

## Advocacy Update

### Federal

**Tariffs and Agriculture Producer Bailout:** Recent surveys show that Ag producers' confidence in our trade agreements with other countries is on the decline. Worried about a collapse in the global market for their crops, farmers and ranchers are speaking up, and have even formed a large campaign called Farmers for Fair Trade...and they are loud. Closing borders and enacting tariffs to create a US limited Ag business is not something that most farmers and ranchers are interested in seeing. Additionally, they are not interested in government handouts for reconciliation from the fallout.

As a reminder President Trump's plan to rescue farmers from declining sales due to tariffs includes a government purchase of US Ag products to distribute through federal nutrition programs. Though many of us in the food rescue network would enjoy seeing an increased supply to our programs, a healthy trade economy has more downstream positive effects than an increase in government commodities.

**What it means to NTFB: Keep an eye on what is happening to our local retail partners and producers. Are their products starting to back up due to decreased exports? The Ukraine embargo in 2014 resulted in thousands of pounds of dark meat chicken being donated to food banks by Tyson. NTFB would be happy to take surplus off their hands.**

**Government Shutdown:** It's that time of year to start talking about Government shutdown. Lawmakers are hastily trying to find a way around President Trump's refusal to sign the spending bill without adequate funding for the US/Mexico border wall. As a poli-sci reminder, it takes a 2/3 majority vote in each chamber to override a presidential veto of a bill. The House likely would not have the votes to swing that, which has many government employees worried.

The USDA has final word on how government shutdown affects federal feeding programs but historically:

SNAP & WIC benefits and essential employees would be safe.

The smaller discretionary programs such as The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), USDA foods for Child Nutrition Programs, and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP or our People And Nutrition boxes), will continue to be delivered to program operators as long as funding is in place until the end of the fiscal year. However, administrative personnel to run these programs may not be safely funded.

**What it means to NTFB: If the government shuts down, messaging will need to be created to reassure our partner agencies that there will be no interruptions to their services or products...as long as the shutdown is resolved fairly quickly.**

## State

**The Census:** The 2020 Census is less than 2 years away and things are heating up as to how it will be conducted. An accurate census count is critical to Texas. It's used to determine our political geographies, our federal funding allocations (housing, medical assistance, transportation, feeding programs), our state responsibilities, and determining who needs help. Unfortunately, the 2020 census will be one of the most underfunded efforts in its history.

Texas Latin-x residents are particularly hard to count. In the 2010 census areas with high populations of Latinos/Latinas had the largest numbers of non-responders. Fears over immigration raids are causing many of the families to either not answer truthfully or not answer their door. Questions about citizenship have not existed since the 1950 census yet many fear it will make a reappearance, though it is highly unlikely.

Making the census even more complex, populations in low-income areas, people with lower levels of educational attainment, homeless, and those who have a hard time getting to the front door (seniors or disabled) are all typically low-responders. Since traditionally these are the very populations of Texans who need government funded services, their counts are imperative to Texas and our budget.

**What it means to NTFB: Accurate census counts lend support to the "why" in what we do. Food insecurity, poverty, and demographic data allow us to target areas of need as well as tell the story of why we do what we do. Misrepresentation of underserved populations mean less federal and state dollars flowing into nutrition programs, compromising our ability to serve every person.**

**Produce:** The Surplus Agriculture Act in the Texas State Budget started as a small grant program of about 1 Million dollars and has grown to \$9.4 Million in funding over the past 4 legislative sessions. This grant allows Texas Food Banks to receive produce from farmers that otherwise would be plowed back into the fields because it doesn't meet "grocery store beauty" quality. Our ask to the Texas Legislature will be to increase program funding up to \$22 Million. With Hurricane Harvey fallout and a focus on school gun violence, advocates from all 21 food banks will be highly focused for the 140 days of our 86<sup>th</sup> legislative session to make our case.

**What it means to NTFB: Making sure we have accurate data on our produce sources, poundage, and distributions will make preparing for session less stressful for all. Additionally, WE NEED YOUR STORIES. Did you see a child taste pineapple for the first time? Did our mobile pantry help someone change their diet? Please let us know [CLICK HERE!](#)**

**Senior SNAP Application:** Just like this update, it's too long y'all. We will be working with many partners around the state to change the SNAP Application for people over the age of 65+. Many states have already done this, Texas should be next.

**What it means to NTFB: Simplified applications decrease a barrier for many eligible seniors to access SNAP resulting in more people we can sign up and less senior hunger. Do you have a story about a senior having a hard time accessing SNAP? Your stories fuel our ability to create change. LET US KNOW and [CLICK HERE!](#)**

That's all from me!

---

### A Note from the Desk of Trisha Cunningham,

I wanted to give you a quick update on the Farm Bill and actions that are being taken at North Texas Food Bank to try to preserve funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and some commodity feeding programs.

In fact, 54% of the meals we provide access to are in some way tied to government funding (40% are SNAP equivalent meals). Therefore, it is essential to protect funding for these programs. Our 2025 goal to close the 92 million meal hunger gap will be seriously threatened if funding for these feeding programs are reduced. Nationally, for every 1 meal a food bank provides, SNAP provides 12.

Currently, there are two versions of the Farm Bill that are being sent to 'conference' to reach an agreement. The House Bill first increases work requirements and then takes money from feeding programs to put into untested work training programs. The Senate Bill keeps SNAP and most other programs intact and we are urging our conferee members to accept this version.

Feeding Texas (of which we are a member) and other state-wide organizations concerned with hunger for their clients are signatories on a letter that was sent today to the chief Farm Bill conferees. From Texas we have: Eddie Bernice Johnson and Jeb Hensarling both from North Texas, as well as Filemon Vela and Jodey Arrington. I ask that you please review the attached document and you will find links to a couple of good articles that help explain both SNAP support from the general public, as well as, supporting evidence that the majority of SNAP recipients who can work, do work.

Also, we participated in a Dallas Morning News editorial board meeting on Monday to educate them about our work at NTFB, the issue of hunger and the influence of policy on our ability to pursue our mission. During this meeting, we focused our policy piece on SNAP to address the Dallas Morning News editorial ([link](#)) last month.

Our key messages were:

- Cutting SNAP to put in work restrictions and training programs at the Federal level is bad for Texas and North Texas.
  - We agree that able-bodied SNAP recipients who can find work should work. Texas already has work requirements in place.
  - Taking money out of benefits to fund work and training programs at the federal level and increasing work requirements means Texans will have less money for actual feeding programs. (Val calculated that the estimated 2.9% of people who would be unable to meet the new SNAP requirements in the House Bill, translates into a \$21M annual impact for our 13 North Texas counties. That doesn't even account for the lower \$\$ that would be shifted to training programs or the new draw on the charitable sector).
- SNAP is the most cost efficient way to feed people. For every meal we can provide as a Food Bank, SNAP can provide 12. When our clients lose their SNAP benefits, it doesn't mean they lose their hunger too. The charitable sector is then expected to make up the difference. It will be logistically impossible for food banks to be the safety net without additional assistance.
- Solution: We ask our legislators to wait for the results of the ten pilot studies that were implemented in 2014 from the last Farm Bill that tested work programs before making sweeping changes. We want to see a nutrition title within the Farm Bill that focuses on feeding programs first. The first initial outcomes from these programs should be available in 2021.

If you have a Twitter account, I suggest you follow @NTFBVoice for more advocacy updates as we get into this hot topic. Feeding the hungry should be a non-partisan issue that all can work together to support.

Trisha

Valerie Stone Hawthorne, PhD



Government Relations Director  
North Texas Food Bank  
Direct: 832.851.0303