



Background:

Today, 27% of Philadelphia's population lives in poverty, including one-third of the city's children.¹ Data from 2011 tell us that in the eastern part of Philadelphia (Pennsylvania's First Congressional District), nearly half of all households with children could not always afford the food they needed. At 49.6%, this Congressional district has the second highest rate in the nation of food hardship among households with children. Our state's Second Congressional District is not far behind with nearly 1 in 3 households with children struggling to put food on the table.² Although the nation is beginning to hope that economic recovery is on the horizon, low-income families are still finding it challenging to meet even their most basic needs.

Issue 1: Under-utilization of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and other benefits that help to put food on the table.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) can go a long way towards helping Philadelphia residents stretch their food budgets. As more businesses implement layoffs and pay cuts, more families turn to the Food Stamp Program (now called SNAP) and the emergency system of food pantries for help: in Philadelphia, SNAP participation has increased by 45% between 2007 and 2012. Across the five county area, SNAP participation has increased by 55%³ to 474,000. Additionally, SNAP benefits the local economy by allowing consumers to purchase food at local retail establishments, including supermarkets, farmers' markets, and corner stores. Yet, an estimated 180,000 Philadelphia residents are eligible for SNAP but are not currently enrolled, indicating the need for innovative outreach strategies that connect low-income families with resources that offer substantial help.

Recommendation: Institute outreach and awareness campaigns about public benefits that alleviate hunger, including SNAP enrollment, utilization at farmer's markets, etc.

¹ Philadelphia Grow Project, "Child Hunger in Philadelphia – Findings of the Philadelphia Grow Project" 2006.

² Food Research and Action Center, "Food Hardship in America 2010: Households with and without Children," August 2011. Available at http://frac.org/pdf/aug2011_food_hardship_report_children.pdf.

³ http://www.hungercoalition.org/sites/hungercoalition.org/files/SNAP%20Participants%20updated%2012.08.10_.doc.pdf

Issue 2: Low-income Philadelphians cannot access the food they need to lead an active and healthy life.

According to the World Health Organization, food security is built upon three pillars:

- *Food availability: sufficient quantities of food available on a consistent basis.*
- *Food access: having sufficient resources to obtain appropriate foods for a nutritious diet.*
- *Food use: appropriate use based on knowledge of basic nutrition and care, as well as adequate water and sanitation*

Both lack of access and lack of affordability play a role in Philadelphia's overwhelming food insecurity problem. The Food Trust's research has showed that in Philadelphia the highest-income areas had 156 percent more markets than the lowest-income areas.⁴ The USDA has also conducted a great amount of research on the correlation between food security and lack of transportation, noting that:

*"Transportation policies and programs can make it easier for low-income families, the aged, and others with mobility challenges and particular nutrition needs to access supermarkets, farmers' markets, and other sources of affordable, healthy food. Innovative policies can also help small farmers transport their products to market and meet untapped demand for local, fresh food."*⁵

The affordability of food at retail outlets also serve as challenges to those whom the economy has left behind. Dozens of farmers' markets run by organizations such as Fair Food, Farm to City, and the Food Trust, have worked diligently to make fresh food more affordable to city residents through the institution of incentives programs like Double Dollars and Philly Food Bucks. Additional vouchers for seniors and WIC families have also served to promote healthier eating in our communities among vulnerable populations. Yet, families still struggle to purchase fresh, shelf-stable, and staples because they aren't affordable. With numerous attacks on the SNAP program that will likely result in the reduction of benefits for families, the pricing of food becomes a more pressing issue. Policies enacted based on thorough research of pricing could

⁴ http://www.community-wealth.org/_pdfs/articles-publications/state-local-new/article-giang-et-al.pdf

⁵ http://departments.oxy.edu/uepi/cfj/publications/transportation_and_food.pdf

ultimately impact the food security of a community by making food more affordable through private public partnership.

Recommendation: Examine opportunities for alignment between the food system and the public transportation system

Recommendation: Conduct a study on grocery store pricing in low-income areas to learn how grocery stores set prices at their various stores and craft recommendations that make food more affordable.

Issue 3: Too much available food goes to waste due to the lack of a recovery and redistribution mechanism.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, more than 34 million tons of food waste was generated in the United States in 2010 - more than any other material category but paper. In fact about 40 percent of food produced, bought, and sold is thrown away each year in the United States⁶. Yet, in many areas in Philadelphia food pantries and soup kitchens- often a last resort for the hungry- are struggling to meet a growing demand. In 2011, more than 438,000 Philadelphia residents received food through the emergency food system of 700 food pantries and soup kitchens, an increase of 27,000 people over the previous year. This network of programs, staffed primarily by elderly volunteers, often suffers from a lack of coordination, meaning that the families who need their services may not know how to best access them. Dwindling resources are also a persistent problem as government agencies on the state and federal levels threaten to decrease funding for programs like The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and the State Food Purchase Program (SFPP). Without adequate food resources, more people will find themselves food insecure.

Recommendation 3: Streamline the food distribution system to reduce waste and recover and redistribute safe, usable food to low-income Philadelphians.

⁶ <http://www.onearth.org/article/how-to-wage-war-on-food-waste>

