

TESTIMONY

Before the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee On Human Services

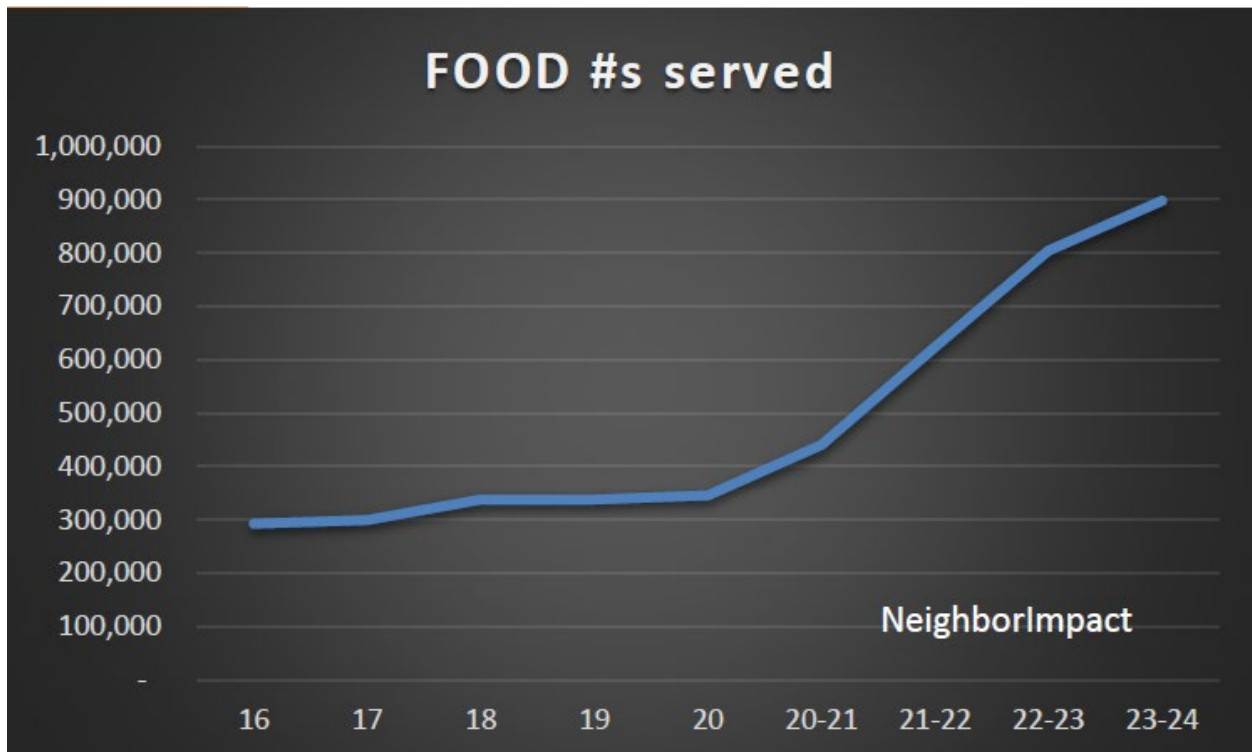
Scott Cooper, Executive Director, NeighborImpact, Redmond Oregon

March 13, 2025

Madam Chairs, Senators, Representatives:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear today. My name is Scott Cooper and I am executive director of NeighborImpact, serving Central Oregon and located in beautiful Redmond. We are a community action agency and we are also the regional food bank, collecting over 4 million lbs. of food annually and redistributing that monthly through 59 partner food pantries and other nonprofit organizations such as homeless shelters, senior centers and domestic violence prevention agencies. Currently, we feed 73,000 individuals per month.

To put that number in context, in 2019, we were feeding 16,000 individuals per month. That is an increase of 456 percent. I am incredibly proud of my team. While the volume has expanded we are working with the same size crew and the same number of trucks today as we were five years ago. We have achieved this by leaning into productivity, technology and embracing best practices to maximize performance while minimizing costs.



But I'm running out of efficiencies. In addition, we are facing the potential shut off of federal commodities which are critical to the food supply, reductions in SNAP benefits, rising prices

for families and the need for the first time ever to purchase commodities to supplement donated food from grocery recovery and federal commodities distribution.

Our friends in faith and philanthropy have been extraordinarily generous in supporting us through this unprecedented rise in demand. But there is a limit as to what private funding can do, and we have likely reached it, especially given that private resources are going to be further stretched by the need to backfill potential loss of funding in other areas. With that in mind, I am here to today to raise the committee 's awareness of the ongoing need for consideration of food as an essential and growing area that demands public support. Our historic model of dependence on private resources to support the food system, while noble, is no longer fit for purpose. The volumes we are experiencing at the moment require an effective partnership between federal, state and local government, growers and grocers. The withdrawal of any one partner damages the entire system.

As appropriators you have various avenues in the DHS budget, both traditional and new opportunities, to support the food system. The Oregon Hunger Response Fund is one of them but not the only one. I urge you to look favorably on these requests. Public responsibility for staving off hunger is one the oldest forms of public charity. The Babylonians, Egyptians and Romans understood the public role. The French and the Russians launched their Revolutions over the government's failure to provide food. Food matters. It matters in Oregon. It is a rising and urgent need. I urge the State to rise to the urgency of the situation.

Thank you for your time.