

## Advocacy Update 12.16.2019

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### NTFB VOICE Advocacy Update

ADVOCATING FOR A HUNGER-FREE, HEALTHY NORTH TEXAS

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#### In Brief -

- Food Deserts, I want your thoughts
- Romaine lettuce, why do outbreaks keep happening?
- Trade Mitigation rebranded to the Food Purchase and Distribution Program
- We may dodge a government shutdown this holiday season

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### The Role of the Consumer in Food Deserts

The Food Desert conversation has resurfaced back into the news cycle lately. D Magazine [published an article today](#). It states that a recent economic study shows that grocery stores can survive in low income areas despite corporate analysis that claims that they cannot.

Another article in the Wall Street Journal, published yesterday talks about [cities issuing policy that requires dollar stores](#) (Family Dollar, Dollar General, popular in food deserts) to set aside 500 sq ft or so to fresh foods like produce and meats.

And the City of Dallas/Communities Foundation of Texas concluded its Food Idea Innovation Challenge selecting 7 submitted ideas, to build into possible concepts, that they believe will improve consumer access to healthy food.

Food deserts are complex puzzles that must be looked at from all angles. If grocery stores or increasing produce purchase options are the solution, why doesn't this work?

For some, the answer is *supply*. Without fresh healthy foods available, people who live in food deserts aren't able to eat a healthy diet and are stuck eating whatever is offered to them such as processed shelf stable snack foods.

Personal experience: I recently observed 130 people wait in line for an hour for fresh fruits & vegetables at a distribution point, this happens all over our area, regularly.

For some, the answer is *demand*. Healthy food options aren't available because consumers aren't demanding fresh foods by backing it up with purchase. If healthy food options are demanded AND purchased, then it would be profitable for stores to carry those items.

Personal experience: Less than a quarter mile away from that produce distribution mentioned above, I spoke to three store managers that say on average they throw away 90-95% of the fresh produce and salad options in their stores, even though they are cheaper than the hot & ready items. Their customers prefer to buy pizzas, burgers, hot dogs, sodas and snacks instead.

And for some, it's a giant complex combination of both that needs interventions on all fronts in order to transform a community, labeled as a food desert.

Personal experience: Grocery stores owners report that margins on middle-of-the-store items are prime real estate markets that keep their business afloat and keep shareholders happy ([are you familiar with how grocery stores sell shelf space?](#)).

**What are your thoughts, I want to hear them.**

**How do we approach the issues with supply, demand, and basic economics?**

**Do corporate grocery stores owe a community anything?**

**What drives people to eat/purchase healthier foods?**

**Does local government have right to impose fresh produce requirements to a store in a free market?**

**Talk to me.**

## **Salads are Dangerous Items Recently**

Why do we keep hearing that romaine lettuce is trying to kill us? Why do my kids keep rejoicing that I'm not forcing them to eat salad at holiday events?

It comes down to water safety. Back in the early 90s and 00s salad contamination issues revolved around the field workers and the lack of basic sanitation methods. Often times field workers were penalized for taking bathroom breaks at port-a-potties located a long distance away from a pick-site.

With jobs on the line, many workers did their business in the growing fields, saving the walk time, but sickening (and killing) customers, including children. When this horrific story broke, new regulations required farm producers to install portable bathroom facilities at a reasonable distance and allow for bathroom breaks. But, other issues surfaced, such as lack of lighting in the portable bathroom areas or no hand washing facilities. Regulations again fixed that after people continued to get sick and some die.

Now, the contamination issues seem to stem from water runoff from livestock fields. Runoff from animal waste will taint nearby produce farms. Though Congress has known this for quite some time, federal standards for water have been delayed since the Food Safety Modernization Act of 2011. After this latest outbreak, that has sickened 120 people, Congress is pursuing final standards, calling this a wakeup call.

For your holiday dinners, stay away from lettuce produced in Salinas, California (the outbreak site) or stick to the desserts and buttered rolls.

## **REBRAND! Trade Mitigation Becomes a Program**

On Friday the US Department of Agriculture announced it will be issuing \$60M dollars to help with the storage and distribution costs for trade mitigation food. Food Banks across the US have been the fortunate recipients of commodities and produce purchased by the US Government to help farmers/ranchers/producers during the trade wars with China, Canada, and other countries.

Though food banks are grateful to receive this unprecedented amount of food from the USDA, the cost to store, refrigerate and distribute them is/was an unexpected budget item.

Why mention the mitigation is now a *program*? Once a program is introduced and funded in the federal government, getting rid of it is really difficult. Will this rebrand mean a large future for commodity purchases from US farmers/ranchers/producers, drastically expanding The Emergency Food Assistance Program? Time will tell, but my money is on yes.

## **No Shutdown?**

Just like your favorite Rom-Com Holiday movie, the drama contained in the federal shutdown watch has kept everyone on their seat, with justified fears from the memory of last year's shutdown on everyone's mind. [But, it looks like a deal has been reached.](#)

The House plans to take up the spending package tomorrow, the Senate approves it next, and then the President needs to sign it. Funding for the border wall is included, the minimum tobacco age is raised from 18 to 21, three taxes from the Affordable Care Act are repealed, and we won't have to worry about a shutdown until next October 2020.

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Questions or Comments?

Hit Reply and talk to me about your thoughts.

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