



**Testimony**

Submitted to The House Committee on Agriculture  
United States House of Representatives

**Hearing**

2022 Review of the Farm Bill: Stakeholder Perspectives on Non-SNAP USDA Nutrition Programs  
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**Statement of Mr. Kyle Waide**

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Dear Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Thompson, and distinguished Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the invitation to testify at today's hearing on the *2022 Review of the Farm Bill: Stakeholder Perspectives on Non-SNAP USDA Nutrition Programs*. My name is Kyle Waide, and I am the President and CEO of the Atlanta Community Food Bank, one of the largest food banks in the country. I am excited to share my perspective today on how to protect and improve federal nutrition programs, specifically The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) to ensure individuals and families facing hunger can continue to put food on the table.

The Atlanta Community Food Bank is a member of the Feeding America food bank network. Feeding America is the largest hunger-relief organization in the United States with a network of more than 200 food banks, 21 statewide food bank associations, and more than 60,000 partner agencies, food pantries, and meal programs. Like our sister food banks across the country, the Atlanta Community Food Bank works to end hunger with the food, people, and big ideas required to ensure our neighbors have the nourishment they need to lead healthy and productive lives.

We work with a wide variety of retailers, farmers, restaurants, manufacturers, distributors, and federal programs to secure donated and purchased essential groceries for people facing hunger in our service area. We distribute this food across 29 counties in metro Atlanta and north Georgia through a large, decentralized grassroots network of close to 700 community-based nonprofit partners, the majority of which are faith-based organizations. In our fiscal year 2021, we served more than 715,000 of our Georgia neighbors in need of food assistance, distributing more than 116 million pounds of food, the equivalent of nearly 100 million meals. In addition to managing a food supply chain, we offer other services that connect individuals and families to local providers offering services such as affordable housing options,

shelters, rent and utility assistance, free to low-cost health services, job skills, nutrition education and food and clothing pantries.

The Atlanta Community Food Bank and the Feeding America food bank network are uniquely capable of working to reduce food insecurity as part of a robust combined government and community response. Through years of growing our infrastructure, building public-private partnerships, responding to crises, and driving innovation, we have built the capacity and the accountability systems to support ongoing large-scale food distribution, providing high-quality nutritious food safely, efficiently, equitably, and reliably to food insecure families when and where they need it.

### **Current State of Food Insecurity**

Prior to the pandemic, national food insecurity rates had reached their lowest levels in 20 years. After reaching a peak following the Great Recession, the food insecurity rate fell steadily as the economic recovery accelerated and we reached historically low levels of unemployment. Despite that progress, 38 million people, including nearly 12 million children are food insecure in the United States in 2022. In Georgia, the food insecurity rate within the Atlanta Community Food Bank's 29 county service area is currently 12%.

The COVID-19 pandemic may be receding, but demand for food assistance is on the rise again. As we all know, the federal response to the pandemic was unprecedented in scale and scope. Investments in nutrition assistance programs made an enormous difference in preventing much larger increases in hunger. Now, however, some of those expansions in program capacity and flexibility have already ended, and others, such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) emergency allotments, will go away nationwide when the Public Health Emergency (PHE) declaration ends. Some states, including Georgia, have already chosen to end SNAP emergency allotments, leading to a projected average loss of \$82 a month in benefits for those enrolled. Many families are struggling to adjust to these changes, and rising costs are only increasing the challenges they face. These families are facing grocery prices that are 10 percent higher this year, alongside the rising costs they face for other basic needs like gas, housing, and childcare. Nationally, the cost of meat, poultry, fish, and eggs has increased by 13%. Households that are low-income already spend about one-third of their income on food. Even relatively small increases in food prices can destabilize budgets and force families to make impossible choices between food and other necessities. Increased food prices also mean that nutrition program benefits, like those received through SNAP, don't buy as much. To survive rising costs at the supermarket and reduced government assistance program benefits and access, many families are turning to food banks.

During the peak of the pandemic our food distribution volumes were 70 percent higher than pre-pandemic levels. An improving economic environment and critical public supports such as the investments in nutrition programs and the Child Tax Credit helped reduce demand for food assistance during the latter half of 2021, and our distribution volume declined as well. In recent months, however, the rising prices for food and other basic needs, combined with the cessation of COVID recovery supports, have put increasing pressure on low- and moderate-income families. Our distribution volumes are rising again, and over the past two months we distributed essentially the same volume of food as we did during April and May of 2020, nearly 35% higher than pre-COVID levels.

Alongside the increase in demand, our operating costs are increasing significantly. Fifty-five percent of Feeding America food banks have recently reported that food donations are down, and 57% report that United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) commodities including The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) have declined significantly this year. To replace these sources of food, food banks have dramatically grown how much food they purchase. With food prices soaring, our costs for food acquisition have increased by nearly 40% to source the food we need to meet current levels of demand. Outside of food

acquisition costs, food banks are also paying more for everything else from fuel to vehicle maintenance. And like everyone else, we are paying more in wages and benefits to keep up with the highly competitive labor market. In Atlanta, this means our costs per meal distributed have risen by 22%.

Food insecurity continues to disproportionately impact Black, Latino, and Native American/Alaskan communities, which experience rates of food insecurity that are more than double the rates of food insecurity among their white counterparts. Similarly, many rural communities continue to experience higher levels of hunger, with food insecurity rates exceeding 20% in many rural census tracts across Georgia. At the Atlanta Community Food Bank, more than 70% of the people receiving food through our network identify as Black or Latino, with demand growing significantly in a number of counties and communities with highly concentrated BIPOC populations. And we distributed close to 30 million pounds of food in the exurban and rural counties outside metro Atlanta over the past twelve months.

The resiliency, diversity and breadth of our partner network makes our work possible and enables us to continue adapting to the rapidly changing environment in which we operate. Food banks are not stand-alone organizations, working in isolation from a single location to deliver services. We are truly defined by and best understood as a widely distributed network of hyper-local community-based organizations, supported by a high-capacity centralized engine for acquiring and distributing food and other resources. We are the churches, soup kitchens, social-service programs, shelters, and community centers where food insecure families access the food we source through our central warehouses. In Atlanta, two-thirds of these partners are faith-based organizations, representing a wide array of faiths and denominations across urban, suburban, and rural communities. Approximately 60% serve majority BIPOC communities, and half are led by BIPOC leaders. Two-thirds of our staff, more than 60% of our leadership team, and 44% of our board of directors identify as racially diverse. We represent, include, and engage all aspects of our community, which has helped us build a unique level of trust and connectivity in all kinds of local communities across our region, including and especially in our most vulnerable populations. It is also why the community turns to us during crisis, enabling us to work closely with schools, government leaders, business groups and others to support a variety of emergency food distributions across our region, including the events we supported with Chairman Scott and a variety of community partners over the past several years.

In addition to our community-based distribution network, our work also depends on broad community support and deep relationships across food and agriculture industries. We are supported by 20,000 volunteers and 60,000 financial donors, who help our team of 180 food bankers pack food boxes, pull orders, manage food distributions, and address other client needs. We source donated food from a long list of local, regional, and national food manufacturers and distributors, which includes collecting donated perishable food items from more than 500 retail grocery store locations in north Georgia. We work closely with farmers to collect and distribute millions of pounds of surplus produce, dairy and other agricultural products that otherwise would go to waste. These relationships include large, multi-generational farms, as well as smaller, local farms, including socially disadvantaged BIPOC growers and urban farmers.

This deep connectivity across our community, with grassroots organizations, large corporations, and everything in between, enables us to get food and other resources to the people and communities who need it, when and where they need it. And against the backdrop of growing demand, a tightening food supply and increasing costs, food banks are working as hard as ever with our partners to feed families in need. We are committed to continue growing our capacity to acquire and distribute more food to respond to the growing need for food assistance. But we cannot do our work alone. We need help, and in particular we need access to more of the high-quality food commodities provided by USDA through programs authorized by the Farm Bill. The people and communities we serve need more food. The 2023 Farm Bill provides an opportunity for Congress to help continue to reduce food insecurity and address

racial equity in food insecurity by increasing investments in federal nutrition programs including The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP).

### **Role of Federal Support in Addressing Food Insecurity**

The support provided by and through a variety of federal nutrition programs has been critical to helping food banks do our work, starting with two programs that provide the backbone of nutritious food we distribute. The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) is a means tested federal program that provides nutritious food to low-income individuals through food banks and other charitable organizations nationwide, while supporting U.S. grown commodities. The program provides critical support, helping us ensure a nutritious balance of food is distributed to families in need by allowing us to combine TEFAP with our other sources of food. As the committee already knows, Congress authorized more than \$1 billion in additional TEFAP spending through a number of COVID recovery bills in 2020, dramatically increasing our access to food resources during the crisis. USDA also provided short term assistance through an additional allocation of food purchases in 2020 and 2021, including support for states to partner with food banks and local growers to connect local food with people in need.

This made a critical difference for us in north Georgia. In our fiscal 2021 year, we distributed approximately 40 million pounds of food commodities provided through TEFAP and other special USDA programs (e.g., the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program, commonly known as the “Farmers to Families Food Box Program”). This represents more than a third of our total volume during that critical year. For food banks serving less populated areas of the country, federal commodities accounted for an even larger percentage of their food distribution volume. To state the obvious, we would not have met the need in our community were it not for these extraordinary investments in TEFAP spending during the pandemic.

But looking ahead, we are concerned that simply reverting back to pre-pandemic levels of TEFAP funding will be insufficient to respond to the needs of our communities. Food banks across the country are anticipating a decline in federal commodities of 40% or more. At my food bank, we are planning to receive 14 million pounds of TEFAP food in fiscal 2023, representing only one-third of the food we received through TEFAP and CFAP during 2021 and a reduction of approximately one million pounds in food compared to what we received pre-COVID. And this does not account for the growing number of TEFAP shipments that are being cancelled due to complications in the food supply chain – for us in Atlanta, approximately 13% of the TEFAP shipments we ordered this year have been cancelled and we believe this number is higher in many other parts of the country. We expect to spend nearly \$15 million next year on purchasing food to offset this reduction, and we will source 25% more food next year through purchasing (17.5 million pounds) than we expect to receive through TEFAP (14 million pounds). We are concerned that this pattern will not be sustainable over the long term.

Food banks and other charitable feeding organizations have demonstrated the critical role they play in providing immediate food assistance as well as in augmenting gaps in broader food assistance programs. Congress should include additional mandatory funding for TEFAP food in the next Farm Bill in recognition of the sustained high need for food assistance nationwide. Specifically, TEFAP mandatory funding should be authorized to \$450 million per year in the next farm bill and TEFAP Storage and Distribution Funds should increase to reflect the actual distribution costs needed to \$200 million per year. TEFAP Infrastructure Grants should remain at \$15 million per year.

There are 5.2 million seniors facing hunger in the United States. The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) works to improve the health of low-income persons at least 60 years of age by supplementing their diets with nutritious USDA Foods. The program itself serves 619,000 seniors with incomes at or below 130% of the Federal Poverty Line (approximately \$15,301 for a senior living alone)

and the Feeding America network serves more than half a million seniors (age 60 and older) through the CSFP program. More than half of Feeding America network food banks participate in CSFP, the most extensive hunger-relief program for seniors operated across our network. In Atlanta, we distribute roughly 5,000 CSFP boxes each month to low-income seniors, connecting them with high-quality nutritious food they would not otherwise be able to access.

While CSFP serves more than half a million seniors across the Feeding America network, the population of food insecure seniors is growing and will continue to grow over the next decade. To expand access to this program, Congress should increase the Federal Poverty Level for eligibility determination above 130% to reduce the burden of reporting requirements as part of the program. We also recommend increasing the length of time between recertification periods to ensure more seniors are able to participate in this important federal program, instituting a self-declaration of needs to determine CSFP eligibility, and tailoring CSFP food packaging to assist with meeting dietary and medical needs of seniors. Furthermore, Congress should help us more effectively meet the food needs of seniors across the nation by adding culturally appropriate nutritious food options.

In addition to the food provided to food banks and other nonprofits by USDA, support for food assistance through other nutrition programs has played a critical role in response to this crisis. Our food insecure neighbors rely heavily on an array of federal programs - SNAP, school lunches, Pandemic - EBT, WIC, senior meals - to meet their families' needs. Millions of Americans would not have the food they need to survive without the continued strong support of federal nutrition programs.

## **Conclusion**

Recovering from COVID will continue to be a challenge for all of us. Ongoing federal investment and support will be necessary to accelerate and sustain our recovery. This is even more true for food insecure families, whose recovery will be disproportionately harder. I urge the committee, congress, and the administration to take the lessons learned from COVID and use that insight to create a strong Farm Bill that puts people facing hunger at the center. Purchase more food through TEFAP and other USDA programs. Leverage high-capacity partners like the nation's food banks to move this food safely, efficiently, and equitably to the people and communities who need it. Flood the zone with access to food. Doing so will help our families, communities and our country recover faster.

I want to again thank Chairman Scott for inviting me to testify. We celebrate the committee's interest in ensuring all our neighbors have the food they need. I look forward to working with you on that important goal and to answering your questions.

Sincerely,



Kyle Waide  
President and CEO  
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