



Connecticut Food Bank Testimony to Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee on HB5886:
An Act Establishing A Tax Credit For Food Donated By Farmers To Charitable Organizations
Testimony by Paul Shipman

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Senators Fonfara and Frantz, Representative Rojas and Members of the Committee, my name is Paul Shipman. I am with the Connecticut Food Bank, headquartered in Wallingford. We provide food products to a network of 650 local hunger relief programs in six of Connecticut's counties - Fairfield, Litchfield, Middlesex, New Haven, New London and Windham. Last year, the Connecticut Food Bank distributed enough food to provide more than 19.6 million meals.

I am here to testify in support of HB5886, An Act Establishing A Tax Credit For Food Donated By Farmers To Charitable Organizations.

The proposed bill would provide multiple advantages for the State of Connecticut, beginning most importantly for the Connecticut Food Bank and the people we serve by increasing the amount of fresh produce available to hungry people in Connecticut.

Of the more than 23.5 million pounds of food we distributed in 2016, more than 35 percent of it was fresh produce and frozen meat. We are proud of the highly nutritious food we provide. We work with a range of sources for food, including partnerships with food growers here in Connecticut. Last year, Connecticut growers provided more than 300,000 pounds of produce to our system. It's an important part of our food mix, but it could be higher if growers had more incentive to donate food, rather than to plow it under or elect not to grow it.

We know the need is there for more nutritious food donations. In 2006, the Connecticut Food Bank distributed 12.7 million pounds of food, providing 10.6 million meals. Last year we distributed 23.5 million pounds, providing 19.6 million meals, an 87 percent increase. In 2017, we are projected to distribute 25 million pounds of food, up 5.5 percent over 2016. Trends in food insecurity bear out this growth.

Comparing the USDA-reported 2003-2005 average and the 2013-2015 average, Connecticut's food insecurity rate jumped from 8.2 percent (281,503 people) to 13.1 percent (475,685 people), a 67 percent increase. In 2005, Connecticut ranked as the 8th most food secure state in the nation; in 2015, it ranked 23rd. Today, Connecticut has an estimated 194,000 more food insecure people than ten years ago.

The challenge every year for the Connecticut Food Bank is to raise enough funding to buy or secure enough donated food to meet growing need. In 2016, 30 percent of our food was donated. Our Strategic Action Plan projects the need for our annual food distribution to grow to 30 million pounds by the end of 2020. This projection includes 10 million pounds of donated food. Locally sourced food can be an important part of this equation.

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Much of what we source from growers includes surplus produce and what is known as seconds. Seconds are items that are edible, but perhaps have blemishes or are non-standard sizes and shapes. They are nutritious and taste as good as the product that makes it to retail sales, just not as attractive. Many growers opt to plow this produce under because it's not cost-effective to harvest it, store it and transport it. Likewise, surplus, unsold crops are left to spoil because it's the cheapest option. Providing an incentive to growers to do otherwise with these foods would increase donations to food banks and local food pantries. It would also help to preserve farm land and agricultural jobs by helping farmers realize more benefits from more of the produce in their fields.

We know that these incentives would work, because when we are able to pay even a small amount to growers to help subsidize the costs of harvesting, storing and transporting their excess product to us, we see more food coming into the system. A tax incentive to make such donations more attractive would not only help growers in our state, it would help the Connecticut Food Bank receive more food.

Budgets and tax plans are delicate balancing acts. We appreciate the complexities involved in the process. We ask that you consider the benefit in this proposal to supporting the charitably donated food safety net in Connecticut, as well as the potential benefits of preserving farm land and farm jobs when you weigh this proposal.

Thank you.