



Fostering Innovation, Collaboration, and Improved Measurement

Statement of

Jonathan Webb, MPH MBA

Director of Foundations and Community Engagement

Feed the Children

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The Past, Present, and Future of SNAP:

The World of Nutrition and the Role of the Charitable Sector

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Introduction

Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, and members of the Committee, it is an honor to be among my colleagues here today to testify on the role of the charitable sector in addressing hunger in the United States. Thank you for the opportunity to share about our work and offer insight into how the nonprofit community and government can strengthen our vital collaboration. Additionally, thank you to my fellow witnesses from Texas Hunger Initiative, Texas Community Partner Program, and the Greater Chicago Food Depository for coming to the table to share their experience and shed light on both the nexus of the federal nutrition safety net and the necessary role and work of nonprofits.

Feed the Children's mission is to *ensure that no child goes to bed hungry*. To this end, Feed the Children works alongside the government, serving individuals and communities struggling to overcome food insecurity. Based in Oklahoma City, Feed the Children is one of the largest charitable organizations in the U.S. Over the last 36 years, we have developed a national partnership network of over 1,200 agencies and established a legacy of meeting the immediate needs of Americans struggling with food insecurity and educational challenges in all 50 states. We provide critical relief after natural disasters and support our community partners who serve populations in rural and urban communities. The majority of people we serve are enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or another form of federal nutrition assistance. Collaborating with grassroots leaders, we have built a track record of combating childhood hunger through dynamic local partnerships and impactful programing. Today, we will present three concrete suggestions for how the federal government can leverage its infrastructure to better incentivize collaboration among nonprofits.

As the Director of Foundations and Community Engagement, I work closely with private companies, charitable organizations, and individual donors that together provide 99% of our funding. Additionally, I assist in facilitating Feed the Children's pioneer efforts to root our programing in research-based, partnership initiatives.

Five years ago, Feed the Children conducted a detailed assessment on how we – and our vast partner network – approach hunger here in the U.S. Our assessment revealed that our U.S.-based programing was simply not as effective as our global anti-hunger work. Despite the challenges of working in impoverished developing countries, we were winning the fight against hunger overseas. In the U.S., with its thriving economic and government infrastructure, this simply was not the case. The difference? Internationally, Feed the Children and many nonprofits work *collaboratively* on addressing the root causes of hunger. Domestically, far too often, our hunger initiatives operate independently from (or, worse, at odds with) other like-minded government and nonprofit entities. Both then and now, the social

sector in the U.S. remains focused on the isolated interventions of individual organizations to solve complex problems.¹ Armed with this understanding, Feed the Children launched a new phase of collaborative, partner-based programming in the U.S.

As an organization, Feed the Children recognizes that evidence points to the need for broad, cross-sectoral coordination to bring about systemic social change. We fight hunger through integrated, child-focused community development. We combine our resources with existing community assets to teach parents and family leaders new skills, improve livelihoods, encourage savings, improve environments and infrastructures, and promote behavior change. Recognizing the imperative of grassroots leadership, we strengthen the abilities for families and communities to stand on their own, fostering sustainable change.

Globally, we are calling upon innovative and effective tools and methods that are constantly emerging through the collaborative work of a wide set of stakeholders: nonprofits, local communities, academic institutions, businesses, and governments. And the results are impressive. ***Globally, both child deaths and absolute poverty have decreased by half since 1990, accompanied by many other improvements in food security and nutrition.*** A parallel innovation and progress can be unleashed in the United States if we can learn from these lessons. In the U.S., we can decrease childhood poverty and deaths, and simultaneously increase food security and nutrition through an active effort to promote collaboration and by focusing on innovation, measurement, and a continuous improvement in methods.

The U.S. requires a strong safety net for poor children and their families. As an organization, we firmly uphold the value and role of SNAP and other federal nutrition programs. However, as we reach the 50th anniversary of America declaring a War on Poverty, we believe that our national strategy for fighting hunger must be broadened and made more inclusive so that fewer Americans will *require* that safety net. We are eager to work with you to support the independence and vitality of these communities and families.

Feed the Children applauds the Congress for strengthening SNAP in the 2014 Farm Bill and for investing in new, innovative demonstration projects on both childhood hunger and SNAP employment and training. The topic of this hearing is timely and we recommend the U.S. government improve multi-sector collaboration as an avenue to move SNAP participants beyond the safety net. We support this sentiment and agree that, to effectively bolster SNAP, we must move beyond the question of simply adding funds or cutting dollars. As a part of this hearing, Feed the Children recommends strengthening

¹ Kania, John and Kramer, Mark. (2011) Collective Impact. Stanford Social Innovation Review. http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/collective_impact

programs and interventions that will sustainably support current SNAP participants and the overall program.

The Current Role of Nonprofits

Learning from our successes and failures in the U.S. and around the world, Feed the Children is focused on championing partnership and innovation, working with and through trusted grassroots organizations. With our partners, we offer the federal government an opportunity to strengthen our collective response to food insecurity by further incentivizing anti-hunger stakeholders to *collaboratively* end hunger.

Feed the Children's program staff in Oklahoma City, New York City, and New Orleans are deeply and thoughtfully engaged with local communities and are pioneering integrated approaches to ending child hunger. We use innovative and evidence-based ways to improve Americans' nutrition and food security. For example, as humans, many of our beliefs about what is good or acceptable to eat are patterned and fixed in the first years of our lives.² Humans naturally form their diets based on what foods are more familiar to them.³ Consequently, identifying ways to improve what children's perceptions of healthy food are, and their approach to nutritious meals is critical to changing what Americans eat. For that reason, Feed the Children uses a peer educator model that has spread to 28 countries around the world – Care Groups – to reach parents of very young children in our New Orleans Food and Education Oasis Project. This innovative model has been shown to double the nutrition behavior change of other program models at very low cost.

In our home state of Oklahoma, Feed the Children is pioneering an innovative way to increase access to healthier food options for families in rural areas. In partnership with the Chickasaw Nation and through a USDA demonstration project, we are leveraging our organization's strong logistical capabilities to better serve families in rural Oklahoma that struggle with healthy food access. A report from USDA's Economic Research Service⁴ found that giving SNAP beneficiaries the option to preorder groceries by telephone or online could improve their food choices. Using this evidence, our program will allow families to use their EBT cards to grocery shop online and have their meals delivered through the U.S. Postal Service. This

² Smith, T. (2004) The McDonald's Equilibrium: Advertising, Empty Calories, and the Endogenous Determination of Dietary Preferences. Department of Economics, University of California, Santa Barbara. Smith T and Tasnadi A. (2007) A Theory of Natural Addiction. Games and Economic Behavior. <http://ssrn.com/abstract=979192>.]

³ Smith, Trenton, and A. Tasnadi. (2007) "A Theory of Natural Addiction." Games and Economic Behavior. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=979192>.

⁴ Just D, Mancino L and Wansink B. (2007). Could Behavioral Economics Help Improve Diet Quality for Nutrition Assistance Program Participants? USDA, Economic Research Service, Economic Research Report #43.

partnership is the first of its kind for both the Chickasaw Nation and Feed the Children. It has fostered programmatic collaboration outside of our own respective organizations to improve how SNAP dollars are used to ensure healthier meals. This partnership would not be possible without the strong, bipartisan support of the Congress in authorizing the Demonstration Project to End Childhood Hunger. In addition to improving families' nutrition, by funding this demonstration project, the government has helped Feed the Children and the Chickasaw Nation deepen our collaboration *outside* of the grant. For example, using private funding, we are now collaborating with the Chickasaw Nation to improve their nutrition programs by conducting formative research on The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), SNAP education, Summer EBT, and farmers' markets.

Feed the Children is also striving to foster stronger collaboration within the nonprofit, academic, and government sectors. We have learned the value of identifying "bright spots" and are committed to helping scale-up those best practices and program models. We launched the Center for Children and Social Engagement to help our own organization, other nonprofits, and academic institutions engage in more knowledge sharing and collaboration to *laterally* scale-up – organization to organization – cost-effective, innovative program models that improve child nutrition and food security.

Additionally, Feed the Children is an active member of Mission Measurement, which brings the power of data science to social impact, enabling decision makers to maximize their return on investment. We are also part of the Clinton Global Initiative, which is formulating collective commitments to the U.S. Food Insecurity Call to Action for child, adolescent, and youth hunger, and healthy food access issues. We are working closely with a range of nonprofit and private sector partners to improve our collective strategy advancing efforts to increase participation in "out of school time" feeding programs and increase access to healthy and fresh food options in underserved communities. These represent prime examples of how nonprofits are striving to leverage their community resources to strengthen and support federal nutrition programs, like SNAP and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). Despite these gains, we can only do so much to promote collaboration across sectors with our private resources, and we encourage the U.S. government to do more to incentivize coordination among nonprofits, academic institutions, and government agencies.

When addressing the issue of food insecurity, nonprofits often focus on providing short-term, *palliative* responses to hunger rather than dealing with the underlying causes. Many times, the nonprofit sector presents emotional appeals to the public around acute needs that generate funds. This approach can be successful, but makes it difficult for funding agencies to support innovative hunger-*prevention* work. The system tends to reward organizational individualism rather than collaboration. As a result, nonprofits

working on hunger issues often view themselves as competitors rather than partners in the fight against child hunger. Viewing peer organizations as competitors hinders the broad, cross-sectoral collaboration needed for social change. Nonprofits, academic institutions, local communities, and government agencies need stronger government incentives to coordinate their efforts. We commend the House Agriculture Committee for pulling together a few of our partners to have a more intentional conversation on the role of nonprofits in addressing hunger. It is our hope that the following recommendations will present an opportunity to formalize our collaboration.

The Role of Feed the Children

An estimated 49 million households struggle with the volatile nature of food insecurity. These individuals and their families need initiatives that simultaneously support and prevent them from needing a long-term safety net. What they need is a reliable, short-term, and cost-effective safety net, and ongoing programs that help them recover from situational adversity so they can move *off* the safety net as quickly as possible.

In our 36 years of fighting hunger, Feed the Children has learned that nonprofits, government agencies, and other anti-hunger stakeholders cannot continue to address this problem in our respective silos. Deeper collaboration among anti-hunger stakeholders will yield innovative, more effective, and sustainable program models. The federal government has the unique ability to serve as the organizing infrastructure to incentivize a transformative, collective approach to end hunger. Feed the Children seeks to collaborate with others to identify what is working, foster stronger innovation and collaboration among anti-hunger stakeholders, and to collectively define what it means to have impact on food security and nutrition. This partnership needs to be formalized at the national level since no one organization can do it alone.

Each of the following recommendations seeks to establish mechanisms that foster innovation, collaboration, and improved measurement of results and impact in order to ultimately decrease the number of individuals who need the federal safety net; improve food security and nutrition; and make the safety net more cost-effective.

Recommendation 1: The Food Security and Nutrition Social Innovation Fund

Feed the Children recommends that Congress use existing resources to formalize its work with the nonprofit community and academic institutions to establish a Food Security and Nutrition Social

Innovation Fund. The purpose of this Social Innovation Fund will be to promote collaboration among nonprofits, community leaders, faith groups, academics, and the government. Such collaboration would seek to create, identify, and scale-up program models and policies that decrease the number of people who need the safety net, not just improve it. Creation of an inclusive, national, implementer-driven network of anti-hunger practitioners – a “community of practice” – would allow them to:

- better understand what each organization (and agency) is doing in a given geographical area and foster coordination of efforts;
- learn how to conduct formative research that can improve program outcomes;
- disseminate and integrate research findings and best practices into program activities;
- learn to accurately monitor and evaluate in order to identify what is working best (and not working), and collect and analyze evidence;
- challenge old, ineffective, and wasteful program models;
- create tools (e.g., training manuals, videos) that are helpful in laterally scaling up the best program models and approaches (across organizations and states); and
- build consensus and skills in program planning, design, and implementation.

The *Food Security and Nutrition Social Innovation Fund* will be principally used for **innovation grants** that are administered to a consortia of nonprofits, academic institutions, community-based organizations, and other food security practitioners (e.g., social enterprises). Such grants would require organizations to apply and work together (rather than to single organizations) to document their innovative work, test ideas, and scale-up successful programs from organization to organization. Grants from the fund would enable organizations to:

- create training manuals and conduct trainings for practitioners on innovative food security and nutrition program models (e.g., the Liberty’s Kitchen⁵ social enterprise model) and tools (e.g., Barrier Analysis⁶ for formative research);
- improve measurement of their work;
- conduct demonstration projects to test scale-up of promising ideas (see below), strengthen and improve SNAP and other federal nutrition programs for specific populations; and
- foster project partnerships (e.g., through planning grants) with universities, faith groups, and municipalities.

⁵ See <http://libertyskitchen.org>

⁶ Kittle, Bonnie. (2013) A Practical Guide to Conducting a Barrier Analysis. New York, NY: Helen Keller International. http://www.coregroup.org/storage/barrier/Practical_Guide_to_Conducting_a_Barrier_Analysis_Oct_2013.pdf

Feed the Children estimates that the initial investment needed to establish the *Food Security and Nutrition Social Innovation* would be roughly \$370 million of overall annual funding, which includes \$333 million for the innovation grants and \$37 million to maintain a national community of practice (network), including development and maintenance of an online repository of anti-hunger tools and methods; listservs; working groups; face-to-face and online meetings; and practitioner training.

Many nonprofits and academic institutions welcome the opportunity to further collaborate on programs and knowledge sharing, but lack the resources to bring together the group required to implement these plans. Because the *Food Security and Nutrition Social Innovation Fund* will be driven by a diverse group of stakeholders, it will allow practitioners to break down the silos that have historically prevented a review of the cross-sectorial issues that define hunger. Leveraging the various skill sets from community leaders, nonprofits, academics, churches, and governments will allow us to creatively collaborate on solutions that move beyond increasing access to direct services and emergency response to more integrated community development.

This community of practice would be able to help identify best practices and scale up work in improving access to – and production of – healthy foods in low-income areas (urban and rural); improving child nutrition; dealing with mental health and trauma issues that often underpin food insecurity; and getting people receiving government nutrition assistance back to work - into better paying, high quality jobs. It will also allow collaborators to strengthen interactions between government, nonprofits, and SNAP participants, while identifying innovative solutions to such challenges as employment training, retention, recertification, and caseload turnover.

Where This Collaborative Model Has Worked

Feed the Children has witnessed this collaborative model work in breaking down silos and generating life-saving solutions in the field of *international* food security and nutrition. The manner in which the U.S. government facilitated and incentivized collaboration and program improvement among organizations, academic institutions, and government agencies working on international food security and nutrition could be replicated to improve *domestic* food security and nutrition.

For example, the Food Security and Nutrition Network⁷ was created through a USAID Food for Peace grant to Save the Children and four other organizations in the TOPS Project to improve food security and nutrition in developing countries. The network now has 210 member organizations that work closely to produce training manuals, create new tools (e.g., for assessment and formative research), test

⁷ See www.fsnnetwork.org

new program models, and improve members' knowledge and skillsets. The network holds regular online and face-to-face meetings of food security implementers, maintains a website and online repository of resources, organizes working groups, and makes innovation grants available to members of the network. As a result, the network has considerably improved the scale-up of food security and nutrition models and tools through peer-to-peer adoption.

A second example is the CORE Group's Child Health Network⁸. The Child Health Network was created with funding from USAID's Child Survival and Health Grants Program. This network now has 70+ member and associate nonprofit and academic organizations working together with government agencies to reduce child deaths. Many of the same strategies used in the FSN Network (e.g., working groups, innovation grants) are used in the Child Health Network.

Additionally, to fund communities of practice (network groups), the federal government can also help foster better collaboration among domestic anti-hunger actors through the structure of grant funding (e.g., creating RFAs that encourage multi-organization consortia to respond rather than single organizations). Federal funds that support collaboration among multi-sector stakeholders allows nonprofits to play the role of social innovator or solution tester to identify those programs that can be reasonably scaled up and have a measurable impact in communities of need. Formation of a thriving community of practice and better structuring of grants (e.g., for demonstration projects) will lead to better, faster development, and scale-up of more cost-effective program models that can help defeat hunger.

Recommendation 2: Demonstration Projects

Feed the Children recommends that Congress focus funding for nonprofits working collaboratively on demonstration projects that test new, innovative approaches to improving food security and nutrition, and in administering federal nutrition programs. To this end, Congress should continue to dedicate funding for nonprofits implementing targeted demonstration projects, and ensure USDA implements these and other federal food security and nutrition programs with reasonable and effective program rules and requirements. Currently, a majority of promising federal grants are primarily run through state agencies that can be ineffective and overly bureaucratic.

Exemplifying the benefit of this type of funding, two significant demonstration projects by USDA were recently rolled out: The Demonstration Projects to End Childhood Hunger,⁹ and the SNAP

⁸ See www.coregroup.org

⁹ See <http://www.fns.usda.gov/demonstration-projects-end-childhood-hunger>

Employment and Training Pilots¹⁰, which were conducted in ten states to help SNAP participants to find jobs and work toward self-sufficiency. These two opportunities help foster the sort of collaboration we recommend on a larger scale. Feed the Children applauds the Congress for making such investments and creating platforms to improve federal nutrition programs like SNAP. While these opportunities represent laudable support for innovative approaches to improving nutrition and food security, there must be increased focus on fostering innovation. Additionally, without the presence of a community of practice, demonstration projects will not do enough to stimulate innovation. By encouraging lateral scale-up of program models and tools through a larger share of these government funds, more organizations will adopt ways of fighting hunger in their privately funded programs.

Currently, funds for these sorts of demonstration projects are typically channeled through state agencies. Implementation of these promising projects should directly focus on nonprofits, academic institutions, and community organizations. Working collaboratively with the government, nonprofits will be able to leverage significant private resources, and broad participation from community and academic organizations to make a real impact on food security and nutrition challenges. Demonstration projects and other federal USDA grant opportunities should be designed in a way that creates pathways for resources to the groups serving local communities and have low barriers to entry for small- and medium-sized nonprofits. Such organizations are severely limited in how they can partner with the federal government. The nonprofit sector is a vital partner of the government, and yet there are several federal USDA grants that are difficult, if not impossible, for nonprofits to access.

Recommendation 3: Measurement and Impact

To sustainably relieve people of being “beneficiaries” of government and nonprofit assistance, *Feed the Children recommends the Congress require results and impact measurement of programs using food security and nutrition indicators that assess which programs are having the most impact on food insecurity and nutrition.*

Ronald Reagan believed that every problem in America has been solved somewhere in America and that the job of the federal government is to replicate success. This is true in the category of food security. Functional, effective anti-hunger programs already exist. Feed the Children and our partners offer several examples of how we can fight hunger through grassroots initiatives. The federal government can support nonprofits to study success, measure success, and replicate success.

¹⁰ See <http://www.fns.usda.gov/2014-snap-e-t-pilots>

Feed the Children recently launched its Center for Children and Social Engagement initiative based in New York City. The Center for Children is tasked with identifying domestic and international programs that foster and measure innovation around child nutrition and food security. For example, in New Orleans, Liberty's Kitchen is a social enterprise dedicated to transforming the lives of vulnerable youth. Liberty's Kitchen provides a path to bright and healthy futures through employability and life skills training and by providing freshly prepared, nutritious meals to schoolchildren. Though relatively small, Liberty's Kitchen staff is prioritizing strong investments in measurement and impact, while intentionally sharing their model, success, and failures with other groups around the U.S. The Center for Children will continue to work with Liberty's Kitchen to better understand this program's success and capture its best practices to be replicated around the country. This local, community model leverages existing community assets and the federal safety net to deploy unique programs around job skills training and nutrition education to ultimately empower youth to flourish mentally, economically, and physically. Building on this success, we encourage the federal government to support this type of measurement and impact by incentivizing more nonprofits to better measure programs to improve food security and nutrition.

More federal grant applications should require measurement of a key, consistent set of food security and nutrition indicators to better assess which food security and nutrition program models are having the most impact. This requirement to measure key indicators has been one way that the U.S. government has stimulated competition amongst international nonprofits and other agencies to continuously improve their methods for improving food security and nutrition, and to increase accountability, and to have a common understanding of what constitutes progress.

Additionally, Feed the Children recommends the Congress make changes to how federal programs are measured by taking into account food security and nutrition services enabled by federal investments but paid for with private funds. This approach will further strengthen the role of nonprofits and encourage stronger and more effective public private partnerships. The USDA can develop a list of required indicators for measurement of programs receiving funds from the *Food Security and Nutrition Social Innovation Fund* that will be used in programs and reported to the Congress. This will focus innovation on interventions that move the needle around the focus areas. For example, depending on the type of funded program, demonstrative indicators that would be measured before and after projects would include the:

- proportion of children and adolescents who consume fruits and vegetables five or more times per day and who meet physical activity guidelines;

- proportion of children 6-13 years with a normal BMI; and
- percentage reduction in people qualifying for SNAP in a given low-income census tract.

Conclusion

Feed the Children stands ready to collaborate with the federal government in fostering innovation, collaboration, and improved measurement. The 50th anniversary of America declaring a War on Poverty has come and gone. Poverty still plagues our nation and will continue to do so unless nonprofits, academics, community leaders, faith groups, and governments collaborate to their full potential.

As a nation, our success in combating hunger will hinge on the quality of our interventions, the strength of our relationships with grassroots organizations, our unique ability to bring together a nexus of public and private partners to fight hunger, and strategic policy decisions and investment from the U.S. government. Through collaboration and strategic policy reform, we can end hunger in America.