



Testimony of Ashley Stanley

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Thank you Chairman McGovern, Representative Perlmutter, Representative Raskin, Representative DeSaulnier, and distinguished members of the House Committee on Rules for inviting me to speak with you today about the paradoxical issues of wasted food and hunger, and the scalable solution food rescue provides.

My name is Ashley Stanley. I am the Founder and Executive Director of Lovin' Spoonfuls, which is the largest food rescue operation in New England. Spoonfuls is headquartered in Boston and operates across 50 cities and towns in Greater Boston, MetroWest, and Hampden County, with plans to expand service to Worcester County this Spring.

So what *is* food rescue? Simply put, it is a tool we have to prevent good food from going to waste while addressing food insecurity in our communities. I'll speak to our model, and our impact, momentarily but would like to begin by framing the issues that drive our work.

Today, in the United States, 35% of the food we produce goes unsold or uneaten (ReFED, 2021).¹ Meanwhile, it's projected that over 38 million people are facing food insecurity in our country today (Feeding America, March 2021).² Right here in Massachusetts, a state which fairs better than many, the latest full-year data, captured in 2021, indicated that 8.4% of people don't know where their next meal will come from (USDA, 2020).³

¹ ReFED. (2021). *Food Waste*. https://refed.org/food-waste/the-challenge/#what_is_food_waste.

² Feeding America. (December 2021). The Impact of Coronavirus on Food Insecurity in 2021 and 2021. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/research/coronavirus-hunger-research>.

³ Coleman-Jensen, Alisha, Matthew P. Rabbitt, Christian A. Gregory, and Anita Singh. 2020. Household Food Security in the United States in 2019, ERR-275, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.



The high price of healthy food creates access barriers for many low and lower-middle-income families, who are forced to make hard choices between paying for food and other expenses like gas for their cars, heat for their homes, and prescription medicines.

Said Linda, a mother of six living in Needham, “It’s hard to eat healthy food because it’s expensive.” Linda, who was employed in the airline industry until a layoff earlier in the pandemic, sought food assistance from one of our nonprofit partners. Linda said the thing she appreciated the most was that the foods she and her family received there - foods provided to the pantry through our food rescue efforts - were on par with those she would have chosen for herself in the grocery store if finances had been less of a consideration for her family: fruits and vegetables, lean proteins, dairy, and more.

Hank, a Springfield-area senior and Army veteran, has struggled with food insecurity for years. He - like Linda - values the healthy food he receives at his local pantry, which Lovin’ Spoonfuls supplies with fresh vegetables recovered from a farm about 20 minutes away. “They don’t carry vegetables like this at the corner store,” he said - and he’s right. Nearly 3 million people in Massachusetts live in “food deserts,” low-income communities that lack traditional grocery stores. Springfield, where John lives, is the second-largest food desert in the Commonwealth (Massachusetts Food Trust Program, 2021).⁴

Healthy food shouldn’t be a luxury - but, for neighbors like Linda and Hank who are limited to the foods they can easily afford and access - it too often feels like it. People seeking food assistance shouldn’t be restricted to shelf-stable items. They shouldn’t require a can opener for every meal - especially not when there is enough fresh, wholesome food to go around.

In fact, 80.6 million tons, \$285 billion dollars’ worth of food, goes unsold or uneaten in the United States every year. In production, that food consumes over 300 million barrels of oil and 14% of our freshwater resources (ReFED, 2021).⁵ This is not to mention that food left to rot in landfills contributes to the climate emergency. The human, environmental, and economic consequences of wasted food cannot be overstated.

⁴ Massachusetts Food Trust Program. (2021). *MA Public Health Association Food Trust Fact Sheet*. <https://massfoodtrustprogram.org/resources>.

⁵ ReFED. (2021). *Food Waste*. https://refed.org/food-waste/the-challenge/#what_is_food_waste.



At almost every level of policy - local, state, and national - the need to reduce wasted food has been well recognized, too. Here in Massachusetts, the Department of Environmental Protection introduced the first organics waste ban in the nation in 2014, aimed at addressing the climate impacts of wasted food: the number one source of solid waste in our waste stream (US EPA, 2021).⁶ It is reflected in UN Sustainable Development Goal 12.3 (United Nations, 2021)⁷ - a goal to reduce global food waste by 50% by 2030 - and related USDA and US EPA goals.

Still, our food system relies on overproduction, and waste is a natural output. This happens in some capacity at every food manufacturing plant, in the warehouse of every food distributor, and in every grocery store.

While some foods have limited opportunities for recovery (think: banana peels and coffee grounds), the vast majority of this excess is still good food; it is not “waste” as you might picture it. It has simply been removed from the shelves to make room for newer or sometimes different products. Or sometimes it is considered otherwise “unsaleable.” (Think: produce that is slightly misshapen or a jar of peanut butter with an upside-down label. There’s nothing wrong with it. It’s still nutritious, still safe to eat. Still, it would go to waste if we didn’t recover it.)

Importantly, food rescue *isn't* “dumpster diving.” In fact, we do not and cannot rescue food once it hits the trash. At that point, it’s too late for us to rescue it. It is waste. (And the reasons we don’t rescue waste have as much to do with the dignity of our end-users - the people who ultimately eat the food we rescue - as with food safety.) Our model is designed to *prevent* waste.

Here’s how it works. We partner, on the one hand, with big-shelf retailers like grocery stores, produce wholesalers, farms, and farmers’ markets that have large quantities of excess perishable food available. And we partner, on the other, with nonprofits serving people facing food insecurity: pantries, meal programs, shelters, addiction treatment and recovery centers, senior centers, veterans’ programs, after-school programs, and more.

Our team of professionally-trained, ServSafe-certified Food Rescue Coordinators operates on a direct distribution model. They make scheduled pick-ups from food vendors along assigned

⁶ US EPA. (2021). *Sustainable Management of Food Basics*.

<https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/sustainable-management-food-basics>.

⁷ United Nations. (2021). *Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumptions and production patterns*.

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-consumption-production/>.



routes, transporting the food they recover in refrigerated vehicles, to nonprofits in the region. Food is never stored, or “banked.” It is distributed within the same day, often within a few hours, which both minimizes the likelihood of it going to waste and improves access to fresh, healthy food for programs and people who need it. (This supports often under-resourced staff and volunteers at those food programs and it curtails unnecessary shipping between, for example, the store, the local food bank, and nearby pantries.) Instead, using a real-life example, we partner with a vendor like the Big Y grocery store in Chicopee to pick up excess food and distribute it directly to food bank-enabled pantries in Springfield. That food didn’t have to detour to the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts first; we helped move it more quickly than the Food Bank could to partners they also support, rooted in a mutual commitment to reaching people with healthy food.

While Food Rescue Coordinators are trained in inventory management and food safety protocols, they are fundamentally relationship managers. They get to know the vendors and nonprofits along their routes well enough to make thoughtful decisions about the food they’ve rescued and a nonprofit’s needs: from pantry guests’ cultural and dietary requirements to how much food a meal program can realistically use in the course of their average week given the number of people they serve.

Currently, we work with over 70 food vendors including major brands such as Whole Foods Market and Trader Joe’s, and over 160 nonprofit organizations of various sizes: from small pantries operating in church basements to large-scale meal programs serving hundreds each day. Additionally, we have partnerships with two of the three Feeding America member food banks in Massachusetts.

And despite supply chain interruptions making news in recent months, we continue to rescue over 78,000 lbs. of food each week - the equivalent of over 62,000 meals’ worth of food - for 38,000 neighbors across the Commonwealth. To date, in our 12-year-history, we have prevented more than 23 million lbs. of good food from going to waste, creating the equivalent of 18.4 million meals. Importantly, the food we recover is fresh and nutritious: 42% of what we rescue is fruits & vegetables, with other top categories of foods distributed including dairy (14%), baked goods, such as bread (14%), and meat (11%).

Yet there’s more to be done to keep good food from going to waste here in Massachusetts and across the country. ReFED recently reported that only 3% of surplus food is donated (ReFED,



2021),⁸ and there continues to be unparalleled interest in that food. Indeed, right now, there are 94 nonprofits on a waiting list for Spoonfuls services - our ability to reach them is limited only by the extent of our current funding. There is, without question, an opportunity for expanded food recovery.

Over the years, we have demonstrated the ability to successfully scale our operations - a testament to the model. Since our founding in 2010, we have grown from a one-person operation (when I was recovering food in my personal vehicle in and around Boston) to a team of roughly 30 staff, a fleet of refrigerated vehicles, and soon-to-be nine routes across Massachusetts.

This model can be successfully replicated in communities across the country as a means to bridge the gap between abundance and need. Because, by our calculations, if we rescued just 30% of all the food we waste in the United States, we'd be able to feed the majority of people facing food insecurity now.

Yet while food rescue is an excellent tool we have to prevent waste and meet an immediate need for healthy food, it shouldn't be necessary. It is through policy solutions that we'll build a better, less wasteful food system and address the root causes of food insecurity, the underpinnings of why people are hungry in the first place. It is through policy solutions that we'll strengthen the safety net, improve educational opportunities, wages, and access to affordable childcare. It is through policy solutions that we'll lift people out of poverty.

On behalf of Lovin' Spoonfuls, I would like to voice our strong support for a White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, Hunger, and Health. It is badly needed and long overdue. We at Lovin' Spoonfuls commit to working with you to identify inroads for expanded food recovery and improved access to healthy food for people in Massachusetts and across the United States.

Thank you, once again, for the opportunity to share this testimony with you today.

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Additional Resources

⁸ ReFED. (2021). *Key Action Area - Strengthen Food Resources*.
<https://refed.org/action-areas/strengthen-food-rescue/>



US EPA. (2021). *Food: Material-Specific Data*.

<https://www.epa.gov/facts-and-figures-about-materials-waste-and-recycling/food-material-specific-data>

US EPA. (2021). *United States 2030 Food Loss and Waste Reduction Goal*.

<https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/united-states-2030-food-loss-and-waste-reduction-goal>

Lovin' Spoonfuls. (2020). *Annual Report*. <https://lovinspoonfulsinc.org/financials>.

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