



Statement for the Record

U.S. House Committee on Agriculture

RE: A Look at Food Insecurity in America

March 11, 2021

Submitted by: Barbara P. Glenn, Ph.D. Chief Executive Officer

On behalf of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA), we appreciate the opportunity to submit this statement outlining the priorities of state departments of agriculture on policies related to food insecurity in America. We request that this statement be included in the record of the upcoming, March 11th hearing of the Committee on Agriculture focusing on “A Look at Food Insecurity in America”.

NASDA represents the commissioners, secretaries, and directors of the state departments of agriculture in all 50 states and 4 U.S. territories. State departments of agriculture are responsible for a wide range of programs including food safety, combating the spread of disease, and fostering the economic vitality of our rural communities.

On March 8th, NASDA sent a letter to USDA supporting the continuation of the Farmers to Family Food Box Program as well as recommending ways to improve its effectiveness. NASDA proposed the following enhancements to USDA:

- Increase the variety of meat products by removing the current restriction that limits products to only pre-cooked meats.
- Provide vendors an additional two to three weeks between the awarding of the contract and the start of the performance period.
- Consider the adverse impact on smaller farms and distributors when contracts are awarded to vendors solely on having a lower price.
- Remove county restrictions within awarded states which create significant difficulty for both vendors and distributors.
- Give preference to vendors who previously participated in the program in the bidding review process based on contract performance.
- Provide vendors greater flexibility in curating food boxes to allow for the selection of items based on local preference and local availability.
- Increase the participation of socially disadvantaged and BIPOC farmers and vendors.

These recommendations will encourage and increase participation of local farmers and vendors as well as ensure USDA can make a greater difference in the local communities who need it most.

Additionally, NASDA recently published a Food Security Toolkit (see attached) to increase awareness and improve coordination around hunger solutions. The Food Security Toolkit concludes that when state departments of agriculture partner with other entities, state residents become more food-secure and farmers, ranchers and food producers within the state benefit from wider market-access. NASDA surveyed state departments of agriculture and found that successful state food security programs involve partnerships. The partnerships that reported the most success include engaging in Public-Private Partnerships, Food Policy Councils and federal grant programs.

Examples of programs and partnerships include:

- The Kentucky Department of Agriculture's Kentucky Hunger Initiative, for example, brings together farmers, charitable organizations, faith groups, community leaders, and government entities to begin a dialogue to help reduce hunger. The effort, which started as a task force in 2016, has since reformed the state's food donor immunity law and raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for hunger relief.
- Tennessee Department of Agriculture's partnership with Cul2vate, a faith-based farm worker training and hunger relief program, produces and donates thousands of pounds of produce each year for food insecure people.
- New Mexico Department of Agriculture's SNAP-Ed Double Up Food Bucks program provides families and seniors with additional funds to purchase food from local farmers. This program benefits local economies while bringing fresh foods into homes.
- Oregon's Department of Agriculture partnered with the Oregon Farmers Market Association to create an online portal where people could place an order online and do curbside pick-up at farmers markets across Oregon. This online portal resulted in an additional \$390,000 sales at 30 farmers markets across the state.

Another area that has been a point of focus for NASDA members is food waste. NASDA members unanimously passed an action item recently at our annual Winter Policy Conference requesting the inter-agency agreement between USDA/EPA/FDA regarding food waste be extended to 2030, consistent with the national goal commitment results. Even further, NASDA supports additional efforts to improve coordination and communication amongst federal, state and municipal stakeholders to use resources more efficiently and effectively to address food waste.

Lastly, the Covid-19 pandemic has underscored the essential work performed by meat and poultry processing plants of all sizes. Many smaller processing plants saw an increase in demand for services due to pandemic-related supply chain disruptions. These processing plants stepped up to reduce processing backlogs and help support their local food supply. Limited in terms of facility size and processing capacity, these small plants need equipment upgrades and workforce enhancements in order to keep pace with increased demand. NASDA urges Congress to expand meat establishment modernization grants to any small meat establishment operating under state or federal inspection. Regardless of the destination of the meat and poultry products made by an

establishment, i.e. intra-or interstate, modernization of an establishment will add resiliency to the food supply chain, thereby protecting consumers from price shocks, avoiding distress to producers caused by unexpected herd culling, reduce local food insecurity, and bolster local economies.

NASDA stands ready to assist this Committee in any way possible as it carves a path forward on this important policy issue.

Please contact Zachary Gihorski (Zach.Gihorski@nasda.org) if you have any questions or would like any additional information.