North Texas Food Bank
2023 State Legislative Agenda

*In alignment with the Feeding Texas 2023 State Legislative Priorities.

Double the Surplus Agricultural Products Grant to $20M for the Biennium

Inflation continues to hurt Texas families, farmers and food banks. This funding allows food banks to obtain fresh produce that is unsellable, with 100% of funds going to farmers and transportation costs. Economist Ray Perryman estimates that every $1 invested in the program yields $3.27 in healthcare and education savings for Texas.

Modernize the SNAP Vehicle Asset Test

Inflation in the value of used cars is causing thousands of Texas families to lose their SNAP benefits. The extremely low limit on a family’s second vehicle ($4,650) disqualifies many two-parent and multi-generational households from accessing SNAP. No family should lose their ability to put food on the table due to inflation in the car market.

Allow Community College Student Access in Vocational and Technical Degree Programs to be Eligible for SNAP

College hunger is on the rise with 38% of students at 2-year colleges experiencing hunger. The inability to afford basic needs including food is the #1 reason cited by community college students for not completing their education. SNAP provides short-term food assistance so students can complete their degrees on time and increase their earnings potential.

Support a “Healthy Food is Good Medicine” Bill

Low-income individuals struggle to afford nutritious food and adequate healthcare. Reimbursing organizations that provide medically based nutrition to individuals with chronic health conditions can improve health outcomes and also reduce healthcare costs for individuals and the state.

Expedite SNAP Access for Texans Exiting the Criminal Justice System

Ensuring access to food upon release means that people leaving the criminal justice system can focus on securing housing, finding a job, and reuniting with family. This supports the reentry process, reducing recidivism, and lowering state incarceration costs. This is not an expansion of benefits; these individuals are already eligible for SNAP.
In the 2019-21 biennium, Texas food banks distributed 90.7M pounds of fresh produce to Texans facing hunger, at an average cost of $.11/lb., or nine pounds of produce per $1. Texas economist Ray Perryman estimates that every $1 invested in the program yields $3.27 in healthcare and education savings for Texas.

**BACKGROUND**

Since 2001, the Surplus Agricultural Products grant has supported a cost-effective strategy to fight hunger, improve health, and reduce food waste in Texas. Food banks use this funding to obtain fresh produce that is unsellable due to imperfections or market conditions. 100% of program funds go to farmers and transportation providers to offset the cost of harvesting, storage, packaging, and freight.

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**PROBLEM**

Texans everywhere are struggling with the rising cost of food, and food banks are still seeing one-third more clients than they did prior to the pandemic. Recent data shows that 1.5 million Texas households were found to be facing hunger, more than any other state.

While inflation is hurting both Texas farmers and low-income Texas families, food banks are also coping with the rising costs of food and fuel. While need is increasing, USDA support for food banks and local donations fell sharply this year. Food banks project they will receive 31% less food in 2022 compared to 2021.

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**SOLUTION**

Food banks will be unable to meet the increased need in Texas due to inflation without additional support from the state. The Texas Legislature should ensure that food banks can continue to provide healthy produce to struggling Texans across the state by increasing funding for the Surplus Agricultural Products grant to $20M for the biennium.

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In Texas, able-bodied adults are required to work 30 hours per week or they can lose their SNAP benefits. But the Vehicle Asset Test prevents people from qualifying for SNAP and owning a reliable vehicle.

4. It harms families when inflation is high.
Inflation has recently caused thousands of Texas families to lose their SNAP benefits at recertification. These families’ cars, which were previously below the limit, have now risen in value so much that their food assistance has been taken from them.

SOLUTION
Texas must modernize the SNAP Vehicle Asset Test by applying an inflationary adjustment to the current limits. No family should be denied help simply because they own a reliable vehicle, and no family should lose their ability to put food on the table because of inflation in the car market.

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SOLUTION
A simple change in policy will allow low-income students in vocational and technical degree programs to access SNAP while they pursue their educational goals.

The Texas Legislature should instruct the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to identify college degree programs that are vocational or technical in nature, so that students enrolled in these programs can receive SNAP.

Our workforce depends on students graduating with the skills and training that they need to succeed. Improving short-term food assistance will help these students along their path to economic self-sufficiency.
BACKGROUND
At any given time, nearly 300,000 Texans are on parole or probation. These Texans reenter their communities with a set of complex needs and challenges including chronic health conditions, unstable housing, and impediments to finding and retaining quality employment. Many struggle to reintegrate and a large share are rearrested or reincarcerated within a few years of release.

Research shows that formerly incarcerated people are especially vulnerable immediately after release. Early access to a robust set of supports at this time can help these Texans attain self-sufficiency and avoid rearrest and reincarceration.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a critical part of this reentry support infrastructure, providing basic food assistance and supplementing inadequate income.

PROBLEM
Federal SNAP rules require that states process applications within 30 days of an individual filing the request. However, recent staffing shortages at the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HSSC) have pushed this processing time to over 60 days. For Texans leaving the criminal justice system with no means to afford groceries, this delay leads to hunger and undermines their reentry.

SOLUTION
Several states have decided to address this issue by allowing people who are incarcerated to apply for SNAP prior to release, so that benefits can be available immediately upon release. Ensuring access to food upon release means that people leaving the criminal justice system can focus on finding a job and reuniting with family.

Texas should allow people who are incarcerated to pre-register for SNAP prior to release. This commonsense policy ensures that formerly incarcerated people can meet their basic needs, supports the reentry process, and reduces recidivism.

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PROBLEM
The USDA defines food insecurity as a lack of consistent access to nutritious food. In Texas, 13% or 1.4M households are food insecure, making us one of nine states in the U.S. that are above the national average of 10.5M U.S. households.

Food insecurity is associated with higher health care costs. The Center for Disease Control suggests that food insecurity adds about $53B annually to health care cost in the U.S. In Texas, it can add up to more than $2B.

What is Food Rx?
Food Rx is a food prescription program, provided by a community-based organization and healthcare partner to individuals who are food insecure and have an ongoing health condition.

What are Medically Tailored Meals?
Medically tailored meals are delivered to individuals living with one or more chronic illness and tailored to their medical need by a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN).

SOLUTION
Health and food are fundamentally linked. For individuals who are low-income and living in poverty, access to nutritious food and adequate health care is unattainable. As a result, a decline in their health occurs, making it more costly for them and the State of Texas.

Medical nutrition programs:
- Food Rx programs have proven that those who participated have a statistically significant decrease in their HbA1c numbers. (UTHealth- Rockefeller Study)
- Medically Tailored Meal programs have shown improvements in health outcomes for chronic illnesses such as type 2 diabetes, heart failure, and chronic liver disease, as well as reduce health care utilization. (CHLPI- Harvard Law School)