



Feeding with Impact: Food as the Portal to Health

Testimony to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Articles VI, VI and VIII

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February 16, 2015

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I am the CEO of Feeding Texas, formerly the Texas Food Bank Network. Feeding Texas is the state association that represents the 21 food banks in Texas. Since the 1970s, food banks have provided the primary charitable response to hunger in America. Our member food banks serve every Texas county through a network of over 3,000 charitable food providers. Approximately 3.5 million Texans, over one-third children, rely on our food banks to fill the gaps in their food resources. Our clients visit our food pantries, on average seven times per year.

Our food banks act as regional hubs for hunger relief and related services across Texas. We receive support from individuals, service organizations, businesses and government. In addition to feeding the hungry, our food banks work to promote healthy eating, minimize food waste, and address the causes and consequences of food insecurity. Our warehouses, trucks and tracking systems ensure that struggling families in every Texas county have access to a safe, nutritious supply of charitable food when they need it most.

Last year, our food banks move 360 million pounds of food. Feeding Texas meets the challenges of relying on donated food by coordinating relationships with Texas growers and truckers, developing statewide funding opportunities and advocating for adequate public resources to help us address food insecurity.

Our Partnership with Texas Department of Agriculture

Since 2001, the TDA has administered the *Surplus Agricultural Product Grant Program*, a partnership between the TDA, Feeding Texas, our 21 member food banks, and Texas farmers. With funds from the Legislature, this partnership enables Texas food banks to

source donations of fresh produce from farmers seeking an outlet for surplus or unsellable product. The funds cover up to \$.10 per/lb. for harvesting, packaging, and storage costs as well as transportation. We then distribute this throughout our network of partner agencies.



In 2013, the Legislature added funds for the **Brighter Bites** program. *Brighter Bites* is a partnership between TDA, Feeding Texas, and the Houston and North Texas Food Banks. Using produce sourced by food banks through the Surplus Agricultural Product Grant Program, *Brighter Bites* combines produce with nutrition education in low-income schools. Funds cover administration and operating costs.

Feeding With Impact: A Cost-Effective Solution to Obesity

Through our produce partnership with TDA, our food banks combine fresh produce with nutrition education and health interventions with a demonstrated ability to improve dietary health and reduce obesity. We call this **Feeding with Impact**.

These interventions include Brighter Bites, Diabetes Hands On, Cooking Matters, and other model programs that are proven to change eating behavior and turn our clients into produce consumers. Our programs show reductions in blood sugar levels among Diabetics, decreased BMI in children, and reductions in blood pressure and other chronic conditions that affect overall health. One program requires participants with chronic, diet-related illnesses to sign up with a clinic for their health care rather than use an emergency room. Another shows that 75% of participants continue to include fruits and vegetables in their diets after a 16-week program.

With obesity costing Texas \$9.5 billion a year, and Medicaid costs consuming one-quarter of the state budget, this is a problem we cannot afford to ignore, but one that we can afford to solve! Feeding with Impact programs have the potential to greatly improve dietary health and significantly reduce health care costs for the state of Texas. In short, we bring you a cost-effective solution that is scalable statewide. But our success is dependent on getting the resources we need to increase our capacity to capture more of the hundreds of millions of pounds of produce that go to waste in Texas each year.

Therefore, I am here today to request your support for the Feeding with Impact initiative.

Our Request of the 84th Texas Legislature

Specifically, we are requesting an increase in funding to \$18M for the biennium for the Surplus Agricultural Product Grant Program. HB 1, as introduced, maintains current funding of \$2.9 million. The amount of our request is based on three factors: the need, the availability of surplus produce, and the capacity of our network to meet this need.

We measure the need in two ways: first, how much food do we need to distribute to meet the needs of food insecure Texans, and second, what kind of food and other support do our clients need to become healthy and productive citizens.

Feeding America, the national food bank network, has identified a "meal gap" of 270 million in Texas, and determined that the most cost-effective way to meet this need is through produce. We further know that ***there is enough surplus produce going to waste in Texas for our food banks to close the entire meal gap.***

In the current biennium, Texas food banks will have distributed 19.5 million pounds of produce to needy Texans. With the requested increase in funds, we anticipate distributing 136M pounds of produce throughout our statewide network, the equivalent of over 500M servings of fresh fruits and vegetables for the families we serve. This is the equivalent of meeting 15% of the Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) of fresh produce for our 3.5 million clients. With the current funding, we can only meet 2% of RDA.

The increase to \$18 million for the Surplus Agricultural Grant Program would enable us to close the meal gap, significantly increase consumption of fresh produce in our clients to improve dietary health, and scale Feeding with Impact programs. We bring you a solution to the state's obesity epidemic and the rising health and education costs associated with food insecurity and poor dietary health that is scalable and sustainable.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today.