



February 13, 2013

Testimony to the Senate Finance Committee

Department of Agriculture

The Texas Food Bank Network (TFBN) represents 21 regional food banks that collectively feed more than three million Texans each year, including one million children. Our food banks are part of a national network of food banks and hunger relief agencies called Feeding America. Established in 1986, TFBN provides a unified voice among its members in support of a common mission: end hunger in Texas.

Last year, our food banks collected and distributed 300 million pounds of food through a network of 3,900 hunger relief agencies. Approximately 28% of the food we distribute is fresh produce. We recognize that hunger is a health problem and are committed to improving nutrition while we fight hunger.

Texas ranks among the eight states with the highest rates of food insecurity. Texas has the second highest number of food-insecure households in the nation. Low-income families struggle to afford healthy, unprocessed foods, which tend to cost more on a per-calorie basis. This problem is especially acute in urban and rural food deserts, where access to fresh produce is scarce.

Surplus Agricultural Grant Program (Rider 15, VI-7, SB 1)

TFBN requests that Rider 15 be increased to \$3.2 million, which would result in a \$3M grant for Texas food banks. We distribute 12 lbs of food for every \$1 we receive, or roughly 20M lbs per biennium. An increase to \$3.2M would enable us to distribute roughly 40M lbs of Texas-grown produce to needy Texans in the next biennium.

Administered by TDA, the “Texans Feeding Texans” (Surplus Agricultural Grant Program) grant helps the Texas food banks provide hungry families with Texas-grown produce. The program leverages the statewide infrastructure of the Texas Food Bank Network (TFBN) to solicit donated produce that would otherwise go to waste while reimbursing Texas farmers for their expenses. ***We are able to distribute more than 12 pounds of Texas-grown produce for every \$1 the state invests, offering one of the most cost-effective means to increase the consumption of fresh produce by low-income Texans.***

TFBN and its agents solicit farmers who have excess produce in their fields that would otherwise go to waste. These farmers are offered up to \$.10 per pound to offset the gleaning and packaging costs associated with a donation. TFBN offers this food to its 21 member food banks, who efficiently distribute it to hungry families through local food pantries and soup kitchens. TFBN expects to provide nearly 20 million pounds of healthy, Texas-grown produce to hungry families during the current two-year grant cycle.

Rider 15 in TDA's budget includes \$1.8M for the Surplus Agricultural Product Grant Program (SAG):

Appropriation: Surplus Agricultural Product Grant Program. Included in the amounts appropriated above out of the General Revenue Fund in Strategy D.2.1, Nutrition Assistance, is ~~\$1,500,000~~ **\$1,800,000** in fiscal year ~~2012~~**2014** to be used to fund the Surplus Agricultural Product Grant Program to offset the costs of harvesting, gleaning and transporting agricultural products to Texas food banks.

History of funding for SAG

TDA's Legislative Appropriations Request noted that the rider was "updated to reflect the years for this appropriations request and the correct amount for this program." The \$1.8M in Rider 15 reflects the current level of funding for the program and is **not** an increase of funding:

- **2009:** *A rider of \$1.5M was added to the budget increasing the original grant of \$500K (established in 2001) to **\$2M for the program.**
- **2011:** The funding was cut 10% in 2011, from \$2M to \$1.8M. In addition, TDA retained a portion of these funds to administer the program as part of their cost recovery requirements, **reducing the grant to food banks to \$1.6M.**

An increase to \$3.2M would enable us to distribute roughly 40M lbs of Texas-grown produce to needy Texans in the next biennium.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Chief Executive Officer