



**Testimony before the U.S. House Committee on Agriculture
Subcommittee on Department Operations, Oversight and Nutrition**

**Rocco DiSpirito
April 14, 2010**

Introduction

Good morning, and thank you for inviting me to share my thoughts about the important topic of the hearing you are holding today. As you know, I am a chef and author of several cookbooks that offer recipes for health and flavorful eating. I am also a citizen of this country who is shocked by the number of people in this nation who are hungry and unable to secure the healthy and nourishing foods that so many of us take for granted.

I am a strong proponent of healthy foods and good nutrition, and I find it difficult to reconcile the fact of the alarming obesity rate in this country with the data showing that there are so many hungry people. But as we all know, obesity is about more than poor food consumption and there is more than just one villain in this story. Changing one's diet cannot take the place of exercising; nor can plunking down at a television, or computer or game terminal for hours on end. Moreover, I know that eating healthy requires challenges that many in this nation, rich and poor, find difficult to meet. For those who are without the means to achieve adequate amounts of food, the challenge may be nearly impossible.

Vicki and her colleagues at Feeding America have helped me understand the problem of food access as it relates to those served by the network food banks. They also have outlined the special challenge this presents for low-income populations whose diets require greater amounts of fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low fat dairy that may be difficult to find or afford.

The findings of the recently released Study, *Hunger in America, 2010* provides national and local data on those seeking help from Feeding America food banks and their local charitable feeding agencies. It helps to inform us about the causes for poor access to nutritious foods. The following are some of the findings of this study.

Hunger in America, 2010

The worsening economy and an unemployment rate hovering at 10 percent nationally and higher in some areas brought a sudden and dramatic rise in the number of people seeking food assistance from the Feeding America food bank network. Many of those coming to food banks in recent months never imagined that they would be seeking food assistance at their local pantries and soup kitchens. In fact, many are first time users, or people who formerly volunteered at the local food pantries of food banks. Many hope that their emergency situation will be temporary, and for some this is true but, many others will continue to need help for themselves and their loved ones as they struggle with chronic illness or disabilities, falling wages, fixed incomes, and/or inadequate social security and other benefits. The

homeless continue to need help from shelters, soup kitchens and food banks. Their number is growing to include a whole new class of people who have been caught in the downward spiral of housing foreclosures, lost jobs, high mortgages and rent, and heavy debt loads.

The Feeding America study, completed this year (Hunger in America, 2010) confirms the unprecedented growth in demand for help from food banks and their agencies. This study found that in 2009 food banks and their local affiliates were serving some 37 million people, an increase of 46% over the study findings for 2005 (Hunger in America, 2006). Children made up 13.9 million of food bank clients, a fifty percent increase above the number of children served in 2005.

Among racial and ethnic groups, the greatest population group increase— 66% - was among Hispanics, with numbers rising from 1.8 million in 2005 to 3 million in 2009.

Over 11 million of those served by food banks in 2009 were unemployed – with 3.2 million of them unemployed for less than one year, and less than half (41%) of household members reported that someone in the household received SNAP benefits.

When queried about the reason for needing food assistance:

- 6.7 million households reported difficulty choosing between buying food and paying for utilities or heating bills;
- 5 million households reported having to choose between medicine or medical care;
- 5.7 million households reported the choice between buying food and making rent or mortgage payments;
- 4.3 million households reported at least one member in poor health;
- 3.5 million reported not having health insurance for a family member, and
- 6.7 million reported having unpaid medical or hospital bills

Unlike a lot of other hunger studies, the Feeding America Hunger study is about much more than numbers. It puts a face on hunger, and it is a face that many of us can recognize.

Many of those needing help from food pantries are young families, like Lisa and David and their two children. They lost the family business and couldn't make ends meet even after David found a low-paying job. They needed the local food pantry in the Boston area to supplement their SNAP benefits until David got a promotion and wage increase.

Candy and James, a middle aged couple, started going to St Paul's Place in Maryland about ten months ago after Candy lost her job and they had to leave their home because of foreclosure.

Mary, a senior citizen from Wyoming is diabetic and has spinal arthritis. Despite this, she cuts her own wood to save on utilities. Mary's Social Security doesn't cover her medical, household and food expenses. She needs the Salvation Army food pantry food box to stretch her grocery budget so she can get the food she needs to stay healthy.

Crystal, a college student in Arkansas studying to be a nurse needs food provisions from the local food pantry for herself and her brother so she can pay the rent and stay in school.

Katherine, a working mother with two children needs help from the local food pantry in Oklahoma where she gets food and clothing to help her cover heavy medical expenses for her two children, both of whom suffer with serious medical conditions.

Daniel is five years old and the youngest of a family of eight. He and his family came to the local church pantry in Colorado in 2008 because it offered a safe place to play and have a meal. Daniel's father is recently unemployed and his mother is putting herself through school by working at a discount store.

Robin and Russ of Iowa and their four children lost everything when their home was washed away in the Midwest floods of 2008. The emergency shelter set up by a nearby school helped them with a place to stay and they received food and emergency food stamps to help get them through.

Leanna is a grandmother and volunteer. She relies on the food bank for those times when her disability check and SNAP benefits can't cover monthly expenses.

Zoey, a young mother of four and her husband lost their rental home after hurricane Gustav. They live out of a motel room and turn to a local soup kitchen for warm meals and bags of food.

Ginger, a single mother of four in Idaho needed help from the Women and Children Only shelter after her abusive husband left her and her children with no car and \$10.77 cents. She is starting her own business in the evenings and works during the day at the local Department of Education.

Edward, has a chronic illness and is raising four children. His modest disability pay and food stamps are not enough to feed the family and he receives groceries from the local food pantry run through the San Antonio Food bank.

Angelina is 88 years old and the sole caregiver for her husband of 67 years who has leukemia and diabetes and needs medications and a special diet that is nearly impossible to afford. When their fixed incomes can't cover the mortgage, insurance and utilities, Angelina gets help from St Theresa's Food Pantry in Rhode Island.

Lavern, a divorced mother raising six children, lost her construction job and relies on Reaching Out Community Services Food Pantry in New York to supplement her monthly social security and SNAP benefits and meet high rent and utility bills.

Steve and Judy, a retired couple, rely on Logan Food Pantry's monthly food distribution to make ends meet when their social security and disability checks don't cover their high medical bills.

The tragedies behind these stories often find hope in the food pantries, shelters, and soup kitchens across the country. And, I am very humbled to be able to speak on behalf of the Feeding America network and the millions of those that they serve.

Food access and Healthy Eating

As a chef and long time proponent of healthy living, I am a strong advocate of helping people to maintain balanced and nutritious diets and to consume meals that are both healthy and appealing. For many young families and working parents it is hard to find the time for shopping and food preparation. Competing school, work, and other activities and schedules often make fast foods the easiest menu

choice. This does not have to be so if families have the wherewithal to buy enough food, understand its nutritional value and long term health benefits and know how to prepare and cook meals. This is a big IF for low-income families. The challenges for them are much greater. They have limited resources to pay for housing, utility and medical and other necessities, which often win out in competition against food spending.

Moreover, for many low income households, the location of a grocery store can be a challenge along with the often limited variety of fresh foods available for sale and the higher food prices in neighborhoods that only have small grocery and convenience stores. Many low wage earning families are working night and weekend shifts, or several jobs that limit the time they have to spend on buying and preparing meals. Finally, too many people lack knowledge and access to information about the practical aspects of achieving a healthy diet. Too often, people are told what not to eat, but less often what they should eat, what foods to buy, and how to prepare them.

Nutrition Education: Expanding nutrition education and instruction is an important way to help people access and consume “the right foods.” Feeding America food banks are developing innovative and creative programs throughout the country to help families learn how to make the best use of the food they receive, the importance of nutrition to health, and how to use limited food dollars and SNAP benefits to achieve a balanced diet.

The Food Bank of Delaware employs two Registered Dietitians with SNAP Nutrition Education funds. A Calcium Banking module teaches children and adolescents the benefits of including calcium rich foods in their diets. Children are given deposit tickets for “bone banks” that reflect the number of servings of dairy foods a child consume each week. A favorite of mine is The “Kids In the Kitchen” lesson, which gives children chef hats and teaches them how to prepare their own smoothies and fruit and yogurt parfaits. Children also learn how to follow a recipe and measure ingredients.

As part of its SNAP outreach work, Food Finders Food Bank in Lafayette, Indiana has developed a partnership with Purdue University, which provides for a three week community nutrition rotation by students who work and learn about barriers to SNAP participation and increase awareness of the importance of nutrition. The program incorporates recipes for foods distributed by food pantries.

In Texas, the Tarrant Area Food Bank’s SNAP outreach staff partners with state Health and Human Service Commission to conduct SNAP outreach and develop and distribute nutrition education materials to help SNAP recipients understand the value of healthy eating.

As public awareness of the link between diet and health has grown along with the disturbing increase in obesity, growing numbers of food banks are engaging dietitians and nutritionists to help clients with their diets. Kids Cafés provide nutrition education for children in afterschool care, BackPacks contain instructional material on nutrition and proper food handling, and programs provide healthy diet instructions for those with medically related dietary needs. Increasingly local community feeding agencies offer recipes and cooking classes.

These and many other food bank programs are ensuring that in addition to receiving food packages, the people they serve receive information and instruction about how to stretch their food dollars, understand the importance of good nutrition, the amounts of specific foods they should consume for a balanced diet, and recipes for healthy eating.

Income, Access, and Affordability: The recent USDA- ERS, report discussed at this hearing found that 11.1 million low income people were living in low-income areas located more than one mile from a

supermarket, or so-called Food Deserts. In rural and small town areas the report found that the most defining access problem was lack of transportation infrastructure to get to grocery stores.

While location and access to grocery stores is an issue, the ERS report suggests that it is less of a problem than lack of money. Their report found that while 6% of all US households reported they did not have food they wanted or needed because of access problems – more than half reported that this was because they lacked money for food.

Although food prices in this country are among the lowest in the world, the variation in food prices among foods and even for the same food can vary according to the location. In general, supermarkets and large grocery store food prices are lower than those of small grocery and convenience stores. But even among supermarkets, food prices can vary substantially, as reported by the ERS.

Food costs vary across the United States
(Source: Amber Waves, Nov 2008, “Can Low Income Americans Afford a Healthy Diet?)

City/State	<i>Half Gallon whole milk</i>	<i>Head, Iceberg Lettuce</i>	<i>29 oz can of peaches</i>
Highest	\$2.51 (Boston)	\$1.79 (DC-Va)	\$2.47 (SanFran, Ca)
Lowest	\$1.45 (Pittsburgh)	.90 (Jackson, Ms)	\$1.39 (SanAntonio,TX)
Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA	\$2.34	\$1.28	2.24
San Antonio, TX	1.88	.99	1.39
Pittsburgh, Pa	1.45	1.19	1.85
Jackson , Ms	1.98	.90	1.57
Ames, Iowa	1.71	.92	1.55
Cincinnati, Oh	1.90	1.02	1.69
Atlanta, Ga	1.75	1.24	1.63
Springfield, Mo	1.86	.97	1.93

Filling the Gaps

Numerous federal nutrition programs have gaps that food banks and emergency agencies try to fill. In some cases benefits are not adequate; in others administrative requirements and excessive application and eligibility requirements are barriers.

I am not an expert on the SNAP program, but it seems clear that benefits for many are not adequate for achieving a healthy and nutritious diet. The examples from the Hunger Study that I cited about why people needed food bank help illustrate the point that many SNAP benefits do not last through a month.

I cannot help wondering if the basis for determining the benefit levels and food plan for achieving a healthy diet is not part of the problem. I understand that SNAP benefits for those with some income are reduced on the basis of data from 50 years ago that showed American households spent 30 percent of their income on food. The current comparable figure is closer to 10%. If this is the case and if benefits need to be reduced to reflect American food spending habits, it seems to me that the more current lower percentage reduction makes more sense..

Speaking of children, I also am troubled by the fact that so many poor children are unable to access child nutrition programs during periods when they are out of school, or after school. Vicki's testimony refers to the millions of low-income children who do not have access to Summer Food Service Programs when schools are not in session. Many poor children also go without nutritious foods on weekends and holidays when schools are not in session. Fewer children have access to the nutritious foods provided by child care food programs because sponsors are finding it difficult to operate programs under the unnecessarily complex and confusing administrative requirements. Removing these barriers seems to me an easy solution to this problem.

Finally, I applaud all efforts to improve people's understanding of the relationship between good nutrition and good health. Nutrition education is extremely important and I hope that funding will continue for programs to help people understand the value of a balanced and nutritious diet and how to achieve it.

Concluding Thoughts

I believe that all Americans should be able to eat healthy and enjoy their food. That is why I have written about "Real Life Recipes," and authored the book, "Now Eat This! 150 of America's Favorite Comfort Foods, All Under 350 calories.

For me, cooking is a passion and food is the exciting ingredient. For many, however, cooking is a chore and obtaining enough food is a challenge. This is especially true for those without the resources and time to spend finding the right foods to improve their diets. While we may not be able to address all of the reasons why people do not have access to healthy foods, we do know that a major reason is insufficient income and resources. Given this, it seems reasonable to improve nutrition programs so that those with limited means can enjoy the same benefits of healthy and nutritious foods as you and I. More knowledge about food and its safe handling and preparation is needed as well, especially among those with limited incomes who cannot afford to make bad choices.

Our nutrition programs can do more to educate children and their parents on the value of nutrition and how to achieve a healthy diet on a limited budget. The SNAP program can do more to make sure that benefits truly reflect modern consumption and food expenditure patterns and give people the

information they need to make healthy choices. Finally, our food banks need federal support to obtain the nutritious foods essential to a balanced diet, and the capacity to safely store and distribute them.

I hope that the Committee will continue to work to examine federal nutrition programs with an eye toward improving the ability of families to obtain the nutritious foods and the knowledge about a healthy diet that is essential to a healthy life.

Thank you again, for inviting me to testify before your subcommittee on this important issue. I will be glad to answer any questions you might have.



**Testimony before the U.S. House Committee on Agriculture
Subcommittee on Department Operations, Oversight and Nutrition**

**Vicki Escarra, President and CEO, Feeding America
April 14, 2010**

Introduction

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to be with you today to talk with you about the problem of food access for low income populations and the role that food banks play in providing access to healthy and nutritious foods. I also want to thank you and your colleagues for your leadership in the fight to end hunger in this nation.

As you know, our network and those we serve are greatly dependent upon the nutrition and commodity donation programs authorized by the Farm bill. We are very grateful to your Committee for the truly historic nutrition title in the last Farm bill (the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008), and for your on-going support for these critically important programs that help feed and nourish the hungry of this nation.

With me today is, Rocco Dilspirito, who is a member of our Celebrity Council. Rocco is a renowned and wonderful chef and a dedicated advocate in the fight to end hunger and promote nutritious and healthy diets for all Americans. Rocco will talk about his commitment to ending hunger, sharing some stories of people who have been served through our programs. He also will provide information on our hunger study and discuss some of the challenges that poor people face in achieving healthy diets.

I have submitted full written testimony for the record and will briefly highlight the major points of that testimony and then turn it over to Rocco for his remarks. If we are lucky, he may even share some of his gastronomic secrets.

As President and CEO of Feeding America, I am pleased to be able to share with you information on the many creative and innovative ways that our 200 food banks provide access to nutritious foods for over 37 million people served by more than 62,000 local charitable feeding organizations.

Food Banks and the Access Challenge

Addressing food access is an integral part of the mission of Feeding America food banks. In addition to food boxes and congregate meals at pantries, soup kitchens and shelters, our network reaches out into local communities as well through mobile pantries, community gardens, senior centers, afterschool and out-of-school programs.

The main sources of federal support for food banks are The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP). Though only a small part of our overall food distribution, food provided through these programs provides the firm foundation for most of our anti-hunger efforts. These programs make it possible for our network to distribute millions of pounds of

nutritious foods to the food pantries, shelters, soup kitchens, and senior nutrition programs. They also support the farm economy by providing an outlet for surplus or price supported commodities.

Feeding America food banks are the largest user of commodities provided through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). This program provides a consistent source of food that allows many feeding agencies to keep their doors open, and as noted below, helps us leverage private, charitable donations to significantly expand the total amount of food and resources we are able to distribute through our food bank network.

In FY2009, Feeding America food banks distributed a total of \$2.2 billion worth of food to local charitable feeding agencies; approximately \$436 million of this total came from commodities bought with The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and the Commodity Supplemental Food Assistance Program (CSFP) funding.

The reliable federal support provided for nutrition programs and policies allows our network to tap into a wide array of private donations and partnerships with corporate donors and sponsors that help to stretch federal dollars many times over.

Last year the Feeding America network distributed over 2.6 billion pounds of food to hungry people. Federal commodities made up about 25 percent of this total; donations to local food banks brought in some 33 percent; national partnerships provided 28 percent and we purchased some 15 percent of all the food distributed. This shows the multiplier effect that a relatively small investment of federal commodities can have, and demonstrates a remarkably high return for the millions in this country who rely on food banks and their community feeding organizations.

In addition to providing nourishment to those in need, our network is heavily involved in promoting and helping hungry people to access other nutrition programs, like SNAP, Child Nutrition, and WIC.

Filling the Gaps

Low rates of participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are another area where food banks are working to improve access. Recognizing the enormous importance of SNAP to meeting the goal of ending hunger, our network has invested heavily in efforts to help our eligible clients gain access to SNAP benefits. As the Committee well knows, too many people who are eligible for SNAP benefits are not receiving them. USDA data show that about one-third of those who are eligible for SNAP do not participate in this program (the proportion is much higher for elderly).

Our own data from the recent study of Feeding America clients (Hunger in America, 2010) confirms low rates of participation among potentially eligible households. According to this study, 88 percent of households served by our food banks reported incomes below 130% of the federal poverty level, the income cut-off for SNAP eligibility. Yet, only 41% of our client households were participating in SNAP.

Our food banks are committed to addressing this problem by conducting outreach and working with local Federal, state and local SNAP agencies to offer on-site application assistance to clients struggling with the difficult and time-consuming process of qualifying for these critically important benefits. Food bank workers and volunteers are receiving rigorous training to help potentially eligible families learn about SNAP and its benefits. They offer on-site assistance to help clients fill out applications so that they can be quickly certified by public agencies and receive SNAP benefits. We hope that our SNAP partnership with USDA and with state and local authorities will continue, and that it can be expanded through waivers and other methods to help more eligible households secure SNAP benefits.

Many of our food banks are expanding efforts to fill the gaps in child nutrition and other programs, as well. With support from the federal child and adult care food program, our network operates afterschool nutrition programs for children in low-income areas. These Kids Café programs offer nourishing snacks or meals and activities that keep children safe after school. More recently, we have undertaken efforts to reach poor children through weekend nutrition or Backpack programs that provide nutritious meals for poor school children to take home on weekends. Much more needs to be done to improve access to healthy foods for the millions of low income children when schools are out of session and child care facilities are not available to them.

Safe and Nutritious Food

Quality is a priority for the Feeding America network of food banks. They work hard to ensure that the food which is bought or donated and distributed to those in need is safe and nourishing.

Food banks strive to design food packages and meals that are balanced, nourishing and protein rich. In addition to providing healthy foods, our network helps educate clients about nutrition and the value of a healthy diet. This work includes education and instruction from registered dietitians and community nutritionists, as well as distribution of recipes and hands-on cooking lessons for adults and children. Utilizing grant awards for innovative programs, food banks are developing creative ways to instruct clients about the value of good nutrition and how to incorporate healthy eating into their diets with limited resources. SNAP nutrition education funding also is being utilized to develop instructional classes on healthy eating and cooking for families that qualify for SNAP benefits.

Over the years we have expanded storage capacity and refrigerated trucks to increase distribution of fresh foods, especially fruits and vegetables. This allows our food banks to intensify efforts to raise donations of, and funding for greater quantities of fresh produce. Our commitment to the cause of healthy eating is demonstrated by the extraordinary increases in the amounts of fresh produce distributed by network food banks.

Over the past 10 years, the volume of privately funded and donated fresh fruits and vegetables that Feeding America food banks distribute to the needy has nearly tripled - growing from 150 million lbs. in 1999 to over 430 million lbs. of fresh produce in 2009. Accompanying this are community garden projects and leasing arrangements with local farmers to harvest their food products.

Finally, our national office closely monitors product recalls and issues recall alerts to food banks immediately when there is a USDA or industry food product recall. In every case, food banks and affiliated agencies go through their inventory to remove and destroy recalled products. This may sound simple, but it involves a significant investment of time and effort when the food product, like the recent peanut recall, is contained in a variety of end products like cereals, nutrition bars and other foods.

Commodity Distribution Programs

TEFAP: As you know, the 2008 Farm bill contained a substantial increase in mandatory funding to buy commodities for TEFAP. This increase helped offset erosion in the value of funding for commodities that had been frozen at the same level for the previous five years. More significantly, it offset much of the loss in bonus commodity donations that had been falling dramatically for several years and which emergency feeding agencies had come to rely upon.

The funding increase in the new Farm law was a blessing and helped emergency feeding agencies replenish their declining stocks, at least for awhile. By FY2009, however, as economic conditions

continued to worsen and more and more people were seeking food assistance, emergency feeding agencies again were facing food shortages. The Congress included \$100 million in additional funding for TEFAP commodity purchases for FY2009-10 in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). This has enabled many emergency feeding agencies to continue serving the growing numbers of people coming to them for help.

In 2010, economic conditions, although improving, are not expected to significantly alter the bleak unemployment figures, which continue to hover around 10% nationally and much higher in hard hit regions of the country. The additional commodities bought with the ARRA funding will run out early this April. Meanwhile, changes in the farm economy and a cap on the use of Section 32 funds for bonus commodity purchases are expected to substantially reduce bonus commodity donations to TEFAP. Bonus commodities provided for emergency feeding programs in FY2010 are expected to be about \$181 million, less than half the FY2009 level, and are projected to fall even lower in FY2011.

There is no indication that the numbers of people coming to food banks for help (already at record levels) will abate while unemployment remains high, which most economists predict will be the case for some time to come. Many food banks and emergency feeding agencies already are struggling and well may be facing the prospect of empty or seriously depleted food stocks by the end of the year if no additional commodities are forthcoming.

Feeding America estimates that an additional \$250 million in commodity assistance is needed to cover the TEFAP commodity shortfall this year and to ensure that service can be maintained for the rest of this fiscal year. We recommend that the Congress approve this "emergency funding" as quickly as possible and hope that the House Agriculture Committee will support this proposal.

Infrastructure Grants: The Administration budget request proposes to zero out the \$6 million in funding for TEFAP infrastructure grants that were authorized by the 2008 Farm bill and finally funded by FY2010 agriculture appropriations. These grants, just recently announced by the Administration for FY2010, are critically important to help food banks with the costs of maintaining and improving their facilities and equipment and ensuring safe food storage and handling. Many of our food banks, particularly those located in rural areas are struggling to update their facilities and equipment. Efforts to increase the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables for distribution are hindered by outdated refrigeration and storage units. Moreover, the poor economy in many regions is handicapping efforts to raise sufficient private funding for capital improvement projects. We hope that the Committee will support the continuation of funding for these projects when the House takes up FY2011 agriculture appropriations legislation.

Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP): More than one-third of Feeding America food banks operate CSFPs in states approved for this program. We are pleased that your Committee has long-supported the CSFP, which is critically important to so many needy elderly and young mothers and children. The addition of new states to this program last year has opened the way for many more hungry people to receive the nourishment they need. It is our hope that caseloads in states with programs can be increased and that over time more states and localities will be able to offer CSFPs. The decline in bonus commodities available to this and other nutrition programs is worrisome, and we hope that this does not impede progress in reaching the many people, especially seniors, who require the nutritious supplemental food packages provided by the CSFP.

Innovative Programs for Children

Child Nutrition programs are the foundation upon which to build a nation where all of our children have access to the nutritious foods essential to help them learn and thrive and lead healthy and productive lives. It is critically important that comprehensive child nutrition reauthorization legislation be enacted this year, and that enough funding be provided to make this happen.

Too many low-income children in this country are unable to access child nutrition programs when they need them. For example, only 2.2 million children participate in the Summer Food Service Program, which is targeted to children living in low-income areas. This compares to some 19 million low-income children receiving free and reduced price school lunches during the school year. Summer food and child care feeding programs are handicapped by excessive sponsor requirements, proscriptive eligibility rules and administrative and paperwork burdens that limit access to these programs and reduce cost efficiencies. At a time when state and local governments are struggling with budget cutbacks, these administrative barriers hinder sponsorship of federal nutrition programs that could help millions of children without adding fiscal burdens to states and communities.

Recognizing the many gaps in our child nutrition programs, our food banks are extensively engaged in promoting and feeding children through innovative child nutrition programs. Along with providing food to over 14 million children through our food pantries, shelters and soup kitchens, our food banks operate more than 1,600 Kids Cafes serving more than 115,000 children each year. These after school programs are able to operate with support from the Child and Adult Care Food program and private donations. They are run in a wide variety of local settings like Boys and Girls clubs, churches, community centers, and schools. Kids Café programs had their origin in Savannah, Georgia, in 1989 after two young brothers were found late one night in a housing project community kitchen looking for something to eat.

More recently, our food banks have taken on the issue of gaps in our child nutrition programs by initiating weekend feeding programs for low income children. These programs, commonly known as Backpack programs, operate in partnership with local schools and community agencies and provide child-friendly, non-perishable, nutritious foods for children to take home on the last day before a weekend or school holiday. Backpack programs originated in Little Rock, Arkansas after a school nurse contacted the local food bank to ask for help when she noticed that many children were coming to her on Mondays complaining of stomach aches and dizziness. There now are more than 140 Feeding America members and partner organizations operating 3,600 Backpack programs that serve more than 190,000 children.

The Administration FY2011 proposes to increase funding for child nutrition programs by \$1 billion annually (or \$10 billion over 10 years) to make changes to these programs that will help achieve the President's goal of ending childhood hunger by 2015. Feeding America fully supports the President's ambitious and achievable goal and budget proposal.

Feeding America recommends that changes to child nutrition programs be accomplished this year to expand their quality and reach to all children, and that these changes fill the gaps in current services for low-income children. Our priorities call for (1) expanding the reach and quality of foods for hungry

children in schools, child care, After school and summer sites; (2) providing start-up funding and outreach to increase the number of Summer Food Service programs in unserved and underserved areas; (3) funding innovative programs, like the Backpack Program, to help hungry children when they do not have access to nutrition programs, and (4) better coordinating programs and streamlining and simplifying rules that prevent or hinder the operation of child nutrition programs.

We hope that the Agriculture Committee of the House will support new funding to make the needed improvements to child nutrition programs so that all of our children can grow and learn and lead healthy and productive lives.

Concluding Thoughts

Food Banks and local feeding agencies often are the first to see the devastated faces of those who never imagined that they would be seeking help at a food pantry, shelter, or soup kitchen. The charitable sector has truly stepped up to try and serve the growing numbers of those in this nation who are hungry. Nonetheless, as we learned in the Great Depression and are reminded of in the current Great Recession, charity alone cannot meet the need.

The government and charitable sector must work together and Federal nutrition programs must be the solid foundation upon which to finish the work of finally ending the scourge of hunger in this nation. No one in this country should have to wonder where their next meal will come from, or how they will afford to buy nutritious foods for their families.

Thank you so much for allowing me to present this testimony. I hope you will not hesitate to contact me or my colleagues in our Washington policy office if we can be of assistance in helping you and the President finally put an end to hunger among children and for all of those living in our great nation. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.