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## **From food aid to food advocacy in North America:**

Lessons and warnings for addressing root causes of household food insecurity and food waste in the UK

Report by Charlotte Spring  
WCMT Fellow April-May 2016

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# Executive Summary and Recommendations

## Introduction

This Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship research was first inspired by Janet Poppendieck's book *Sweet Charity* (1998), which explored the institutionalisation of 'emergency' food charity as a solution to both corporate food waste and growing evidence of hunger following cuts to social security in 1980s America. As the UK grapples with the growth of food banking following welfare reform that has negatively affected the incomes and subsistence strategies of the poorest people<sup>1</sup>, my trip to the USA and Canada included visits to food banks, pantries and soup kitchens, street feeding community kitchens, advocacy and campaign groups, cross-sector working groups, US Congress, food producers and systems thinkers.

I wanted to ask how the food bank sector has changed over the past three decades, and whether such change addresses the charge that receiving food charity is demeaning and inadequate for many? Further, can evidence be found to back up Poppendieck's argument that charitable food provision can in fact prevent effective government action to *prevent* household food insecurity? Should food waste solutions be decoupled from food insecurity solutions? I wanted to find out about channels and methods of **effective advocacy for change that addresses the poverty underlying food insecurity and hunger, while building a sustainable food system**. I wanted to identify innovative approaches to improving food access for low-income communities that consider social and environmental justice. Along the way, however, I kept in mind the notion that poverty is relational: it is not just about a lack of something, but about inequality and the excesses of a food system that result in the contradictions of want amidst plenty. Fixing food poverty, then, is not just a matter of supply, given the food abundance of these wealthy nations, but of distribution.

The report begins by summarising some of the findings and recommendations made in the main body of the report, which gives a more detailed history of food insecurity in North America and the trip objectives and methodology before exploring the findings and key recommendations in more detail. It has been impossible to do justice to the detail of what was shared with me over the 8 weeks of travel, but I hope it stimulates further conversation and that the insights provide a comparative context for the writing of my PhD, which similarly explores the role of surplus food redistribution as a 'solution' to household food insecurity. The context and rationale for the Fellowship, including a detailed history of the politics of food insecurity in America, are explained in further detail in the main report and Appendix 1.

## Acknowledgements and thanks

Firstly, thanks to the staff of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, without whose generous support this trip could never have happened. Thanks to my PhD supervisors Dr Mags Adams and Dr Mike Hardman for allowing me to take 2 months out of my UK fieldwork to explore North American dimensions of hunger and food waste. So many thanks to the friends who hosted me along the way, and to Scooter for teaching me so much about the realities of growing up poor in America. Thanks to those who read and commented on the blog, and to Annie Levy for her special encouragement, ideas and support of my writing. My sincere thanks go to every person I met on the trip, whether face to face or other means of communication. The many fascinating teleconferences, Skype chats, email exchanges, interviews and accompanied visits and outings have equipped me with many lessons, some personal and some for sharing. I cannot mention every person individually so apologies for listing some by their group or organisation: thanks to Judy Goldhaft (formerly of the San Francisco Diggers), Alison Pratt (Alameda County Community Food Bank), Food Runners, Hank Herrera, Tree, Willy McCrea (Santa Cruz Food Bank), Adelante Desert Harvest (and Arts and Animals) Steven Serrano (St Martin's Hospitality Centre), The Storehouse food pantry (Albuquerque), The Rock soup kitchen, Albuquerque East Central Ministries, The Community Kitchen Collective (New Orleans), Feeding America, Freedom 90, Mike

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Fabian Commission 2015

Balkwill, Put Food in the Budget and Voices for Change Halton, Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health, Lauren Schweder-Biel (and DC Greens), Paula Reichel and Molly McGlinchy (and Capitol Area Food Bank), the Washington DC Food Justice Action Team, Amy Bachman (and DC Central Kitchen), Jennifer Chandler (and the office of Congressman Jim McGovern), Josh Protas and Amanda Nesher (Mazon, a Jewish Response to Hunger), Mariana Chilton (and the Center for Hunger-Free Communities and Witnesses to Hunger), Melanie Cataldi (and Philabundance), Joel Berg (and Hunger-Free America), Maggie Dickinson and last, but not least, Janet Poppendieck.

Additional thanks to some very kind folk: almost my entire itineraries in Albuquerque and Toronto were organised by Jim Knutson and Mike Balkwill. And I thank Graham Riches and Geoff Tansey for kindly remarking on my recommendations (and whose teaching and writing provided ideas and inspiration before I even met you).

## Key recommendations

### Theme 1: Can 'emergency' food provision become better in the short term?

- Improve 'emergency' food provision as an interim effort to improve the health and experience of users: in the longer term, we must eliminate the need for it by addressing the poverty and inequality that underlies food insecurity and a welfare system that can precipitate crises of access to food.
- **Refuse to view food charity as a legitimate channel of food waste disposal:** America's experience suggests that this will not result in adequate food provision for those in poverty over the long term, does not uphold the Human Right to Food and does not address the overproduction and mal-distribution that causes food to be wasted in the first place.
- Assist clients, both rural and urban, to access good food by **ensuring full participation in relevant benefits schemes**, including multi-lingual services, and through strong partnership with related agencies, and draw upon Joseph Rowntree Foundation guidelines towards eliminating poverty.
- Advocate for **national measurement and monitoring of household food insecurity** and use data to better understand the impacts and geographical distribution of programming and policy, which in North America has shown that the growth of charity has not led to a reduction in household food insecurity.
- Consider food as part of a broader shift towards preventative medicine, working with resident communities and healthcare providers to improve access to fresh, healthy food not as ad-hoc charity gifts but as integrated **community assets**: how might the energy put into food charity help improve food systems more generally? For example, integrate gardens, kitchens and learning spaces into food banks and pantries, where staff, clients and volunteers can learn how to **grow, cook and eat** together in new ways: these invite the whole community to participate rather than entrenching a segregated food system.

- **Increase dignity** for those accessing food and services, considering for example 'community hub' or 'shopper' models, but recognise the limitations of any approach that does not ultimately engage clients, staff, volunteers, donors and the wider public to advocate for public policy that addresses the root causes of poverty and inequality.
- Tax credits and liability protection for farmers, businesses and corporate donors has incentivised surplus food donation in the USA but such a taxpayer subsidy might be better spent on implementing poverty-reduction programs. How can food businesses be helped to **reduce overproduction and waste** in the first place?
- Those receiving donations of surplus food must ensure donations are suitable and that philanthropy does not replace sustained poverty-reduction policy e.g. **refuse donations** of sugary soda and other health-harming food/drink, sending a message to food companies to limit overproduction of such products.
- Charity/donor relationships should also be leveraged to advocate for **fair employment practices** within donor organisations so that low-paid workers do not have to rely on food charity and food corporations are held to account.
- Non-profit organisations connecting surplus food donors with recipient agencies should **ensure that recipients are equipped to deal with the unpredictability of donations**, and do not have to deal with the waste management of large amounts of food, especially food that may be unsuitable or harmful to clients' health.

## **Theme 2: Eliminating the need for food charity 1- Involving those with lived experience**

- **Ensure the views of clients are consulted and acted upon**, through for example participation boards to engage clients in advocacy or service improvement.
- **Campaigns to address the root causes of hunger should be led by those with lived experience of poverty and food insecurity**, accompanying those who may be vulnerable in telling their stories in public forums and collaboratively planning and organising campaign activities. Freire's principles of critical pedagogy can provide inspiration and structure for including and organising with communities.
- **Myth-busting** is vital. People have important stories to tell about the realities of life on low-incomes and the intersectional injustices associated with classism, inequality and punitive welfare systems. Organisations such as Put Food in the Budget and Witnesses to Hunger use various tactics: direct action, photographic exhibitions and engaging with the media and people in positions of influence to ensure peoples' truth is 'spoken to power'. UK models such as the Poverty Truth Commission and ATD Fourth World's Poverty Awareness Training could provide ideas for local efforts.

### Theme 3: Eliminating the need for food charity 2- Welfare systems and fair work

- Advocacy campaigns should include a **key focus on the root causes of the poverty that underlies food insecurity and hunger**, which has been exacerbated by welfare reform and austerity policies. Some US food banks dedicate staff to ensure full participation in government income support programs, and also testify on behalf of low-income and vulnerable people in policy-making contexts where the existence of charity might be argued by to justify cuts to social assistance spending.
- **Recognise and realise the Human Right to Food** by appointing a minister responsible for monitoring and addressing household food insecurity, and put in place an accountable pathway towards eliminating the need for food charity, in line with recommendations of recent reports by the [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#), [Fabian Commission on Food and Poverty](#) and the [All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the UK](#).
- In line with the above, **ensure that wages are high enough to prevent household food insecurity**-eliminating the social and financial costs of responding to poverty. Some in North America advocate strongly for a Universal Basic Income aimed at such ends, while others warn that this could be used as an excuse to cut other social benefits or systems, or to delay changes that could be simply made by increasing incomes using existing social assistance systems.

### Theme 4: Eliminating the need for food charity 3- Innovations in collaborative food systems change

- Create and nurture **cross-sector partnerships** to address the problems raised in this report: linking health to incomes and food access, as tackled by Washington DC's Food Justice Action Team, for example.
- The power of partnership can also be leveraged to **improve local food systems** and improve access to good food through examples such as Washington DC's Produce Plus program (city-funded free vouchers for benefits recipients to spend at farmers markets, also stimulating economic activity in low-income areas).
- Food banks can provide **access to food** in innovative ways that protect dignity. Philabundance Food Bank subsidises a low-cost supermarket in a town where major grocers had closed stores due to the lower profits: Philabundance see access to good food not simply as a market commodity but as a human right.
- Organisations such as DC Central Kitchen demonstrate a shift from **food charity to job creation** through their surplus food rescue and culinary arts training program, which enables those excluded from the job market to cook nutritious meals for local procurement, localising food systems, supporting farmers and improving the health and environmental impact of institutional meals.

## Theme 5: Eliminating the need for food charity 4- From charitable kindness to effective advocacy

- **Engage volunteers and the public in understanding the root causes** of household food insecurity, and encourage participation in advocacy to address this rather than simply donating food and volunteering in a food bank. Tools include [NY Coalition Against Hunger \(now Hunger-Free America\)'s handbook](#), which indicates a scale of 'impact' for activities from donating a can of soup to contacting elected officials.
- **Connect volunteers to broader campaigns:** in the UK this could include End Hunger UK, the Independent Food Aid Network and JRF's #solveukpoverty
- **Challenge stereotyping** of food charity recipients and classism more widely, through for example induction and trainings that raise awareness of multiple forms of inequality and discrimination.
- Emergency food provision is labour-intensive. How can staff and volunteers link to other organisations to ensure that campaign and advocacy work is not prevented by the everyday running of operations, which in North America has led to the institutionalisation of food charity (despite this having been intended as a temporary response to austerity in the 1980s)?

## DETAILED REPORT

### Context of WCMT Fellowship

My decision to apply for a WCMT Fellowship came soon after the start of my PhD at the University of Salford in 2014. After working for anti-poverty organisation ATD Fourth World and having worked and studied in the field of environmental sustainability, my PhD joins my concerns for questions of social and environmental justice by asking how food waste might be related to food poverty. Having chosen to explore this through the lens of organisations attempting to redistribute 'surplus' food to those who may struggle to afford good food, I came across Janet Poppendieck's 1998 book 'Sweet Charity? Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement'. This book struck an eerie chord as it described the explosion of American food banking following Ronald Reagan's cuts to welfare spending in the 1980s. Much of what I read in this almost twenty-year old book appeared to mirror what I was witnessing in the UK: retrenchment of government supports and a growth in charitable efforts to meet the needs of those left even further behind in an increasingly unequal society. The core argument of the book is that, even more than being an inadequate solution to hunger and poverty, 'emergency' food charity serves to exacerbate poverty by giving an appearance of solution while policy to redress root causes goes unquestioned.

My trip to the US, therefore, sought to ask how the UK might learn from nearly four decades of food charity, which has also been long linked to the need to redistribute the surplus food of big agriculture and retail, whose public visibility has since the Great Depression served as an embarrassing emblem of unequal resources- the modern 'food stamp' system in the USA could be argued to date back to the 1930s, when the government was criticised for letting large stocks of cheese rot as breadlines grew (for more on this, see Poppendieck's book *Breadlines Knee-deep in Wheat*).

## **Fellowship objectives:**

- **Understand the impacts of food waste redistribution on food charity, and learn lessons to inform the UK at a time of evidently rising household food insecurity, food waste and social movements aiming to address these;**
- **Learn diverse experiences of North America's long history of food banking and 'emergency food aid' as a form of poverty alleviation and to apply this learning to my critical studies of food charity in the UK, especially in terms of its efficacy and ethics;**
- **Understand how social movements and organisations can affect change at different levels, focussing on a) food waste b) household food insecurity c) food sovereignty/alternative food systems;**
- **Gain personal skills in advocacy, public communication and dissemination, comparative participatory research in view of future work fighting for just and sustainable food systems.**

## **Background to the issues: household food insecurity and food waste**

Please see Appendix One for a more detailed history of the politics of hunger, federal nutrition programs and food banking in North America, and a more detailed account of the research and literature that inspired this trip.

In this report I will refer to 'food poverty' as a term has become familiar in the UK, but generally use the term 'food insecurity', the term more commonly used in North America to describe one's risk of experiencing hunger. The Fabian Commission of Food and Poverty adopt the term 'household food insecurity' for its capturing of food access issues that go beyond affordability (Fabian Society, 2015). The choice of language is controversial- researchers have commented on responses to the USDA's decision to replace 'hunger' with 'very low food security' in the measurement scale (Himmelgreen & Romero-Daza, 2010). See Poppendieck (1998, p104) for further context and Berg (2008) p.25-44 for further reading on the politics and limitations of hunger measurement (it does not, for example, count the many thousands of homeless people in the US).

The USDA defines a household as food insecure if it is "at times, uncertain of having, or unable to acquire, enough food for all household members because they had insufficient money and other resources for food." (Berg p.28). Hunger was described as "the uneasy or painful sensation caused by a recurrent or involuntary lack of food." The situation of being food insecure, of course, puts one at close risk of becoming hungry, especially when circumstances change rapidly. In 2015, 42.2 million Americans lived in food insecure households, including 13.1 million children (13% of households). 6.3 million households experienced very low food security, or hunger, at some point- this may mean adults going hungry so that children eat first (children also have access to subsidized lunches and increasingly also school breakfasts)<sup>2</sup>. This report will not tackle the politics of statistics; these can be easily misrepresented or misused, but the organisations I represent confront hunger, or the risk of hunger, on a daily basis, and it is their voices and experiences that make up the substance of this report.

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<sup>2</sup> Feeding America. Hunger and Poverty Facts and Statistics. <http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/impact-of-hunger/hunger-and-poverty/hunger-and-poverty-fact-sheet.html>

Household food insecurity has become increasingly apparent in the UK. While there is no official measurement of the links between poverty and access to good food as yet, there has been a sharp increase in awareness and understanding of this complex issue, from the media, academia and the voluntary sector in particular. While over a million Trussell Trust food parcels were given out in 2015/16, this only represents a portion of the distributions by independent food banks and other organisations providing hot meals, breakfast clubs and ‘pay-as-you-fee’ food outlets. In May 2016 the Food Foundation reported UN data suggesting that “8.4 million people, the equivalent of entire population of London, were living in households reporting having insufficient food in the UK in 2014, the 6<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world”<sup>3</sup>

The reasons for the evident rise in household food insecurity are complex but [research reported in the BMJ](#) linked the impositions of benefits sanctions following austerity-led welfare reform to the rise in food banks, while other key reports such as the All Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Food and Poverty report ‘Feeding Britain’ listed such interlinked factors as rising food, rent and utility costs, zero-hours contracts and ‘the poverty premium’ as explaining some of the pressure on household incomes that can cause food insecurity.

### A right to food?

The Human Right to Food has been ratified by many of the wealthiest nation states (however, not America). It is enshrined in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 11), made internationally justiciable by the 2009 Optional Protocol and laid out in practical Guidelines (2004). It calls upon state governments to respect, protect and fulfil the right of every person to access a dignified, adequate, suitable diet, though it is pointed out that many states still fall far behind Sustainable Development Goal 2, to “end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture”. Again, it is not only ‘developing’ countries that are failing to achieve food security and food justice for all. UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food Olivier de Schutter reported following a visit to Canada in 2012 that despite Canada’s ranking at 6<sup>th</sup> on the Human Development Index and its strong record on civil and political rights, “the inadequacy of social protection schemes to meet the basic needs of households has precipitated the proliferation of private and charity-based food aid” (de Schutter, 2012). More about a ‘right to food’ approach to addressing food insecurity can be found in Riches and Silvasti (2014) and Chilton & Rose (2009).

## Fellowship itinerary outline

My trip began in San Francisco and, via many train legs and a tiny plane across the one leg unserved by train, ended in New York eight weeks later. Here follows a trip outline; further details of organisations will be given in later sections:

### WEEK 1: SAN FRANCISCO

San Francisco was an abrupt introduction to the extent of homelessness and unmanaged ill-health on the streets. I presented a paper at the Annual Conference of the American Association of Geographers and absorbed current research into food waste and food insecurity issues by academics and practitioners around the world. I talked and participated in living histories of the San Francisco Diggers movement that sought to create alternative access to food and resources, and the more recent tech boom whose excesses sometimes find their way to the shelters attempting to assist those who’ve fallen through the cracks. I also

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<sup>3</sup><http://foodfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/FoodInsecurityBriefing-May-2016-FINAL.pdf>

visited my first food bank, in Oakland, and visited the farm of Hank Herrera, a community advocate combining farming with providing affordable food outlets.

### **WEEK 2: NEW MEXICO**

I spent my first days in Albuquerque soup kitchens and felt the discipline of a food pantry (what we currently call a 'food bank') queue. I helped prepare, served and ate the food eaten daily by the people, often American Indian and African American, disproportionately affected by the uneven development of colonialism and capitalism. In Santa Fe I met Mark Winne, who has attempted to redress food insecurity not through charity but through food systems change.

### **WEEK 3: LOUISIANA**

A visit to a friend in the State Penitentiary revealed some of the links between slavery, race, poverty and carceral history. In the backyards and streets of New Orleans, I joined a group of young activists who weekly collect surplus produce and cook a big meal for homeless folk.

### **WEEK 4: CHICAGO**

Chicago is home to some of what might be called the 'global food banking institutions' where I was able to glean a sense of the scale of operations of food banking at a national and international level, and better understand its integration into national politics and big retail.

### **WEEK 5: ONTARIO, CANADA**

I spent a week with people who've devoted their lives to direct action campaigning for structural solutions to food poverty, from a group of retirees who formed a union to bring about the end of their need to volunteer in food banks by the time they're 90, to recipients of welfare and food charity who organise to take their demands to the highest levels of state government.

### **WEEK 6: WASHINGTON DC**

The capitol district, awash with affluent NGOs, brought me into contact with several innovative systemic solutions to improving access to healthy food, often uniting political advocacy with practical projects that avoid some of the pitfalls of food charity: its indignity, its costs and its unpredictability. I also made it to Capitol Hill and the offices of a congressman who's used his position to advocate for improved conditions for food insecure people through the Farm Bill.

### **WEEK 7: PHILADELPHIA**

Here I met Mariana Chilton, an academic-activist working tirelessly alongside mothers and children experiencing daily food insecurity and bringing their collaborative research to the attention of federal government. I also got a sense of the geography of a food desert when staying in Kingsessing, an area lacking fresh food outlets.

### **WEEK 8: NEW YORK**

I rounded off my trip by meeting Janet Poppendieck, author of the book that inspired the trip. Her work has inspired many, including another author and activist Joel Berg, who leads Hunger-Free America and gave me some great insights into the political history and intricacies of trying to achieve long-lasting change.

The blog account written while travelling and photos can be found at:

<https://seekingsitopia.wordpress.com/>

## Methodology

I prepared for the trip with research into which cities and organisations would best suit the travel. I drew on recommendations from academics and activists I'd met at conferences and meetings through the years, and contacted organisations well in advance to arrange meetings, sometimes following an email with a phone call. A 'snowballing' approach inevitably followed- individuals would recommend another organisation or even offer to plan my itinerary for me! Thus, my trip resulted in part from my seeking out specific organisations but also through the serendipitous connections handed to me by those I met along the way. I knew, however, that I wanted to meet a breadth of organisations: not just food banks, pantries, soup kitchens and other 'emergency food' providers but also food rescue organisations, policy-makers at various governmental levels, academics, advocates and activists. One absence I felt keenly during my trip was that of people with experience of food insecurity; except for meeting food bank clients advocating in Toronto, it was far easier to access those working with or on behalf of people in poverty.

My PhD is based on the principle of ethnographic research: long-term, in-depth fieldwork where the researcher is involved in the activities being researched and aims to understand phenomena from the perspectives of those involved by questioning his or her own assumptions and beliefs. This trip didn't permit the kind of research I am adopting with my UK research, but rather envisaged a breadth of diverse experiences to learn from. However, I tried where possible to participate in activities with organisations I visited- this may have simply constituted a tour of facilities but also comprised cooking, eating, attending meetings, collecting and distributing food and even registering senior citizens for a new program to give them free access to produce at farmers markets! I wrote a blog along the way, which includes pictures of my travel- it was largely written aboard the long train journeys between cities, which crossed farmland, desert, swamp, forest and prairie. But the core data for this report came in the form of interviews with key staff and participants of the organisations visited. Interviews were, where permissible and appropriate, digitally recorded and later transcribed. Every person interviewed signed an informed consent form to ensure they were aware of the nature of my travel and to ask whether they wished anonymity for themselves and/or their organisations.

The data was analysed by detailed reading and coding of my interview transcripts, and themed. The report will inevitably leave out some of the rich detail of the transcriptions, and it is difficult to lend equal weight to the diverse views and experiences that were shared so generously with me. The themes below try to capture the contentious nature of the anti-hunger movement and my own convictions about effective ways to pursue social justice. I hope it lays out some of the debates around responsibility and ethics for systemic failings and various efforts to alleviate these.

## FINDINGS

### Theme 1: CAN 'EMERGENCY' FOOD BECOME BETTER?

#### 1.1: Health, wellbeing and food: improving systems

Many of those I spoke to predict a sea change in understanding about the links between food and health. In researching for his book, Joel Berg explored the catalogue of Harvard Medical School, which listed

hundreds of courses on operations to fix a failing heart, and only 3 on nutrition (none on adult nutrition). Lauren Biel of DC Greens likened the present moment to the problem of fixing cholera for municipal authorities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: once the causative link between disease and water was made, huge investment in public water works virtually eradicated it. “We’re in that cholera moment for food right now, where the connections are being made forcefully between diabetes and chronic illness and a clean, healthy food stream for all people”, she argued. In some states, doctors prescribe fruit and veg, and Theme 4 will describe organisations including DC Greens’ innovative ways to improve access to fresh produce.

Whether a health system is privatised or public, the role of preventative medicine is a key to sustaining services: some food banks hope to work with hospitals to share data and resources to better understand the links between diet and health, and to improve access to foods that may prevent chronic illness. While simply saving money should not be the only incentive to prevent illness, uncertainties around the future of the NHS as chronic illness rises should provoke greater attention to building a ‘healthy food stream’.

### *1.1.1 The food offer: from old cans to fresh fruits and vegetables*

In 1998 Poppendieck wrote that “to the considerable extent that the emergency food system is supply driven, rather than need driven, it will continue to distribute more sweets and snacks and less canned fish and fresh vegetables than nutritionists recommend”. If the foodbanking system is more about corporate bodies offloading their unsold goods than about what recipients want and need, she suggested, the food being distributed will most likely be inadequate, nutritionally and culturally. The health properties of foodbank food have been the subject of some controversy in the UK, with the Trussell Trust’s reliance on non-perishable goods causing some to argue that it lacks fresh produce<sup>4</sup> but the Trussell Trust argue that its food bags are judged by nutritionists as providing ‘sufficient nutrition...for three days’ and they continue to attempt to tailor bags to the specific needs of clients<sup>5</sup>.

However, the Trussell Trust only represents about a half of UK food banks- many obtain fresh and other food by recovering ‘surplus’ food, wasted by supermarkets, wholesalers and food producer for reasons from short expiry dates on the shop floor to warehouse damage to farmers unable to sell a glut or oddly-shaped/sized produce. The US foodbanking system has long recovered surplus food from farms and businesses; section 1.4 will pinpoint some of the ways that greater surplus donation can be achieved through government and corporate policy. For many of the larger food banks I visited, they obtain about a third of their food from store-level donations and a further third is purchased or acquired through TEFAP, a government program to redistribute surplus commodities. UK emergency food is therefore supply-driven to an extent, especially as many call for greater redistribution of wasted food, which should alert us to ask whether this is the kind of food people want/need.

### *1.1.2 Increasing fresh produce availability*

Since Poppendieck’s writing in 1998, the image of the foodbank as largely giving out old canned food has shifted, though smaller food pantries are often still dominated by non-perishable goods (though Poppendieck notes that by the end of the 1980s one gleaning program in California was harvesting a quarter of a million pounds of produce annually). One third of many larger food banks’ inventory (and an even greater proportion for some), however, is fresh fruit and vegetables, often also donated. As organisations such as the Gleaning Network in the UK increase their links with farmers who may not be able to sell their entire crop, more produce could make its way to people who struggle to afford it through primary markets- this could include packhouses putting aside produce for collection or delivery to emergency food providers, using the services of organisations such as FareShare, but consideration should

<sup>4</sup> For one man’s view on this issue, see Can Cook’s blog: <https://foodpoverty.wordpress.com/2016/04/11/institutionalising-food-poverty-the-uk-way/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.trusselltrust.org/get-help/emergency-food/food/>

be made to ensure farmers receive compensation for such produce, to provide lower-cost fresh food to communities while supporting farmers in their vital work.

The move towards increasing the fresh food offer by food charities has been spearheaded by certain organisations, including the [Farm to School Program](#), Oregon Food Bank's [Healthy Pantry Toolkit](#) and Santa Cruz food bank's attempt to combine food distribution with [community-led nutrition education](#). During a phone interview, its CEO Willy McCrea told me that 3 out of 4 families attending the food bank were pre-diabetic, so their fresh food provision is combined with peer-led cooking classes and "encouragement and support with education so that parents will teach future generations". Nutrition education, however, must take into account cultural variation in perception of a healthy diet and a healthy body so as not to alienate people with narrow and exclusive definitions of healthiness.

Food banks like Alameda County in California and Philabundance have the advantage of being located close to either major food producers or ports where fresh produce can be intercepted. Investment in cold-chain logistics and storage technology has allowed for extended shelf-life in getting intercepted fresh food to agencies that distribute it to clients, though this can sometimes present a race against the clock to ensure produce remains fresh. One solution is for foodbanks to connect distributing agencies directly with produce donors, especially when small quantities make it financially and environmentally inefficient for a foodbank truck to collect it and store it in the foodbank before distribution.

### **Case Study: Capitol Area Food Bank, Washington DC**

Part of the Feeding America Network, CAFB is designated as 'Apple', meaning it serves an area of high need and as such receives greater financial support. Paula Reichel and Molly McGlinchy showed me some recent investments: one is a **community garden**, built using salvaged items from Craig's List and irrigated by roof-harvested rainwater. An outdoor teaching area and greenhouse provides shade and shelter for learning. It focuses on items preferred by clients such as collard greens, a favourite among Afro-Caribbean chefs, but also on easy-to-grow plants suited to the local climate and limited garden space. A nutritionist and chef are employed to create **recipe cards in English and Spanish** to go out with food as its seasonably available, and a new kitchen is installed for teaching both clients and agencies, as well as **co-creating and tasting** new recipes for the cards. With a growing health focus, one garden-kitchen connection has been to teach the replacement of salt with fresh herbs for flavour!

#### *1.1.3 Preventing illness and health costs through food? Working with healthcare providers*

Some food banks hope to integrate food banking into healthcare and education systems. Some provide free produce for schools to distribute in back-pack schemes for kids to take home. Alameda County is working with local healthcare providers as part of a national study (also in Detroit and Houston) to trial the provision of produce-heavy food boxes to clients testing for unmanaged diabetes to explore the role of food as preventative medicine.

*"We know that the communities that we're serving are also disproportionately impacted by chronic conditions such as diabetes and hypertension, conditions that are very sensitive to nutrition. So we can make assumptions that by putting out all of this free produce that we're having a positive impact on public health, but what we're really doing now is making an effort to tell that story in a very evidence-based way, and to use that evidence base to inform future programming"*

Healthcare providers are slowly recognising the need to prevent acute presentation, including the potential role of better access to healthy food, which for Alameda County was couched in terms of future cost savings to existing systems. Alison continued "If you compare the cost of a box of healthy food for an entire family over the course of the year to one hospital admission because somebody has a diabetic

emergency- you can't even compare it, the difference in price is just astronomical". As mentioned previously, UK healthcare providers face enormous challenges balancing available resources with growing demand: linking better access to healthy food and future health outcomes can play an important part in long-term public health planning.

#### *1.1.4 Engaging families*

St Martins' Hospitality Center in Albuquerque is piloting 'Produce Blue Box', with 60 low-income families with elementary school-age kids being given a large, produce-heavy box every Friday for a year, with recipes and menus. "We wanted to create a culture of the kids wanting to cook with families, and being involved with what's on the stove", he says: food is not just about ingredients, but the relationships and contexts in which they're cooked up into social experiences, skills and memories. Community and family education programmes, including increasingly popular budgeting and cooking classes for low income families, must beware not to 'blame the victim' and replace recognition of structural inequality with a focus on individuals' behaviour and skills. Rather than dissemination of information and food, such education should enable families to develop their own analyses of food insecurity in a broader context and ensure that content taught bears in mind peoples' access to food outlets, kitchen equipment and other resources.

#### *1.1.5 Research and advocacy: challenging unhealthy donations*

Anti-hunger advocacy organisations have played a role in challenging the health implication of foods obtained through surplus streams. Mazon, a Jewish anti-hunger charity with a base in Washington DC, has been conducting research into the costs imposed on foodbanks having to accept large donations of unhealthy food that they may even have a policy NOT to distribute: many have decided not to redistribute sugary soda, for instance, but then have to deal with the disposal labour and costs. Mazon hope to report on ways to incentivise healthier food donation. This connects to a wider focus of their advocacy at the federal level for the recognition not just of the "physical manifestations but long term health and financial consequences to the country" (Josh Protas, Mazon). As UK organisations such as FareShare advocate for tax incentives for surplus food donation, how can this prevent charities being overwhelmed with unsuitable food?

For food banks and especially smaller pantries, dilemmas abound over the risks of refusing donations. During my interview at Feeding America, this was expressed as such: "if you say no to a donor, what happens if that donor also makes a whole bunch of nutritious food and you've just said 'I can't take your cookies, crackers and chips- but I want your other good stuff!'" However, at the food pantry level, it was suggested that some volunteers judge clients in terms of their likelihood to eat certain foods and may only hand out such foods: "some well-meaning volunteer takes one look and it's like oh, they wouldn't eat yoghurt. They're too heavy, they don't eat yoghurt! But they'll eat these chips". Section 1.2.4 will give an example of an 'accompanied shopper model' that tries to overcome such stereotyping and dietary paternalism. When relying on the beneficence of donors, however, it may be hard to control what is made available to clients in the first place, although a growing number of food banks do indeed refuse certain less-healthy donations.

## **1.2 Measurement and process**

### *1.2.1 Monitoring healthiness*

Some food banks are trying to 'rate' the food they stock in broad health terms: Capitol Area Food Bank, for example, rates all foods as 'wellness' or 'non-wellness'. Other food banks denote certain 'foods to

encourage'. A binary system is challenging as single foods are judged for just one nutrient group, such as sodium, meaning a high-salt peanut butter may be deemed 'non-wellness' despite its high protein content.

### *1.2.2 Challenging 'success by poundage'*

How do food banks estimate 'success' in a food charity world that ideally would not have to exist? While many food bank staff repeated the idea that they would like to see themselves 'out of a job', they admitted that they didn't see their contracts ending anytime soon, and some asked whether there was honesty in the desire no longer to be working in a sector that also lends a sense of satisfaction.

However, some are taking active steps to challenge a long history of measuring success in terms of 'poundage' - weight of goods- distributed. In some ways, this practice has been adopted by food charities in the UK, sometime converting weight into 'meals given' via a formula. As some point out, this is an odd way to represent a large donation of sugar, or milkshake. In the States, many have recognised that by banning soda donations, their poundage may decrease but the health value of their offer may improve. As seen, some foodbanks distinguish 'wellness' from 'non-wellness' foods and use IT systems to track where donations go and can thus better understand which clients are receiving what kind of food.

### *1.2.3 Measuring hunger*

Capitol Area Food Bank uses USDA annual food insecurity monitoring data (via the census survey) against Geographic Information Systems (GIS) analysis to produce its 'Hunger Heat Map', which it then uses to tailor specific programs to specific communities. Similar efforts in the UK were recently reported upon in a Guardian article<sup>6</sup>. Some food banks gather data that can inform their advocacy to prevent hunger in the first place and can act as strong defenders of a robust social safety net: federal policies and programs that boost income and access to nutritious, desirable food, and beyond this, challenging complex and deep-rooted inequality of access to resources and education.

### *1.2.4 Promoting dignity and community cohesion? Food bank models*

Seb Mayfield's WCMT report<sup>7</sup> focussed on Canada's Community Food Centre model (such as The Stop in Toronto) which combines a healthy food bank with community garden, tailored social services, advocacy, community kitchens and other such facilities. Other food pantries have adopted such a 'hub' model to include, for example, a community garden that provides vegetables for pantry clients, and a kitchen to cook lunches for senior residents, and so on. Alameda County is encouraging its partner agencies to consider their models of food distribution: a 'shopper' model where clients can pick items they want rather than being handed a pre-prepared bag, for example. I was told about one pantry where volunteers offer to 'accompany' clients throughout the space and discuss the health qualities or cooking potentials of various categories and items of food.

However, while the 'hub' model offers more holistic support than the basic pantry model, Seb notes that it remains a charitable offer rather than a public entitlement, concluding that 'community food providers' can play an important role in engaging communities to advocate for policies that can prevent the institutionalisation of food aid (Mayfield, 2015, p.10). Later sections will suggest that rather than creating 'better' food banks, staff and volunteers should consider advocating for solutions that entitle citizens to support that prevents the need for charitable last-resorts. As Josh Protas wrote in a blog entry for Mazon, "we will never food bank our way out of hunger"<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2016/may/09/data-science-helping-charities-fight-hunger>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.wcmt.org.uk/fellows/reports/involving-charitable-food-providers-advocacy-efforts-%E2%80%93-lessons-canada>

<sup>8</sup> <http://mazon.org/inside-mazon/charity-alone-is-not-the-answer>

### *1.2.5 Improving access across intersectional boundaries*

A number of food bank staff recognised limitations for different community members in accessing food aid and federal supports. I noted the prominent display on subways and buses of posters advertising SNAP support in a variety of languages. Alameda County Food Bank employs staff speaking a range of languages and is trying to increase its representativeness, for example in manning the helpline that clients are encouraged to call when in need of food assistance (so that the food bank can inform local agencies of expected demand). Their outreach program in 2014 helped 3,400 households access SNAP benefits, providing access to 4 million meals and generating \$19.4 million in local economic stimulus. Their 'Super Enrollment Clinics' expedite the application process into a 30-minute appointment and shorten the waiting time to receive benefits<sup>9</sup>.

## **1.3. Food waste recovery: liability and incentives**

A vast network of 'food rescue' or 'food recovery' exists in the United States. While food banks accept growing amounts of government-bought surplus commodities, large amounts of surplus food are also 'rescued' from retailers, wholesalers, restaurants and farms. In 2015 the Feeding America network alone distributed 3.2 billion pounds- just under 1.5 billion kilos, and an additional 800 million pounds of government commodities and donated product. Alameda County's annual review shows that the food bank received nearly \$2.5 million in government revenue and just over \$9.5 million in financial donations, but over \$46 million-worth of donated food, suggesting that the food charity network is heavily dependent on food surplus- food 'wasted' by the primary market for a variety of reasons.

### *1.3.1 Incentivising surplus food donation*

Food businesses benefit from the Bill Emerson 'Good Samaritan' Act of 1996, which encourages surplus food donation by protecting donors from liability (except in cases of gross negligence). Jim Knutson of Adelante Desert Harvest, Albuquerque, told me that he can guarantee reluctant donors "three levels of legal protection if you donate food- federal law, state law and the donor's signature on their responsibility...they like that". Donors can also claim tax credits on their donations, which acts as a further incentive to donating. A key staff member at Feeding America discussed with me the work of forging partnerships with food producers and retailers- she noted recent legislation making it easier for farmers to claim tax credits, as well as the advantages of avoiding the increasing costs of disposing of waste. Some states, she noted, are passing similar legislation to that in Europe which penalises stores for throwing away edible food, and renewed public interest in tackling food waste has resulted in more coordinated efforts to ensure food is redistributed rather than thrown away (for example, the Food Waste Reduction Alliance brings together food industry and retailers with organisations like Feeding America to engage with such goals as the UN target to reduce food waste by 50% by 2030). While surplus redistribution organisations in the UK call for similar incentives, the question must constantly be posed as to whether this risks entrenching corporate donations and food charity rather than income entitlements and social policy to address the root causes of waste and food insecurity.

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<sup>9</sup> Alameda County Community Food Bank 2014 Annual Report

### **Case study: food waste redistribution as social critique in San Francisco**

I have long been interested in social movements using food waste to create shared public meals that can especially benefit the homeless or vulnerable, such as Food Not Bombs. The San Francisco Diggers pioneered such work in the 1960s, collecting surplus food from markets and backs of stores, and using it to cook meals that were served in local parks. Judy Goldhaft, a Digger, spoke of retailers who donated food: “they felt it was for the good of people and the good of society and the good of people that people were willing to cook food for people that didn’t have it” (regretfully, there isn’t enough space here to do justice to the extent of the Diggers’ philosophy and practice: more can be found in my [blog post written at the time](#)).

Hunger and homelessness still coexist visibly and disturbingly in San Francisco. I spent a day with Food Runners, whose volunteers collect trays of food leftover by the well-fed workers of the big tech companies, and take them to homeless shelters- at one church we delivered to, people sleep between the pews. Travelling between these worlds was a sad thing, especially as the inhabitants may rarely meet, even if they are somehow sharing a meal. And this work will not fix the problem of wage disparity, rising house prices and displacement. But it is tireless work, and rooted in long histories of people attempting to care for others.

I spent another day in the urban farm where Tree and friends grow delicious, vibrant produce to give out in the form of a ‘Free Farm Stand’ in the Mission district. Tree arrived in San Francisco in the 1960s and was fed for free by the Diggers, an experience that stuck with him and informs his work providing food for free. It’s about engaging people who want to find a way to help others, creating an alternative to a system of linear exchange where “sharing has become renting”. To Tree, tackling the wastefulness of global food systems is key to feeding everybody, though ways of distributing it that centre peoples’ needs rather than corporate profits. Rather than putting rocket boosters on the ‘productivist paradigm’ of the past century, we simply need to be better at sharing, with “no strings attached”. Tree’s work puts this belief into practice daily and ‘Free Farm Stand’ models have spread around the nation (and are run by some food banks, too.)

#### *1.3.2 Storage and infrastructure: opportunities and limitations*

Food banks’ investment in cold-chain infrastructure has been key in enabling the donation of perishable goods- for example in order to receive their tax credit, many retailers freeze meat products on the day of expiry, which means it can be redistributed later. Many food rescue organisations link stores with surplus to food charities so that food can be directly picked up rather than passed through a middleman. But the unpredictability of the size and nature of a donation can pose problems to charities. Steven Serrano at St Martin’s soup kitchen, for example, noted the problem with small donations, such as those intercepted from institutional cafeterias: they can create competition and resentment among clients (such donations are better placed in Tupperwares and taken to rehoused clients as individual meals). He received a call from a local food bank needing to redistribute a surfeit of icecream sandwiches, but he’s limited in storage and refrigeration capacity and is mindful of flooding his clients’ space with ‘sugar and carbs’.

#### **1.4. Corporate Social Responsibility**

As mentioned above, the corporate food sector is a vital source of donated food for the charity sector, lubricated by Good Samaritan and tax credit incentives. During my interview at Feeding America, it became apparent that retail surplus food ‘rescue’ is an area with much potential for growth, but requires engaging senior staff who can understand, for instance, the tax benefits and roll out a company-wide program, and also engaging shop floor staff who often have a fast turnover in, for example, ensuring that food that will remain edible for another couple of days is separated for donated and frozen or refrigerated, while other food is composted. Food bank volunteers can cut off blemishes so that food can be used by programs that cook meals, increasing the amount of potential donations. As UK supermarkets increasingly audit and

publically announce their food waste figures and action plans, staff at all levels could be trained to identify surplus that is suitable for donation and stored in ways that keeps food safe, clean and desirable.

Others had a more critical perspective on supermarkets' food donation practices: Freedom 90 in Toronto feel angry at a proposal to award supermarkets tax credits for donating surplus food, aimed at reducing food waste. "They want corporations to be able to get a tax break for their excess production that they donate to foodbanks. And there's so many of us saying that 'well maybe you should be looking at the root of the problem- why are we having excess production?'" , said member Gerald Fox. Mike Balkwill of Put Food in the Budget, argued that one key to ensuring a solid tax base for fair income distribution is tackling corporate tax avoidance, and this has been one target of campaigns. These groups recognised efforts to raise public attention about hunger and funds for food banks, such as an annual Christmas radio show encouraging food bank donations, but argued that these allow people to feel good about doing a little yet wages and benefits remain below living costs. Businesses, however philanthropic, should also, they argued, ensure all workers are paid a minimum standard of income to ensure they don't have to rely on food charity: Put Food in the Budget links to the campaign ['15 and Fairness'](#) aimed at raising the minimum wage to meet basic cost of living standards.

## **Theme 2: INVOLVING THOSE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE**

No matter how 'streamlined' and 'client-focussed' the food bank model, it remains a structure of giving and receiving, introducing an often unquestioned power imbalance between staff/volunteers and recipients. One focus of visits was to organisations prioritising the involvement in decision-making and advocacy of those with lived experience of hunger and using food banks. While the previous section highlighted food banks' efforts to provide 'healthy' food, one might ask whether such efforts are imposed on, or co-planned with those affected by such changes? What methods can be used to involve users in planning or decision-making and advocacy?

The previous section highlighted the role of measurement of household food insecurity as evidence to lever policies that may reduce it. However, many advocates recognise that this isn't enough to sway political opinion, and that statistics reduce to numbers diverse and visceral experiences that might help inform policy making tailored to the diverse needs of the most vulnerable people, especially where this brings to light the root causes of food insecurity: the complex factors that bring about and maintain people in financial and other forms of poverty.

### **2.1 Consultation and representation**

Some food charities attempt to take into account the views and preferences of the clients they serve. St Martins is a large soup kitchen in Albuquerque, serving up to 600 meals each day from morning to evening. Director Steven Serrano attempts to combine clients' wishes, gathered through 'satisfaction surveys' (translated into multiple languages) with providing culturally diverse/appropriate, nutritious meals. He noted the 'reality' to such involvement: "clients are shooting heroin and prostituting all night long, you know. For me to expect them to like- 'do you want pizza? Or do you want salad?'...you know?". Local community groups are invited to cook one night per month, fundraising for the food and purchasing, cooking and serving it, bringing a diversity of provision, less pressure on staff and space for interaction.

### Case study: Engaging clients in advocacy: Alameda County Community Food Bank

ACCFB has a community organiser on staff, and convenes a ‘committee of advocates’ with lived experience of hunger. They ran the ‘Speak Up’ project, which trained food bank user advocates in emergency food aid spaces and local neighbourhoods about the legislative process. Elected officials were invited and themes included ‘how to hold a meeting’ and ‘how to get the word out’, including a focus on confidence in raising one’s voice. Many reported feeling more confident and gaining greater agency in speaking to their political representatives, but such interactions also allowed food bank staff to advocate on behalf of, and alongside clients, at for example budget hearings where decisions that affect incomes are made.

## 2.2 Campaigning

In Toronto I met [Put Food in the Budget \(PFIB\)](#), a campaign group seeking social assistance rates that meet minimum living standards. Key organiser Mike Balkwill told me “our campaign is led by people who are poor”. At a planning meeting, they discussed their direct action campaigns: audiences with policy makers to make key demands, publicity stunts to raise awareness of the inadequacies of food charity, and research, including their recent survey [‘Food Banks are Not Enough!’](#). It takes time for campaigners to feel comfortable telling their stories and becoming campaign leaders: rather than ‘wheeling them out to tell sob stories’, Mike ensures that adequate preparation precedes media interviews and that peoples’ stories are woven into a co-written analysis that develops over time. At the meeting, I asked why they want to participate. The first response was that “it’s fun!”. They organise creative campaigns that have a visible impact and convene with similar groups across Ontario.

Mike also invited me to a meeting of [Voices for Change Halton](#), which convenes local residents to advocate for systemic solutions to poverty and to promote human rights. The meeting was a space for sharing personal stories of the emotional impacts of discrimination and poverty, but also to develop a collective critique aimed at people and institutions in power. The complexity was brought out of multiple struggles to navigate parenting, mental and physical ill health, work, housing, racism, gender and, crucially, a sense of being excluded from participating in everyday life as a ‘worthwhile’ citizen.

## 2.3 Busting myths

One of PFIB’s key concerns is classism and ‘poor-bashing’. Negative stereotypes of people in poverty circulate in the popular media and can have a damaging effect on policies to redress. Josh Protas of Mazon gave the example of Jason Greenslate, a SNAP recipient portayed by FOX News as epitomising undeserving welfare fraud: a ‘beach bum’ shown buying lobster and coconut water with his food stamps. The film was circulated to members of Congress, depicting Greenslate as the ‘face of SNAP’ and symbol of wasteful government spending. Such representations often intersect with race and gender: they re-cycle the image of the ‘welfare queen’, typically African-American, propounded since the 1980s.

### Case Study: Witnesses to Hunger

Witnesses to Hunger is a photographic research and advocacy project by the Center for Hunger-Free Communities. Mariana Chilton runs the program and met me in Philadelphia. An expert in public health and anthropology, her advocacy combines quantitative and statistical methods with qualitative and participatory action research. For example, her team’s research showed that families receiving housing subsidies are less likely to raise an underweight child: **food, income, housing and health are interwoven**. But working closely with low-income families, she is able to communicate the lived experience of hunger and poverty to those in the highest level of government: the women involved in Witnesses are regularly invited to Congress to testify. From advocacy as ‘speaking on behalf of’, **the aim is to “speak truth to power”**. These truths can conflict with the campaign goals of other anti-hunger organisations, who struggle to defend existing budgets for federal nutrition programs such as SNAP: Chilton’s participants, rather, “want *off* of Food Stamps...they want freedom”.

## Theme 3: WELFARE SYSTEMS AND FAIR WORK

### 3.1 Austerity and welfare reform

Welfare cuts and reforms were among the reasons for the explosion in food banking both in the 1980s under Reagan and again in the 1990s under Clinton. As UK studies have repeatedly shown, the growth in food bank visits in recent years can be attributed in large part to the loss of income people have experienced with such policy changes as the 'bedroom tax' and greater 'conditionality', such as the enforcement of workfare programs through the use of 'sanctions' that leave people without sufficient income to buy food for, as [one food bank study showed](#), up to 26 weeks.

In the US, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 ensured that able-bodied adults without dependents could only access SNAP benefits for 3 months out of 3 years. Cash benefits were slashed and it was this erosion of the safety net that Poppendieck argues led to many "emergency" food providers converting their services to "chronic household supplementation" (p67).

Advocates working at the federal level note the difficulty of defending nutritional welfare programs, not solely due to partisan ideologies but also due to the placement of such programs within the Farm Bill, which aimed to balance agricultural subsidies against nutrition supports. Lobbyists for wealthy agricultural corporations have in recent years tipped the financial balance towards 'Big Farming' and away from nutrition supports, as Joel Berg suggested to me. The two are related, for example the funding for TEFAP, which diverts agricultural subsidies to the food bank network and thus maintains farm prices during periods of overproduction. This can have the effect of imposing large quantities of hard-to-distribute crops: several food charities noted the recent tide of cranberries that had to be absorbed. Also, food banks find themselves having to handle and distribute ever-larger quantities of surplus food without concomitant infrastructural and human resources, as Joshua Lohnes has noted in a recent research paper into US foodbanking (Lohnes & Wilson, 2015). These problems point to the need to decouple policy that tackles food insecurity from policy geared at reducing food wastage, though the potential trade-offs of trying to balance farmer income, affordability of food and environmental sustainability pose sticky issues for policy-makers, as the Fabian Commission report outlines. One solution to the inevitably higher costs of sustainably-produced food, they argue, is to ensure people receive minimum income standards to withstand such changes.

### 3.2 Responsibility and accountability at the policy level

While the governmental systems and programs to deliver income supports in the US differ in important ways from the UK, a similar debate abounds about whether food insecurity should be ring-fenced as a public spending concern. As pointed out in recent high-profile reports<sup>10</sup>, the UK could benefit from a government minister with direct responsibility for hunger, to be addressed not through the diversion of wasted food but by addressing the underlying poverty of income and opportunity. Access to food should not be subject to the whim of food charity and its unpredictable supplies of food, but fulfilled as part of the Human Right To Food. Food insecurity is not merely a problem of the unemployed but increasingly recognised to affect the working poor<sup>11</sup>.

### 3.3 Raising wages

Josh Protas of Mazon argued that one solution to the problem of government welfare having to subsidise low wages would be to raise the minimum wage- one consistent response to this is that employers would not be able to afford to employ people, although Josh replied that there is little evidence of this at scale. With a scanty union/labour movement, he noted that there is a lack of co-ordinated demand for such

<sup>10</sup> E.g. [The Fabian Commission's 'Hungry for Change'](#), the [All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the UK's 'Feeding Britain'](#)

<sup>11</sup> Dickinson, M. (2016) ['Working for food stamps: Economic Citizenship and the post-Fordist welfare state in New York City'](#), *American Ethnologist* 43:2.

policies, but the Canadian ‘Put Food in the Budget’ group frame their campaign around increased wages specifically to reduce hunger, if hunger is a widely recognised public concern that can garner attention for a campaign that is essentially about preventing poverty through wages and a robust social safety net.

### 3.4 Universal Basic Income?

Some experts have been vocal at the potential of Universal Basic Income as a way to reduce the inequality of income that has grown over the decades, or at least to guarantee a floor of living standards. The Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health (OSNPPH) in a recent [‘position statement on responses to food insecurity’](#) argue that “The current charitable model absolves governments of their responsibility to ensure the basic right to food insecurity for all” and argue that “A basic income guarantee has the potential to eliminate poverty and spending on its consequences”. While the UK is nowhere close to implementing such a radical income redistribution program, the question must be asked about how to ensure citizens are cared for as mechanisation and globalisation reduce the future likelihood of full employment.

## Theme 4: INNOVATIONS IN COLLABORATIVE FOOD SYSTEMS CHANGE

This is the part of the trip that excited me the most, but in many ways the projects described here are relatively small scale in comparison to the huge resources commanded by national government that could be diverted to address domestic poverty and hunger. However, they united other interests that I carried to the trip, including the question of how to create more localised and low-carbon but affordable and realistic food system change. Imagination met with gritty determination and skilful collaboration; a look *beyond* the idea of merely diverting food waste to hungry people and stimulating change that can challenge their root causes.

### 4.1 Food justice: rebalancing intersectional injustice through food

The concept of ‘food justice’ emerged in the United States, where unequal access to food, and the land to grow it on, has been critiqued and challenged by those who link it to racial, class and gender struggles to achieve social justice. The following case study explores a group challenging food injustice through collective action on the streets:

#### **Case study: Community Kitchen Collective**

One of my favourite writers about food and activism in recent years has been David Giles, whose PhD research saw him travelling the globe to scavenge, cook and eat with the global network Food Not Bombs. Community Kitchen Collective, in a similar way, rescue food that is going to waste in New Orleans (largely fresh produce) and spend a day each week cooking it collaboratively into a giant hot meal that they serve in a central park to a largely homeless crew of diners. On the menu was fresh green chillis, roasted with salt and blended with avocado and lemon juice into a mouth-exploding relish. While some chefs ate back at the house where the food was prepared, others waited until they had served it, and sat and ate with the men and women in the park. This continual effort is a quiet revolution, one that asks no questions of eaters but, they hope, offers **solidarity through shared eating**.

### 4.2 Collaborating across sectors for urban food justice

Food Policy Councils and other institutional arrangements have developed globally in recent years to bring together diverse experience and expertise in planning for more sustainable food cities. In Washington DC, I joined a meeting of the Food Justice Action Team, hosted by the district’s Department of Health and convening a diverse range of grassroots and municipal organisations. The group began with a focus on

'diabesity' and has broadened its scope to look at access and participation in healthier food economies; the meeting I attended highlighted food cooperatives. I was struck by the positive and dynamic atmosphere, the openness to innovative forms and the nuanced discussions about race, food access and health inequalities. Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy was mentioned as an organisational influence behind, for example, the organisation of a Food Symposium held in the deprived Ward 7 of Washington DC: billed as a 'Presentation of community-based ideas and solutions to food deserts and swamps, food access and markets (after Walmart pulled out)'. Could such approaches be used to develop, for example, cookery classes in the UK: using emancipatory methodologies to enable people to develop analyses and organise solutions to problems?

### 4.3 Job provision

One of DC Central Kitchen's (DCK) mottos was repeated to me by Director of Procurement and Sustainability Amy Bachman: "hunger is never going to be solved by food". Their model, rather, aims to equip beneficiaries of their culinary training program with skills to get a well-paid job and prevent the poverty that causes hunger. Most students of the 14-week program have struggled with homelessness, long-term unemployment, incarceration and/or substance dependency. The program includes 'job-readiness' training that addresses the psycho-social aspects of barriers to the workplace, such as self-esteem and time-management. Many graduates end up employed by DCK to cook the meals that constitute the project's other arms: creating nutritious and tasty meals for institutions. Using surplus produce, including back-of-store/market food rescue and farmer donations, they create 5000 meals for shelters and other charities that feed people as part of their activities- these meals are given away free of charge. At a separate facility, they cook meals that are purchased by schools, businesses or for event catering. The ingredients for this social enterprise wing are purchased (as locally as possible), but together both programs feed 9000 people a day and stimulate a local food procurement economy that reduces the carbon emissions and job-'offshoring' associated with many large-scale public procurement companies.

Amy noted key challenges: storing space, securing adequate donations of quality protein and having to turn down unhealthy, processed donations, or excessive quantities of, say, tomatoes: although she noted that through relationships with other local food charities such as Capitol Area Food Bank, they can 'share out' unneeded donations. Smaller donations can be logged on a [local database](#) which allows non-profit organisations to see and claim surplus food donated by businesses in their area.

DCK also advocate for policy that protects their students and employees, joining a recent campaign to 'Drop the Box' that former inmates had to tick when making job applications. They speak and write widely about their work with such groups to challenge stereotypes and inspire others to challenge discriminatory policies and practices. During my visit they were preparing to host Feeding the 5000 DC, a public street-feeding event founded by UK-based anti-food waste group Feedback Global to raise awareness of the scale of edible food waste. How could such large-scale public events also raise awareness about the issue of food insecurity by bringing together diverse people in shared activity?

### 4.4 Enabling food access

'Food access' refers not only to peoples' limited financial access to adequate and nutritious food, but also to the geographical limitations some face in physically accessing it. The term 'food desert' has been used to denote such communities (although the multitude of definitions makes the term somewhat controversial). One issue noted by analysts in the US is supermarket 'redlining'- closing stores in largely low-income areas where profits may be lower. Mark Winne's book 'Closing the Food Gap' is a fascinating account of attempts that have tried, and sometimes succeeded to tackle such access issues.

#### 4.4.1 Community stores

One attempt is for community groups to open their own grocery stores. While food buying cooperatives are commonplace, one food bank, Philabundance, has opened its own grocery store in Chester, Pennsylvania. The small town hadn't seen its own grocery store in 12 years, Philabundance's Chief Operating Officer Melanie Cataldi informed me. Strategies to acquire food included car-sharing to stores several miles away and buying over-priced and often unhealthy food at corner stores. Their store, Fare and Square, offers a full range of fresh food at prices as low as possible (in some part enabled by wholesaler donors to the food bank allowing them to purchase food at cost price). It is open to all but customers whose income is below a certain level qualify to earn 'carrot cash' - a 10% rebate on all purchases that sits as a savings account to be spent at the store. Children often use carrot cash to buy food on the way to school, she noted. While the store fails to make the sales to be fully self-sustaining, Melanie is happy to accept that a certain amount of fundraising is necessary- this is part of the food bank's wider fundraising and allows people choice and dignity to purchase their food locally rather than relying on charitable handouts in a 'secondary' food system.

#### 4.4.2 Farmers Markets

Another impressive market-based solution is 'Produce Plus' in Washington DC. Lauren Schweder-Biel of DC Greens was part of the collaborative team that devised and grew the scheme. While many US cities now run 'matching schemes' whereby benefits recipients double their money up to a certain amount spent at farmers markets, Lauren notes that it may only be wealthier neighbourhoods that can raise the funds for matching schemes.

Produce Plus goes further, giving \$10 per household per farmers market to spend on fresh produce, as long as the recipient is receiving a key benefit (including Medicare, SNAP or WIC). "The psychology is different", Lauren noted of the vouchers- unlike a matching scheme that asks you to spend something, there's a powerful motivator in getting something for free (but not via a 'secondary' charity route). The uptake has been impressive, and the city's Department of Health has steadily increased funding, from \$200,000 a couple of years ago to \$1.2million this growing season.

When market sellers know they will receive an income for their produce, they're more likely to site themselves in lower-income areas. "To me it's an important counter-example to food banking- by allowing dollars to circulate, it has the potential to be a system changer as opposed to just perfecting the safety net" (Lauren). Farmers' markets are now located in poorer areas of the city such as Ward 7 and 8, which Lauren told me see concentrations of diet-related illness and life expectancies up to 15 years lower than wealthier wards, tracking along lines of racial disparity. DC Greens are working with healthcare providers to analyse data from card use that could help better understand the links between access to fresh produce and medical outcomes.

#### **Case study: "Change moves at the pace of trust"- Engaging Produce Plus communities**

At first, people were mistrustful of the program: 'why am I getting something for free? What's the catch?'. The program organisers employed **community champions**, customers of Produce Plus who are passionate about ensuring their neighbours can also access fresh produce, and are, to Lauren "key to creating critical demand... having someone inside the community bears witness and builds trust for the program once people know it's there for them".

The program is also assisted by a corps of volunteers who are trained to give out vouchers at each market (and 'create environment'), 30% of whom are Produce Plus customers. DC Greens' outreach specialist travels to senior citizen centres and public housing projects to enlist program and volunteer participation. Social media platforms are used to communicate news about the program, markets and available food.

One other success was to encourage customers and volunteers to send thanks to the council member who supported the program, which helped strengthen the case for increased funding and gives hard-pressed city bureaucrats something to be able to celebrate!

Such innovative solutions work within the ‘normal’ operations of food markets: in a society where one’s capacity to exchange and consume in the market denotes a key part of one’s citizenship (Bauman 1998), receiving charity marks one out as ‘other’, especially where specific criteria or conditions apply, whereas Fair and Square enables people to shop on their own terms. They represent an investment in ‘clean food streams’: local infrastructures of growing, distributing and preparing food that move beyond older models of addressing food insecurity through the charitable redistribution of surplus food.

## **Theme 5: JUST CHANGE: FROM CHARITABLE KINDNESS TO EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY**

This theme cross-cuts the previous themes, exploring the ways attitudes and behaviours of those involved in anti-hunger work can affect very different outcomes. It returns to a key theme of Janet Poppendieck’s book ‘Sweet Charity’, which questioned the feel-good factor that can make giving out food a more achievable and satisfying activity to address hunger than tackling the structural inequalities and policy environments that underwrite poverty. This, she argues, has resulted in food charity becoming institutionalised and normalised as the seeming solution to hunger and thus masking the underlying causes and political responsibilities in addressing those causes.

### **5.1 Understanding the limits of charity**

Feeding the hungry is a core moral urge, rooted in maternal love and early ethico-religious codes. The existence of hunger is morally offensive in a way that commands responses, and the energy given over to tackling hunger, largely through charitable food redistribution, has been immense. Can one morally ignore the urge to simply give food to those in need, even if one accepts that it is impossible to ‘feed our way out of hunger and poverty’? As Poppendieck notes, “food is one of the first media through which we learn our notions of being good” (p42). But food insecurity has not BEEN eradicated as a result. As a key staff member at Feeding America noted, it has indeed gone up, from 1 in 10 people when she began work 20 years ago, to 1 in 6 people today lacking the financial resources to afford good food throughout the month.

Many food bank staff and volunteers are busily engaged with the work of meeting demand for food assistance, where lofty talk about fighting poverty can easily fall to the bottom of the to-do list. The voluntary staff of many smaller food pantries and meal providers are ageing, and many speak of an ‘ageing’ infrastructure of food redistribution. In addition, food banks are becoming increasingly called-upon to handle government surplus commodities as the resources to undertake such work decline, as pointed out earlier. Theme 1 explored ways that food banks are adopting ‘smarter’ systems as well as expanding their cold-chain or storage infrastructures. But I met those along the way who want to see a more radical change. By radical, they simply mean ‘at the roots’. Addressing the root causes of hunger, which means tackling poverty through advocacy and action. The case of Alameda County Food Bank’s Speak Up project, featured in Section 2.1, gave an example of how volunteers can be shown new ways of challenging injustice.

### **Case study: volunteers and clients fighting back: Freedom 90 and PFIB**

Freedom 90 are activists of a certain age, who after a number of years of serving or receiving ‘emergency’ food, realised that this situation was chronic and required deeper solutions than simply redistributing more food. They formed a ‘Union of Food Bank and Emergency Meal Program Volunteers’ to organise their labour in ways that could affect deeper change. I met with some of the group at the HQ of York Region Food Bank Network, Ontario. Yvonne Kelly recalls talking to volunteers in their late 60s who felt ‘exploited’ that after 35 years of providing food, they still felt like they were holding the system together as the national and provincial governments had not yet made up for the cuts to social security made during recessions of the 1980s and welfare reforms of the 1990s.

Freedom 90 work alongside Put Food in the Budget to re-frame public messages about people in poverty and to leverage their position as older voters to raise key demands. Member Kristine Carbis noted that they recognise peoples’ continued need for charitable food assistance: while the need for foodbanks can’t be eliminated overnight, she argues the need to look BEYOND, to structural solutions such as higher incomes for the unemployed and disabled and fairer wages and work conditions for those in work. The group’s passion, commitment and frustration echoed that of many food bank staff who recognise the need for structural change, but their voice is a different one, one that recognises the relevance of the unpaid labour of food bank volunteers. The group made the point that the amount of wealth and labour expended on redistributing surplus and donated food through the charitable network could be harnessed to rebalance incomes in more

## **5.2 Engaging volunteers in new ways**

As discussed in Theme 3, groups such as Put Food in the Budget and Voices for Change Halton organise communities to lobby government support for increases in spending on welfare or policies to support higher wages. Food banks work hard to ensure their volunteers feel rewarded for their contribution, such as providing a recreation area or ‘thank you’ board. Could such efforts be used to help volunteers engage with advocacy? Williams et al’s (2016) recent research into UK food banks suggests that they can constitute ‘spaces of encounter’ where volunteers might be challenged in their stereotypical notions of poverty and welfare (the inverse can also be true!). From attitudinal change to action, some US organisations are actively encouraging would-be or current food charity volunteers to use their time and energy in advocacy activities. Hunger-Free America, for example, uses an ‘impact’ scale in its [handbook for volunteers](#), demonstrating the far greater efficacy of contacting an elected official than, for example, donating a can of soup. Advocacy is tough and doesn’t perhaps yield the immediate rewards of ‘on the ground’ charity volunteering, but perhaps inspiration can be drawn from the evidence and expertise of decades of advocacy by both food banks and those campaigning against their existence.

One challenge in writing this report has been to include different perspectives on whether and how different kinds of social and political change might occur. Some promote ‘relentless incrementalism’: working with existing systems and relationships to improve provision and carve space for innovative solutions. Organisations such as DC Central Kitchen have slowly grown their operations and continue to campaign for policy that supports their goals alongside their practical work. Others focus on co-creating shared demands towards eliminating the need for food charity altogether. Some groups argue that ‘better’ food banking still reproduces a segregated food system that (patchily) patches up holes in a social security system that it argues should guarantee incomes to allow all citizens equal opportunities to participate and thrive.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Food waste and food insecurity could be said to point to the relational nature of poverty in this country- an environmental poverty of imagination in the excesses of food produced/imported but never eaten, alongside the income scarcity of millions who struggle to afford the food in the first place. It is worth highlighting again the *collective* interests served by eradicating domestic food insecurity and poverty. Inequality delivers poor results across many indicators not just at the bottom, but throughout society. Again, poverty is relational- a problem not just of scarcity, but of excess. In a world of growing populations and limited resources, just distribution is a matter of survival.

One objective of the Fellowship was to better understand the impacts of food waste redistribution on food charity. The US food banking system has developed to redistribute vast quantities of surplus food, and some food banks are highly strained by the increasing demand to redistribute private and government surplus without matching funding to support infrastructure (Lohnes & Wilson, 2015). While food banks are one of the largest recipients of corporate and private financial donations, critics argue that this does not equate to the guaranteed entitlement of government-funded (income-based) food security programs. In addition to the vulnerability of food charities, the food offer, especially for smaller operators, is largely dictated by the whims of market excess rather than the specific nutritional and cultural needs of those receiving charitable food. Theme 4, therefore, laid out examples of programming that goes beyond food handouts towards improved, entitlement-based access to good food, such as the Washington DC city council-funded Produce Plus program which gives benefit recipients money to spend at farmers markets each week.

However, Theme 1 did explore ways that food banks have evolved to improve the health and dignity of their food offers and that of their partner agencies (soup kitchens, meal programs, food pantries etc). From developing relationships with farmers to procure greater proportions of fresh produce to employing community organisers to involve clients in advocacy, examples abound of attempts to redress some of the shortcomings of food banking outlined in Poppendieck (1998). Cooking and eating together, and integrating food pantries into 'community hubs' aims to reduce stigma and diversify food access activities, such as community gardening, peer-led cooking classes and shared meals.

Certain aspects of food banking remain problematically unchanged, however. A key argument of Janet Poppendieck's critique is that the 'feel-good' factor of charitable assistance encourages the public and non-profits to focus on this rather than the less-satisfying task of advocating for systemic solutions to the root causes of hunger and waste i.e. poverty and overproduction. Some organisations have, however, worked to facilitate food banks, clients and civil society capacity to engage in such advocacy, such as Hunger-Free America's volunteering impact meter and Alameda County's Speak Up program. In the UK, emerging networks such as the Independent Food Aid Network and End Hunger UK provide potential channels for public debate and collective demands to ensure that structural solutions are found to end poverty, rather than the institutionalisation of food charity. Poppendieck describes the latter as a 'moral safety valve': the existence and scale of food aid makes it appear to be managing the problem while government policy that could ensure the Human Right to Food goes unchallenged.

Food bank staff themselves recognised the limitations of charity: as Allison Pratt of Alameda County insisted, "Our resources are absolutely limited and we will be the first ones to say that our role in solving hunger is smaller than the government and the public sector role". The Feeding America network employs staff to defend government nutrition programs (such as SNAP and WIC which provide money to spend on food for low-income people). Yet their own promotional material gives the impression that food charity alone can end hunger, and food banks continue to expand operations (as both demand and supply increase). The ambivalence over the future of food banking is heard in the frequent assurance of

foodbanking staff that “we’d like to put ourselves out of business”. But this was often combined with predictions such as “in 10 years’ time we’ll be moving 10 times as much food”, or growth targets, or continued measurement of success by volume of food redistributed and not by decreased rates of food insecurity. Discussions are underway to implement national food poverty monitoring in the UK and such data should be used by food charities to assess their impact (while such monitoring will only be a partial representation of the conditions and experiences of poverty and hunger).

The American dream of self-sufficiency and the capacity of every individual to pull his or herself up by the bootstraps is, arguably, one that can be seen in the individualising tendencies of British welfare policy in recent years, which calls for greater individual ‘responsibility’ and ‘accountability’ (as evident in certain aspects of the Universal Credit application process). While of course the individual plays a major part in directing his or her life, however, household food insecurity measurements reveal that policies to curb social supports (such as America’s PRWORA reforms of the mid-1990s) do in fact worsen food insecurity (Borjas, 2004). Community support and government protection are vital parts of enabling people to access opportunities to move out of poverty and to ensure they do not fall through the safety net when they are unable to do so (a fall which is hugely costly to both productivity and to health and legal systems (Tarasuk & OSNPPH, 2015). [JRF’s recent report](#) outlines steps different bodies can take in eradicating poverty within 15 years. Once again, focussing not just on poverty as a lack that can be filled by gifts of kindness but as part of social inequality that costs everybody, such a commitment needn’t be seen as idealism but as a practical task that can benefit all.

## DISSEMINATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

I have discussed the findings of my trip in a number of ways in the months since returning from the USA. I reported findings at a planning meeting of End Hunger UK and have discussed insights at various events planned to discuss food insecurity since then. I presented a session about my trip to my hometown’s Transition Towns group in Powys, and used my observations about date labelling in the US to write a paper on this theme which I presented at the 2016 Royal Geographical Society Annual Conference, as well as discussing the implications of a current campaign to standardise food date labelling in the US with the organisers of the campaign. I included insights from my America research in an article written to accompany the transcript to a recent Westminster Food and Nutrition Forum on food waste and redistribution. I would be honoured to present or discuss my work at relevant forums or events. While I plan to focus on completing and writing my PhD over the next year, I will be participating where possible in the ‘Big Conversation’ planned as part of the End Hunger UK campaign.

I can be contacted at [c.spring@edu.salford.ac.uk](mailto:c.spring@edu.salford.ac.uk) and would welcome feedback of any kind.

### About me

I have always been fascinated by cultural variability, change and interconnections. I have also always treasured the chance to travel and learn about the world’s diverse ways of understanding and doing things, having studied for a BA in Social Anthropology (with a dissertation exploring gender and family planning in Kwahu, Ghana) at the University of Cambridge before spending two years as an Assistant Language Teacher in rural Kagoshima, Japan, as part of the JET Programme. I have since worked for ATD Fourth World in London (focussing on the inclusion of people in poverty in policy processes) and AMSED in Strasbourg, an organisation that creates opportunities for recent immigrant communities to interact with city life, and helps French Algerians set up development links with Algeria. These experiences taught me about the disproportionate impacts of environmental degradation on vulnerable communities and I found myself seeking skills in addressing the tensions between environmental and social justice. I restarted postgraduate studies in Sustainable Development Advocacy at the Bulmer Foundation, which included consultancy work around community orchards and adult community education. I moved to Manchester to run Salford University’s Green Impact scheme to engage staff in pro-environmental behaviour before taking up my current PhD research in Human Geography, exploring the connections between food waste and household food insecurity through a comparative ethnography of surplus food redistribution organisations.

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## Appendix One: Detailed introduction to food insecurity and surplus food redistribution as charitable ‘solution’

### 1. ‘First world’ hunger

The task of feeding human populations has been a central tenet of social organisation throughout evolutionary history. The birth of cities, religion, organised hierarchy and conflict can all be linked to early agriculture and the food surpluses it produced. Producing enough food has long been a technical and ecological challenge, but the distribution of that food to all has always been political- about the distribution of power. Amaryta Sen decoupled the idea that starvation and famine is simply the result of a lack of food; rather, it is the characteristic of *some* people not having enough food to eat. It is a matter of distributive justice. But surely highly developed Western nations stand far apart from the countries we typically associate with famine and hunger? With our histories of state welfare and wealth to command the abundant imports afforded by post-WW2 ‘Green Revolution’ food systems?

There is a crude geographical distinction to make between the global ‘stuffed’ and ‘starved’, as Raj Patel puts it. In some parts of the world, health systems creak as waistlines and blood sugar levels rise, while in others millions persistently go to bed with bellies rumbling. But could the stuffed also, in some ways, be the starved ones? Inequality within, as well as between, countries and regions has been growing globally. Rather than viewing hunger merely as a lack of calories, our understanding of nutrition has increasingly

recognised the nutritional deficiencies of diets that may nevertheless supply more than enough calories. We have recognised some of the consequences of the Green Revolution and the subsidised monocultures of corn, wheat, sugar and rice that it has so abundantly produced. Damage to soils, water supplies, biodiversity and energy resources notwithstanding, it has led to the situation where poverty now correlates with obesity and diet-related illness.

In an economic system where money determines the vast majority of one's access to food, it's not hard to grasp the basic point that hunger is closely associated with poverty. And from this point, it's not hard to see that hunger and access to good food is in large part about incomes: wages and welfare.

## 2. Hunger in America

Expert testimonies to the Senate in the 1960s reported levels of malnutrition in certain US states to be akin to that of some developing countries (Berg, 2008, p.27), prompting public outrage that saw the creation of modern nutrition assistance programs. But the extent of hunger was still unknown and a matter of controversy. In 1984, President Reagan's Task Force on Food Assistance noted "we regret our inability to document the degree of hunger caused by income limitations, for such a lack of definitive, quantitative proof contributes to a climate in which policy discussions become unhelpfully heated and unsubstantiated assertions are then substituted for hard information"<sup>12</sup>. In the UK, unhelpful debates have raged over uncertainty over definition and extent of food poverty, with many commentators noting Lord Freud's denunciation of demand for Trussell Trust food parcels as reflecting 'infinite demand for a free good'<sup>13</sup> rather than as a proxy for the existence of UK hunger.

The findings section will outline both quantitative and qualitative approaches taken in North America to translate the extent, experience and moral dimensions of hunger to the public and policy realm. Household food insecurity has been measured by the United States Department of Agriculture since 1995, via the Food Security Supplement to the annual Population Survey by the Census Bureau, which has allowed hunger to be tracked over time. It asks a series of questions about food behaviours and experiences and is tailored to families with or without children, with responses measured against a scale of food security. Valerie Tarasuk has argued that measuring hunger in Canada has been vital to stimulating and monitoring the impact of government policy<sup>14</sup>, and many in the UK are calling for government-led measurement of the problem.

Federal nutrition programs have been vital in preventing hunger in North America, particularly the US where cash benefits are more stringent than in Canada. The largest program is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, commonly known as food stamps. While eligibility criteria vary from state to state, for many one is eligible to receive SNAP if one's income is below 130% of the poverty line. SNAP recipients receive a payment card that can be used to purchase food in most large grocery stores, as well as many smaller stores and food markets. In the United States, it is the 5-yearly Farm Bill that decides how spending on both agricultural subsidies and nutrition programs addressing hunger. There are also specific nutrition programs for seniors and children. Joel Berg told me "we're the only industrialised western country that doesn't trust poor people with cash", linking this to the broad historical trend of "blaming people for their poverty". I will discuss discourses and myth-busting around poverty and hunger in the findings section.

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<sup>12</sup> Committee on National Statistics and National Research Council (2005) 'Measuring food insecurity and hunger'. <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/11227/measuring-food-insecurity-and-hunger-phase-1-report>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201314/ldhansrd/text/130702-0001.htm>

<sup>14</sup> Tarasuk, V (2015). *Measuring and Monitoring food insecurity in Canada*. Slides available at: <http://www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/tarasuk-jan-15-16.pdf>

### 3. Intersectional inequalities

Race and hunger have long co-existed. In early days of government attempts to measure the extent of hunger in the 1960s, a racist Congressman blocked its measurement in Mississippi, known for its high levels of poverty. Racial disparities in income are complex but cannot easily be disentangled from North America's histories of colonialism, slavery, segregation and carceral/ immigration policies. Misogyny and gender inequalities also have a big part to play in the way poverty affects families, with the WIC program (Supplemental Nutrition for Women, Infants and Children) aimed at pregnant and nursing mothers and their babies. Hunger is largely hidden, domestic, intimately inscribed onto vulnerable bodies both young and old. The intersectional inequalities that constitute one's vulnerability to hunger are worth pausing over, and must be seen in local and national contexts, though cross-Atlantic comparisons can be drawn from the deep histories of industrialisation, Enclosures and the displacement of peoples.

### 4. The growth of food charity

It is important to clarify a key difference in the use of the term 'food bank', which in the UK still largely refers to a charity distributing 'emergency' food parcels (although the Trussell Trust is moving towards the use of the term 'foodbank centre'). In North America the term for this is 'food pantry', while 'food bank' generally refers to the warehouse that receives and stores donated, purchased or surplus food for subsequent distribution to pantries and other organisations such as meal programs and soup kitchens. In the UK, FareShare most resembles an American food bank.

Again, detailed histories of food charity are available in Berg (2008) and Poppendieck (1998). Poppendieck argues that poverty became 'redefined as hunger' (p.87) in ways that allowed charity aimed specifically at providing food to become perceived as the dominant mode to address food insecurity (rather than boosting incomes or challenging punitive government cuts). Berg argues that, in the 1980s "Reagan...began the multi-decade process of selling the nation on the false notion that voluntary and uncoordinated private charity could somehow make up for a large-scale downsizing in previously mandatory government assistance (Berg 2008, p20).

Following recession and cuts to the nutrition assistance safety net and other income supports in the 1980s, food banks and the pantries and soup kitchens they serve grew at an incredible rate. Poppendieck notes that "emergency food programs illustrate the retreat to charity...because they offer such pronounced contrast to the food assistance policies and politics of the previous two decades" (p.9). Fundamentally, her book argues, they represent the replacement of rights-based, federally-funded entitlements with contingent gifts of charity. After visiting such food projects all over the country, her critique of food banks can be summed up by recounting the 'Seven Deadly Ins': emergency food poses problems of Inaccessibility, Inappropriateness, Indignity, Inefficiency, Inequality, Insufficiency and Instability. The findings below report ways that food charities have attempted to overcome such shortcomings, but the basic argument stands: that charity can, and never will be, an adequate replacement for a robust, rights-based, government-funded safety net with income supports to guarantee a basic living standard. Graham Riches argues that most food-insecure people do not in fact access food charity due to fear of stigma or poor access/inadequacy of the food offer, furthering the case for state-backed income supports.

### 5. Linking hunger to food waste

Poppendieck argues that the link between food waste and emergency redistribution traces back to the breadlines and soup kitchens that formed during the Great Depression, when Roosevelt's administration faced destitution alongside "an overwhelming surplus of unmarketable farm products" (p.144). Public outrage at government incentives to avoid a hog market glut by slaughtering young pigs produced the Federal Surplus Relief Corporation to purchase and redistribute surplus commodities. Efforts to balance the farming economy with hunger relief, against the embarrassing spectre of want amidst plenty, continue to this day in the Farm Bill's divvying up of farm subsidies and nutrition program funds. Today's TEFAP program continues the work of redistributing farm surpluses through the charitable network. As Poppendieck notes "we have faced this situation before and we will probably encounter it again, because an agricultural surplus is a predictable outcome of the structure of our economy" (p.142). This report is not the place to delve into the systemics of overproduction and food waste, although many food waste organisations grapple with the question of whether to prevent waste by diverting unmarketable waste to those in need or to address the overproduction and waste that is part of a capitalist food economy (Giles, 2013).