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January 20, 2021

TO: Supervisor Hilda L. Solis, Chair
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Supervisor Sheila Kuehl
Supervisor Janice Hahn
Supervisor Kathryn Barger

FROM: Fesia A. Davenport
Chief Executive Officer

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REPORT BACK ON ESTABLISHING PLANS FOR LONG-TERM, CROSS-SECTOR COORDINATION IN SUPPORT OF A SUSTAINABLE AND JUST FOOD SYSTEM (ITEM NO. 29, AGENDA OF JUNE 23, 2020)

On June 23, 2020, the Board of Supervisors (Board) passed a motion directing the Chief Executive Office's Chief Sustainability Office (CSO), in collaboration with a philanthropic co-lead and stakeholders, to report back on best practices, current efforts, and a plan for ensuring cross-sector coordination to address food insecurity. The CSO partnered with the California Community Foundation and the Annenberg Foundation to form a working group that reviewed best practices, assessed the County of Los Angeles (County) context, and gathered extensive stakeholder input to develop the following report. Collectively, the working group consulted 46 stakeholders across multiple sectors to develop these recommendations. A full list of stakeholders consulted is included in Attachment III.

Best Practices: Food Insecurity Trends, Causes, and Solutions

"Food insecurity" refers to disruptions in food access and normal eating patterns. It is often experienced as a trauma and can have many negative impacts on a person's physical and emotional health. It has been an ongoing problem in Los Angeles (LA) County for many years. Since regular assessments began in 2002, no fewer than 20 percent of low-income LA County households have been found to experience food insecurity in any given year. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become more urgent than ever, affecting almost 40 percent of low-income households, and more than one in four households altogether across the County, according to a University of Southern California research.

Food insecurity is primarily caused by economic hardship and structural discrimination, as evidenced by its correlation to economic trends: prior to the pandemic, food insecurity within LA County reached its highest point in the wake of the Great Recession. During the pandemic, it

spiked to almost three times its previous level with people of color, women, and single-parent households, who were among the most affected. These inequities carry through to the health impacts of food insecurity, burdening the already-vulnerable groups with higher rates of malnutrition, anxiety, and more. The relative expense of healthy food, which creates economic pressure to eat unhealthy food, also places food-insecure people at risk of diet-related diseases.

Epidemiological literature suggests that the most impactful solutions to food insecurity are those that directly address the economic roots of the problem, such as income support and cash transfer programs. Distribution of subsidized, donated, or recovered food, such as through food banks or home-delivered meal programs, is another common approach. However, significant infrastructural requirements and unreliable resources often make it difficult for these programs to sustain high levels of service for extended periods of time.

Other solutions include diverse programs and policies aimed at addressing inequities in food retail, such as the poor quality of food retail outlets or lack of healthy options in low-income neighborhoods. These inequities are experienced most acutely by the same groups of people who face economic hardship, further contributing to their risk of food insecurity. Programs and policies intended to address these issues need buy-in and involvement from the private sector.

County Context: Recent and Ongoing Initiatives to Address Food Insecurity in LA County

Prior to the onset of the pandemic, there were already many programs and collaborative efforts aimed at addressing food insecurity in LA County. The three largest federal food assistance programs collectively serve millions of LA County residents, and hundreds of community organizations independently provide free groceries or meals to people in need. Two notable Countywide collaborations, the CalFresh Taskforce and Nutrition Access LA, have successfully supported CalFresh enrollment and helped build the capacity of charitable food distribution efforts. A few geographically targeted efforts, such as the Healthy Neighborhood Market Network and the Safe Access to Alcohol and Food Establishment Ordinance, work to address food retail inequities. Additionally, various public benefits administered by the County provide income support for low-income individuals and families, playing a critical but under-recognized role in food security. More information on relevant County initiatives can be found in Attachment II.

After the onset of the pandemic, a slew of new initiatives at the Federal, State, County, and local levels helped to address the surging need for food assistance. Some of these initiatives, such as the Farmers to Families Food Box program, used and expanded food distribution networks. Others, such as the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), supported food security through a broader economic approach. The PUA and other Federal assistance programs were significant mitigators of food insecurity due in part to their sheer magnitude. More than 200,000 people in LA County enrolled in CalFresh and received money for food, helping reduce hunger

and infusing the local economy with up to \$70 million in additional consumer spending each month.

In response to food insecurity surging during the pandemic, the County established a Food Security Branch (FSB) within its Emergency Operations Center to support the expansion and adaption of existing food programs. The FSB convened partners regularly and leveraged local capacity in the form of staffing, equipment, and communications to increase impact. When funding became available, the FSB worked with philanthropy, nonprofits, and other County departments, including the departments of Health Services; Public Health; Public Social Services; and Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services, to develop mechanisms for allocating it to underserved populations through both existing and new food programs. These efforts included food distribution events that provided over 50 pounds of food each to over 100,000 households; a grants program that provided \$20 million to community organizations that provided food assistance; meal delivery programs for older adults that served more than 30,000 people; and a food voucher program that provided grocery cards to over 20,000 low-income, food-insecure families. Although it is difficult to estimate its total impact on food security rates, these coordinated efforts helped feed hundreds of thousands of LA County residents. Other County programs that were designed to provide financial relief, including the rental assistance program and resources for dislocated workers, likely also supported food security by preserving limited household income for food.

Unfortunately, the need for these programs far outstrips participation in them, and rates of food insecurity remain high. The number of eligible residents who do not access food assistance, as well as the large number of residents who are at risk of hunger but ineligible for most food assistance programs, are issues of continuing concern that would benefit from a long-term commitment to the issue by the County.

Stakeholder Engagement

Many of the stakeholders consulted for this report noted that it is impossible to eliminate food insecurity without addressing poverty and related injustices within the food system, such as inequitable access to fresh and healthy food. They emphasized the importance of treating access to healthy food as a basic human right, and of investing in a more sustainable and resilient food system. They indicated that improvements in data sharing, collection, and analysis, combined with a coordinated approach to policy and advocacy, would be important to assessing and addressing food needs, especially among underserved populations.

Stakeholders also hope to see more inclusive and structured cross-sector coordination, both for supporting system improvements and making systemic change. Although cross-sector collaborations to address food insecurity already exist, stakeholders indicated that awareness of these efforts is low – including among key policymakers and funders who are positioned to accelerate change.

Recommendations and Options

Based on stakeholder input and our research, the authors of this report jointly recommend that the County consider establishing a two-year LA County Food Equity Roundtable (Roundtable). This Roundtable would represent a cross-sector and intergovernmental mix of stakeholders, co-led by the County and philanthropy, that would convene regularly to advance a mission broadly framed around the goals of promoting economic security, including, but not limited to, programs such as CalFresh and Special Supplemental Nutrition for Women, Infants, and Children, and building the capacity of food distribution programs and advancing food justice.

Over the course of the two years, the Roundtable will develop and implement a workplan and key initiatives, and would assess whether long-term continuation of the work would be beneficial. More detailed information about the potential goals and activities of the Roundtable can be found in Attachment I.

Staff support of the Roundtable will be needed for relevant outreach, stakeholder engagement, and analysis. Additionally, resources may be required to support the participation of historically underrepresented communities. We recommend the County continue to work with philanthropic partners to identify private funding to launch and sustain the Roundtable's work over two years.

Should you have any questions concerning this matter, please contact me or Gary Gero, Chief Sustainability Officer, at (213) 974-1160 or ggero@ceo.lacounty.gov.

FAD:JMN:TJM
GG:AF:jg

Attachments

c: Executive Office, Board of Supervisors
County Counsel
Health Services
Public Health
Public Social Services
Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services

Concept Paper: A Food Equity Roundtable for Los Angeles (LA) County

It is recommended that the County of Los Angeles (County) establish a two-year Food Equity Roundtable (Roundtable). The Roundtable would be a cross-sector and intergovernmental mix of stakeholders, led jointly by the County and philanthropy. Philanthropy has expressed a potential willingness to fund the work of the Roundtable.

Over the course of two years, Roundtable members and staff would be expected to develop and implement a workplan and key initiatives aligned with the vision, mission, and activities outlined below. Roundtable members would also be expected to assess the value and viability of continuing the work long-term; if continuation were determined to be worthwhile, they could collaborate to identify pathways for long-term continuation.

Vision

A resilient, equitable, and sustainable food system through which every resident and family across LA County can access foods that optimize their health and well-being.

Mission

Alleviate hunger and reduce inequities in access to healthy food by identifying and investing in long-term solutions. Structured collaboration is required to ensure more consistent engagement across sectors and communities, and advancement of systemic changes that will:

1. **Promote economic security and opportunity** by improving access to and use of financial resources, including, but not limited to, food-specific resources such as CalFresh and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).
2. **Maximize impact of food distribution programs** by identifying opportunities to improve reliability and quality of the food supply, developing methods for greater efficiency, and planning for surges in need of resources.
3. **Advance food justice** by improving access to and affordability of healthy food; promoting healthy and equitable services and business practices; and identifying opportunities to address racial disparities and other systemic inequities in the food system.

Structure

The County will work with philanthropic partners to convene an intergovernmental, cross-sector Roundtable -- potentially consisting of public benefit providers, charitable feeding organizations, food justice advocates, and policymakers, including representation from the Board of Supervisors (Board), among others, who will meet regularly to:

- learn from food system stakeholders about ongoing efforts;
- identify or elevate gaps, inequities, and opportunities for addressing them;
- advise on strategies for coordination; and
- help generate the financial or political support that may be necessary to amplify impact and effectuate change.

The Roundtable should be supported by staff who will plan convenings and strategize with stakeholders on how to use this new Countywide collaboration as an opportunity to deepen the impact of existing efforts. The staff will also provide analytical support and engage

broader networks of stakeholders in efforts to advance Roundtable goals. This may include convening standing or ad hoc workgroups as needed; doing additional outreach to smaller organizations through sector-specific communication channels or convenings; and coordinating emergency food response, such as the COVID-19 Food Security Taskforce, in case of future emergencies.

Other proposed activities of the Roundtable and supporting staff are outlined below.

Activities

Communications and Engagement

- Support ongoing efforts to promote utilization of financial and food assistance resources, including, but not limited to, CalFresh and WIC, among populations at high risk of food insecurity. This would be achieved through the development of shared communications strategies and data-driven, culturally relevant outreach methods.
- Amplify or establish mechanisms for sharing information and resources with organizational partners and stakeholders across the County, such as a newsletter or web portal.
- Create or promote regular opportunities for stakeholders in each Service Planning Area, especially those serving vulnerable populations, to learn and share information about food assistance programs and related resources; and to provide input and feedback on:
 - Implementation of Countywide food assistance programs, including outreach and service delivery;
 - Systemic barriers to accessing healthy food and using food-related resources;
 - Opportunities for improving the food supply, especially among public and charitable food programs (e.g., in terms of reliability, nutrition, cultural sensitivity, environmental impact, etc.); and
 - Opportunities for improving equity, resilience, and sustainability in the food system.

Data-Sharing and Analysis

- Identify metrics that can be tracked over time to understand how much progress is being made toward Roundtable goals.
- Track and advise ongoing efforts to share and analyze data on food-related needs/requests and program participation rates in order to:
 - Monitor the reach and impact of public food assistance programs;
 - Assess the diversity, reach, and impact of nongovernmental food programs;
 - Develop a shared understanding of overall needs and gaps, including systemic barriers to accessing healthy food; and
 - Inform advocacy, outreach, and quality improvement plans.
- Identify opportunities for sharing client data across programs to identify gaps, enable service integration, and maximize program reach/utilization.
- Identify opportunities for gathering and analyzing data on the quality of food supplied through public and charitable food programs.

Policy and Advocacy

- Support ongoing efforts to identify, track, and advance policies and legislation that will promote Roundtable goals through:
 - Expansion of the social safety net, including, but not limited to, food assistance programs such as WIC and CalFresh;
 - Improved access to and affordability of quality food, especially for underserved populations; and
 - Funding for local initiatives, such as incentives or technological supports for food surplus recovery or healthy food access.
- Provide policy support and guidance to the County and the Board on the advancement of Roundtable goals through County activities, including:
 - The County's legislative agenda;
 - Economic development policies and business affairs; and
 - Development and implementation of relevant programs and services, including, but not limited to, food assistance programs.
- Coordinate with cross-sector partners to develop and advance a shared Countywide advocacy agenda for State and Federal policy relevant to Roundtable goals.

Financial Planning and Budgeting

- Determine funding needs and identify/secure cross-sector resources for implementation of the above goals and strategies.
- Develop recommendations for long-term County investment in the food system.

Recent and Ongoing County of Los Angeles (County) Initiatives to Address Food Insecurity

The County government administers a number of programs that help to prevent or mitigate food insecurity and related impacts. Additionally, the County has instituted policies with similar goals, and has led and participated in various collaborations aimed at maximizing the impact of those programs and policies. Each of these programs, policies, and collaborations can be broadly categorized according to whether they bolster a household's financial resources for food, facilitate the distribution of free food, or promote access to healthy food environments.

The list below only includes programs, policies, or collaboratives with which the County is directly involved; many community organizations and cities throughout the County have related initiatives not captured here.

Programs

The County programs that bolster a household's financial resources for food include:

- CalFresh, a federally-funded nutrition assistance entitlement program administered at the County level by the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS);
- The Produce Prescription Project, administered by the Department of Public Health (DPH);
- The LA Cares Voucher program, administered by the County Food Security Branch (FSB)*; and
- A variety of social welfare, affordable housing, worker assistance, and consumer financial empowerment programs implemented by DPSS; the Los Angeles County Development Authority; the Department of Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services (WDACS); and the Department of Consumer and Business Affairs.

The County programs that distribute or facilitate distribution of free food include:

- The Elder Nutrition Program, administered by WDACS;
- Great Plates Delivered, administered by WDACS*;
- The CalFresh Healthy Living Program, administered by DPH;
- The Emergency Food Assistance Program at the County's regional senior and community centers run by WDACS (currently offering home delivery);
- Meals and snacks for children in daycare at County-run facilities and K-12 students in County-operated schools, administered by the LA County Office of Education (LACOE);
- Meals and snacks for after-school programs offered at County libraries and parks, administered by the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) and LA County Library;
- The Food DROP program, administered by the Department of Public Works (DPW);
- Meals for people experiencing homelessness, offered by Housing for Health at the Department of Health Services (DHS) and the LA Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA)*;
- Drive-thru food distribution events, administered by the FSB*; and
- The COVID-19 Grant Program for Food, administered by the FSB*.

The County programs that promote access to healthy food environments include:

- The Healthy Store Refrigeration Grant program, administered by the Internal Services Department.

Policies

The County policies that have helped bolster households' financial resources for food include:

- The [Dec 2017 motion¹](#) directing DPH, DHS, and DPSS to develop and implement an action plan for leveraging the health system to promote CalFresh (see [reports²](#));
- The [Dec 2017 motion³](#) directing DPSS and LACOE to implement a nutrition access program for K-12 and college students (see [report⁴](#));
- The [May 2018 motion⁵](#) directing DPSS, DPH, and DHS to work with the 88 cities, Community Based Organizations, Faith Based Organizations, food retail, charitable food programs, schools, and homeless services providers to expand outreach on CalFresh;
- The [Dec 2018 motion⁶](#) directing DPSS, the Department of Children and Family Services, and the Probation Department to promote CalFresh among Transition Age Youth (see [report⁷](#)); and
- The [April 2019 motion⁸](#) directing DPSS and WDACS to implement and track impact of the Supplemental Security Income/State Supplemental Payment Cash-out Reversal policy change to reduce food insecurity among seniors and people with disabilities (see [reports⁹](#)).

The County policies that have facilitated the distribution of free food include:

- The [Feb 2019 motion¹⁰](#) directing DPH, LACOE, and DPW to develop strategies for recovering surplus food and redistributing it in schools and community settings (see [report¹¹](#)).

The County policies that have promoted access to healthy food environments include:

- Public recognition of World Breastfeeding Week and Breastfeeding Awareness Month;
- The [SAAFE Ordinance¹²](#), developed and enforced by the Department of Regional Planning (DRP); and
- The [Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone¹³](#), developed and enforced by the DRP.

¹ <http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/118487.pdf#search=%22calfresh%22>

² <http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/118634.pdf>

³ <http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/118641.pdf#search=%22calfresh%22>

⁴ <http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/119793.pdf>

⁵ <http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/122547.pdf#search=%22calfresh%22>

⁶ <http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/130367.pdf#search=%22calfresh%22>

⁷ <http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/130544.pdf>

⁸ <http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/131386.pdf#search=%22calfresh%22>

⁹ <http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/134433.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/133178.pdf#search=%22food%20security%22>

¹¹ <http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/133312.pdf>

¹² <https://planning.lacounty.gov/saafe/>

¹³ <https://planning.lacounty.gov/uaiz>

Collaborations

Relevant collaborations include:

- The [LA Food Policy Council](#)¹⁴;
- The [CalFresh Task Force](#)¹⁵, managed by the LA Regional Food Bank;
- The [Nutrition Access LA](#)¹⁶ Collaborative, the [LA County Food Redistribution Initiative](#)¹⁷, and the [Healthy Retail Environment Work Group](#)¹⁸, managed by DPH; and
- The Food Security Taskforce and related workgroups, advising the FSB of the County's COVID-19 Emergency Operations Center.*

¹⁴ <https://www.goodfoodla.org/>

¹⁵ <https://www.lafoodbank.org/tag/cal-fresh-taskforce/>

¹⁶ <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/nut/CNAP.htm>

¹⁷ <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/eh/LACFRI/#:~:text=The%20Los%20Angeles%20County%20Food,that%20divert%20food%20from%20landfills>

¹⁸ <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/nut/HREWG.htm>

Food Security Stakeholders Engaged

Process:

- Standard set of 15 questions developed in advance and used for both interview and Survey Monkey with minor tweaks
- Average interview time was one hour per interviewee
- Summary of interviews compiled and key themes collected and reflected in the Concept Paper (Attachment I)

Government – 11

- City of Bell – Survey Monkey
- City of Claremont – Survey Monkey
- City of El Monte – Survey Monkey
- City of Los Angeles/Mayor’s Office – Interview
- Gateway Council of Government – Interview
- County of Los Angeles (County) Department of Health Services – Interview
- County Department of Public Health – Interview
- County Department of Public Social Services – Interview
- County Office of Immigrant Affairs – Survey Monkey
- County Department of Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services – Interview
- Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority – Interview

Nonprofits – 23

- 211 – Interview
- American Heart Association – Survey Monkey
- Antelope Valley Partners in Health – Interview and Survey Monkey
- CA Food Policy Council – Interview and Survey Monkey
- Center for Good Food Purchasing – Interview
- Community Health Councils – Survey Monkey
- Food Forward – Interview
- Hunger Action LA – Interview
- Los Angeles Food Policy Council – Interview
- Los Angeles Regional Food Bank – Interview
- Los Angeles Urban League – Survey Monkey
- Meals on Wheels/Long Beach – Interview and Survey Monkey
- National Health Foundation – Survey Monkey
- Public Health Foundation Enterprise/WIC – Interview and Survey Monkey
- Prevention Institute – Survey Monkey
- Project Angel Food – Survey Monkey
- Salvation Army – Interview
- Share Our Strength – Survey Monkey
- Sustainable Economic Enterprise of Los Angeles – Interview
- Special Service for Groups/Asian and Pacific Islander Forward Movement – Survey Monkey
- United Way of Greater Los Angeles – Interview

Nonprofits – 23 (continued)

- Westside Food Bank – Survey Monkey
- World Central Kitchen – Interview

Education – 3

- Cal State Los Angeles – Information culled from prior interview
- Los Angeles County Office of Education – Interview and Survey Monkey
- Los Angeles Community College District – Information culled from prior interview

Business and Philanthropy – 8

- Annenberg Foundation – Interview
- California Community Foundation – Interview
- Everytable – Interview
- First 5 – Interview
- Grocers Association – Interview
- Health Net – Interview
- The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation – Interview
- Wells Fargo – Interview

Labor – 1

- Los Angeles County Federation of Labor – Interview

TOTAL: 46