

**U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Agriculture  
Subcommittee on Nutrition**

**The Past, Present & Future of SNAP:  
The World of Nutrition, Government Duplication and Unmet Need**

Testimony of  
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Chairwoman Walorski, Ranking Member McGovern, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

I am Sherrie Tussler, Executive Director of Hunger Task Force, an anti-hunger public policy organization located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. During my 17 years in this role, our organization has grown to become recognized as Wisconsin's anti-hunger leader, and for forwarding the belief that everyone has the right to adequate food obtained with dignity.

I became an adult as the 1981 recession took hold of our economy and social programs disintegrated. I know what our state looked like before homeless shelters and food banks. I have lived and worked in Milwaukee since 1988. For 10 years I directed a homeless shelter that sheltered, fed, and educated, while holding out hope of ending homelessness in the U.S. I have witnessed welfare reforms, including the implementation of Wisconsin Works and its resulting hardship for women and children. Within my current job, I have become an issue expert on most federal nutrition programs. My staff of advocates are compelled to end hunger. Our food bank has a rich tradition of service to the community. Reflecting Wisconsin traditions, we are independent, free and local. Our values are justice, dignity, compassion and stewardship. I believe we can and should end poverty in America.

On a good day, I have helped several hundred seniors receive first-time help through the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), watched as children were fed breakfast in their classroom, and seen new refugees successfully apply for and receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. On bad days, I have witnessed near-riot conditions over disaster SNAP benefits, listened to seniors left homeless after the Farm Bill eliminated their standard household utility allowance and observed children turning their shirts inside out in hopes of fooling summer staff into giving them a second sandwich.

I have grown accustomed to explaining the reach and limits of the federal nutrition assistance programs. I know that you have concerns that the federal nutrition programs are duplicative. You

want to save tax dollars and create efficiencies. Today I will explain where the federal nutrition assistance programs overlap one another and why. I will also detail their shortfalls.

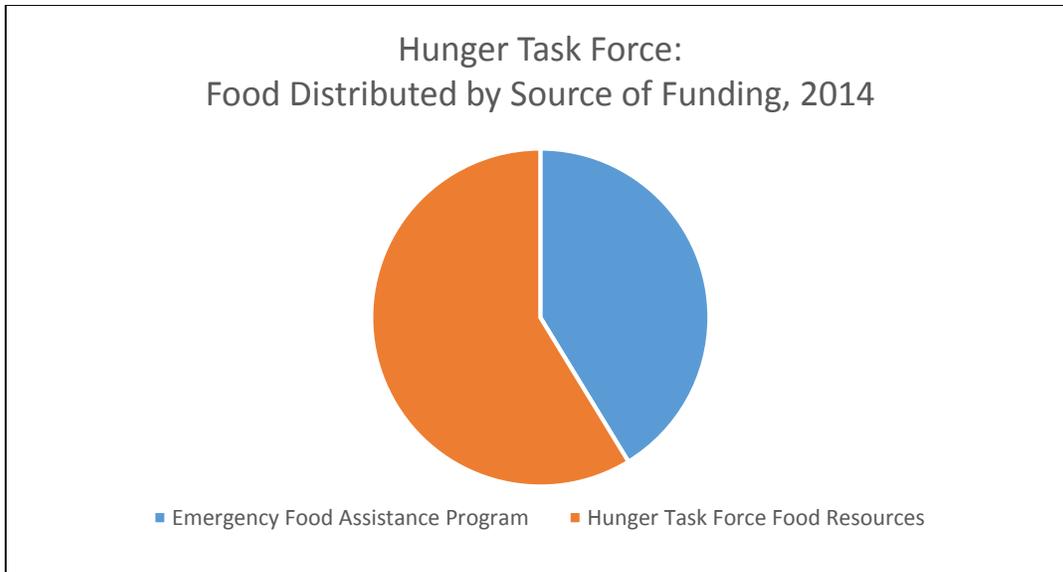
The federal nutrition assistance programs are a patchwork of underfunded programs layered around the shortfalls of SNAP and the National School Lunch Program. And while these programs serve certain populations well, they also fall short of their intent due to limits of funding or regulation. As such, concern for program duplication should be balanced with the knowledge that the federal nutrition programs do not meet the need.

Funding for these programs is wholly inadequate. The evidence of this is the billions of dollars that the private sector plows into buoying their shortfalls. Hunger Task Force has convinced donors to substantially backfill what these programs don't provide in order to combat hunger in Wisconsin.

Last year, local corporations, foundations and individuals donated \$6,174,969 to Hunger Task Force to fund shortfalls of the federal nutrition assistance programs. These grants are a fabulous testament to the will of local people to improve their community, but should also be viewed by this Committee as unsustainable gifts, offered to meet unmet need—need that is truly the responsibility of government.

The purpose of today's hearing is to discuss duplication and unmet need in the federal nutrition assistance programs. Hunger Task Force administers The Emergency Food Assistance Program, the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, the Emergency Food and Shelter Program, a SNAP Education program, a SNAP Outreach program, as well as organizing a collaboration of Summer Food Service Program providers. As I describe each of these programs I will note their reach and their shortfalls.

Hunger Task Force's mission is to feed people in need today and to promote social policies that achieve a hunger-free community tomorrow. We feed people today by operating a food bank that delivers nearly 10 million pounds of food each year. We combine federal commodity foods from The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) with donated and purchased food in order to assure our network of 74 food pantries, soup kitchens and homeless shelters have sufficient healthy foods to provide breakfast, lunch and supper foods to meet a three to five day emergency. Last year Hunger Task Force purchased eight full semi-truckloads of food with contributions and secured another 1,712,322 pounds (equal to 40 semi-truckloads) of food through large scale community food drives in order to satisfy TEFAP shortfalls. TEFAP supplies 41% of the total food distribution; Hunger Task Force resources account for the remaining 59%. The State of Wisconsin estimates that a household visiting a food pantry in Milwaukee receives 27 pounds of food each month. Pantry visits are limited to once per month.



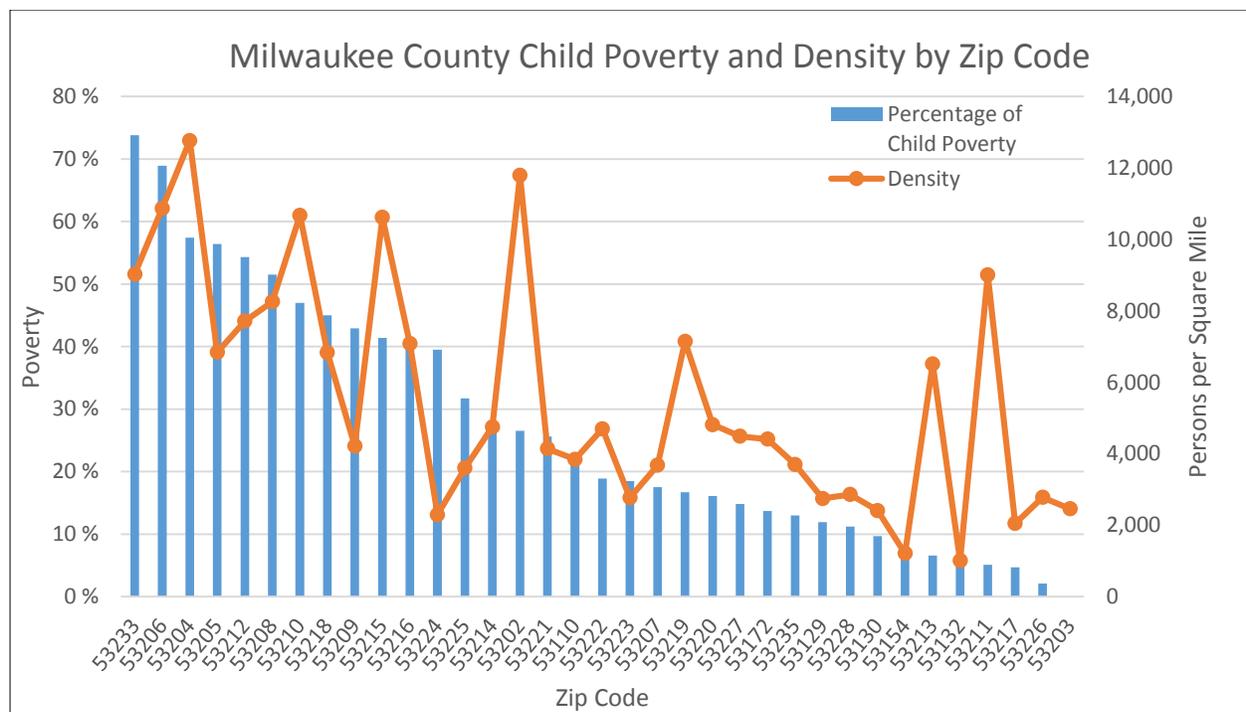
Hunger Task Force offers wholesome, nutritious foods and we mandate that food pantries pack bags according to household size, diet, religion and culture. Believing that we will not end hunger if we are motivated by profit, we never charge charities for food. We value dignified and confidential treatment of all people and work to build and support the network of charities in order to create a sustainable safety net of services for Milwaukee. Supplemental infant formula is provided to emergency food pantries to meet the shortfalls caused by limits in the Women, Infant and Children’s Program (WIC). Infants six months and older often need more formula than WIC provides. Assurant Health in Milwaukee donates \$50,000 annually to meet this need.

The Emergency Food and Shelter program, which is funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), allocates federal funds for the provision of food and shelter. FEMA provides \$50 million annually for food pantries, soup kitchens and homeless shelters. We serve as the administrative agent for this program in Milwaukee. Two years ago, FEMA so elongated the process of distributing funds that we have effectively skipped a year of funding. Hunger Task Force distributed \$174,286 in grants, effectively "fronting" funds to our pantries to keep them from ending their fiscal year in deficit.

Hunger Task Force serves 8,803 low-income seniors each month with boxes of commodities through the Commodity Supplemental Food Program. These boxes of commodity foods are packed by volunteers and delivered directly to seniors at meal sites and senior subsidized housing. The foods inside the box are highly regulated. Each box must contain: one loaf of low fat cheese, four cans of vegetables, two cans of fruit, one can of meat, one jar of peanut butter, two boxes of breakfast cereal, two pounds of rice or pasta , two liters of juice, two quarts of boxed liquid milk and one bag of instantized milk (every other month.) Although the intent is to sustain healthy diets, the cost of foods combined with influence of producers on buyers results in a distortion of the program. Seniors receive canned beef stew that is practically inedible, and grapefruit juice which could actually harm some of them depending on their medication. The sole fresh food is the loaf of low fat cheese.

Ending future hunger requires that we diligently monitor the administration of the federal nutrition programs ultimately operated by State and local agencies. Hunger Task Force is data-driven. We examine need based upon poverty by population using American Community Survey (ACS) data and look to program location and participation as an indicators of program effectiveness. We rely on the USDA for measures of quality for SNAP. For the federal programs we do not administer, we work to influence open access, increase enrollment and assure quality in service.

A case in point: Child Hunger. While poverty is a major issue in Wisconsin<sup>1</sup>, child poverty is even more pronounced in the City of Milwaukee, Wisconsin's largest city. Nearly two out of five children (42.8%<sup>2</sup>) in Milwaukee are in households below the poverty line, compared to 29.1% for all age groups. If this child poverty number seems high, it is. It is nearly double the child poverty rate for the U.S. as a whole. The chart below shows that most of the zip codes ranking highest for child poverty are also the most population dense.



Children living in poverty are more likely to experience hunger, inadequate nutrition and food insecurity. Households with children are nearly twice as likely to experience food insecurity. The percentage of Wisconsin elementary and secondary school students eligible for free or reduced-price meals increased 13.8 points over the last decade, from 29.5% in 2003-04 to 43.4% in 2013-14. The percentage is even higher in Milwaukee where 83% of students are eligible. Furthermore, in 44% of the city's schools, nearly every student is from a family living close to or

<sup>1</sup> For more on poverty in Wisconsin, see: <http://www.irp.wisc.edu/research/WisconsinPoverty/pdfs/WI-PovertyReport2014.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Poverty statistics used in this paper are provided by the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2009-2013 estimates.

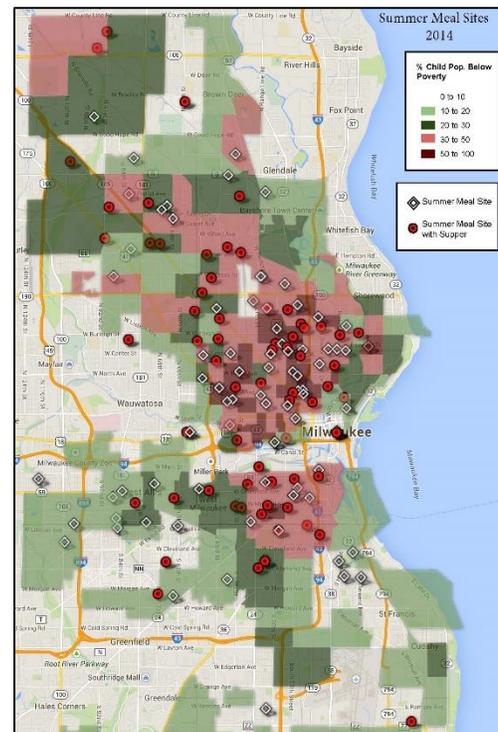
in poverty. Data like this helps Hunger Task Force to advocate for effective programs to meet the need.

A primary goal of our organization is ending childhood hunger. School meals programs combat childhood hunger by providing healthy, normal access to foods. During the school year, the School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program serve children and youth effectively. Hunger Task Force has determined that schools that serve breakfast in the classroom, after the first bell, show the greatest promise for full participation in School Breakfast. There is plenty of evidence to prove that feeding children breakfast enhances their educational success. With the advent of the recent Community Eligibility Provision, schools and full school districts with high concentrations of poor children as measured by the share participating in SNAP can serve free meals to all children, reducing the paperwork burden and fee collection. This should be interesting to the Committee because it represents how SNAP can be an opportunity for cost savings in other programs.

During the summer months, when children are not in school and receiving school meals, Hunger Task Force organizes a collaboration of school districts, meal providers, congregations, nonprofit charities and youth service organizations to provide free summer meals. For the past ten years, this group has worked collegially to target services and meals to children in high need areas and eliminate duplication of service.

Our goal is to feed as many children and youth through the Summer Food Service Program as possible. Because this program does not offer both lunch and supper, Kohl's Department Stores provides \$500,000 annually in funding for suppers through a program called "Kohl's Serving Up Supper For Kids." Nearly a million meals are served each summer in Milwaukee County. While the Committee is concerned with duplication it should note that the Summer Food Service Program has a significant shortfall: it does not provide three meals per day to vulnerable children. Last year, the Summer Food Service Program funded 648,444 meals in Milwaukee, while Kohl's, Northwestern Mutual Foundation and individual donors funded 180,238 suppers and the Salvation Army provided 114,899 through its Feed the Kids program, also ineligible for reimbursement through the Summer Food Service Program.

Our collaboration—called the "Milwaukee Model" by the USDA—has received a special circumstances waiver related to high crime areas. Children in these areas are allowed to "grab and go" meals if they are inclined due to the extreme incidence of violent crime. Violent crimes include arson, rape, murder and aggravated assault. These are daily concerns of children and families in specific neighborhoods in Milwaukee. Allowing program flexibility and special

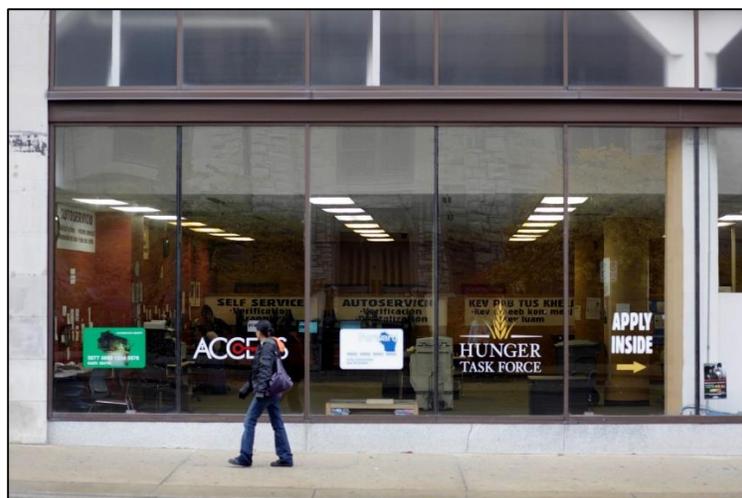


circumstance waivers allows states and communities to implement solutions that feed kids best at the local level.

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) subsidizes meals by providing reimbursement for healthful meals and snacks served to children and adults in a licensed child care setting or a family day care home. Hunger Task Force has only been moderately successful in increasing enrollment in CACFP. By strongly encouraging youth service organizations and school districts to utilize this program to offer supper after school in licensed child care settings, we have nudged up participation in a program. In the present day, "child care" often takes the form of before and after school care offered by the Boys & Girls Clubs inside schools before and after they start the school day. What is troubling about this program is that it does not serve children over the age of 12. In Milwaukee, our schools are K-8<sup>th</sup> grade, which means that they serve students 4-14 years old. CACFP denies meals to 13 and 14 year old teens whose younger siblings are allowed to eat—often at the same cafeteria table. This is another shortfall of the federal nutrition programs for children.

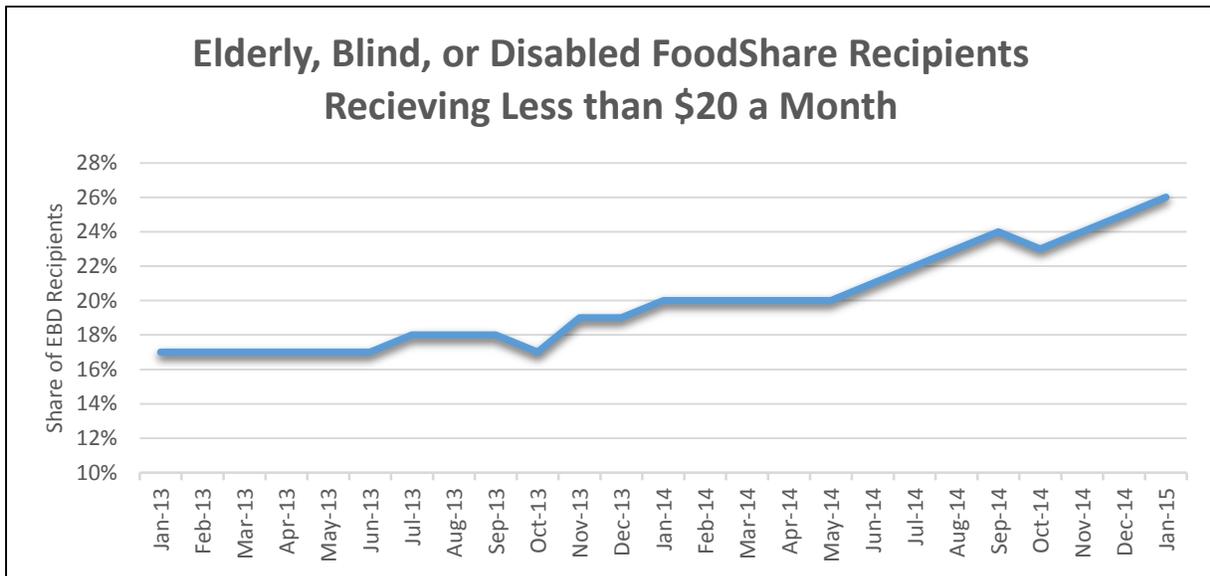
Hunger Task Force provides SNAP Outreach, a program that employs 10 regular full-time employees who assist SNAP eligible households to apply for or maintain SNAP benefits. Our staff are located inside job centers, disability resource agencies, refugee programs and senior centers. Underserved households including the Limited English Proficient and Elderly, Blind and Disabled are assisted. Wisconsin is "modernized," meaning the SNAP application is online and interviews are conducted telephonically. Verification of eligibility is provided using a scanner or fax. Our SNAP Outreach staff speak English, Spanish, Hmong, Karen, Burmese and Lao. They are culturally competent with respect to age, race, ethnicity and disability.

Several of our staff work at our self-service welfare office which has been operating for five years. This walk-in welfare office is equipped with computers, telephones, copiers and scanners. Our staff, non-governmental employees, provide technical help to use equipment and understand how the online system works. A merit employee is positioned on site to trouble shoot difficult circumstances. This should be interesting to this Committee as the Self Service model offers significant cost savings, while expanding customer service options for clients and improving dignity in service.



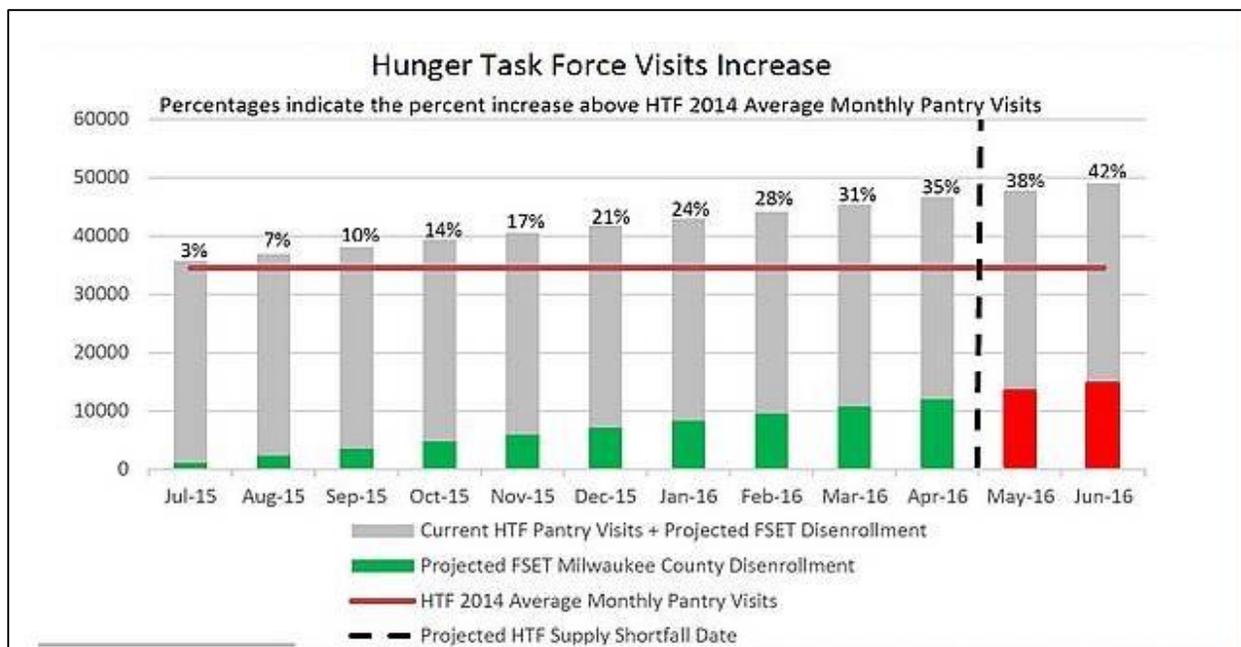
The need for help has grown greatly in Wisconsin and Milwaukee in recent years. Currently, one in seven people in our state are enrolled in the SNAP program (called FoodShare in Wisconsin), including about 30% of the people living in Milwaukee County.

SNAP does not meet all the food needs for a household. The average SNAP payment for a family of four (in Milwaukee County) is \$482 per month, while the federal government estimates the cost to feed a family of that size on the most thrifty food plan to be \$650 a month. In Wisconsin, 22% of SNAP recipients are elderly, blind, or disabled, and 26% of these people are receiving a monthly benefit of \$20 or less.



Over my 17 years at Hunger Task Force, Wisconsin SNAP has experienced periods of improper administration and erroneous case closures leading to USDA-imposed penalties. It has also corrected these conditions and modernized access to benefits.

SNAP is under fire right now in our State's legislature. Recent legislative actions are directing state agencies to write requests to the USDA in order to "waive" well established, nationwide regulations related to SNAP usage. Wisconsin proposes requiring photo identification on SNAP cards, drug testing of broad classes of people and limits to SNAP purchases for only "healthy" foods. Wisconsin has also returned to the three-month time limit for Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents. Our state anticipates that at least 50% of the group required to work for SNAP will not be able to find a job or allowable training activity and, as a result, suffer SNAP case closure for three years. Hunger Task Force anticipates that increasing demand for emergency food from this group will result in a wide-scale food shortage within 11 months. The chart below shows our projected shortfalls into June of 2016.



It is extremely unlikely that TEFAP can or will address wide scale hunger created by SNAP cuts. The quality of life in Milwaukee will decay as people are relegated to begging for food.

Healthy eating is the mantra of the USDA, the People and Hunger Task Force. TEFAP and CSFP commodity foods are primarily shelf stable and canned. Offering fresh fruits and vegetables sufficient to meet the new “My Plate” standards is more possible with produce grown at Hunger Task Force’s Farm. Hunger Task Force operates a 208-acre Farm for the express purpose of feeding the hungry. Each year, The Farm grows and distributes nearly a million pounds of fresh-grown fruits and vegetables to our network of charities absolutely free of charge. The Harley-Davidson Foundation funds The Farm, offering \$825,000 annually. While the Committee may see this as a creative use of resources, the lack of fresh foods in the diets of poor people is not only a federal nutrition program shortfall, it results in obesity, diabetes and hypertension.



The Farm is home to a unique SNAP Education Program. With its in-house classroom kitchen and 28 raised-bed outdoor gardens, children in grades 3-5 learn the value of healthy eating through practice. Hunger Task Force offers a year-round program of education that includes pre- and post-testing its participants who receive weekly classroom instruction and visit The Farm every other week from April through November.

SNAP Education, SNAP Outreach and TEFAP require a local "match" of private sector or state funds. Our budget reflects matches to these programs but also substantial investments in funding

the unmet needs of CSFP, SFSP, CACFP and WIC. While the committee contemplates duplication of federal nutrition programs we suggest that the inadequacies of these programs must also be considered.

### **Are the Federal Nutrition Programs Duplicative?**

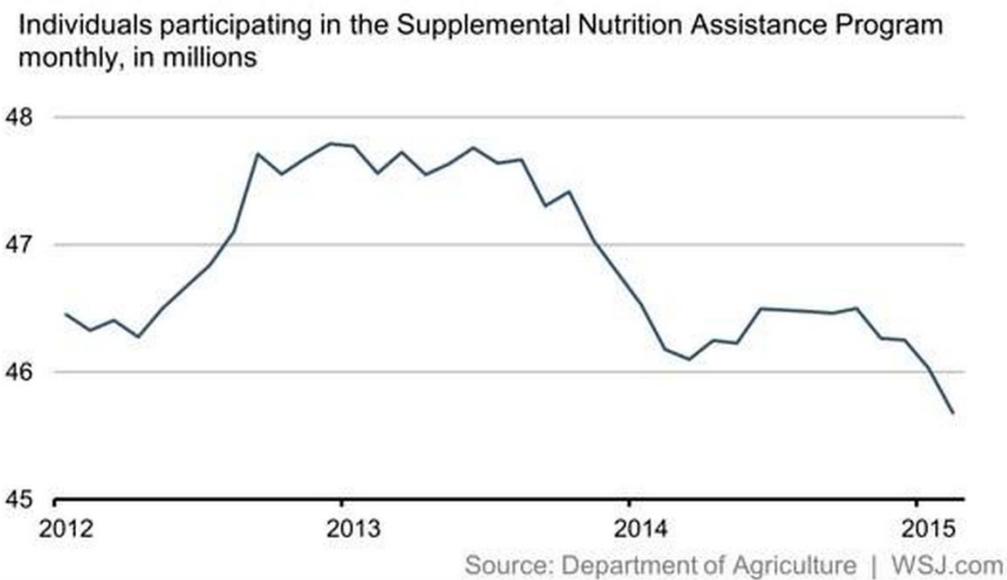
No. The federal nutrition assistance programs are not duplicative. Instead they were built to complement and supplement one another in order to combat hunger in the United States.

SNAP, the largest nutrition program, is the most important anti-hunger program, and the strongest and most wide-reaching program. SNAP supplies food buying power that stimulates our economy. It normalizes and humanizes how people get food when they need help. SNAP is non-dictatorial—it lets you shop for the food you prefer and its limits are practical. SNAP is not bound by age or whom it can serve. Unlike all of the other federal programs, SNAP doesn't make you the victim of over-regulation.

In Wisconsin, 41% of SNAP recipients are children. 40% of SNAP households in Wisconsin contain a member who is elderly, blind or disabled. 39% of adults receiving SNAP are employed.<sup>3</sup> The average monthly SNAP benefit in Wisconsin is \$111 per month and for senior, elderly, blind and disabled households the average monthly allotment is \$144.

SNAP is powerful help for struggling families and communities. SNAP is designed to increase participation in times of economic decline. SNAP participation declines as the economy improves. SNAP participation today is the lowest since 2011.

### **Fewer Collect Food Stamps**



<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/foodshare/atag glance201501.pdf>

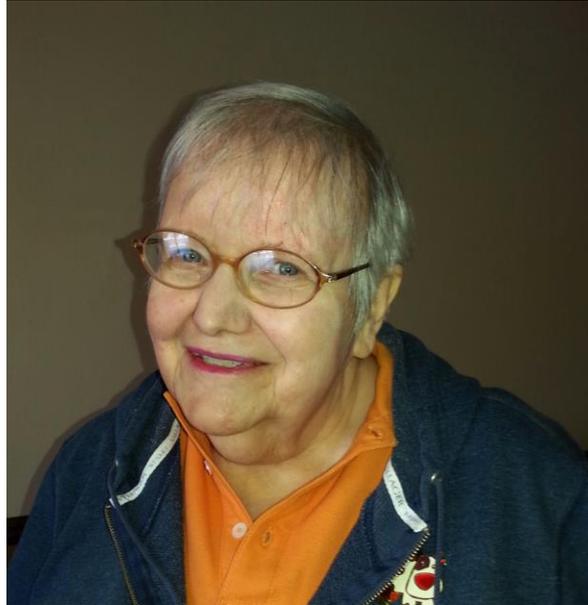
The federal nutrition programs were intentionally and purposefully designed to overlap and complement one another by the people who went before us. This intentional creation of multiple, targeted nutrition programs may commonly be referred to as the “safety net” by folk like me or "duplicative" by others. For me, it is not a surprise that a family who participates in SNAP also has children benefitting from the School Lunch Program. It is not a surprise that a senior could get \$14 in SNAP and still need a \$50 commodity box. It is not a surprise that a single, childless adult needs TEFAP, a soup kitchen and a homeless shelter to be healthy. However, each of these sets of circumstances, although known and even routine, remain abhorrent. SNAP benefits aren't enough. There is just not enough food buying power for SNAP recipients to ensure a healthy diet.

Consider a few stories:

*Ta Lah, 49, his wife and three children are refugees from Burma. Ta Lah was hit by an exploding land mine and lost his arm. He and his family were granted asylum in the United States. The family income is \$1,675 a month. They pay \$925 in rent and utilities. They receive \$130 a month from SNAP. SNAP benefits to refugees are limited to eight months. Ta Lah has been unable to find work because he does not speak English very well and is an amputee.*



*Molly is 76 years old. She receives \$898 a month in Social Security. She pays \$500 monthly for her subsidized apartment, with heat included. Her medical expenses, hygiene and cleaning products leave her with \$100 each month in “excess” income. After losing the Standard Household Utility Allowance under the Recent Farm Bill, Molly’s monthly SNAP amount was cut from \$90 to \$16 dollars. She receives a Commodity Supplemental Food Program box of commodities valued at \$50 each month, making the value of her monthly combined total federal nutrition assistance \$66.*



*Marilyn, 72. She receives \$729 in Social Security. Her rent is \$610. Marilyn receives \$130 in SNAP each month as well as a Commodity Supplemental Food Program box of commodities valued at \$50. Sometimes she visits a local food pantry and receives \$12-\$15 in TEFAP commodity foods. “I get so nervous about needing to go to the pantry, I get sick. When I first started using the Quest card, I would throw up in the bathroom because I was so ashamed that I needed the help. Whenever I’m standing in line to pay I get really nervous.”*

*Meghan is 31 years old and has a five-year-old son. Her monthly income is \$740. She pays \$690 a month for rent and utilities. After losing the Standard Household Utility Allowance under the recent Farm Bill, Meghan’s monthly SNAP amount was cut from \$267 to \$93 dollars. She visits food pantries and uses WIC.*

*Paul is 48 years old. He lives in Milwaukee and is a veteran of Desert Storm. His unemployment ran out in April, and he applied for FoodShare and qualified for \$170/month. He is a trained electrician and part of the union. He tries to find work to pay his \$700 rent but currently doesn’t have income. He is #7 in the Union Book but must participate in FoodShare Employment and Training to maintain his FoodShare eligibility. He will sometimes visit a pantry and will receive \$15 in TEFAP commodities.*

These stories demonstrate how a household might make use of more than federal nutrition program, and should help everyone understand why. These people are not making ends meet and are trying to get food on their table.

In communities across the country, including your own there are many stories like these. Hunger in America is real, but it is also realistically solvable. We end hunger when we become thoughtful in both our conversations and actions about it. I am confident that none of us would intentionally subject someone else to the physical and emotional stress of hunger, yet too many of us repeat anecdotal stories or judge people without having any direct experience in combatting hunger. I suggest that everyone learn what they can by visiting a welfare office, a school meals program or a food pantry. Newspaper articles and Facebook reports are not a substitute for knowledge.

So, while there may be concern that the federal nutrition programs are duplicative, there should be equal concern that they are inadequately funded and as a result there are far too many hungry Americans.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

[Summer Hunger in Milwaukee](#)

[Senior Hunger in Wisconsin](#)

[Impact of 2014 Farm Bill on Seniors in Wisconsin](#)

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