

Joint Legislative Hearing – Health
Testimony of Feeding New York State
Dan Egan, Executive Director
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Last year at the Joint Legislative Hearing on Health I said, “Every county in New York is home to people who cannot afford adequate food, and it is about to get worse. Over 2.2 million New Yorkers are food insecure.”

I wish that I had been wrong last year. The facts today are that over 3 million New Yorkers are now food insecure. That is a 46% increase in need. In some communities it is much higher. This has been covered very well in the media; I am sure you have all seen the lines of people, stretching around the block, waiting for a food pantry. You’ve seen the lines of cars being loaded.

I want to talk to you about another line. The line of wasted food. Even as millions of New Yorkers went hungry, we wasted perfectly good food. The Pollution Prevention Institute estimates that 1.2 billion pounds of New York produce are wasted every year, never leaving the farms because it has no market. Let’s be clear here: our farmers did their jobs. They worked hard and raised healthy food. The failure is in the food economy.

You might ask: what does 1.2 billion pounds of food look like? That amount of food would fill 30,000 tractor trailers. If you parked those trucks bumper to bumper, one in front of the other, the line of trucks would stretch from Montauk to Buffalo, 450 miles.

This was not shown in the media. We have almost everything we need to feed everyone in New York and support every farmer. The ten food banks of Feeding New York State distributed over 250 million pounds of food in the year before the pandemic. So far, in the first ten months of the pandemic, we have distributed 397 million pounds, a 62% increase. We are on track to distribute somewhere in the neighborhood of 450 million pounds of food this year. We are prepared to do even more if given the resources.

Feeding NYS has worked closely with the Department of Health for over 35 years, and more recently with the Department of Agriculture and Markets and the Department of Environmental Conservation to improve food distribution and reduce waste. All three agencies have been tremendous partners to us. The people of our state can be proud of the work these staff do.

The Department of Health’s Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) must be protected and enhanced. HPNAP is critical because it funds our operations – paying for staff, rent, fuel,

and other things that, while not glamorous, are essential to getting food to people. The Executive Budget proposes funding HPNAP at \$34.5 million. In past years the Legislature has restored \$500,000 to fund the program at \$35 million annually. We are thankful for that support and ask you to again restore that funding. But, beyond that, let us recall that the need for food is up 46%. A proportionate increase in HPNAP would add \$16 million for a total funding level of \$51 million. HPNAP has not been increased for several years; all we ask is that the funding keep up with the documented need.

The Department of Agriculture and Markets has managed the Nourish NY program in partnership with the Department of Health. I think you all know what a fantastic program Nourish NY is. In the first two phases, with \$35 million in funding, food banks and other grantees were able to purchase over 17 million pounds of top quality New York-origin food and get it where it needed to go. Every penny of that money was spent here in New York, providing support to over 4,100 farms.

We applaud Senator Hinchey and Senator Borello for introducing Senate Bill S4892, which establishes Nourish New York as a state program. It is absolutely essential that Nourish New York continue. We request that \$100 million be allocated to Nourish NY this year, and that the program be put on a permanent basis. Other states have already done this. The program has proven to be efficient and effective; it is both an anti-hunger program and an economic development program. It is simply the right thing to do.

The Department of Environmental Conservation has provided us funding to obtain more produce and dairy products. Their funding has enabled us to distribute millions of pounds of produce in recent years that would otherwise have gone to waste. The Food Scraps Law, which will come into effect in January of 2022, is another great opportunity to reduce waste and increase food donations. We have proposed that Feeding NYS could help to publicize this program, educate food waste generators, and help to direct that food waste to productive uses such as food pantries, shelters, or to food waste digesters. We request that adequate funding be made available for us to do that job.

If these requested resources are added, we can close the new hunger gap, support our farmers, reduce food waste, and make New York a better place.