



**Testimony to the House Majority Policy Committee  
Hearing on the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank**

Erin Smith Wachter, Director of Advocacy and Public Policy, Central PA Food Bank

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Chairman Benninghoff and distinguished members of the House Majority Policy Committee, welcome to our food bank, and thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on the Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System, or PASS.

My name is Erin Smith Wachter, Director of Advocacy and Public Policy at the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank. I will begin with a brief overview on our food bank and hunger in Pennsylvania, and then discuss the PASS program in the context of hunger.

Hunger in Pennsylvania

The Central Pennsylvania Food Bank has been dedicated to ending hunger for more than 30 years. We live our mission of *fighting hunger, improving lives, and strengthening communities* every day. We truly believe no one should be hungry and are committed to working hard every day to make that belief a reality. We are also a fine example of public/private partnerships to benefit society, with generally 80 percent of our food and financial resources sourced through private donations.

Serving 27 counties, the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank is the largest non-profit food distribution organization in central Pennsylvania. We distribute more than 48 million pounds of food and grocery products, equivalent to more than 40 million meals, every year to more than 900 soup kitchens, shelters, and food pantries in our 27-county service territory. These agencies directly feed thousands of hungry families throughout central Pennsylvania. We could not do this

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without the generosity of food donors and financial supporters from all sectors, including food companies, retailers, farmers, corporate funders and individuals.

Hunger impacts every single county across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Per Feeding America's "Map the Meal Gap 2017," more than 1.6 million Pennsylvanians – 1 out of 7 – throughout the Commonwealth are at risk of hunger and may not know where their next meal is coming from. That number includes more than 482,000 children – 1 out of 5.

The need is real, and the need is significant across the country. Research conducted by Feeding America demonstrates that there is a significant meal gap, or difference between the food low-income people need and the resources they have to buy that food. Map the Meal Gap 2016<sup>i</sup> shows that there are over 8 billion meals missing from the tables of low-income Americans per year. Thousands of Pennsylvanians continue to struggle to get back on their feet and for many, work does not provide protection from poverty and food insecurity. While many people think that poverty impacts only a small number of people who remain impoverished for many years, the reality is something different... many Americans experience food insecurity over the course of their working lives, often due to unforeseen circumstances such as job loss, inadequate hours, divorce or health issues<sup>ii</sup>.

Feeding America's quadrennial study of the people utilizing charitable food assistance, Hunger in America 2014, reveals that about two-thirds of the people our food banks and their local agencies serve are making impossible trade-offs between paying for food and other necessities like rent, transportation, health care and utilities.

### Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System

While Pennsylvania is home to over 1.8 million people who struggle with hunger, we are blessed with more than 57,000 farms and \$7.4 billion in agricultural products sold. 30,000 of those 57,000 farms are within our 27-county service territory. In a region as agriculturally rich as central Pennsylvania, there is no reason that anyone should go to bed hungry. Farmers in our state and across the country produce the safest, most affordable, most abundant supply of food in

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the world. And we do our part every day at the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank to ensure that we are sourcing and distributing nutritious fruits and vegetables, protein and calcium that are essential to food insecure individuals. In doing so, we're not only working to meet the supplemental nutrition needs of low-income people, we are supporting Pennsylvania agriculture and food businesses across the economic spectrum, and their employees.

The Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System, or "PASS" program, is critical to this connection between meeting the needs of low-income Pennsylvanians and supporting Pennsylvania agriculture. By way of background, PASS is a statewide program that was enacted into law in 2010, and was funded for the first time ever – at \$1 million – through the 2015-16 state budget, and again at \$1 million through the 2016-17 state budget. The program is funded through the State Food Purchase Program line item within the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's (Department) budget.

PASS is administered by the Department, who in turn contracts with the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank (selected after a rigorous Request for Proposal and scoring process) to implement the program on behalf of the entire state. The \$1 million appropriation is distributed using the State Food Purchase Program formula so that all 67 counties receive a PASS allocation. To make this happen, we contract with Feeding Pennsylvania and Hunger-Free Pennsylvania member organizations that distribute food, whose combined statewide network total more than 3,000 partner food pantries, soup kitchens, and other food assistance sites and reaches all 67 counties.

PASS provides funds for the state's food banks and other emergency food providers to purchase a variety of surplus agricultural products produced in Pennsylvania. PASS provides an alternative market for many farmers in the commonwealth who currently have no outlet for safe, but somewhat inferior, quality product. At the same time, PASS provides an additional opportunity for the state's charitable feeding organizations to purchase locally-grown and produced agricultural products. This is especially important because many low-income individuals and families do not have the same level of access to healthy food as do higher income groups.

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Moreover, PASS provides a safe, efficient system for farmers who donate products. Producers, packers, and processors are reimbursed for costs involved in harvesting, processing and/or packaging donated product. Many benefits accrue to those members of Pennsylvania's agriculture industry participating in PASS, including: offsetting costs related to harvesting, packaging and/or processing; eliminating disposal/landfill costs; keeping farm workers more consistently employed; reducing overall overhead costs; offering potential tax benefits of the difference between current market value and production costs; and reducing food waste.

Since the program was first funded in 2015, more than 3.9 million pounds of food have been distributed through the program. This means that more than 585,000 low-income Pennsylvania households have received healthy, nutritious Pennsylvania-produced food! 39 different products (including fruits, vegetables, dairy, meats) have been sourced across all 67 counties. PASS has proved effective to the state and regional agriculture economies by providing 78 farmers, growers and processors and their regional food banks a method to connect excess wholesome food with communities in need. This food is distributed efficiently, at a cost well below retail.

Ideally, we would like to work with the General Assembly to move toward a \$5 million appropriation for PASS. This would allow the sourcing and distribution of 5 to 15 million pounds of nutritious food and generate large economic benefits for the state's agricultural economies.

The PASS partnership between the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, our food bank and the entire statewide charitable food network, and Pennsylvania farmers truly is a game-changer that ensures hungry Pennsylvanians have access to nutritious food while supporting our commonwealth's agricultural and food industries and reducing food waste. A win, win, win.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to answering any questions.

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### **York Benevolent Food Pantry, York, PA**

- The PASS grant has made a tremendous difference for our clients! This past year was the first time in over six years that we could provide our clients with milk and eggs. And the fabulous assortment of produce, fruits and vegetables were a huge benefit to so many of our clients as they provide the essential nutritional requirements.”
- “I didn't know the food was coming from right around here and helping farmers, too. That is great. This helps me afford more at the grocery store and eat more healthy food.” –*Sam*

### **New Love Center, Jersey Shore, PA**

- We consider this so important that we have committed to include milk and eggs in every distribution. The PASS grant so helped us to defray that cost however we will continue to provide that for our clients. Bless all of you that made this possible! Our clients are grateful and so are we!

### **Faith Community Outreach, Waynesboro, PA**

- Our families at Faith Community Outreach Ministries in Waynesboro have welcomed the milk, butter, eggs, hot dogs and fresh produce they have received thanks to our food pantry receiving the PASS grant. We could offer extra items to every household this summer because of the additional funding. Thanks for making this possible for our food pantry and the folks we serve. It was a win-win experience and we certainly encourage the PA Department of Agriculture to continue the PASS grant program!

### **American Rescue Workers, Hollidaysburg, PA**

- Tim (Roaring Springs): After my wife died, I couldn't make it without the ARW. I have 5 children and I work full time. Things like milk and butter and cereal go a long way in stretching my food dollars.

### **Project Share, Carlisle, PA**

- Sally (Carlisle, PA) from Project SHARE Food Pantry exclaimed how much she appreciated the fresh produce, especially greens and the milk. “My doctor just told me I am malnourished. I am not getting enough calcium and vitamin D. This makes all the difference in my diet.”

### **Our Lady of Hope Fresh Express, Shamokin, PA**

- We love receiving the fresh fruit and veggies, especially the fruit as we don't normally get to purchase that at the store.

### **Caring Cupboard, Palmyra, PA**

- Vicki F., Palmyra: "Getting milk every week is a great help. My kids drink it like there's no tomorrow and getting it at The Caring Cupboard saves me from having to buy 2 gallons a week."

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<sup>i</sup> Map the Meal Gap looks at food insecurity by county across America and the amount of meals missing from food insecure American households.

<sup>ii</sup> Rank, Mark Robert, Hirschl, Thomas A. and Foster, Kirk A. Chasing the American Dream: Understanding What Shapes our Fortunes. Oxford University Press, 2016.