



U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Agriculture  
Subcommittee on Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations

“Review of USDA Nutrition Distribution Programs”  
December 8, 2021

Testimony of Dave Donaldson  
Co-Founder and Chairman

Chairwoman Hayes, Ranking Member Bacon, and members of the Subcommittee, CityServe International (CityServe) offers the following comments on USDA’s Nutrition Distribution Programs and the role that faith-based organizations can provide in the execution of these programs.

My name is Dave Donaldson. I am the co-founder and Chairman of CityServe International. I am grateful to each of you for your service on the Agriculture Committee for a couple reasons: First, I married a farmer’s daughter from North Dakota and helped to manage our ranch in North Dakota for several years, so I know the value family farms bring to our nation. Also, I know what it is like to go to bed hungry. In 1969 my parents were hit head-on by a drunk driver killing my dad and debilitating my mother for many years. A village comprised of government, food banks and churches provided food and clothing with the hope that we could make it through the crisis. Subsequently, my mother got on her feet and became a lead buyer for Dow Chemical.

**Background**

CityServe International is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt faith-based organization that provides logistical and structural guidance to churches that feel ill equipped to fully reach and meet the needs of their local communities. Local needs and community initiatives include addressing hunger as well as meeting the needs of the poor and disaffected, the addicted, and the exploited. Through capacity and partnership building, CityServe assists in empowering churches to make greater community engagement and impacts across the world. CityServe’s collaborative network includes faith-based non-profits, corporations, retail stores, farmers, and ranchers among other food supply partnerships.

Since 2016 the CityServe supply chain comprised of warehouse “HUB’s” channeled millions worth of household goods, furniture, school supplies, toys, and food to local churches serving their communities. Local churches are the primary Point of Distribution (POD). Each POD has committed to be actively involved with their neighborhoods and community through compassion initiatives. In 2020, CityServe and its Regional Affiliates distributed over \$500 million of in-kind gifts through PODs to needy families across America. At the urging of my wife who taught

school for 13 years we are even developing Teacher Resource Centers to furnish teachers with school supplies. It should be noted that instead of this product ending up in landfills it is meeting tangible needs.

### **Current USDA Nutrition Distribution Programs**

Specific to USDA's currently operated nutrition distribution programs, CityServe is aware of The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), and the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR). CityServe acknowledges the goals of these programs to meet the nutritional needs of vulnerable American citizens. We also recognize, however, that gaps exist within and among these programs in both rural and urban communities.

It is well known that over 40 million Americans face hunger every day and that food insecurity affects all genders, ethnicities, ages, and backgrounds. Through-out the CityServe network we have established over 2,000 distribution sites that have been trained in proper food management and distribution. Despite working with varying ethnic groups, seniors, and children, CityServe and its affiliate members have not participated in TEFAP, CSFP, or FDPIR. While we acknowledge the work of these programs, access to them to further drive down community and regional hunger has not been available to our organization.

### **Pandemic Response – Farmers to Families Food Box Program**

In May 2020, USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service developed and executed the Farmers to Families Food Box Program. By all acknowledgement, this new and innovative program was geared to respond to anyone in the U.S. facing food insecurity due to Sars-CoV-2, also known as the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The food box program, however, has been catalytic in discovering other needs of families that CityServe has been able to tangibly meet by providing beds, diapers, school supplies, and home furnishings, among other needs. During each distribution, which represented 17 million boxes from June 2020 through May 2021, CityServe cultivated the trust of under-resourced families and successfully linked them to both public and private programs geared towards helping them move from dependency to stability.

During the operation of the box program, CityServe and its 2,000 plus affiliated organizations which included hundreds of African American led churches within the National Baptist Convention, Hispanic churches, and great organizations like World Vision, we worked to ensure the neediest among us had the opportunity to receive food who would otherwise go without sustenance due to no fault of their own. The program effectively responded to the significant and persistent economic disruptive effects on urban and rural communities across America. In addition, it would become transformative in not just reaching those acutely affected by recent joblessness, but also the long-term unemployed who had given up on both employment opportunities and traditional government social support systems.

On a personal note, I participated in many of the distributions and as part of the "Means Testing" and spoke with people about their need for the food boxes. Nearly every person I spoke to said that they were running out of food and felt alone in their struggle. I cannot adequately convey the

importance of the food but also the social interaction with people closed off from their support system of friends. This degree of interaction is typically not available at traditional USDA food distribution outlets.

As the pandemic persisted in 2020, CityServe shifted its focus towards incremental improvements to USDA's food box program and even coined the term "Last Mile" to describe its mission to assist the hardest to reach regions in the nation. USDA subsequently incorporated last mile organizations in the program which enabled CityServe, among many other non-profit and faith-based organizations, to efficiently maximize the reach of the box program. By the end of the program, CityServe and its affiliates assisted in the delivery of 17 million food boxes to urban, rural, Tribal Nations and to those in the Rio Grande Valley. In addition, CityServe has formed enduring relationships with over 30,000 families and individuals who were given a food box but now have also found new purpose and commitments within their communities.

It should be noted that the majority of last mile food box distribution work was funded through direct donations and targeted fundraising. In addition, some USDA contractors voluntarily contributed to CityServe in the early rounds of the food box program. These monies offset the costs of the last mile deliveries for expenses such as personal protective equipment, refrigeration, storage, and transportation costs. When last mile was merged into USDA's solicitation process, awarded contractors in most cases committed resources to faith- and community-based organizations in advance of distributions. This action provided for reaching even farther into America's food insecure populations.

The food box program was the first time CityServe was significantly incorporated in a USDA food distribution program. In addition, the program's structure provided for higher levels of nutrition with its inclusion of fresh fruits, fresh vegetables, and dairy products. While the program was discontinued on May 29, 2021, in an assessment of USDA's traditional programs in light of the food box program, CityServe projects that if an aggressive effort of faith- and community-based non-profit organizations was incorporated within the current body of food assistance programs an additional 20 million people annually would be reached. This reach would translate in helping pull Americans out of poverty and deal with the conditions that contribute to food insecurity.

### **Post-Pandemic**

Many valuable lessons were learned from the food box program. The most significant among them is that the distribution of highly perishable food and nutrition assistance generally can be performed in ways that were not previously contemplated and tested. Secondly, the food box has proven that the federal government can utilize the efficiencies and seasonality of food in the free market to purchase and deliver high quality, fresh and highly nutritious food at reasonable prices and place that food directly in the hands of the food insecure population. Such a program, began and could continue to cure food deserts, assist in curbing health issues that are prevalent among low income and food insecure populations, and further the goal of ending hunger in America.

Because of these lessons, CityServe, food pantries, and food producers and distributors across the country are all attempting to replicate the program with private funding. CityServe is

currently conducting food box program distributions in several states. That said, the resources of the federal government in redeploying the food box program and its inclusion of the faith- and community-based organization could significantly bridge gaps in current USDA programs and curb food insecurity among all genders, ages, and ethnicities in both rural and urban communities. CityServe highly encourages Congress restore the food box program as a tool within USDA's nutrition distribution programs. We also encourage the inclusion of faith- and community-based organizations in existing USDA distribution programs.

### **Conclusion**

CityServe has assisted in the delivery of 17 million USDA food boxes to the "hardest-to-reach" communities. Generally, CityServe's work represents a community of churches and non-profit organizations that have proven that their assistance is needed and that we will continue to be a critical member of the nutrition assistance community to respond to that need. The reach of our organization has found food insecure populations in both urban and rural areas and among some in Tribal Nations. CityServe takes seriously the work of feeding the needy, but in addition it also works to investigate and solve the underlining conditions associated with Americans who are food insecure. For this reason, we have developed a network and skill set to reach and maintain the connection with families and individuals who are often lost within federal and state social programs. We will continue to perform this mission and request that the recommendations above be considered and incorporated in the Committee's ongoing work.

CityServe thanks the subcommittee for inviting us to provide testimony and is committed to the conversation and action towards improving the efficiency and value of federal nutrition assistance and distribution programs.



## ***Biography of Dave Donaldson***

Dave Donaldson has invested his life inspiring, equipping, and resourcing leaders in more than 100 countries to bring aid and opportunity to tens of millions of needy and under resourced people. As the former Director for Operation Blessing and co-founder of Convoy of Hope, Dave spearheaded global partnerships with churches, organizations, businesses, and governments to mobilize tens of thousands of volunteers worldwide to respond to victims of disasters and to feed over 200,000 undernourished children each day.

In 2016 Dave retired from Convoy of Hope to launch CityServe International (CSI) to train and resource local churches and non-profits to serve families in need and to move people from dependency to sustainability. CSI is helping communities effectively address systemic poverty, addictions, foster care, job readiness and other areas of need in America. As part of the “Neighborhood to Nations” campaign Dave and the CSI team are partnering with World Vision to aid refugees in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. Additionally, CSI hosts 150 leaders to Israel annually and partners with the Israeli government to help the poor.

As part of the USDA Farmers to Families program CityServe coordinated a faith-based collaboration to distribute over 17 million Food Boxes suffering through the pandemic.

Dave is the Co-host of “INFLUENCERS” on the Charisma Podcast Network where guests from corporate, government, non-profit and church sectors share insights to impacting our culture from local communities, our nation’s capital to hot spots around the globe.

Dave is an advisor to [Produce Alliance Foundation](#), a critical part of the solution set to provide hunger relief, grow jobs, and strengthen local economies, particularly in underinvested rural and urban communities.

As a veteran of Washington, D.C. for more than a decade, Dave has coordinated White House briefings and roundtables between clergy, faith-based organizational leaders, and government officials. For several years Donaldson served on a Health and Human Services (HHS) National Council for Mental Health and Substance Abuse (SAMHSA). Dave hosted the first ever National Summit on Foster Care and Adoption with the United States Children’s Bureau. As a result, he and his wife adopted a teenager out of Foster Care in Fairfax County in Virginia. He has served on numerous boards including Vanguard University and the National Football League (NFL) sanctioned Courage Awards, which honors NFL players who have shown courage on and off the field.

Donaldson has advised leaders around the globe and appeared as a guest on numerous Christian and secular television and radio programs and has authored several books including the best-selling Rock Solid Discipleship program, *Relentless – Pursuing a Life that Matters* and co-authored with former White House official, Stanley-Carlson, *The Revolution of Compassion (The President’s Faith-based and Community Initiative)*. Dave’s newest book *CityServe: Your Church-based Guide to Compassion* is co-authored with Wendell Vinson and includes forty leading experts in community-based and global compassion

Dave earned his master’s degree from Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, with a focus on “Developing and Implementing Social Programs in a Cross-cultural Environment.” He and his wife Kristy reside in California and have four adult children.

**Committee on Agriculture  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Information Required From Nongovernmental Witnesses**

House rules require nongovernmental witnesses to provide their resume or biographical sketch prior to testifying. If you do not have a resume or biographical sketch available, please complete this form.

1. Name:     Dave Donaldson
  
2. Organization you represent:     CityServe International
  
3. Please list any occupational, employment, or work-related experience you have which add to your qualification to provide testimony before the Committee: \_\_\_\_\_  
As part of the USDA Farmers to Families program CityServe, Dave Donaldson coordinated a faith-based collaboration that distributed over 17 million Food Boxes suffering through the pandemic. Seperately, CityServe built strategic partnerships with businesses and local government agencies to access and distribute fresh produce and food supplies to their community. CityServe churches are engaged in feeding and nutrition support to help families that are struggling to obtain healthy foods.
  
4. Please list any special training, education, or professional experience you have which add to your qualifications to provide testimony before the Committee: \_\_\_\_\_  
Mr. Donaldson has advised leaders around the globe and appeared as a guest on numerous television and radio programs and has authored several books on subject matters including responding to community needs up to and including food distrubition. Mr. Donaldson was appointed by HHS to serve on the SAMHSA committee for Substance Abuse Treatment and to spearhead the Faith-based Committee for the nation. As the co-fouder of Operation Blessing, Convoy of Hope and CityServe he is recognized as one of the top experts in mobilizing the faith community to respond to victims of disaster.
  
5. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list the capacity in which you are representing that organization, including any offices or elected positions you hold: \_\_\_\_\_  
Co-founder and Chairman

**PLEASE ATTACH THIS FORM OR YOUR BIOGRAPHY TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.**

## Truth in Testimony Disclosure Form

In accordance with Rule XI, clause 2(g)(5)\* of the *Rules of the House of Representatives*, witnesses are asked to disclose the following information. Please complete this form electronically by filling in the provided blanks.

Committee: Agriculture

Subcommittee: Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations

Hearing Date: 12/08/2021

Hearing Title :

Review of USDA Nutrition Distribution Programs

Witness Name: Dave Donaldson

Position/Title: Co-founder and Chairman of CityServe International

Witness Type:  Governmental  Non-governmental

Are you representing yourself or an organization?  Self  Organization

If you are representing an organization, please list what entity or entities you are representing:

CityServe International

### **FOR WITNESSES APPEARING IN A NON-GOVERNMENTAL CAPACITY**

Please complete the following fields. If necessary, attach additional sheet(s) to provide more information.

Are you a fiduciary—including, but not limited to, a director, officer, advisor, or resident agent—of any organization or entity that has an interest in the subject matter of the hearing? If so, please list the name of the organization(s) or entities.

N/A

**Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) related to the hearing's subject matter that you, the organization(s) you represent, or entities for which you serve as a fiduciary have received in the past thirty-six months from the date of the hearing. Include the source and amount of each grant or contract.**

N/A

**Please list any contracts, grants, or payments originating with a foreign government and related to the hearing's subject that you, the organization(s) you represent, or entities for which you serve as a fiduciary have received in the past thirty-six months from the date of the hearing. Include the amount and country of origin of each contract or payment.**

N/A

**Please complete the following fields. If necessary, attach additional sheet(s) to provide more information.**

- I have attached a written statement of proposed testimony.
- I have attached my curriculum vitae or biography.

\* Rule XI, clause 2(g)(5), of the U.S. House of Representatives provides:

(5)(A) Each committee shall, to the greatest extent practicable, require witnesses who appear before it to submit in advance written statements of proposed testimony and to limit their initial presentations to the committee to brief summaries thereof.

(B) In the case of a witness appearing in a non-governmental capacity, a written statement of proposed testimony shall include— (i) a curriculum vitae; (ii) a disclosure of any Federal grants or contracts, or contracts, grants, or payments originating with a foreign government, received during the past 36 months by the witness or by an entity represented by the witness and related to the subject matter of the hearing; and (iii) a disclosure of whether the witness is a fiduciary (including, but not limited to, a director, officer, advisor, or resident agent) of any organization or entity that has an interest in the subject matter of the hearing.

(C) The disclosure referred to in subdivision (B)(iii) shall include— (i) the amount and source of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) related to the subject matter of the hearing; and (ii) the amount and country of origin of any payment or contract related to the subject matter of the hearing originating with a foreign government.

(D) Such statements, with appropriate redactions to protect the privacy or security of the witness, shall be made publicly available in electronic form 24 hours before the witness appears to the extent practicable, but not later than one day after the witness appears.