



IOWA HUNGER SUMMIT | 2019

2019 IOWA HUNGER SUMMIT
Iowans United in Fighting Hunger – At Home and Abroad
October 14, 2019 - Des Moines, Iowa

MORNING KEYNOTE

Speaker: Claire Babineaux-Fontenot
October 14, 2019

Introduction

Madeline Goebel

Director, Community Outreach, World Food Prize Foundation

It is now my great pleasure to introduce our next speaker, Claire Babineaux-Fontenot. As Chief Executive Officer, Claire oversees the nation's largest domestic hunger relief organization and second-largest U.S. charity.

Feeding America is a nationwide network of over 200 food banks and 60,000 food pantries and meal programs. Together, the Feeding America network provides more than 4 billion meals to more than 40 million people across the United States and supports programs that improve food security for families we serve.

Prior to joining Feeding America, Claire spent 13 years as part of Walmart's leadership team and her most recent role being Executive Vice President and Global Treasurer. A Louisiana native, Claire has been entrusted with the leadership of terms for nearly three decades. Before Walmart, she was a partner in charge of the Baton Rouge office and Tax Practice Leader for Adams and Reese LPP. Earlier in her career she was Dispute Resolution Practice Group Leader for the Southwest Region at PwC and an Assistant Secretary for the Office of Legal Affairs for the state of Iowa.

Claire holds a Bachelor of Science from the University of Louisiana in Lafayette, a Juris Doctor from Southern University Law Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and a Master of Laws in Taxation from Southern Methodist University, Dedman School of Law in Dallas, Texas.

Please join me in welcoming Claire to the stage.

Claire Babineaux-Fontenot

Chief Executive Officer, Feeding America

Hello! So maybe something we can establish from the very beginning is—you will have more credibility with me if you raise your hand when I ask the question: So how many of you are wondering, with that background, what on earth is she doing here?



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Well, I hope you'll understand the answer to that question really soon. I got excited by the prospect of coming to talk to you today. I was especially excited by the time of year that I'd get to do so, that I'd be here in the fall is important and significant, I thought. I get a chance to come to the heartland around harvest season. It was also special for me because there's this image that I have in my mind that I've long had in my mind that has everything to do with why it is that I'm standing here on this stage today. It's an image that's difficult for me to have in precision, because it began a journey that my mother was on while she was pregnant with me.

In the fall of 1963 my mom learned that there were two little children in a neighboring town who was suffering from neglect and abuse. I imagine her getting in our blue station wagon, driving to that town, picking those babies up, and bringing them home. I've learned over the years about my father's surprise when he returned home from work only to discover that his family had doubled and knowing that he had another on the way. But neither my father nor my mother had any idea about what was going to happen over the course of the years to come, but that would be just the first of many such trips that my mother would go on. And every now and then my dad would come, too. But apparently he wasn't essential to the trip. And through the course of those trips and over the course of my mother's lifetime, she became mom, and he became dad, to 108 children, including the remarkably privileged me.

So really the question that's more fundamental is—What on earth took me so long? Growing up in our unique household, I learned things, lots of things, important things, things that would change the course of my life, that would inform the way that I saw the world for the rest of my life. I learned things that my parents wanted me to know, and I learned a lot of things that they wished that I didn't know so early. Remember, the typical path to our home was through some form of neglect or abuse.

So when other moms were trying to get their finicky kids to eat their food by saying, "There are hungry children in Africa," or "There are hungry children in China," it wasn't a necessary thing for my mom to say to us, because we knew that you didn't have to look to distant shores to find hunger among children. There were hungry children right here in the United States. It's a difficult truth but a truth nonetheless.

But what I saw in the example of my parents, neither of whom had high school diplomas, I saw the power of compassion. I saw the power of nutritious food on the frail bodies of children. I saw that not only is it affirming for the body but also for the spirit, for the soul. And I wondered—is it okay for me not to be on the frontlines of this work, knowing what I know? I don't think it was. I didn't. I asked myself why was I not yet.

And now in the moment that I stand, I doubt that I would be better positioned to be in this role had I not done all of those things that I didn't understand on the way here. All of the opportunities that I had to do remarkable things, to meet remarkable



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people, the network that has been built around me ever since, all the investments that have been made, I get to use every single one of those investments for the most noble of causes, and that is to help the most vulnerable in our society. And I get to do it with people like you.

It's fitting, I believe, as a tribute to my mother, who we lost seven years ago, that I will spend the rest of my life working in this movement. I will use every resource at my disposal, working in this cause, and that I fundamentally believe that there is an answer to the question asked earlier on this stage—Can there be a future without hunger? The answer is absolutely there can. You will decide, whether or not there will.

This is one of the greatest countries in the history of civilization, one of the richest ones for sure, a country where we throw away over 72 billion pounds of perfectly edible food, not counting household waste, every year, while organizations like the network of Feeding America feed over 40 million people. This is a disconnect that we can solve for. We can do that together, and we are, in fact.

I heard one of the most terrible statistics from this stage that I'd like to update, and I'm so glad that I get to update it in a positive way, sir—41 million people no longer face food insecurity, according to USDA statistics. The good news is that it has decreased for the first time in the last numbers that we have, had we finally returned to pre-recession rates. Now, 37 million people in the richest country, in the history of civilization face food insecurity, 11 million children, 5 million seniors. Is there anyone in this room that believes differently than I? Surely we all agree, but that's 37 million too many.

But we should celebrate the fact that we're making progress. We should. And part of that progress is being made because of deep partnerships that are happening inside of this country and that are happening beyond the United States. One of the things I love about the work that you do here is an acknowledgement, I believe fundamentally, that when you care about people, you care about people that your caring doesn't have territorial boundaries. If you care about hunger, you care about hunger. If you care about people, you care about hunger. If you care about education, you should care about hunger. If you care about medical outcomes, you should care about hunger. If you're fiscally responsible, you should care about hunger. Hunger impacts every single one of those things, and there's plenty data to support these facts.

I am optimistic, and it's for the reasons that I also heard just a few minutes ago from this stage. You see, I mentioned that I was happy I was here during the harvest, because, one, of my family's journey. But the other reason is—one of the things that's not obvious from my bio is that the small town that I'm from actually has its roots in agriculture. Both of my parents were raised on farms. All four of their parents were raised on farms. All of their parents were raised on farms, and so on and so on. And I learned in that agricultural community that I was raised in about compassion. And I



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learned in that community about empathy, about kindness. I learned about the goodness inside of people, because I saw it on display every day, and I've benefited from it, without which there's no way that the granddaughter of sharecroppers and the daughter of two people who didn't graduate from high school gets to do the things I did outside of a country that cares about other people.

I learned to expect people to care, and I believe fundamentally that the disconnect is not a lack of compassion, it's a lack of understanding, and that one of the primary responsibilities that I have and that we have together is to ensure that people better understand whom it is that's hungry, how it is that they became so, and what are the things that we can do together to help them to elevate out of hunger. And that is that we're dedicated to doing at Feeding America.

I've seen partners make investments in capital campaigns. I've seen business partners who make investments in volunteer hours. We have over two million volunteers around the United States who volunteer in our efforts every year. Most of those volunteers come from partnerships that we have with businesses.

We've gained so many important insights from our partnerships, insights that have helped us think about technology and how technology can help us with solutions to the challenges that we confront. And we've received food. We've received food from small donations, middle-size donations, and large donations as well. And though I understand that Iowa is a place of soybeans, I want you to understand also, that the agricultural base of this country is so important to everything else that we do.

And I was so struck when I recently had an opportunity to go to the Bronx, and I witnessed a little girl who saw kale for the first time. And at first she was curious about—well, what is this? And there was someone as a part of our network who was there helping to explain to her mother how to prepare kale in a way that might be tasty for the little girl. And with her wide eyes, how she looked at this little salad that they made with the kale, began to eat it, and she declared, "Oh, my, I think I like kale!"

I also wish you could have been with me when I was in Nevada. I'm sorry. Nevada where there's a senior who started going to a place called Helping Hands, and for the first time she received consistent access to nutritious food. She went on what she referred to as her Helping Hands diet. When she started there, she actually was taking multiple medications for various chronic challenges—hypertension, diabetes, heart disease. After six months, she had lost a significant amount of weight and no longer relied on any medication. That's the power of what you do and what we can do together.

So when I say I'm optimistic, I don't know if you noticed in that bio, as I often remind people of, I did math for a living, people. I have a data-centric sensibility. I like to understand what the facts actually are. I like to understand what the data says, and



then I like to move the things that matter. Together we are moving things that matter, and they matter in a fundamental way.

So thank you for inviting me to be here. Thank you for the progress that we've already made. And know that there is work to be done. But I can't imagine a group in whose hands it is better put than those who would assemble for this convening. I'm deeply grateful for everything that you do, and I'm remarkably optimistic about what it is that will come.

Thank you so much for having me.

PANEL: FEEDING AMERICA

Moderator: *Claire Bobineaux-Fontenot*

October 14, 2019

Moderator

Claire Babineaux-Fontenot

Executive Officer, Feeding America

So what's going to happen next really, really excites me. I'm going to have an opportunity to moderate a panel. A panel of people with whom I work, people with whom I'm so proud to be affiliated, and people whose responsibility, whose task, whose accomplishments are not well known. I hope as a result, in part at least of this panel, you will understand even better why it is that I'm so proud to be associated with food bankers, the food bankers who will be on this panel with me in just a few moments. So I will take my seat, and we will await their entrance.

Hello, all. Wow, so what a distinguished group of panelists we have assembled today, all of whom have been serving underserved communities here in Iowa for a very long time. I'll give them an opportunity to give you a bit of flavor for what it is they're doing by way of some of the questions that I will ask, but I first want to share.

If you had ever heard of me or heard me speak since I've been in this role, you would have heard me talk about this notion of our address. And I see somebody who works there with me at Feeding America national office out there—hi there. I often talk about 35 East Wacker Drive, and when I usually bring it up—that's the official address for Feeding America national office. We have an office in Chicago, and we have an office in DC. And I talk about the address in Chicago usually within this context.

When I go to that office, I ask myself—What are the things that we can do in that building? And there are many things that we can do. We can bring light to the issues of poverty and of hunger. Thank you for acknowledging both are important for us to talk about and to activate around. We can do things about the coordination of efforts around the United States through the network of food banks. But



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something that we never do there is, although we can tout statistics as a part of the network like feeding over 40 million people a year, none of those meals are delivered from 35 East Wacker Drive. They're done in concert with a network of extraordinary professionals, over 200 of them, around the United States.

Some of them—there are 200 member food banks for Feeding America national office or Feeding America as a network. There are other food banks who, while they're not part of that 200 number, they're certainly part of the network, and I'm so excited that today you actually get to hear from a food bank that is a part of our network but not a part of our whole Feeding America membership per se—because our network includes 60,000 additional food banks, sometimes pantries, sometimes soup kitchens as well.

So you have voices from across the state of Iowa sitting here with us today, and it's my privilege to introduce each of them to you in turn. And I have some questions for all of you. Now, I don't know if you know how these memberships usually work, but I'm usually on the receiving end of questions, so I delight in the opportunity to be sending the questions their way today.

Participants

Brian Barks President & CEO, Food Bank for the Heartland
Michelle Book President & CEO, Food Bank of Iowa
Kim Guardado Food Reservoir Director, HACAP
Mike Miller President & CEO, River Bend Food Bank
Barbara Prather Executive Director, Northeast Iowa Food Bank
Linda Scheid Executive Director, Food Bank of Siouxland

Claire So I'm going to start with Barb Prather, and give me a chance to talk a little bit about Barb before I ask her questions, so bear with me and I will get to some information about Barb. Barb is director of the Northeast Iowa Food Bank in Waterloo. She's been in that role since 1999—is that right, Barb? Wow, a mere teenager when she started there. Really? Barb engages in quite a few nutritional problems, some of which she'll get an opportunity to talk to you about, has been a stalwart in this work, has farming in her bones, having been born and raised on a farm in Minnesota, and that helps inform the way that she approaches the work. And along with the work that Barb does here in Iowa, she has served on more than one committee and taskforce for the whole network; and as a result of that work, she has had an impact that reaches far beyond the territory that she has immediate responsibility for.



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So, Barb, I thought I'd start by giving you an opportunity to talk about something in the work that you're doing in your food bank that you're particularly proud of. Why don't we start there?

Barb So start with the easiest first, right?

Claire Yes.

Barb So I think as I look back over the 20 years that I've been in Waterloo and that area, one of the biggest things that I'm most proud of is the partnerships and the people. The people are key to what we do. It's always been about the people that we serve, but it's always been about the partnerships that we form to serve the people. And along with that, it's the people that get involved, some of which are in this room, whether it's staff or volunteers or funders or whoever it is—because we can't do this alone. It's about a team approach. It's about—how do we take something and make sure it gets to the person that needs food? And so it's about all of us working together.

Claire Excellent. Now, I mentioned when you started, so that means you've been around food banking for a while in Iowa. Why don't you share some of the things that have changed over the years?

Barb So as I look at the landscape of food banking in Iowa, we really, all of us were born out of the farm crisis. It was the '80s. Everybody has a little bit of inkling of what was going on. Companies were downsizing, and all of a sudden there was a need for food. And there's three things I found that all of us have in common on this stage—the first being, 1) there was a need for food in the community; 2) there were a lot of community volunteers who wanted to do something about it; and 3) food was being wasted and ending up in the landfill.

And the biggest thing about food banks and food pantries is that a food bank serves organizations and programs, and a food pantry serves people. And a lot of times people don't understand the difference in that. So I always like to start a talk, when I talk about food banking is—Food banks serve organizations and programs. Food pantries serve people.

Now, the food bank that I am at actually started as a food pantry and today still has a pantry housed in its organization. But for the majority of us, the big core business that we do is about food banking, taking that tractor trailer load of products that would have ended up in the landfill, and distributing it out to a network of organizations—because none of them would have had enough storage space to handle that. And together all of us right now are providing nearly 33 million meals to people in need through this network that starts from the food donor and ends up at the



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- food pantry, mobile food pantry, through the Backpack Program, whatever it is, in the community. And none of us can do it alone.
- Claire Absolutely. And it's interesting that you mentioned... In fact, as I was going through the list of things, that if you care about this, you should care about hunger in America and abroad—one of the things that few people understand is how much food we actually save that otherwise would go to landfills. So our current estimates at a national level is that we are saving at least 3.5 billion pounds of food that would otherwise go to landfills, through our work. And we have the ability to do even more, and we're working through the dynamics of how to scale that at an even larger level so that we don't have that incongruity around 72 billion pounds of food going to a landfill when there are people with empty bellies in this country.
- Barb And that's so true, because, you know, it started out with it being a tractor trailer load of product, but it's as simple as the apples that are on the tree that aren't going to go to anybody, and gleaning them. It's going into grocery stores. It's working with food that's redirected from distribution centers—you name it, we run the gamut. We're able to handle that and distribute it out, but we have to distribute it out in a safe manner so that it gets to somebody safely so people don't get sick. And we're forever thankful for the Bill Emerson Food Donation Act that really gives us the basis for that donation.
- Claire Thank you for that. And you mentioned the term... You talked about food safety. I don't know that members of the audience would have an understanding about how invested we are in food safety, in fact, in the work that we do. And this is open to anyone on the panel who'd like to chime in with your thoughts about how important food safety is to our work, whether or not you've seen any evolution in that space over time.
- Barb You know, since I've been probably involved with food banking longest, I'll start, and I know Mike has very, very passionate feelings on it was well. You know, food safety has always been a part of what we do. We've always inspected the food that comes in to make sure that it goes out safely. But in the last four years, we've really upped our game. And each Feeding America food bank is required to pass some sort of a food safety audit in order to ensure that the food that they're bringing in is distributed out. And it's not an easy audit to pass. We want to make sure that nobody gets sick, so we do temperature checks, we document things, we document all of our policies and procedures. It's not an easy thing to do, but we make it happen on limited budgets.
- Claire Absolutely, and that's one of the features of being part of a national network, one of the resources that Feeding America provides. Inside of our network is a process and protocol around food safety. But are there any



other thoughts or comments about food safety among the members?
Mike?

Mike The only thing I'd add to that...

Claire Would you introduce yourself as you speak?

Mike Sure. I'm Mike Miller, president and CEO of Riverbend Food Bank in the Quad Cities. The only thing I would add to that is—there should not be a lower standard for food and safety just because it's charitable food, that people who come to a food pantry should be able to expect the same care about the proper temperatures, the proper sanitation procedures as we would expect if we go eat anywhere.

Claire Absolutely. Yes.

Michelle Michelle Book for the Food Bank of Iowa. The only thing I'd add to Barb's comments is that we hold our partner agencies accountable to those same food safety standards. So when you come to a pantry or you're working with somebody who gleans and rescues food, if they're working through the Feeding America network, you can rest assured that those partner agencies are held accountable to very exacting food safety standards.

Claire Absolutely. Thank you. So I think I'll turn now to Miss Linda Scheid. How are you down there?

Linda I'm great, thank you.

Claire As we talk, there's always going to be language around different areas, of course, and we talked about... And, thank you, Barb, for discussing food bank in contrast to food pantry. Now you are a food bank. You have a food bank.

Linda Yes.

Claire And you're a part of the network that we serve as well, and your food bank is referred to as a PDO. Would you mind talking about that means for the group?

Linda We love our alphabet soup.

Claire Yes.

Linda I refer to it was food bank ease. There's a language that we speak that's a little bit different, and if you're not part of the network, it wouldn't make a lot of sense. But we are not a full member food bank of the Feeding



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America network. We are what's called a PDO, which stands for Partner Distribution Organization. So we are affiliated with a member, and in our case it's my friend Brian Barks at Food Bank for the Heartland in Omaha. We are a full food bank in that we do all the elements just like other food banks do. So we have our own board of directors, we have our own staff, we have our own building, we make all our own decisions, we have to adhere to all the same standards, food safety standards, that sort of thing. We're a little bit smaller, so they will talk about distributing far more meals and far more pounds of food than what we do. But my perspective is, and I think it's important to know that, we look at it was the people we serve—because as Barb was sharing, it's all about the mission—the pounds we distribute and the meals we provide. They're the same as any other food bank across the country as well as in the state of Iowa.

Claire Something else I think you could help us with in terms of definitions, I'll ask you in just a moment. But I want to set the stage for the question by acknowledging something else that happened in that remarkably powerful panel that proceeded our conversation, which was this discussion about how hunger shows up in the U.S. versus how it might show up outside of the U.S. Now, having had a number of siblings who actually found themselves in significant positions of neglect. Sadly, we even saw evidence of malnutrition with some of my brothers and sisters—but that's not often, I'm happy to report, the way that hunger looks in America. Would you mind talking specifically about hunger in Iowa for this group, and talk about how it's actually quantified here?

Linda Absolutely. I think it's a conversation that I have on a frequent basis, because hunger tends to be a bit of an invisible problem. And I love the fact that the Feeding America network established through the month of September something called "Hunger Action Month," and we attached a color to it, and that's the color orange; because orange is going to stand out in the room, and that's what we need to do is to speak to the hunger challenge and make people understand that there is a hunger problem before we can even start talking about the hunger solutions.

The hunger problem in the United States and particularly in Iowa and some counties that we work with in Nebraska as well. It isn't so much the stereotypical image. You're not going to see the starving people on street corners. You're not going to see the children with the distended bellies that you see in promotions for world hunger challenges.

What you are going to see are people that are having a hard time, and they don't want you to know. So you may not be aware that it's the person that lives across the street from you. They own their own house. They're going to work every day. What do you mean, they're food insecure? You're not opening their refrigerator, you're to opening their cupboard door, and you



have no idea that they have what we call “more month than money.” And so they’re struggling to provide enough for themselves and their families to eat. And they find themselves in the position of having to visit one of our partners, a food pantry, perhaps a feeding program, so that they can meet their own and their family’s nutritional needs.

Why? Well, there’s a gamut of answers to that. Sometimes it’s a case of the income just not meeting what their needs are. Sometimes it’s situational—so maybe someone has a health challenge and all of a sudden they’re paying major medical bills, they’re picking up prescriptions, and they need to take care of other bills besides going to the grocery store. Maybe it’s a case of they lost a job or there’s a reduction in their pay, or there’s some kind of circumstance that means the budget that they had so carefully planned that should meet all of their needs, it’s not meeting all of their needs anymore. So they’re having a hard time.

If you’re going to the grocery store and you have so much money in your hand, in your checkbook, credit left on your credit card, and that’s how you’re making your choices as to what you’re going to buy at the grocery store, what are you buying? We’re going to go right by the produce department, you’re going to zip right into the shelf-stable, cheap stuff that isn’t going to be as healthful for you.

So sometimes what hunger looks like is someone with an obesity problem, someone with a problem controlling their blood sugars, or other health problems, because they’re making their choices on the basis of what they can afford to do—and what they can afford to do isn’t what we’d like to see them doing.

So people struggle with the idea that they have to go for help. They’re working. They don’t understand why they’re having such a hard time. And if they’re in a rural community and they have to go to a local food pantry, there’s an additional element to what hunger looks like, because they don’t want to go to that food pantry where they know the person that’s going to hand them the food they’re going to take home for themselves and their family, they know that person; they’ve known them their whole lives, and they’re afraid that that person’s going to go home and say, “You won’t believe who came in today.” And that there is a stigma around the judgment that comes with—Well, why are they hungry? I don’t understand. Why don’t they get a better education? Why don’t they manage their money better than they’re doing? Why don’t they make different choices?

But the bottom line is—if you’re in food banking, you are dedicated and passionate to the idea that no matter who you are, no matter what your circumstances are, if you are hungry, we want to help you. There’s food to



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be had out there and people who need it. And what we provide is the link to make sure that happens. That was the concept of food banking in the beginning, and in a nutshell it's what we still do today.

Claire That's absolutely right. I think one of the things that helped raise the American consciousness around hunger was, unfortunately, during the government shutdown where statistics around the fact that the average American, being he or she in Iowa or anywhere else in the country, is \$400 away from a financial crisis. So when you had a number of people who, everyone understood that that person had a job, that that person didn't participate in the reason for not having a job, so it insulated them from the judgment that sometimes, and unfortunately often, accompanies how people perceive hunger. It insulated that group from that judgment in a way that I think helped to buoy our work overall. And food bankers like the ones sitting on this stage rose to the occasion and galvanized donors and other contributors and partners like the ones sitting in this audience helped to provide additional resources so that we were able to help people in need.

Sometimes the need comes in the form of something that everybody can see, because significant groups are experiencing it at the same time. More often it comes in terms of a family's crisis, as you so well-articulated, so thank you for sharing that as well.

So, Michelle, I think you're right here in Des Moines—is that right?

Michelle I'm right here in Des Moines, the Food Bank of Iowa right here in Des Moines.

Claire So we've been talking about food quite a bit so far, and of course food is central to what we do and what we offer. But there also are some programmatic designs that we participate in. I think it would be great for you to share maybe some of the programmatic work that's being done in your food bank and also that I'm sure has application across our network here in Iowa.

Michelle Well, I'd like to start by saying we are the Food Bank of Iowa. We're not the only Food Bank of Iowa. We're a Food Bank of Iowa, and all together those of us sitting up here deliver programs to serve 341,000 food insecure Iowans. Of that 37 million across the United States, 341,000 reside in Iowa. It's our job to get food to all of those.

We run basically the same kind of programs across our Feeding America Iowa network. Wherever we go, we're always working with a partner. It's very rare, except for in Barb's situation, where we hand food directly to the person who needs it most. How many of you are affiliated with a food



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pantry, with a food rescue organization, how many of you volunteer? So you're part of this network. You understand.

We have three big programs that we run. One is the Backpack Program where we provide bags of food, 12 to 14 individually labeled, kid-friendly items in an innocuous grocery bag, plastic bag, that a school teacher, a counselor, a nurse, tucks into an elementary school child's backpack on Friday afternoon so that child has something to eat over the weekend. Now, this doesn't go to every child that qualifies for free and reduced lunch. These go to children that have been diagnosed as being chronically hungry. And today in Iowa across our network, I know we distribute more than 12,000 backpack bags into backpacks each and every Friday of the school year.

Also, we serve a lot of small, rural communities. Traditionally, our pantry partners are steadfast pantry partners, have been faith-based organizations, so in small-town Iowa there's an abandoned classroom or maybe a basement room where a caring person of that church sets up a food pantry. Well, how many of you are from rural Iowa? Faith-based organizations in rural Iowa are shrinking. Are you seeing that too, where the Presbyterian and the Methodist church are combining? My grandmother would have a heart attack. She died of natural causes as a very old person. So that traditional, faith-based pantry is no longer there for us in each and every community. But what is there, what still sits in those small communities in so many cases is the school. So we now today have more and more school pantries than we've ever had before. And where there's a caring administrator and they have an empty broom closet, we move in with wax and food, and all they have to do is unlock the door and make sure there's somebody there to hand the food to a hungry child. They're in elementary schools, middle schools, high schools. Some of them are open to the entire community, not just the families they serve. Some of them deliver food—a caring teacher will deliver food to out-of-town families from what we put in that school pantry.

The other thing we do in communities where we don't have standing, committed food pantries, something called a mobile pantry, where we put food in our truck—each one of us do it, we load up our trucks, we drive to that community. We have somebody there willing to allow us to unload the food or at least use their parking lot. They find volunteers to help us, they advertise that we're coming, and we hand out food to the people at the very moment who need it most. So pop-up, pop-up mobile pantry.

Other than that, we work, the six of us, work with over a thousand committed, dedicated partner agencies across our 99 counties to make sure 341,000 Iowans get the nutrition they need to live healthy, active lives.



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Claire Thank you so much. As you talked about that, immediately in my mind I was thinking about the work that we're doing as a network around rural hunger and how one of the things that attracted me to this particular role as I contemplated how I was going to spend the rest of my professional life, was the fact that you have an opportunity in this work to be very, very local, to serve that neighbor who's hungry but you don't realize it. And you also have an opportunity through this network to serve people across the United States who are struggling with hunger as well. And what we found is that there are certain challenges that are pretty unique to certain types of demographics and of geographies. So we're finding that there are lots of things in common among people who are hungry in rural America.

So we have an effort that we've undertaken to learn very actively from all of our food banks who are serving rural communities to figure out what's working really well and then to scale that work. We're in the learning stage right now. We have some early reports out from communities of practice that we have around that work. And then we're getting really excited about moving that out and scaling that work across rural America, and that's an exciting part, I think, of working here.

Are there any other thoughts about programs that any of you would like to share?

Barb I just want to add a couple things. We have a couple other programs in Northeast Iowa that we have tried to get to populations that might be our most vulnerable, and that's seniors and kids. When I got to the food bank, I remember somebody saying to me, "Well, you don't serve kids. What are you talking about?" I'm like, "Well, wait a minute here. Yes, we do." But as a result of that, we started an initiative that's called Kids' Café, which is an after-school meal program. And so a lot of it does happen just around Black Hawk County, but this summer we were able to even expand it beyond that to other areas through the summer feeding program. And it's really about a partnership with making sure that kids after school or in the summer have access to food. This last year, I believe we did somewhere over 50,000 meals and snacks through our Kids' Café Program. This summer I think we did probably close to 30,000 meals and snacks and breakfasts to ensure that kids have access. And that's really difficult in a rural area, experience outside of Black Hawk County, because of the distance that we have to go to partner. But we found partners in the community that enable us to make that happen.

The other just quickly is our elderly nutrition program where we provide boxes to homebound seniors through the AAA, as well as bags of food to senior centers in our rural communities, specifically where people who are



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in need that go to those centers can have access to food. It's just another way that we can reach populations that are underserved.

Claire Absolutely, wonderful. So now do you guys understand why I said I was so proud to be affiliated with this group? And we're not done. We're not done yet.

So I'd like to talk to you now, Brian, Brian Barks. And one of the things that I find interesting about our work is that, when Linda was speaking, she was talking about serving Iowa and Nebraska. And she mentioned the fact that she's a PDO that serves in the territory that you have responsibility for. Would you mind talking about, number one, what the name of your food bank is and give a little intro there about the territory that you serve. Why don't we start there, and then I have a follow-up question for you.

Brian Sure. My name is Brian Barks. I'm the president and CEO of Food Bank for the Heartland. We're headquartered in Omaha, and in partnership with Linda, we serve 16 counties in Western Iowa. But on the flipside of that, we are also responsible for serving 77 counties in Nebraska as well. So it's about 78,000 lovely square miles of Nebraska and Iowa territory.

Claire Wow. And so maybe you can talk to the group about some of the things that you do together.

Brian Sure.

Claire So what are the statewide initiatives.

Brian My goodness. You know, for me it's obvious that we can start with distributing USDA commodity food that we receive from the federal government that we distribute. At our food bank we partner with one another through the food assistance hotline. At Food Bank for the Heartland, anybody in the state of Iowa can call in to Food Bank for the Heartland, in to an 800 number that we have and can go through the application process to receive benefits for food assistance. And last year we processed something in the vicinity of 6,000 applications, representing somewhere around two million meals through that hotline.

But the place that I immediately want to go is something that we dealt with and are continuing to deal with at our food bank, which is flood relief. Southwest Iowa was hammered and continues to be hammered. What these folks did, starting in the spring and they would do it today, was immediately contacted me and say, and ask, "How can we help?" Hearing those words—and plus this was about six to eight months into my tenure as president and CEO, as leader of the organization, although I'd been there for ten but in a different chair—was so incredibly reassuring. And then all of a sudden I needed to cash that chip when—okay, we need help.



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Michelle loaned us a driver when we were short. Linda came down and picked up product that we normally would take up to her.

We reached out to our partner, and I'm going to give you a big picture as far as Feeding America is concerned and the power of the network. We needed help in Northeast Nebraska. Feeding South Dakota—"We need your help." "No problem. Got it covered." Our partner, the Food Bank of Lincoln—we needed help in a territory of ours in Southeast Nebraska. "Got'cha covered. No problem." That's what these folks do. That's what food bankers do. They put down what they're doing to help one another. We would do it in a heartbeat if they called us for help. That showed me immediately the power of this group here and the power of the entire Feeding America network nationwide.

Claire Thank you for sharing that. Another space, one of my desires for the panel was that this audience have a better understanding of the whole myriad of things that you do to serve your communities. And I think you're each highlighting so many of those. And we will never have enough time for you to say every single thing that you do. But thanks for calling that one out. Because I consider hunger in America an unnatural disaster.

Brian If I may, just to give you an example that just came to mind in regards to what is happening in Southwest Iowa: We have an incredible partner in Hamburg whose pantry was destroyed. They moved to an elementary school. Before the flood, they were serving (I have a couple people here) 70?—70 households a month, roughly. They're now doing over 700 a month, and they're doing it out of a temporary shelter, a temporary location at the school. And the person who runs the pantry, her house was destroyed.

Claire Exactly, exactly. And thank you for the passion that you clearly have for this mission, and sometimes it is putting people facing hunger at the center of your work that gets you up early in the morning and has you not going to bed until late at night or early in the morning in some cases.

What I was about to talk about was the fact that we have the unnatural disaster of being the richest country in the history of civilization, and we have hunger in this country. But then there are these natural disasters that happen as well. And I don't know that this group would understand how this organization activates around natural disasters also—so flooding, wildfires, hurricanes, tornadoes—that as a result of some advocacy work... And the previous panel talked about how important advocacy is to what we do, and they're absolutely correct. And as a result of some advocacy work that was done, we now have established food bankers as being first-line, frontline responders when it comes to natural disasters, which gives us the ability to serve more completely in the middle of those



challenges. And since you are always consistently across the United States, you know your communities and you have dedicated your lives to serving those community, you're well-positioned to serve in the worst of times. And I've watched, witnessed that activation in natural disasters across the United States and am heartened by how much people get done and usually with very limited resources. The personal sacrifices that you guys make in order to put the public good in front of your own personal interest is something that's so laudable. So thanks for highlighting the work that you do around flooding. Know if there's a disaster happening in this country that there's someone in this network who is either in the process of helping or coming up with a strategy with how in fact they're going to do so. So that's fabulous. Thank you for that.

So Mike Miller, I'd like you to talk about, one, give us an opportunity to understand a little better your food bank, and maybe you could share a few things that you're proud of. But I want to again mention, as it relates to Mike and most people who are on this stage have participated in some way with our national efforts and have not allowed territorial boundaries to define what they do.

But one of the things that Mike does in addition to serving as the executive director of his food bank is he serves on the Knack, which is another one of our little expressions that we use. But it's a representative body, and the members are selected by their peer food bankers to serve as a voice in this national movement, sitting at the table with Feeding America national office and thinking about how we can strategically partner together and better optimize the impact of all of us. So I want to on this stage thank you for that work. Barb has been on a recent revolutionary process, evolution and revolution for us, around how we work together, and it's already bearing fruit. So thanks for your inordinate impact on our national movement. I appreciate you sincerely for that.

With that established, Mike, why don't you talk about... First off introduce yourself properly to the group and your food bank. Then would you talk about some of the trends that you're seeing on the landscape?

Mike

Sure. So Riverbend Food Bank in the Quad Cities, there's five counties there on the Mississippi River in Eastern Iowa and then 18 counties on the Illinois side, so we get that complexity of two states and all of that type of thing that comes into it. Consistent with everybody else in the state, you'll hear us not talking about our own backgrounds, but what becomes clear in the work that we're doing is that this is not work we're doing, it's not work our food banks are doing, it's work that the community is doing together. And so we certainly appreciate the help of all of our agencies, all



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of the volunteers, and the people in this room who are helping make this work happen.

Trendwise, there's kind of two trends I'd highlight. We talked earlier about the 341,000 people in Iowa who don't have enough food—those people are missing 58 million meals per year. That is an astronomical number, but it's the lowest number since the Great Recession in 2009. So we've got that trend working for us. At the same time, the organizations on this stage, through our partners, are distributing 32 million meals. So kind of the three things I'd highlight from that is—we are closer to filling that gap than ever before, but we're still only halfway there and have a long way to go. And then if something changes in the economy, if we have another recession, we could easily give back a lot of those gains that we've made.

Claire So I think maybe I'll go to Kim, and then if we have an opportunity, we might tease out a few additional questions for the whole panel and have any of you respond. So, Kim Guardado—did I get it right?

Kim You did.

Claire Awesome. I told Kim with a name like Babineaux-Fontenot, I really work hard at getting other people's last names right. So, Kim, why don't you introduce your food bank to us, start by introducing your food bank to us and the work that you guys do.

Kim Yes, thank you, Claire. So I come from HACAP, Hawkeye Area Community Action Program. We are a little unique in the sense that we are a community action agency that has a food bank. And so one of the ways, as you've heard many of these panelists talk about working with partners, that's the meat of what we do in community action—so it's a good fit to continue to serve the community, to work to end poverty, and partnering with all those other programs with a food bank makes sense.

Claire So can you talk about some of the ways that businesses have and can work with food banks?

Kim That's a great question. Businesses are very important to the work we do in food banks. Businesses can get involved from the sense of volunteering. We have a lot of businesses that will volunteer in our organization, and that can act as a catalyst to getting involved in other things. And that can be donating—so businesses can do food drives, and that helps them get connected to the work that we're doing, which can also lead to larger, bigger donations.

As an example, I think that I like to tell the story. TCS, Tata Consultancy Services in Cedar Rapids, they started doing a small food drive. And we went to the pick up the food, and we needed a smaller truck. But they



wanted to do more. And so as we were talking about how they could do more, how they can get involved, they ended up participating in our Eastern Iowa Freedom from Hunger Drive, collecting money, collecting food, and also now volunteer in our food bank on a monthly basis. So that's just one example of how businesses can get involved. And it can be just a champion from a business that helps get connected and has that passion to volunteer or to donate that can ignite that passion within businesses. We've also seen in businesses there is lots of competition between different departments, and that can foster increased volunteerism and increased donations.

Claire Excellent. Well, thank you. You know, I think maybe something we... Again, I'm going back over in my mind what my hopes were for the audience coming out of our panel discussion, that they have collectively that we have a better understanding of hunger in America and we have a better understanding of what all of you do every day in service to people who are facing hunger, that they have a better awareness of the things that they, some are doing and that some who are not yet doing, could do to help in this fight. And I'm hopeful that we've accomplished many, if not all, of those objectives.

But one of the things that I'd like to maybe have any of you to talk about—and, Barb, I think you had something in particular you'd like to say on this subject—is, one of the big challenges that we've now mentioned more than once today, is public perception. So we've said it in different ways, so we'll talk about it directly, public perception and what nutrition programs mean for people who are facing hunger. But there's not always an understanding of the impact of some of the cuts, for instance. And on the previous panel they talked about cuts in Medicaid and what that would have actually meant and how devastating that would have been on communities that are already so vulnerable to begin with.

So would you share, any one of you or any number of you? Would you share your thoughts on what the impact of cuts in these programs can and would have on the communities that we serve? Do you want to start, Barbara?

Barb As you can tell, I've done this work for a long time, and unfortunately the effect of government programs on what we do is very vast; because if government programs are cut, our numbers go up. You know, if there's threats to SNAP or food assistance in Iowa, I'm kindly reminded, and it's very difficult to remember that. But if there's cuts to food assistance, then people are going to need our services anymore. All of a sudden there's a reduction.



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I was talking with a woman who was in our food pantry a few weeks ago, and she said to me that she finally decided, “Yep, I'm gonna apply for food assistance.” She was retired, was on a fixed income. And so she did, and she got \$18 a month, which was helping her until she got a cost of living increase, and then that amount was reduced. She still needs our help. She will probably need our help ongoing. But that’s the effect of it.

If we have cuts to whatever program it is, it does affect what we do, and then we ask the community to help us more, whether it’s volunteering, donating money, forming a partnership. You know, for me it’s all about helping that person that needs food. And so what I often tell people—and I've done a lot of advocating at the state level and at the national level—I don't focus so much on bad policy versus good policy; I focus on what it does to the person who’s walking through our door. Because if we can tell that story and the effects of that, it makes a bigger impact than anything. Are we always successful? No. We just need more people talking and writing their congressmen and senators and their people too. And anything anybody can do to raise that awareness, raise that voice will help all of us do our jobs better. And there unfortunately will always be somebody who needs our services. But the more that we can talk about that person that we’re serving, the more the difference and the impact will be made, and that person will have access to food, hopefully through government programs. But if that’s not the case, that’s what we’re here for—the safety net.

Claire Were you going to add something? Oh, Michelle?

Michelle It would be wonderful if we could cut programs, if the government could spend less in the area of feeding people. I just started a tour of the 55 counties that the Food Bank of Iowa serves, and I visited 13 of those counties week before last in the northwest corner of Iowa—and I was shocked by what I saw. Our need is not less. Our need will continue to grow.

Meth is still a problem in rural Iowa. I was shocked by the amount of homelessness in rural Iowa and by the lack of opportunities for single moms with children to find full-time employment that would provide benefits in rural Iowa. There are construction jobs. There are jobs in turkey houses and in hog confinement houses, but women don't have an opportunity to get those jobs.

There is a continually growing need in rural Iowa. We can’t afford to see these government programs cut. It will impact the most vulnerable among us.

Brian One statistic I can give you that was very alarming to me was in relation to food assistance in Iowa. It’s SNAP in Nebraska—that for every meal



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distributed by any of our food banks, any one meal, food assistance does 12. It's impossible for our food banks to fill that gap, impossible.

Claire And one of the things we've chatted about is when we talk about public perception and we talk about even the human brain—right? If you think you know something, then you're seeking evidence that you're right. And that is one of the biggest challenges that we face right now in terms of public perception around hunger and around food assistance, as people think they know who receives food assistance in America.

So I'll have conversations with people, and I'll ask questions like, "Do you believe that children should have consistent access to nutritious food?" And universally people say, "Absolutely, I do." And I said, "Well, thank you. Wonderful. Do you believe that the elderly, when they have gone beyond the time period during which they can be actively engaged in the workforce, do you think that they deserve consistent access to nutritious food?" People will tell me, "Absolutely, I believe that they do." "Thank you. Do you believe that people with disabilities who have challenges that they confront that limit their ability to provide for themselves, do you believe that they should have consistent access to nutritious food?" They will typically say, "Yes, yes, I do." I say, "Oh, then great. You agree with me that there's not room for cutting these nutrition programs, because the people that they inordinately serve are children, the elderly and people with disabilities."

So having people open their minds to the reality of whom it is that receives assistance is an important challenge. And I'm hoping that in this movement, people like you, sitting in this room, will take some of the things that you heard, and if you want to go deeper, we go as deep as you like with some of the data and statistics around hunger. We'd be happy to have you be soldiers in this work along with us and helping to disabuse people of long-held beliefs around what hunger looks like.

And we hope that from participating here and the other work that you've done... I saw so many hands went up in terms of volunteerism already; I thank you all for the things that you're doing there. There's work yet to be done. But if I learned anything from my grandparents, it was about stick-to-itiveness—right? As the expression goes, this is a difficult problem to be sure, but if it were easy, anybody could do it.

Are Iowans just anybody? You're really somebody here in Iowa. Thank you so much for your time and attendance and attention.

We're actually gonna close out our panel with-I hope we've got it queued up-there's an ad that we plan to release that will be designed to help with



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the American public to raise this consciousness around hunger in America and I hope we're ready to queue up that ad.

Thank you.