

The U.S. Farm to Food Bank Interviews – 20 Programs Saving Over 300 Million Pounds of Ugly & Surplus Produce Each Year!

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#GiveUglyAGo



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During the course of my obsession with the plight of cosmetically imperfect or “ugly” produce, I have ventured deep into many facets of the issue. From farms and pack houses to stores to farmers markets and consumers. I had also read a little about the work of food banks and farm to food bank programs that were saving “ugly” (and surplus) produce from going to waste and getting it to those in need. And by “some” I mean there wasn’t much out there to read at all. I could only find a small article here or there that described some quick details of the great work by this or that program.

But despite the bits and pieces I could find on farm to food bank programs (or farm to pantry or field to food bank, etc.), I could find nothing that put at least a few of them together in comparison. And certainly I couldn’t find anything that spoke to the history of farm to food banks. But as I learned more and more farm to food bank programs starting up, I decided something needed to be done to highlight their great work. So, I started emailing and calling all the programs I could find.

At first I thought it would be nice to put 10 to 15 programs together in an article to show a small trend with a handful starting up recently. After digging a bit more and making many calls, I knew there was something really exciting going on and a report, even one as rough as the following one, was needed. Why? There are now more than 20 official farm to food bank programs in the United States saving more than 300 million pounds of “ugly” and surplus produce and getting it to those in need.

I say “more than” because, while I was able to reach so many, I know there are likely more programs out there that just haven’t received their due attention or press to document their great work. Even further, I found that there are plenty of unofficial programs whereby food banks and pantries are working with farmers on their own without the help of an official funded program.

And while these programs are doing amazing things and growing fast (at least 12 new ones in the last 5 years) there is no doubt that they need much more help and support. While hundreds of millions of produce saved is great, there is billions more to save and approximately 1 in 6 food insecure in the United States. So enjoy the report and please consider supporting your local farm to food bank program and, if your state does not have one, consider helping start one to end food waste and hunger!

Sincerely,
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Picture this: a tomato grower in Florida dumps out truckloads of perfectly tasty and nutritious tomatoes, every 45 minutes every day, in a field to rot while so many are food insecure in the U.S. This is the [shocking reality](#) that farm to food bank organizations like [Farm Share](#) face. Approximately [23% of all fruits and vegetables](#) are left uneaten before they even reach grocery stores in the United States, leading to billions of pounds of waste each year. Perfectly edible, wonderfully nutritious apples, peaches, carrots, onions and much more rot in our landfills and fields. Meanwhile, [46.5 million Americans struggle](#) to get enough healthy food.

The good news is that there is a growing movement to end this as twelve new farm to food bank programs have started up over the last five years to recover or purchase surplus and “ugly” produce to get it to those in need. Now over 20 programs are saving more than 300 million pounds of produce for those in need in the U.S. And, as the [U.S.D.A points out](#) food waste has environmental consequences with 25% of all fresh water wasted on food we never eat. Even further, food is the number one item in U.S. landfills which account for 34 percent of all human related methane emissions (which are 21 times more potent than CO₂).

But, as David Cloniger, Food Resource Manager of the Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle Tennessee [Farm to Families Program](#) put it “seconds are not for second class citizens, they are just as tasty and nutritious as firsts (what we see in grocery stores).” Seconds (ugly produce), which make up the bulk of the waste on farms and in pack houses, often have just small visual imperfections. Most likely they are a little too big or [too small](#) for grocery store and produce marketing standards.

Why We Need Farm to Food Bank Programs and Government Help

Farmers are already doing so much to get whatever fresh produce they can to those in need at very little to no financial compensation to them. Even further, [CNBC recently found](#) that farming income is dropping dramatically. David Bobanick, Executive Director of the [Rotary First Harvest Farm to Pantry Program](#) in Washington found lots of small scale farmers coming to them saying they’d love to donate more but they barely make a living and are close to needing food bank assistance themselves.

Feeding America, the nation’s largest association of food banks, estimates that they receive almost 1 billion pounds of fresh produce each year. Some of this is from farms but most of it comes from grocery rescue programs. And while that is great, and while Feeding America provides billions more pounds of processed or shelf-stable food, the reality is that we still have 1 in 6 food insecure in the United States.

Food insecurity cuts deep when you consider the rate of food insecurity in the U.S. is higher in children and as [Feeding America found recently](#), more and more seniors are finding themselves food insecure in the U.S. too. Increasing numbers of baby boomers are reaching retirement age without enough savings. And it’s not just our most vulnerable children or seniors, as college students, those trying to make their way to

being productive members of society, are increasingly at risk of hunger as well. Due to sky high and increasing tuition rates, College students are now seeing [increasing levels of food insecurity](#) and on-campus food pantries to cope.

Produce can be expensive and [SNAP \(food stamp\) cuts](#) have impacted what low income households can buy. This problem is compounded at a time where [1.5 million U.S. households live on \\$2 a day](#) and food deserts, areas with a lack of access to fresh fruits and veggies, [affect 23.5 million people](#) and growing. Needless to say, access and the ability to purchase produce and eat healthy can look very bleak for many. This is where, farm to food bank programs with government help, can step in and make a big difference.

The Programs

Whether they're called farm to food bank, farm to pantry, agricultural clearance program, or something else, the increase in these programs to save produce for those in need, is impressive and promising. While [Michigan](#) started in 1990 and [Ohio](#) took inspiration to start their own program in 1999, the programs expanded west when California started their program which has since become a [model to draw from](#). Most recently [Connecticut](#) (2010), [Georgia](#) (2013), [Indiana](#) (2015), [Kentucky](#) (2011), [Maine](#) (2010), [Maryland](#) (2010), [Massachusetts](#) (2014), [Minnesota](#) (2011), [Tennessee](#) (2011), [Virginia](#) (2015), [Washington](#) (2013), and [Wisconsin](#) (2011) have all started programs in the last five years. You can see the full list of more than 20 programs (with web links) from this report on [my website](#).

The Program Benefits

Often times with funding to pay farmers pick and pack out labor or "PPO" costs (usually in the modest 10-25 cents per pound range) farm to food bank programs save produce at farms or pack houses and ship it to food banks and pantries. In addition to this essential function of most farm to food bank programs, there can be other benefits. Tamara Sandberg of the Kentucky Association of Food Banks [Farm to Food Bank program](#) found that farmers are now planting more crops since their seconds (ugly produce) are being purchased by the program. This is important in states like Kentucky where they are trying to expand their "specialty" crops (produce). In Kentucky, non-food crops like tobacco dominate and specialty crops are only 0.02% of all crops grown.

Some programs, such as Kentucky and Indiana have a published [price list](#) for certain crops so there is no confusion for the grower. With farm to food bank programs, more and more farmers are becoming more like partners with food assistance agencies. As Ben, an Americorp Vista working with the Harvest for Hunger program at Rotary First Harvest in Washington said "it's been a total sea change in how farmers work with the food banks." Now farmers are contacting them to participate in the program.

What Kinds of Produce Do Programs Receive?

The produce from farm to food bank programs is often classified as seconds or “ugly” with just some minor defects. While some programs receive much more seconds and some more surplus, on the whole it seems that more than half of the produce received by farm to food bank programs is seconds. And the reasons for the produce being classified as seconds can be pretty surprising.

Amy Cawley, Farm to Food Bank Coordinator at the Maryland Eastern Shore Food Bank [Farm to Food Bank Program](#) said “Tomatoes and peppers are rejected from the slightest cracks, it’s heartbreaking” talking about the amount of waste. Ms. Cawley went on to say that just watermelons have millions upon millions left in the fields in Maryland each year. Ms. Cawley also mentioned that, when cucumbers are mechanically picked for pickling, the machine just leaves the ones that are too big or too small. And it’s not just Maryland with those strict standards, it’s all over the U.S.

In Florida, Kristen Jaiven, Director of Communications at [Farm Share](#) said that “entire loads of tomatoes can get rejected from sunspots or because they are a little pale.” Kath Clark, Food Programs Manager at the Food Bank Council of [Michigan Agricultural Surplus System](#) said that, from one individual farm alone, they receive millions of pounds of “Abe Lincoln potatoes” that are just a little misshapen but still good.

Just like produce markets for grocery stores, produce crosses state lines for farm to food bank programs as well. Some of the programs even have the potential to purchase produce from other states. In Ohio, they have Ohio farmers that also have farms in Georgia, Florida, and the Carolinas that sell to the Ohio program.

Places like California and Florida with their massive bounty of produce grown ship to multiple nearby states. Some even further out as Midwestern states also purchase produce (with PPO costs) from Florida. And, while this report is focused on fresh produce, there is a range of other things that these programs receive as well. Not all but some do receive bread, dairy and meat items, from farms and others, to get to those in need.

How Much are Farm to Food Bank Programs Saving?

While it would be hard to nail down a firm number for all, with the interviews conducted and firm numbers given by most, I can say that these 20 programs are saving at least 300 million pounds a year. In Michigan, Kath Clark runs the Food Bank Council of [Michigan Agricultural Surplus System](#) that recovers and purchases 18 million pounds a year. The MASS program went from 8 million in 2014 to 18 million in 2015. Tony Mans, Director of Food Sourcing at Second Harvest Heartland with the Farm Share MN program in Minnesota started with 2 million pounds in 2011 when the program first began and now they’re almost at 10 million.

Florida, because it has so much opportunity with 45,000 farms, has two programs doing well. Farm Share saves 15 million pounds of produce a year of mostly seconds and also

some produce that didn't find a market. And the Florida State Association of Food Banks Farmers Feeding Florida program is saving about 30 million pounds a year. Texas has a solid program and is saving about 20-25 million a year from Texas farms with a little coming from the border with Mexico as well. The Georgia State Association of Food Banks is saving 9 million pounds a year, mostly from donation. And Ohio saves 34 million pounds a year and California 150 million pounds.

Are Food Banks and Pantries Set up to Receive All This Fresh Produce?

Many of the farm to food bank programs interviewed said that food assistance organizations, while they are working more and more on the issue, were not set up to handle fresh produce. In addition to not having enough storage in general, food assistance organization all over the U.S. badly need more cold storage and trucking to be able to handle more fresh produce (which there is a great demand from their clients for). Some of those interviewed also said that the food banks and pantries need some education on how to store and cook produce and they were working on this as well.

State Funding

While tax credits are nice, and are used by some farmers who donate, funding is what really make these programs go. State governments often support farm to food bank program start up and ongoing costs but funding levels can vary widely. Many programs receive modest government funding of \$1-2 million or less each year to cover the labor PPO costs for farmers. And then there's the fortunate anomaly of \$20 million per year allotted to Ohio with the very successful Ohio Association of Food Banks Agricultural Clearance Program.

Funding can be very uneven considering state production and capacity to ship produce seemingly not playing any role in their allocations. Folks like Florida Association of Food Banks [Farmers Feeding Florida](#) only receiving \$1 million or less each year (despite having 45,000 farms in Florida). Several programs receive no government funding at all such as California (with an estimated 30,000 farmers and half the nation's produce grown) where they have a [great program](#). As Steve Linkhart Director of the [Farm to Family program](#) at the California Association of Food Banks said "a bill to support farmers in California (on this issue) is needed."

Funding can be something that's voted on every year or two or something that's an annual pass through as it is in Ohio and a few other states. Indiana has a state line item for \$300,000 per year (every year) and the program is was modeled after in Kentucky which receives \$600,000 every two years. The Farm Share MN program, while they got started in 2011 from private grants and donations, received \$2 million from the State in 2014 for 4 years.

The Texas program receives about \$5.9 million every two years from the Texas Department of Agriculture. Farm Share in Florida is one of the lucky organizations that receives funding from a County government in addition to the state. They receive \$2.5

million from the State of Florida and \$600,000 from Miami-Dade County each year. They also work to secure some grant funding and even receive a little from the USDA.

Private Funding

Funding from corporations and donors can really step up in certain situations with California depending almost entirely on tax credits and outside funding to source 150 million pounds a year. The Florida Association of Food Banks is fortunate to receive \$100,000 from the Mosaic Company each year and the [Farm Credit Mid-America](#) program has provided funding for [Kentucky](#), and potentially others. Lastly Farm Credit Services of America (west of the Mid-America unit) also seems to be [donating to match](#) some crop donations in Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wyoming. States that do not have official farm to food bank programs but where some produce donation happens too (as is the case with most states).

Feeding America Funding

In addition to many food banks receiving assistance and support from Feeding America, some farm to food bank programs have [received additional support](#) from Feeding America as well. For example, the Tennessee program received grant funding from Feeding America for a great project to potentially recover millions of pounds green beans. You can see a video of that project [here](#). This [augmented the packing process](#) and added a separate line for the Farm to Families program so that the imperfect beans can be cleaned and chilled, which gives them an extra week of shelf life. Otherwise the beans would have rotted in the heat in a day and a half. Georgia also received a grant from Feeding America for a two year project to start their farm to food bank program in 2013.

Walmart Funding

One thing that's obvious when you research donations and funding in this arena is that Walmart gives a lot to food banks and food bank associations around the U.S. Some might say that they have a responsibility to do so, considering the [billions in profit they make](#) across the U.S. each year and how much their own employees [increasingly rely on food assistance](#) organizations. Either way, several farm to food bank program have received [Walmart Foundation](#) funding, some examples of which are:

- [California](#)
- [Georgia](#)
- [Kentucky](#)
- [Oregon](#)

Walmart [committed \\$2 billion](#) in 2010 to fight hunger in the U.S. so, in addition to many food banks and pantries already receiving funding and assistance, there seems to be plenty of [opportunities](#) for future farm to food bank program assistance. Lastly, there are also some local corporations that are quite generous to a programs here and there with annual donations as well.

Getting Creative with Partnerships

Many farm to food bank programs begin with just the food bank or food bank association all on their own to start partnerships with farmers. Some, like the Second Harvest Food Bank (SHFB) of Wisconsin [Field to Food Bank Program](#) start with the partnership of a university as they did with the University of Wisconsin at Madison in 2011. Danielle Lawson, Food Resources Manager at SHFB said “We also partnered with Del Monte Foods and some of their growers in our area, to process and store surplus and “ugly” produce, helping to extend the shelf life and still provide nutritious vegetables to people struggling with hunger.”

In addition to the phenomenal farmers, producers, food banks, and food pantry partners that are common in most programs, other successful partnerships can also vary from state to state. The [Rotary First Harvest \(RFH\) Program](#) in Washington is working with the State Trucking Association to take advantage of the assistance of empty trucks on their way back from a delivery (reverse logistics). RFH has been able to receive free trucking and pickup and drop-off from some truck runs where the route works out.

Some programs, like [Farm Fresh Rhode Island](#), partner with juvenile corrections on a culinary training programs to process and sell products (made from produce that would have been wasted). Other programs, like the one in Georgia, have started classes to assist food banks clients in learning how to cook and store produce.

State Tax Credits

Tax credits, deductions, and subtractions for produce donations can have an impact. California has a tax credit at 10% and has seen some farms with up to \$300,000 in tax credits in a single year (which is much higher than the usual \$2,500 or \$5,000 cap per farm in other states). However, the threshold for the current California tax credit is nowhere close to being met which likely speaks to the need to increase the percentage to incentivize more farmers to donate. California, which supplies produce to several states and has ample bounty left, has been trying to increase the tax credit percentage “but the recent request wasn’t been approved by the Governor” as Steve Linkhart, said.

While tax credits have been very helpful for California (and for food donation at the distributor and supermarket level across the country), the effect of state tax credits on farm to food bank donation for most of the country is a mixed bag at best. Through this research, I could only find 8 total states that have tax credits, deductions, or subtractions. Most have small caps on what growers could claim for credit in one year. The feedback was also mixed on the effects such legislation has had on recovery of surplus and ugly produce. The following is a quick breakdown, with links, for tax activity:

- Arizona - subtraction of 100% of wholesale value (law was [clarified in 2012](#) to make more donations possible).
- Colorado – credit of 25% of wholesale price [up to \\$5,000 a year](#) per business.
- Iowa – credit of 15% [up to \\$5,000 a year](#) per business (2014 was the first year and there wasn’t a ton of credits issued but the program expects more in the future).

- Kentucky – a credit [since 2011 for 10%](#) of the retail value (not just wholesale like most others). But, unfortunately, it does not seem to be making a huge impact on donations.
- Missouri - a credit at 50% of donation value [up to \\$2,500](#) per business.
- North Carolina - a [tax credit at 10%](#).
- Oregon - wasn't finding much success with a 10% tax credit so it was increased to [15% in 2015](#) (on the wholesale value).

It also seems that, when farmers receive any money from farm to food bank programs, even if it's just covering PPO costs or less, they cannot claim any tax credits. And, even further, when a state does not have an income tax, like Washington or Texas, it seems like there is almost no point to having such a credit.

Other Notable Efforts

From gleaning programs to food rescue to recovery and donation of produce outside of farm to food bank programs, there are plenty of other notable efforts in the U.S., some of which follow. Organized and widespread, the [Society for St. Andrew](#) gleans over 25 million pounds of produce a year (and estimates that there is 100 million pounds more left in the fields of South and North Carolina alone each year). Most farmers markets are also getting fresh produce to those in need as they have stock remaining after each market for donation. Programs like the expansive one by [Food Forward in Los Angeles](#).

There are even huge opportunities at the border with Mexico. [Borderlands Food Bank](#) rescues 30 to 40 million pounds a year of mostly “ugly” produce that gets rejected there in Nogales, Arizona. Borderlands then sends the produce on its way to 18 states in the U.S. in addition to its distribution sites all over Arizona.

Some donations also go to rescue groups as large as City Harvest in New York which has been able to secure [over 3 million pounds](#) of produce donations from farms each year now. Lastly, there are many farmers that donate millions of pounds straight to food banks and food assistance organizations (and to these farm to food bank programs) out of the goodness of their own hearts and ask for nothing in return.

The Produce Capture Institute

There is also a [Produce Capture Institute](#) (PCI) in Minneapolis, Minnesota located at the Second Harvest Heartland Food Bank. I spoke to Bob Branham, Executive Director of PCI and he said that PCI has 10 member food banks it assists mainly with technical assistance in sourcing produce, connections, and small grant funds. To assist their member food banks in sourcing, PCI works with growers, producers and packers in addition to their 10 member food bank. In just over two years, they've helped source about 5 million pounds in produce and expect to continue the growth.

The Future of Farm to Food Bank Programs

So what is the future looking like for farm to food bank programs and efforts to incentivize farmers to donate produce? In short, the future looks bright for programs and credits but the opportunity is massive as only a portion of produce available for rescue is currently recovered. And there is plenty potential for more fresh produce recovery on the horizon as several states are trying for new programs and tax credits right now or soon.

State Tax Credit Work

There are several states that are trying to secure a tax credit:

- California Association of Food Banks [Farm to Family Program](#) recently lost the battle to increase its tax credit to 20% but is sure to try again.
- Maryland is [trying right now](#) for a 50% credit for traditional (75% for organic) donation of up to \$5,000 in credit.
- Massachusetts [tried for a tax credit in 2011 that failed](#) but maybe a future edition could pass?
- New York is also currently trying for a credit that [maxes out at \\$1,000](#).

Federal Tax Credit

Large production farmers have had the option to claim a tax deduction on federal taxes for years. However, on Friday, December 18, 2015, the America Gives More Act was embedded in the gigantic omnibus spending bill and may have changed the game for farm donation. [On page 15](#) of the legislation, you will find language that makes a tax deduction for food donation permanent. In previous years the deduction was renewed only at the end of each year, leaving folks to wonder if the deduction will be available at all. Now they can depend on the deduction and track donations all year!

Also, non c-corps and small businesses are now eligible for the tax deduction (they were not eligible before). What this will translate to in terms of exactly how much more donated food is not certain but it will be more. Maybe a federal deduction on top of a state credit will make the combo (in 5 or so states) more attractive. Lastly, Feeding America published a [Press Release](#) on December 18, 2015 which also speaks to other food provisions from the legislation that help food assistance programs.

Trying to get a Program Going

And most of the above is for states that have a program and some funding. There are many that do not have ongoing funding, as Corey Berkenes, Executive Director of the [Iowa Food Bank Association](#) is working towards in his bountiful state. Mr. Berkenes said that "We are looking into putting a funding request on the legislative agenda for 2016 for an Agricultural Clearance program like the successful program in Ohio." The Iowa Association of Food Banks had received \$1 million from the State in 2013 to start the program but hasn't received any funding since. The Association is looking to add a modest \$650,000 in annual funding (\$500,000 for PPO fees, \$100,000 for transportation, and \$50,000 for administration).

Jim Conwell, Director of Communications of the Greater Chicago Food Depository (GCFD) said that they would love to see an Agricultural Clearance Program in Illinois and the GCFD would gladly play a role in developing it. Mr. Conwell also mentioned that the program may be put on the state legislative agenda in 2016. Because, as he pointed out “the need for food donation in Illinois has been and continues to be at a very high level since the Great Recession.” The Wisconsin State Association of Food Banks is also working on a larger farm to food bank program than the one already existing at SHFB Madison. [Harvest for Hope](#) is their proposal that was recently introduced in the Wisconsin state Senate as [Senate Bill 474](#).

To be sure, all programs are not created equal (but maybe they could be?). In general, California and Ohio are where folks look to for models and best practices. Yes, both states are blessed with lots of produce (especially in California where approximately half of the country’s produce is grown) but there are key takeaways from each program to apply to others, already in existence or in the works or future. California has even hosted a [national conference](#), where more than 18 states attended to learn about their Farm to Family program.

Another thing to consider is that only a [fraction of the nation’s agriculture subsidies](#) going to the healthy stuff we all need to eat more of: fruits and veggies. Most subsidies are currently going to meat and processed food by way of corn and soy subsidies. Maybe some of the subsidy money could be redirected to state program funding and tax credits to save food that is perfectly nutritious and delicious and literally ripe for the picking. Funding tax credits (or farm to food bank-like programs for that matter) is remarkably efficient as [Oregon Food Bank estimated](#) that, for every \$1 in tax credits, 9 meals can be provided to those in need from fresh produce and other farm donations.

Could the Feds Help Farm to Food Bank Programs Too?

Last September, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) put food waste reduction on the national agenda with a [50% reduction goal by 2050](#). While the move was more of a goal than new programs to fight food waste, did you know that the Department of Defense (DoD) already purchases massive amounts of surplus and/or ugly produce each year? It does so through its Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program [\(TEFAP\)](#).

I was able to speak with Carrie Calvert, Director of Tax Commodity Policy at Feeding America about TEFAP. The program was originally started in the 1980s for surplus cheese and “there was a big government effort in the 1980s to end hunger” said Calvert. A lot of TEFAP has been focused on shelf-stable and processed to be shelf-stable food but, as Ms. Calvert pointed out, “a lot has changed and the federal government program has a lot of fresh produce now.” Much of what the USDA sends to states, in terms of produce was fresh when they got it but was processed to last longer.

The way TEFAP funding works is that it goes from the federal government (DoD) directly to the states based on need. The state governments then allot money to food

assistance organizations to spend. In 2014 a total of 730 million pounds of food was moved by TEFAP with funding of around \$500 million. While most of this was not fresh produce, “the nutritional footprint is very strong” said Ms. Calvert and there certainly is the food assistance need and potential for more produce in the future. You can read more in a TEFAP [white paper from 2013](#) or in a report about what was [purchased in 2014 by TEFAP](#).

Pingree’s Proposal

Just over a month ago, the official filing of [HR 4184](#), The [Food Recovery Act](#) Bill by Congresswoman Chellie Pingree marked a new day in the fight against food waste and hunger in U.S. Congresswoman Pingree is now calling for a sweeping set of measures to hit so many issues with wasted food from expiration dates to donation to my favorite, “ugly produce” and much more. The following are the key components of the proposed legislation in relation to “ugly” and surplus produce:

Section 102 - Farm Storage Facility Loan Program: The proposed changes in this section will open up loans (under the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008) to purchase refrigerated vehicles to recover food from farms. This is important because one of the biggest barriers to food recovery across the board is infrastructure with refrigerated trucks and storage being perhaps the biggest need.

Section 304 - Farm to School Grant Program to Improve Access to Local Foods in Schools and Reduce Food Waste: This section aims to increase grant funding drastically (millions per year more) to help schools implement farm to school programs designed to use “ugly produce.” Anyone who works with schools and the amazing folks that run them and shape our young minds know they need more funding. And this would do that and help increase fresh produce access at schools while reducing waste!

Section 305 - Modification of National School Lunch Program Procurement Requirements to Encourage Purchase of Lower-Price, Non-Standard Size or Shape Produce: This section is absolute genius and it’s all in that title. It modifies the school lunch program to encourage purchase of ugly produce! Since education and getting over the barrier of folks thinking there is something wrong with “ugly” produce is the biggest hurdle, this section could save schools millions. Most “ugly” produce in the U.S. can be purchased for 30-50% off. Imagine what schools could do with the money saved on fresh produce purchased this way. And that’s not to say anything about the massive opportunity here to educate students about wasted food and loving all produce.

For more on this proposed legislation, please [click here](#) to read my blog.

The Opportunity: How Much More is Out There Being Wasted?

Despite all of these efforts, only a small portion of the excess produce in this country is going to feed people in need. Ross Fraser, Director of Media Relations for [Feeding America](#) (which assists some farm-to-food-bank programs), estimates that there is still

five to six billion pounds of fresh, edible produce going to waste before it hits grocery stores each year in the U.S. And the waste and opportunity is all too obvious as most of the programs I spoke with said that they are not even saving half of what is out there.

For example, with what's grown in Texas and what's rejected (and wasted) at the Mexico border, Texas studied it. They found that there's about 340 million pounds left to rescue each year (270 million from Texas and 70 million from the border), said Sarah Sykes of the Texas Food Bank Network Texans Feeding Texans Program. You may have heard of [the infamous "apple dumps"](#) that happen in Washington State each year. David Bobanick knows that, while the problem is complex, and 2015 was more so, there are "hundreds and hundreds of millions of pounds of apples going to waste every year in Washington."

When you start to add it up, the opportunity is phenomenal. In California, for example, I have heard from produce businesses that 3 billion pounds is still out there for purchase or rescue each year. Wisconsin estimates that there is [100-150 million pounds](#) of opportunity and the Arizona Food Bank Association has seen analysis that shows that only [1% of produce](#) grown in the state is being donated.

David Cloniger estimates that, despite an innovative program from a Feeding American grant which is now recovering 321,000 pounds of green beans at one pack house, there is 3 million pounds more going to waste at that same pack house. And there are 4 or 5 similar green bean pack houses nearby in Middle Tennessee with the same situation. And in Minnesota, I spoke with Tony Mans at Farm Share MN program and, while they do not track all produce that doesn't get harvested and eaten, he said that they do know that at least 100 million pounds of corn and potatoes alone is left each year.

And then there's Florida where they grow a large amount of tomatoes. Kristen Jaiven, Director of Communications and Development at Farm Share told me that they have this [shocking video](#) on their website that shows a tomato grower dumping large truckloads of perfectly tasty and nutritious tomatoes in a field to rot. That wasn't as shocking as what she told me next; that the truck goes to dump that many tomatoes every 45 minutes every day!

The Challenge: How to Recover More, Reduce Waste, and End Hunger?

As Mr. Bobanick went on to tell me "food pantries and food banks can only take so much. We want to change that so that this problem gets elevated to County, State, and National level so something more is done" he said. And as John Burt of [Farmers Ending Hunger](#) in Oregon said "we're trying to work more with growers but it does take infrastructure." Virtually all of the farm to food bank programs spoke about the huge need to be able feed more people and the need for more funding for infrastructure to do so. Funding that would often go to PPO costs to secure more fresh produce and badly needed cold storage and transportation/trucking, for them and the food banks and pantries they serve.

The produce these programs provide to food banks is becoming increasingly important because, as [Feeding America has found](#), people are depending on food banks and pantries all over the U.S. for more than just emergency food, it's an ongoing supplemental food source. Getting increased program funding and other incentives like state tax credits (with higher percentages and higher caps) from state governments can be challenging and the amount of wasted food juxtapose with hunger is certainly a huge challenge as well. But, as David Cloniger in Tennessee said, "the barrier is really the willingness to do something that's challenging and hard, that's the more important thing to make a difference here." And that difference could mean a better, healthier, and hopefully happier life to so many in need in the U.S.