soaring need, Pennsylvania has cut funding levels for SFPP over the past several years and has instituted an asset test on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) that will displace approximately 4,000 current food stamp beneficiaries, many of whom are disabled people or seniors.² Similarly, the increased need for food assistance has coincided with increased food prices nationwide and decreased availability of commodity food distributed by the federal government through TEFAP.³

The unprecedented incidence of household food insecurity and hunger, coupled with budgetary challenges, are the impetus for developing best practices and outlining opportunities for Pennsylvania’s – and Montgomery County’s – hunger safety nets. To achieve this overarching goal, the report was guided by three aims:

1. Provide an in-depth overview of the domestic hunger safety net system;
2. Review state-based emergency food programs and practices in all 50 states; and
3. Outline best practice opportunities for program administrators, emergency food providers, and funders to better serve children, families, seniors, and disabled people in need.

The outcomes of these aims are the result of multiple conversations with key stakeholders across the state and country and a comprehensive review of practices implemented by states nationwide. Together, they serve as a resource to those who participate in anti-hunger initiatives on all levels of the public and private sectors. Below is a summary list of opportunities identified.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA:

- Improve the scope and dissemination of statewide data collection
- Provide capital to improve infrastructure
- Ensure the steady provision of fresh foods at the client level
- Improve interagency communication at the local, state, and federal levels

OPPORTUNITIES FOR MONTGOMERY COUNTY:

- Promote healthy food standards
- Ensure pantries offer minimum open hours
- Make food safety training available to pantry staff and volunteers
- Actively seek opportunities for capital investments and donations
- Create and disseminate a best practice pantry handbook
- Improve reporting and inventory protocols for pantries and lead agencies
- Improve the scope and dissemination of countywide data collection
- Increase the reach of benefits outreach and enrollment
- Engage in advocacy efforts at the federal, state, and local levels

OPPORTUNITIES AT THE LOCAL PANTRY LEVEL IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY:

- Implement a choice model in pantries
- Increase the food purchase power of pantries
- Provide nutrition education
- Engage with local organizations or coalitions working to fight hunger and improve nutrition
- Engage in system and client advocacy efforts

Given the nationwide focus on deficit reduction, a top priority is to adopt a best practice approach that will strengthen SFPP and TEFAP and will not jeopardize program funding. Any policy efforts to modify the state program should be in conjunction with the Emergency Food Assistance Advisory Committee (EFAAC), which was established by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture under Section 6 of Pennsylvania's State Food Purchase Program Act to offer expertise, advice, and recommendations on how to most effectively administer SFPP, TEFAP, and the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program.

Food insecurity is defined at the household level as having "limited or uncertain access to adequate food."

The unprecedented nutritional needs of children and families, coupled with budgetary challenges, have created the impetus for developing best practices and outlining opportunities for Pennsylvania's – and Montgomery County's – hunger safety nets.

INTRODUCTION: ADDRESSING HUNGER IN PENNSYLVANIA AND MONTGOMERY COUNTY

In Montgomery County,
83,000 children and
adults live in food
insecure environments.

In recent years, as hunger and obesity prevention efforts have taken the national stage by way of political and celebrity champions like First Lady Michelle Obama, actor Jeff Bridges, and chefs Tom Colicchio and Jamie Oliver, terminology such as “food insecurity”, “food hardship”, and “food deserts” have entered the public lexicon. As defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), food insecurity is indicated by “disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake” necessary to maintain an active and healthy life, which is ultimately determined by the availability of adequate quantities of food and the abilities to access, utilize, and prepare food.^{4,5} Consequently, an outcome of food insecurity is the physiological condition of hunger: “the prolonged and involuntary lack of food that results in discomfort, illness, weakness, or pain.”⁶

Similar to the rest of the country, food insecurity and hunger are pressing issues in Pennsylvania. According to Feeding America, the United States’ leading domestic hunger-relief charity, 2010 data suggest that nearly 1.85 million Pennsylvanians are food insecure.⁷ Using average national food costs, in order to provide the additional needed meals for food insecure residents in the commonwealth, an additional \$805.7 million in funds are required annually.⁸

Montgomery County has a high cost of living. For a family of two adults and two children, the annual household income required to maintain self-sufficiency is nearly \$72,000.⁹ This requirement is reflected in the county’s median household income of \$76,380.¹⁰ Despite the level of affluence observed, there are 83,000 (10.5% of residents) food insecure children and adults, and the funds required to meet the annual food needs of these families exceed \$38.3 million.¹¹

The public efforts to alleviate hunger in Pennsylvania are currently supported by hunger-prevention programs at the federal and state levels. The primary hunger relief programs made available at the federal level are Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program; the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP); and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), while the secondary emergency programs are TEFAP at the federal level and SFPP. Since 2007, the number of individuals and families accessing food through food pantries and benefits provided by SNAP – formerly known as the food stamp program – has grown exponentially.¹² Additional public programs that include home

energy, medical, and cash assistance also complement hunger programming by helping to prevent beneficiaries from choosing between basic needs like groceries, medicine, and heat.¹³

Publicly funded programs like TEFAP and SFPP are vital sources of support for Montgomery County emergency food providers, which can largely depend on charitable cash and food donations from individuals or businesses. In fiscal year 2013, SFPP will be funded at \$17.3 million.¹⁴ The program is administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's Food Distribution Bureau, and food is distributed at the county level by designated lead agencies. In addition to TEFAP and donated products, SFPP allows affiliated food pantries, county lead agencies, and food banks across the commonwealth to select, purchase, and distribute food products from state-approved vendors and other retailers.¹⁵ In Montgomery County and throughout Pennsylvania, thousands are able to feed their families because of SFPP.¹⁶

Given the unprecedented demand and increased utilization of the emergency food system in Pennsylvania, specifically in Montgomery County, this report outlines three aims:



The findings of this report serve as a resource for vested anti-hunger advocates, policymakers, funders, and the lay public. Best practices also present opportunities for Pennsylvania to better serve children, older adults, and families, as well as procure and distribute the highest quality and quantity of food.

A PRIMER: KEY FOOD SAFETY NEW SYSTEM DEFINITIONS

Most complex systems and fields have their own vocabulary and accompanying acronyms. The food system is no exception, and this report references many common terms, phrases, and acronyms. This brief primer defines these terms and the context in which they are used.

Food insecurity is defined by the USDA as a “household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food.”¹⁷

Hunger, on the other hand, is an “individual-level physiological condition that may result from food insecurity.” The manifestation of hunger is described as discomfort, illness, weakness, or pain that is the result of prolonged and involuntary lack of food.¹⁸

Lead agencies, organizations such as food banks or social service organizations, are entities designated to participate in emergency food programs such as TEFAP and SFPP on behalf of the county government. In some instances, a specific county employee is charged to serve as the lead agency. Lead agencies work with food wholesalers to provide and distribute food to food cupboards/pantries/emergency food providers. Lead agencies may also distribute food directly to the public, although this is relatively uncommon in Pennsylvania. The lead agency in Montgomery County is Community Action Development Commission (CADCOC).

The terms **food pantry**, **food cupboard**, or **emergency food provider** are all used to describe a nonprofit organization that works to provide food to those in need. Food may be served prepared, packaged, or as fresh staple products often provided in grocery-style bags. Food cupboards may receive food from multiple sources, most often through SFPP, TEFAP, charitable donations, and food drives. Food pantries are not required to maintain health department licenses if they do not repackage or prepare food. Not all pantry clients qualify for or receive state or federal food.

A **food bank** serves as a warehouse and distribution point for the emergency food system. These warehouses receive, store, and redistribute food to community food cupboards, pantries, or other emergency food providers that serve residents in need. Food banks are typically licensed for food handling and repackaging. Many food banks are also associated with the national organization Feeding America, which designates a food bank for each region. The Feeding America designated food bank for Montgomery County is Philabundance, located in Philadelphia. Montgomery, Bucks, and Delaware counties do not currently maintain their own food banks. Chester County is home to the Chester County Food Bank, maintained with generous community support.

The **choice-pantry model** is one that allows the client to select products based on household needs while also instilling a sense of dignity for clients as they are provided greater control over food choices. This deviates from the traditional model of providing clients food in grocery-style bags.

Customer, client, or program participant is an individual or household in need of food assistance to prevent hunger and malnutrition while meeting eligibility requirements for a given state or federal emergency food program. These are the individuals and families food banks and food cupboards ultimately work to support.

The **Emergency Food Assistance Advisory Committee (EFAAC)** is a committee established under Section 6 of Pennsylvania's State Food Purchase Program Act with the purpose of "offering advice and recommendations to the Department of Agriculture on the administration of the [State Food Purchase] program (SFPP)."¹⁹ As stated in chapter 160.17, the advisory committee is composed of between 10 and 15 members of whom no more than three are employees of the commonwealth. The committee is made up of the following members: Secretary of the Department of Agriculture (or a designee); the State Food Purchase Program Administrator; a representative of the Governor's Office; two regional food bank representatives; two to five county government/emergency food provider representatives; two to four food and nutrition advocate representatives; and one dietician, nutritionist or other person trained in nutrition. Members serve three-year terms and meetings are held twice a year.

Administrative and incidental costs are costs separate from food which are authorized by the State Food Purchase Program Act and are necessary for the program to operate. A common administrative cost is the cost of distributing food (gas, trucks, time to inventory and manage food deliveries, etc.).

The **fiscal year (FY)** runs from July 1 through June 30.

Current EFAAC Members*

Joe Arthur
Central Pennsylvania Food Bank

Peg Bianca
Greater Berks Food Bank

Patrick Druhan
CADCOM

Karen Seggi
Second Harvest Food Bank of
Northwest PA

John Weidman
The Food Trust

Larry Welsch
Chester County Food Bank

Steveanna Wynn
SHARE Food Program

*List is not exhaustive and only includes members who are not employees of the commonwealth.

THE HUNGER SAFETY NET

Emergency feeding initiatives such as TEFAP, SFPP, and even donations to food banks and food pantries work together to provide food to lower-income and food-insecure Americans. Emergency feeding programs exist as the last defense against hunger, beneath an even larger safety net to assist households in receiving adequate shelter, basic healthcare, household energy, employment training and placement, and food necessary to care for all family members. The following discussion highlights the importance of these safety net programs, especially as they relate to the emergency food system.

SNAP: THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Nationally, nearly half of SNAP recipients are children.

SNAP is an essential program that provides monthly food purchasing funds to families with net incomes at or below the poverty line in the form of a debit card.²⁰ Nationally, most SNAP recipients are children or the elderly, and most recipients (41%) live in households with some earned income.²¹

SNAP – a mandatory program and provision of the Farm Bill – is funded by the federal government and administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (DPW) by way of county assistance offices.

The commonwealth contributes the administrative costs to implement the program and is reimbursed by the USDA – up to 50% of costs – for these expenditures.²² At the local level, county assistance offices handle applications, eligibility determination, and dissemination of benefit funds.²³ In Pennsylvania, this is an electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card called the Pennsylvania Access Card. Benefits may be redeemed at any retailer approved to accept SNAP.

In order to determine the amount of funds distributed to each participant, SNAP uses the Thrifty Food Plan, which calculates the smallest budget for a household to maintain a healthy diet.²⁴ This plan assumes that 30% of a household's net income is available to be spent on food and SNAP provides benefits to cover the gap.²⁵ As of June 2012, the average benefit issued per household in Pennsylvania was \$262.70 per month or \$8.47 per day.²⁶

During 2012, 1,784,051 Pennsylvanians participated in the SNAP program, a 55.8% increase over the last 5 years.^{27, 28} The Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger reports 6% of Montgomery County residents currently receive SNAP benefits. As of August 2012, nearly 50,000 Montgomery County residents were enrolled in the program, a 7% increase from the year prior, and a 115% increase from December 2007 (considered by many to be the start of the economic recession).²⁹

SNAP Asset Test in Pennsylvania

In May 2012, Pennsylvania re-established an asset test to determine program eligibility and reduce fraud and waste. SNAP applicants and current beneficiaries must declare cash on hand, checking and savings accounts,

stocks, bonds, and the value of a second car over \$4,650. The total value of household assets cannot exceed \$5,500. A \$9,000 asset ceiling has been set for seniors age 60 and over and for people with disabilities.³⁰

Though the asset test was implemented to reduce program fraud and waste, an oftentimes unknown and hidden value of SNAP is that it makes a significant impact on Pennsylvania's economy: reducing SNAP spending reduces positive economic impacts. For example, each food stamp dollar spent generates a \$1.79 return for the local economy.³¹ In fiscal year 2011, over \$2.3 billion from program funds were spent on groceries in Pennsylvania, making the program valuable not only to beneficiaries but also to grocery store operators and other retailers.³²

SNAP and Children

The SNAP program works to protect and ensure the health of children. Across the U.S., the presence of food insecurity and undernourishment is lower among children in SNAP families because their families are able to provide them adequate nutrition.³³ In 2010, 48.8 million Americans lived in food insecure households, of which 16.2 million were children.³⁴ In Pennsylvania, more than 40% of SNAP participants are children.³⁵

Children's HealthWatch, a Boston-based pediatric research center that monitors the impact of public policies and economic conditions on the health of young children, found that eligible, lower-income children in families not enrolled in SNAP – due to access barriers such as lack of information about the program, confusion about eligibility, and concerns about the application process – were more likely to be:

- Food insecure;
- Significantly underweight for age (an indicator of under nutrition); and
- Housing insecure.³⁶

The presence of barriers preventing enrollment and the health risks of food insecurity validate the need for Pennsylvania's SNAP Outreach Program. As supported by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the USDA and PA Department of Public Welfare, SNAP Outreach supports local nonprofit organizations as they assist eligible, but un-enrolled individuals and families.

Nearly 50,000
Montgomery County
residents **rely on SNAP** to
alleviate household hunger.

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An oftentimes unknown and
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WIC: WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) was created in 1974 as a response to concerns from medical professionals treating diseases that could be addressed through proper diet.³⁷ The WIC program benefits more than half of all babies born in the United States, and it has been shown to do the following:

- Reduce the incidence of low-birth weight and infant mortality;
- Reduce the incidence of iron-deficiency anemia in children;
- Improve vocabularies and digit memory scores among four- and five-year-olds;
- Increase child immunization rates; and
- Save \$3 in the Medical Assistance Program for every \$1 spent on WIC.³⁸

The program is successful in these areas by providing eligible women, infants, and children with nutritious foods, nutrition education, and access to healthcare in order to prevent nutrition-related health problems throughout pregnancy, infancy, and early childhood.

To participate in the program, one must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Be a pregnant, postpartum, or breast-feeding woman; an infant; or a child under the age of five;
- Live in the state in which applied;
- Have a household income below 185% of the federal poverty level (this requirement can be met through participation in other federal programs such as SNAP); and
- Be certified by a health professional to be at nutritional risk as measured by poor diet, history of high-risk pregnancy, or child growth problems (underweight, anemia, or homelessness).³⁹

WIC is funded federally and administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Health, which sub-contracts with 24 agencies in Pennsylvania. In fiscal year 2011, Pennsylvania received \$217 million in WIC funding.⁴⁰ Illustrated in *Figures 1* and *2*, preliminary USDA data for fiscal year 2011 indicate the program served 257,911 beneficiaries,⁴¹ with an average monthly per person benefit of \$52.32.⁴² This is an increase from 2007 when the program served nearly 14,000 fewer beneficiaries, and the average monthly per person benefit was \$36.22.^{43, 44} The Senate Appropriations Committee has noted the need and benefit of the WIC program and, near unanimously, voted to increase WIC funding in fiscal year 2013 by \$423 million. This increase supports President Barack Obama's own budget proposal.⁴⁵

WIC is an effective and essential program for young mothers and children. It is also a critical component of the hunger safety net as cross-enrollment in both SNAP and WIC provide an additional method for families to avoid using emergency food programs in Pennsylvania.

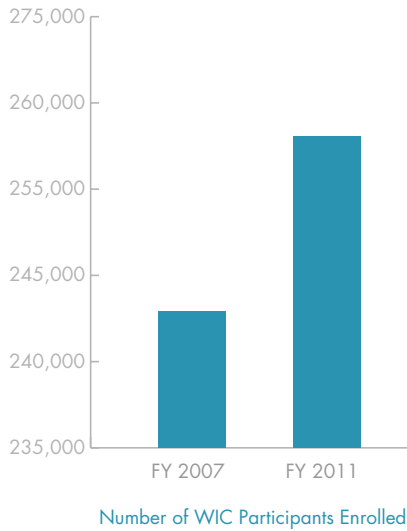


Figure 1. Number of WIC Participants Enrolled

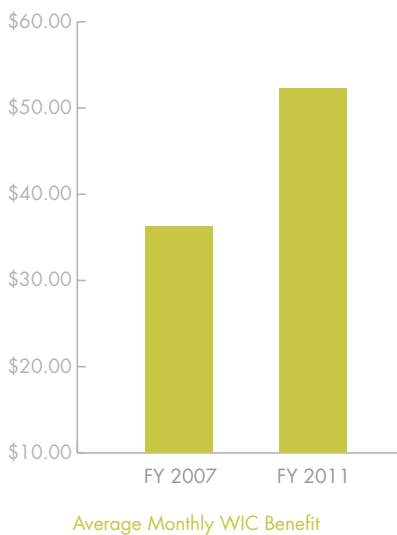


Figure 2. Average Monthly WIC Benefit

53% of
all **babies born** in
the **United States** are
enrolled in WIC.

COMMODITY SUPPLEMENTAL FOOD PROGRAM

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) is a hunger-relief program that primarily serves seniors but can also serve young children and post-partum mothers. The program, launched in Pennsylvania in 2002, provides monthly, nutritious food packages to these vulnerable populations.⁴⁶ Each package includes commodities like vegetables, fruits, dairy, cereals, and meat, but the food package is intended to supplement a diet, not provide a complete one.⁴⁷

CSFP is administered at the federal level by USDA's FNS, which provides food and administrative funds to states.⁴⁸ In Pennsylvania, CSFP is provided in all 67 counties. Funding for the coming fiscal year will increase to accommodate rising food costs but will not allow for program growth. The total commodity food value approved for fiscal year 2013 is \$10 million, with \$2.8 million for administrative costs.

The program is implemented by CADCOM in Montgomery County. Seniors at or below 130% of poverty qualify for the program, as do mothers at or below 185% poverty.⁴⁹ CADCOM currently provides supplemental food boxes to 829 Montgomery County residents.

LOW-INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (LIHEAP)

Energy insecurity is a concern for many households throughout the United States. Households suffering from energy insecurity may also suffer from food insecurity and find themselves making use of programs like TEFAP and SFPP through emergency food providers. Energy insecurity is defined as a household that has experienced at least one of the following conditions within the previous year: (1) a threatened utility shut-off or refusal to deliver heating fuel; (2) an actual utility shut-off or refused delivery of heating fuel; (3) an unheated or uncooled day because of inability to pay utility bills; and (4) the use of a cooking stove as a heat source.⁵⁰ Children's HealthWatch research has shown that children living in energy insecure homes are more likely to:

- Be food insecure;
- Be in fair or poor health;
- Be at risk for developmental delays;
- Have been hospitalized one or more times since birth; and
- Have moved two or more times in the past year.⁵¹

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is a federal block grant program to assist lower-income households. In 2010, only 8.9 million households (20% of all those eligible) received LIHEAP assistance, and of households receiving LIHEAP, almost one third reported going without food in the past five years because of high home energy costs.⁵² In Pennsylvania, SNAP and LIHEAP work together synergistically when states use the SNAP "Heat and Eat" option. According to the Food Research and Action Center, this program allows states to "maximize support for lower-income populations" while also better targeting LIHEAP eligible households through SNAP participation.⁵³ Specifically, the "Heat and Eat" option provides small cash LIHEAP benefits to SNAP households.⁵⁴ Children in households participating in LIHEAP, after

controlling for participation in SNAP and WIC, have been found to be at lower risk for growth problems, more likely to have healthier weights for their age, and less likely to be hospitalized for acute medical care.⁵⁵

The District of Columbia and 14 states, including Pennsylvania, implement “Heat and Eat.”⁵⁶ These policies help to prevent the “heat or eat” choices many households face, while also simplifying the SNAP application process and increasing benefits.⁵⁷ Most importantly, participation in LIHEAP and the “Heat and Eat” program reduces the likelihood families will fall into the hunger safety net (SFPP and TEFAP).

HOUSING PROGRAMS

Housing insecurity occurs when families move frequently (two or more times in 12 months), are crowded within their living space (more than two people per bedroom), or share living space with another family.⁵⁸ Similar to the impacts of energy insecurity, studies have shown that housing insecurity increases the risk that a child is food insecure, in fair to poor health, experiencing developmental delays, or seriously underweight.⁵⁹

Many lower-income families pay over 50% of their income in rent, leaving limited resources to cover other basic household expenses and food costs.⁶⁰ Subsidized housing programs traditionally cap rent, utilities, and expenses at 30% of income which frees up funds for families to use toward other resources such as food. Currently, only one-fourth of eligible families receive subsidized housing nationwide.⁶¹ In Montgomery County, demand for affordable and lower-income housing is high. The county Housing Authority has a two- to five-year waiting list for housing units and rent subsidies.⁶² The program is currently closed to new applicants.

Together, these programs – SNAP, WIC, LIHEAP, and subsidized housing – play an important role in creating a system in which lower-income and food insecure families in Montgomery County and across Pennsylvania are able to care for and feed all household members.

Together, these programs – SNAP, WIC, LIHEAP, and subsidized housing – play an important role in creating a system in which lower-income and food insecure families in Montgomery County, and across Pennsylvania, are able to care for and feed all household members.

THE EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (TEFAP)

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) aims to supplement the diets of lower-income Americans, including elderly individuals, by providing households with food for a three-day period during one calendar month.⁶³ The food made available by TEFAP is free to those who are eligible and may be accessed through an emergency food provider (food cupboard, pantry, and soup kitchen).

First authorized as the Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program in 1981 by the United States Department of Agriculture, the program first worked to distribute surplus agricultural commodities made available by American growers and farmers. Prior to the 1990s, TEFAP aimed to reduce federal food inventories and food costs while also assisting individuals in need. Food surpluses, however, were depleted by 1988, and funds were authorized through the Hunger Prevention Act for the purchasing of commodity foods for TEFAP.⁶⁴ As a provision of the 1990 Farm Bill, the “temporary” designation was dropped and the official name changed to The Emergency Food Assistance Program.

At the federal level, TEFAP is administered by the USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service. In Pennsylvania, TEFAP is coordinated by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, which distributes the food to lead agencies that are approved by county government to subcontract with an emergency food provider. Commodity foods are delivered directly to the lead agency by a private distributor *Figure 3* illustrates the distribution process.



Figure 3. PA TEFAP Distribution

The USDA-purchased foods distributed through TEFAP are dependent on state preferences and agricultural market conditions. For example, canned fruits and vegetables, juices, meat/fish, beans, rice, cereal, milk, and soups have been distributed in Pennsylvania during 2012.⁶⁵ It is important to note that these products are purchased and made available in bulk, with one or two items featured per distribution.

Rates of unemployment and poverty in each state determine the amount of TEFAP commodity made available for purchase, and TEFAP food recipients must meet the income eligibility criteria set by the state.⁶⁶ Some states use participation in other income-based general assistance or welfare programs to determine TEFAP eligibility.⁶⁷ In Pennsylvania, recipients of TEFAP foods must be at, or below, 150% of the poverty level.⁶⁸

States are also provided with administrative funds to support storage and distribution by the USDA.⁶⁹ Administrative funds may be used to reimburse for direct expenses associated with the distribution of USDA commodities: inter- and intra-state transport, storing, handling, repackaging, and distribution of commodities; costs associated with the determination, verification, and documentation of eligibility; costs of providing information to persons receiving USDA commodities concerning appropriate storage and preparation of such commodities; costs involved in publishing announcements of times and locations of distribution; and costs of record keeping, auditing, and other administrative procedures required for program participation.⁷⁰

In addition to food and administrative funds, TEFAP appropriations have been used to support capacity building and infrastructure needs at the lead agency and pantry level. In fiscal year 2010, \$6 million was provided by congress through the one-time TEFAP Infrastructure Grant.⁷¹

As illustrated in *Figures 4 and 5*, congress appropriated a total of \$308.25 million for fiscal year 2012 TEFAP expenditures: \$260.25 million for food purchasing (84%) and \$48 million for administrative support (16%) to state and local agencies.⁷² Pennsylvania was allocated \$8,928,977 for food purchasing, and Montgomery County received a total USDA commodity value of \$204,593 (2%).^{73,74}

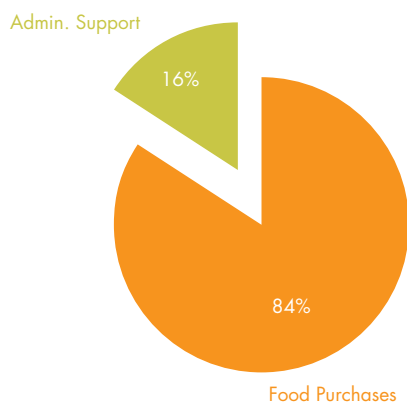


Figure 4. FY 2012 Total Distribution of Federal Funds

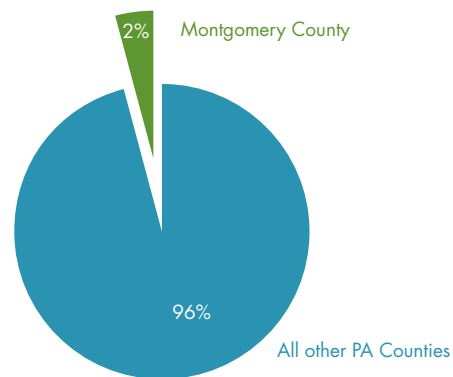


Figure 5. FY 2012 State Total Commodity Value

Looking to fiscal year 2013, the Senate Appropriations Committee has designated \$269.5 million for the purchasing of TEFAP commodities and \$49.4 million for storage and distribution grants.⁷⁵ These figures represent maintenance of mandatory funding levels, as well as a slight increase to account for food price inflation.⁷⁶

PENNSYLVANIA'S STATE FOOD PURCHASE PROGRAM (SFPP)

The State Food Purchase Program supports thousands of families each year and reflects the commonwealth's commitment to address problems of hunger and nutrition.

Pennsylvania's State Food Purchase Program (SFPP) supports thousands of families each year and reflects the commonwealth's commitment to address problems of hunger and nutrition.⁷⁷ The program provides cash grants to county commissioners or lead agencies for the purchase of wholesale and competitively bid foods for distribution to lower-income individuals and families.⁷⁸ The program is intended to supplement the efforts and existing resources of food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters to reduce hunger in the community.⁷⁹

Churches, community groups, civic groups, and other nonprofit organizations may apply to distribute SFPP food to clients. According to Commonwealth Code, Pennsylvanians with household income below 150% of the U.S. poverty level⁸⁰ are eligible for this service along with residents who may also be receiving unemployment compensation, SNAP benefits, cash or medical assistance, and individuals facing a crisis situation.⁸¹ In Montgomery County, the household income requirement line is 185%. This increase was leveraged by the Community Action

Development Commission (CADCOM) of Montgomery County to account for the increased cost of living in comparison to other counties. Pantries are responsible for ensuring client eligibility.

The Pennsylvania Bureau of Food Distribution— an office of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture— oversees the distribution of SFPP cash grants to lead agencies serving all 67 of the commonwealth's counties. This flow is illustrated in *Figure 6*. In addition, the bureau also manages Pennsylvania's food and funding allocations for TEFAP, Commodity Supplemental Food Program, NSLP, Summer Feeding Program, Farmer's Market Nutrition Program, and others in partnership with the USDA and local food system partners.⁸²



Figure 6. PA SFPP Distribution

At the close of fiscal year 2012, a total of \$15,338,000 in cash grants were distributed across Pennsylvania's counties.⁸³ The amount allocated to each county was based on unemployment statistics, SNAP enrollment, Medical Assistance participation, and poverty guidelines. Of that funding, Montgomery County received \$503,960, which accounts for 3% of the total state allocation. The other counties in the five-county region received the following allocations: \$408,190 to Bucks; \$261,605 to Chester; \$588,810 to Delaware County; and \$3,476,394 to Philadelphia.⁸⁴ These values are illustrated in *Figures 7 and 8*.

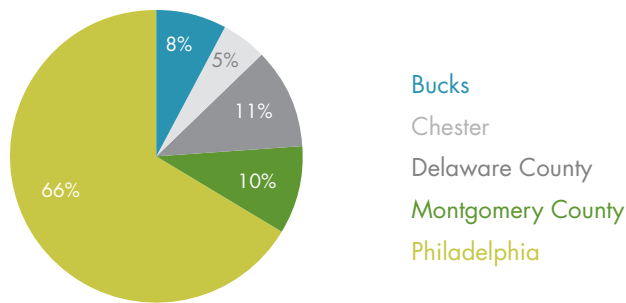


Figure 7. SFPP Allocation for Montco and Five-County Area

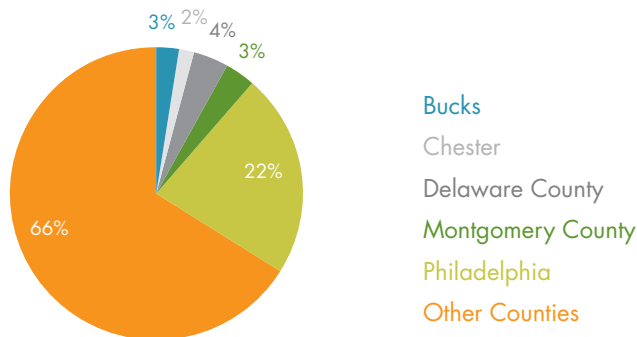


Figure 8. PA SFPP Allocation by County

ADDRESSING HUNGER IN THE COMMUNITY

Montgomery County has long benefited from the commitment of community-based nonprofit organizations, coalitions, and collaboratives organized to improve the health of residents. From the county's lead anti-poverty organization, CADCOM, to Advocates Against Hunger organized in Norristown, to the Pottstown Cluster of Religious Communities, there are vibrant, energized efforts that make positive impacts on the lives of the hungry.



www.NUTRITION_COALITION.org

Allies against hunger

The Nutrition Coalition, founded in 2006, is an example of a regional effort striving to provide fresh food access and nutrition education within the emergency food system. Comprised of food pantries and partner organizations, the coalition supports the dietary needs of individuals and families in Ambler, North Penn, and Indian Valley communities of Montgomery County.^{85, 86}

The coalition consists of seven food pantries: Bethlehem Baptist Church in Blue Bell, Emmanuel Evangelical Congregational Church in Hatfield, Hatfield Church of the Brethren in Hatfield, Keystone Opportunity Center in Souderton, Manna on Main Street in Lansdale, Lamb Foundation: Cornucopia Food Cupboard in North Wales, and Christ Church's Shepherd's Shelf in Kulpsville.⁸⁷ All of the pantries in the coalition are member pantries of the

regional Feeding America food bank, Philabundance.

The Nutrition Coalition implements multiple strategies to achieve its goals of increasing fresh food access and providing nutrition education. First, in partnership with local supermarkets, it hosts fresh food drives throughout the year. In March 2012, the coalition raised over 2,000 pounds of fresh produce and another 700 pounds of produce again in June.

Second, the Vegetable Basket Program encourages community members to donate food directly from their home gardens. In an agriculturally rich state like Pennsylvania, this program has experienced great success. Last growing season, over 10,000 pounds of fresh produce were donated to member pantries from community members.



In another effort to bring local garden produce into the pantries, the Nutrition Coalition works in partnership with the Cultivating Communities Campaign (CCC).⁸⁸ The CCC is an initiative aimed at increasing year-round access to fresh, locally grown vegetables and fruits for lower-income, food-insecure families individuals and families living within the greater North Penn region of Montgomery County.

Community-based organizations and schools are encouraged to establish or expand fruit and vegetable gardens in partnership with the CCC, resulting in a network of community gardens growing fresh, local produce for their neighbors.

In addition to creating a network of community gardens and food distributors, the CCC aims to partner with local farmers and landowners to implement best practices that work to further enhance access to locally grown produce to lower-income, food-insecure families. The CCC is a program of the Health Promotion Council (HPC) and is supported by collaboration with Penn State Cooperative Extension, the Montgomery County Department of Health, and The Food Trust.

Last, the coalition works with multiple partner organizations, such as Philabundance and CFC Logistics. Through membership with Philabundance, coalition pantries may place weekly orders of food that may otherwise be unavailable in their inventories. These essential funds are made possible through grants, donations, and the State Food Purchase Program (SFPP). The partnership with CFC Logistics, a full-service refrigerated and frozen warehousing facility, allows member pantries to order donated cold storage foods, namely proteins, from the CFC warehouse. The product is then transferred to a central location by Philabundance at no cost to the coalition. This partnership supports expanded access to cold storage foods that otherwise would be unavailable and also enables the coalition to accept, process, and store large-scale donations.

The work of the Nutrition Coalition, and many other hunger-relief efforts in the county, would not be possible without the support of dedicated volunteers, the generosity of community members and local businesses, and the support of philanthropic organizations. The continued commitment, engagement, education, and investment of these groups are essential to ongoing support of the county's most vulnerable communities.

IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES

To parse the commonwealth's complex hunger safety nets, a comprehensive, two-pronged analysis of these programs was completed. First, a series of interviews was conducted with nonprofit managers and directors working in hunger and emergency food in Montgomery, Bucks, and Philadelphia counties over a six-month period between 2011 and 2012. Second, a nationwide review of state-funded emergency food programs was executed, buoyed by lessons learned from six years of food pantry coalition building in North Penn, Montgomery County.

INTERVIEWS WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Because emergency food providers and food pantry managers focus on the daily problem of hunger, their contributions and input are invaluable. Informal interviews were conducted with key stakeholders in the region with the goal of creating a broader and more in-depth understanding of the hunger safety nets and emergency food programs in Pennsylvania. These interviews were held with nonprofit managers and directors working in hunger and emergency food in and around Philadelphia. Expertise was also sought from program administrators at the state level and with emergency food policy experts at the national level.

The input from these conversations strongly conveyed the mission of providing the highest quantity of nutritionally sound food to pantries and their clients. Many stakeholders communicated their belief that SNAP and WIC are the best defenses against hunger and malnutrition in vulnerable and needy populations. These stakeholders also suggested that concerned organizations and constituents must take a more active advocacy role in support of SNAP and WIC, as well as compiling comprehensive community-level data to better understand the issue of hunger in a difficult economic environment.

Specific to the implementation of SFPP, local program administrators and pantry managers made a call for infrastructure improvements in pantries, one noting specifically the desire to make her pantry accessible to those with disabilities. From the perspective of pantry managers, the administration and reporting of SFPP in Montgomery County was found to be satisfactory.

Despite a unified desire to improve overall execution of the hunger safety nets in Montgomery County, interviewees also shared a wide variety of recommendations on how to achieve this goal. For example, while some strongly advocated for the choice model of pantries as a mechanism to better serve clients and operate an efficient pantry, others highlighted the benefit of ensuring nutritional soundness in distributing prepacked food pantry bags. Though specific input and recommendations were nuanced based on service areas, all interviewees indicated enthusiasm in preventing and relieving hunger in the commonwealth.

NATIONWIDE REVIEW OF BEST PRACTICES

A 50-state review of emergency food programs was conducted to better understand the practices of state-funded programs like SFPP. Findings indicate that the majority of states across the country do not fund state-based programs, and in those few states that do contribute, the amount is minimal and does not receive an individual line item in the state’s total budget. For example, North Dakota allocates a total of \$20,000 out of the state budget to a total of 100 pantries, a nominal \$200 benefit for each.

State and Program	Annual State-Based Emergency Food Funding (FY 2012)	Number of Food Insecure Individuals (2010) ⁸⁹
New York Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP)	\$29.7M	2.75M
Pennsylvania State Food Purchase Program (PA-SFPP)	\$17.3M	1.85M
Ohio Food Program (OFP)	\$12M	2.08M
Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP)	\$11.5M	806,480
New Jersey State Food Purchase Program (NJ-SFPP)	\$6M	1.19M

Table 1. Funding Levels in States with Food Purchase Programs

As outlined, the states with the highest appropriations and largest programs, besides Pennsylvania, are Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Ohio. Though funded at varying levels, there are many commonalities in their best practices. For example, all four states encourage pantries to implement a choice model, and they provide resources to do so. Individually, Ohio is most exemplary in their promotion of advocacy activities and the distribution of program handbooks, while Massachusetts is standout in their statewide efforts to collect client- and pantry-level data.

Currently, Pennsylvania does not have a progressive, state-wide agriculture clearance or gleaning program. The Pennsylvania Agriculture Surplus Program (PASS) was piloted in 2008 – in partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and Hunger Free PA – and made surplus Pennsylvania-grown produce available to lower-income Pennsylvanians. The program, however, was not expanded statewide. On the other hand, the statewide Massachusetts Grown Initiative supplied nearly one million pounds of produce to the emergency food system in 2011.⁹⁰ A similar program in Ohio – The Ohio Agricultural Clearance Program – has supplied the state with 136 million pounds of produce since its inception in 2006 while supporting hundreds of Ohioan farmers.⁹¹

OPPORTUNITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING THE HUNGER AND FOOD SAFETY NET SYSTEM

There are a number of opportunities for Pennsylvania's SFPP to enhance and improve emergency food distribution at the state, county, and community levels. Together, they provide a framework with the potential to enhance the scope and impact of state-level emergency food programs and offers guidance to pantries, food banks, lead agencies, nonprofits, and philanthropic organizations as they work collectively to end hunger in our communities. This framework is not only intended for Pennsylvania; its application may be realized in other states with similar hunger-relief philosophies and programs.

STATE LEVEL

Improve the Scope and Dissemination of Statewide Data Collection

Pennsylvania should undertake an annual research initiative to provide comprehensive and reliable food insecurity data for the state at the county level. A thorough food insecurity database would identify areas of need and inform policymakers and philanthropists. The commonwealth should also provide survey materials and technical assistance to lead agencies collecting local data about the needs of pantries and clients. Though encouraged by the USDA, there is currently no comprehensive data sharing and reporting process to delineate food insecurity and emergency food needs at the state and county levels. An organization like the Benefits Data Trust, which utilizes data-driven strategies, could be a nonprofit partner in this regard.

Provide Capital to Improve Infrastructure

The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture should work with lead agencies and allocate funds to improve infrastructure and increase food capacity at the lead agency and pantry level. With increased demand and rising operation costs, lead agencies and pantries require additional assistance by way of refrigeration, shelving, and resources for manual or electronic inventory tracking. Funding to build infrastructure may also be explored through private donor matching.

Ensure the Steady Provision of Fresh Foods for Pantry Clients

Aligned with the commonwealth's commitment to locally-grown and raised foods and the commonwealth's rich agriculture system, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture should consider the possibility of reinstating a gleaning or clearance program that would support local farmers and the emergency food system. Fresh foods made available through a gleaning or clearance program would supplement those made available for purchase through SFPP.

Improve Interagency Communication at the Local, State, and Federal Levels

In collaboration with lead agencies and pantries, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture should actively engage in interagency communication throughout all levels of government with a focus on food insecurity and hunger prevention efforts. Such a strategy would improve cost-effectiveness and efficiency of the commonwealth's safety net programs and services. Areas of interest include monitoring and reporting on federal/state progress and policies to ensure goals are met, compliance is maintained, and administrative burden on those implementing programs (i.e. pantries) is alleviated.

REGIONAL AND COUNTY LEVEL

Enforce Healthy Food Standards

The county lead agency should enforce guidelines that emphasize and promote healthy food ordering when state or grant funds are made available to pantries by the lead agency.

Ensure Pantries Offer Minimum Open Hours

The county lead agency should establish minimum hours/day(s) of operation for pantries utilizing SFPP and TEFAP based on the distribution of TEFAP commodity foods and variable human resources at each pantry. At a minimum, pantries should be open at least one day a month for distribution.

Make Food Safety Training Available to Pantry Staff and Volunteers

The lead agency should be granted the capacity to offer and provide basic food safety training (i.e. fresh food handling) and nutrition education to pantry employees and volunteers wherever possible.

Actively Seek Opportunities for Capital Investments and Donations

The lead agency should work with pantries, the private sector, and local communities to seek opportunities for private donations and other infrastructure investments and to leverage the value of one-time investments or donations.

The Role of Funders

Community-based foundations have a unique role in supporting the recommendations outlined at the state, local, and community levels:

- Support local, regional, and state efforts to implement best practice recommendations;
- Educate policymakers through support of scholarly research and the dissemination of best practice models. Support training and collaborative learning opportunities.
- Partner and collaborate with other public and private funders; and
- Support coalition and system building initiatives.

Create and Disseminate a Best Practice Pantry Handbook

In addition to the programmatic guidelines from the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, best practice manuals should be made available to all pantries distributing state and federal food. A pantry-focused handbook could also serve as a resource to organizations interested in opening a food pantry. Suggested content contributors are the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's Office of Food Distribution, lead county agencies, local food banks, the Food Funders Affinity Group of Delaware Valley Grantmakers, and other nonprofits with expertise in the field.

Improve Reporting and Inventory Protocols for Pantries and Lead Agencies

In an effort to ease the reporting requirements of pantries participating in SFPP and TEFAP, resources should be given directly to pantries to electronically record and submit data to the lead agencies. This will ensure the lead agency is reporting accurate and current data to the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and the USDA. Pantries should also be granted the resources necessary to operate an efficient inventory of donated, state, and federal food. For example, bar code labeling and scanning could be a viable option to track inventory in large pantries or pantries serving multiple counties in the commonwealth.

Improve the Scope and Dissemination of Countywide Data Collection

In addition to state and federal reporting requirements, the lead agency should be granted the capacity to support ongoing needs assessments and client surveys at pantries countywide, providing counts of families served regardless if they are receiving TEFAP, SFPP, or donated food.

Increase the Reach of Benefits Outreach and Enrollment

Provide pantries with support to promote and enroll clients in SNAP and other eligible state benefit programs (WIC, LIHEAP, etc.).

Engage in Advocacy Efforts at the Federal, State, and Local Levels

In collaboration, pantries, lead agencies, and other nonprofits should collectively engage in advocacy work that will bolster efforts to raise

awareness and relieve food insecurity at the county, state, and federal levels. Areas of focus include advocating for increased funding for programs like SNAP, TEFAP, and SFPP, or encouraging local policies that increase access to local and fresh food through farmers' markets.

PANTRY LEVEL

Implement Choice Model in Pantries

The choice-pantry model reduces indirect waste of food by allowing the client to select products based on household needs. This model also instills a sense of dignity for clients as they are provided greater control over household food choices. Pantries should be provided resources to adopt a choice-pantry model and should be encouraged to do so.

Increase the Food Purchase Power of Pantries

Pantries should proactively work with the lead agency in the county to ensure full utilization of available SFPP funds as allocated by the lead agency. This process includes spending all allocated funds and ensuring each dollar has a strong purchase power by negotiating the lowest price or by using state-approved wholesalers.

Provide Nutrition Education

Pantries should work with the lead agency, the county health department, and other nonprofit organizations to provide regular nutrition education to clients.

Engage with Local Organizations or Coalitions Working to Fight Hunger and Improve Nutrition

Pantries and emergency food providers should work in coalitions to achieve common goals in an organized and coordinated way. Existing coalitions, like the Nutrition Coalition, should continue to work and strengthen their members' ability to leverage local community efforts to secure healthy food donations and disseminate nutrition education. There are a variety of innovative nonprofit, corporate, and public-private partnerships and practices that are possible through coalition building at the pantry level.

Engage in System and Client Advocacy Efforts

Pantries should actively engage in advocacy work that will bolster efforts in the community and at the state level. With the unique perspective of working directly with clients, pantry staff and volunteers possess real-world understanding of client needs. Similar to other hunger and nutrition advocacy efforts, areas of focus may include federal nutrition, housing, and general assistance programs.

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⁷⁹ Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. (2011). State Food Purchasing Program (SFPP). [http://www.agriculture.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_6_2_75292_10297_0_43/AgWebsite/ProgramDetail.aspx?name=State-Food-Purchase-Program-\(SFPP\)&navid=12&parentnavid=0&palid=15&](http://www.agriculture.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_6_2_75292_10297_0_43/AgWebsite/ProgramDetail.aspx?name=State-Food-Purchase-Program-(SFPP)&navid=12&parentnavid=0&palid=15&)

⁸⁰ There are two federal measurements of poverty. The first of these measures is calculated each year by the U.S. Census Bureau and is used to calculate the population of those living in poverty in the previous year. The second measure of poverty is called the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). This value is calculated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services each and is used by federal and state programs to determine eligibility and/or calculate benefits, such as for SNAP. The FPL only varies by family size, regardless of the composition of family members. Source: http://www.pathwayspa.org/10-11_SS_Standard.pdf

⁸¹ PA Code: Title 7, Part VII, Chapter 160. (1997). The State Food Purchase Program. http://www.pacode.com/secure/data/007/chapter160/007_0160.pdf

⁸² Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. (2012). Bureau of Food Distribution: Description. http://www.agriculture.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_2_24476_10297_0_43/AgWebsite/OrganizationDetail.aspx?name=Bureau-of-Food-Distribution&navid=34&parentnavid=0&orgid=12&

⁸³ Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. (2012). SFPP Allocation Schedule, FY 2011-2012. http://www.agriculture.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_2_24476_10297_0_43/AgWebsite/Files/Publications/Allocation%20Schedule%202011-2012.pdf

⁸⁴ Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. (2012). SFPP Allocation Schedule, FY 2011-2012. http://www.agriculture.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_2_24476_10297_0_43/AgWebsite/Files/Publications/Allocation%20Schedule%202011-2012.pdf

⁸⁵ More information can be found at: <http://npchf.org/impact-stories/nutrition-coalition-improving-food-safety-net-system>

⁸⁶ For more on the nutrition coalition, visit www.thenutritioncoalition.org.

⁸⁷ The Food Trust manages the Nutrition Coalition with the support of the North Penn Community Health Foundation.

⁸⁸ <http://npchf.org/strategic-initiatives/cultivating-communities-campaign>

⁸⁹ Feeding America. (2012). Map the Meal Gap. <http://feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/hunger-studies/map-the-meal-gap.aspx>

⁹⁰ Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program. (2011). <http://www.mass.gov/agr/programs/mefap/Docs/FY11-MEFAPCF-Report.pdf>

⁹¹ Ohio Association of Second Harvest Food Banks. (2012). <http://oashf.org/docs/resources/endorsementform2010.pdf>

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One Penn Center
1617 John F. Kennedy Blvd. Suite 900
Philadelphia, PA 19103

Phone: 215.575.0444 | Fax: 215.575.0466
contact@TheFoodTrust.org
www.TheFoodTrust.org