



Listening Session on Hunger Issues
by the PA Senate Agricultural & Rural Affairs Committee
Testimony by Joyce Rothermel, CEO
Gr. Pittsburgh Community Food Bank, Duquesne, PA
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Welcome to southwestern Pennsylvania and specifically Duquesne, the home of the Gr. Pittsburgh Community Food Bank. Our central distribution facility serves 11 counties in southwestern Pennsylvania, reaching approximately 120,000 people in need annually through a network of 360 local food assistance providers and 7 county-wide food banks, that in turn serve the local food assistance providers in their respective counties. Our distribution averages 1.6 million pounds monthly. Over 50% of the food we distribute is donated by the food industry and private companies and individuals in food drives. Thank you for conducting these listening sessions throughout Pennsylvania to hear those of us working in our communities every day. I would also like to thank you for your recent confirmation of Secretary of Agriculture, Dennis Wolff, who himself has listened and partnered with those of us in the private sector in the important task of reducing hunger and food insecurity here in Pennsylvania.

In 2004, "A Blueprint to End Hunger" was created by 13 national anti-hunger organizations including America's Second Harvest: the nation's food bank network, of which we are one of 208 members throughout the United States. It outlined a plan to end domestic hunger by 2015. It focused on the critical role of U.S. policy to achieve this goal, requiring a heightened political will, noting that effective food and nutrition programs are in place, requiring adequate funding and an elimination of the barriers to participation in them. This year, we are joining with advocates from across Pennsylvania, Governor Rendell, and our colleagues throughout the county in seeking a strong nutrition title in the reauthorization of the Farm Bill. As you know, it sets the policy and budget for important federal programs, most notably the Food Stamp Program (soon to be renamed), The Emergency Food Assistance Program, the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, and the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program.

The Blueprint also outlines the roles for state and local government, schools and community organizations, non-profit groups, labor and industry, and finally, all of us as individuals. Today, our topic is the role of our state government. Since 1983, Pennsylvania has been a leader in addressing hunger and food insecurity through the State Food Purchase Program (SFPP). Annually, the funds provided to each county have resourced lead agencies to provide a safety net for those in our respective counties whose own household budgets, coupled with other food assistance programs, do not stretch to meet all of their nutritional needs. It is one of the most cost effective programs funded by the Commonwealth. Here in Allegheny County, we obtain and distribute food through the SFPP on an average of 21 cents per pound. Over 50% of those who are helped are children and seniors.

This year's increase to the program from \$18 million to \$18.75 million has made a significant difference in our ability to more adequately address the needs of those who benefit from the program with a nutritious food supply. We know from the recent studies conducted by America's Second Harvest that many people

on limited budgets choose between paying for the roofs over their heads, medical and heating bills and food. Recent poverty figures updated since the 2000 census show more people now living in poverty, although more are working. Rates in Allegheny County grew from 9% up to over 12% - from one out of 11 to one out of 8 -9 people. With losses in population, there are fewer people to help this growing number among us who need it. I have two brief notes to share with you from those from whom we sought private sector donations.

This is why we are asking for an increase in the SFPP for 2007-08. The proposed cut in the Governor's budget would mean a loss of over \$67,000, translating into 225,331 fewer pounds of nutritious food. We applaud the Governor's proposal to expand access to the school breakfast program and the increased federal resources it will bring into many school districts. We know that more is needed to address the needs of our seniors, the working poor and the disabled. We respectfully request an appropriation of \$20 million for the SFPP for 2007-08. This would be an increase of \$105,000 providing an additional 352,000 pounds of food for residents in need in Allegheny County. We will be completing a gap study municipality by municipality here in Allegheny County this summer. A plan will be developed to target the greatest gaps to insure greater reductions in hunger and food insecurity here. Additional resources from both state and private sources will be needed to implement our plan. Working with our partner food banks in our 11 county service area, these additional dollars will also strengthen us in our efforts to reach the many communities where persistent poverty abides; we have more of these areas than any other region in Pennsylvania.

We are fortunate to have great fertile land in Pennsylvania and hard working farming families. The Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) of both federal and state governments provides \$20 in checks to women participating in the Women, Infants, and Children Program and low-income seniors for the past several years. This year's boost to the program from \$2 million to \$3 million has allowed the program to continue to serve 3 years olds, whose participation was threatened. The Governor's budget calls for a \$1 million reduction for the coming year. This program has become increasingly important to our farmers and the program participants. This mutually beneficial program increases both job and food security for thousands of Pennsylvanians. We are asking for a retention of the program at this year's funding level of \$3 million.

Finally, I ask you to consider a new program for Pennsylvania. Similar to the FMNP, the PA Agriculture Surplus System (PASS) is a mutually beneficial program for PA growers and people in need, served by the PA Association of Food Banks' member food banks. Modeled after a successful program in Michigan, PASS would provide surplus PA grown produce to be distributed to people served by food banks throughout Pennsylvania if funded at the \$750,000 level that we request. In its inaugural state-wide year, 708,000 PA households in need could receive bagged PA apples. We and our network of food banks here in SW PA are ready to play our part to make PASS happen in 2007-08. PASS enjoys the support of Sec. Wolff and apple growers in PA. PASS will help apple farmers this year by adding the state-wide food bank network as a market for their apples, helping them to move their produce and avoid crop waste. It is our hope that additional products will be added to PASS in subsequent years.

These requests are all included in the Yellow Book. We ask for your support and leadership on each of them as well as your help in advocating for the Governor's requests for the Nutrition Title of the Farm Bill. Working together, we can achieve food security for all Pennsylvania residents. Thank you for listening.