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"YOUTH HUNGRY AT SCHOOL: WHAT CAN BE DONE?"
Youth Civic Leaders Summit – March 2-4, 2012
Youth-Led Issues Forum – "Healthy Lifestyles" Track

SUMMARY OF PROBLEM

"Children living in poverty experience deprivation of the material, spiritual and emotional resources needed to survive, develop and thrive, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, to achieve their full potential or participate as full and equal members of society."

The State of the World's Children Report, UNICEF, 2005

Strategic Summary: Hunger in Our Schools

- Hunger in the classroom—that is, students regularly coming to school hungry because there is not enough to eat at home—remains a problem. K-8 teachers nationwide report seeing child hunger as a problem manifesting itself in their classrooms, and showing no sign of receding.
- Addressing child hunger is a priority for K-8 teachers. They believe schools and the education community have a role to play in addressing child hunger, and they want to see it made a priority on both the local and national levels.
- While few teachers have heard of Share Our Strength's "No Kid Hungry" campaign yet, once they learn about the campaign and its goals, a strong majority are willing to sign the pledge and join in the campaign. Teachers strongly believe there could be significant impacts on education if communities focused on addressing child hunger.
- From the perspective of teachers, hunger in the classroom is ongoing and frequent. Nearly two-thirds of K-8 teachers say that children in their classrooms regularly come to school hungry because they are not getting enough to eat at home, and over eight in ten see this happening frequently. In terms of magnitude, this means that for nearly half of K-8 teachers, one quarter or more of their students come to school hungry on a weekly basis. Hunger among students is seen as a more prevalent and serious problem among teachers in rural and urban areas.
- Teachers are among the first line of defense for students who regularly come to school hungry. Teachers report taking action in a variety of ways to address the hunger they see in their classrooms, most commonly by helping students sign up for free or reduced price school meals and through purchasing food for their classrooms (and spending an average of $25 a month on this), and by referring students and parents to resources in the school.
- A large proportion of students rely on school meals. Two-thirds of teachers say most or a lot of their students rely on school meals as their primary source of nutrition. This reliance is widespread across urban, suburban, and rural areas, but reliance is particularly strong in urban and rural areas.
- While more traditional school lunch and school breakfast programs are available at most schools, teachers report that other wrap-around programs are more limited, including programs such as afterschool snacks, the weekend backpack program, summer meals, fresh fruit and vegetable programs, and in-classroom and universal school breakfast

programs. There is strong support and interest among teachers for their schools to participate in afterschool snack or meal programs and in the summer meals program.

- Breakfast has significant importance to teachers, and they nearly unanimously believe there is a strong connection between eating a healthy breakfast and a student's ability to concentrate, behave, and perform academically.
- From the perspective of teachers, only half of students who qualify are enrolled in free and reduced price breakfasts. Much of this, teachers believe, is not because the enrollment process is difficult (in fact teachers say it is quite easy), nor is it stigma, but logistics of transportation, lack of awareness about the program, and students not showing up on time to eat the breakfast provided.
- One potential solution to this gap in breakfast coverage is in-classroom breakfast, which is served to all students at the beginning of the school day. Teachers with experience with this program have solidly positive views of it. Among all teachers, however, views are more mixed. A small majority would support having the program in their school, but a segment of teachers would oppose this. Their primary concerns revolve around a mixture of the practical—the mess, cutting into instructional time in a schedule where there is already not enough time to cover the material—and the emotional—with some teachers feeling it should not be the role or responsibility of the educator to serve, oversee, and clean up breakfast.

Key Findings: Teacher Perspectives on Hunger in the Classroom

- When K-8 public school teachers consider a list of problems they face in the classroom, they rate discipline as the top problem (83 percent), with student hunger falling among the second tier of problems (40 percent), alongside lack of supplies (42 percent).
- Hunger in the classroom is an even bigger problem for teachers in 2010 than the Share Our Strength teacher survey measured in 2009 (35 percent in 2009 named it as a problem; 40 percent 2010).
- Over four in ten (44 percent) teachers at schools where 16 percent or more of students live under 100 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) say that hunger is a problem in their classroom. This is slightly lower among teachers in schools with lower poverty rates (37 percent of teachers with zero to 15.9 percent of student poverty under 100 percent FPL).
- Over four in ten teachers in urban (41 percent) and rural (46 percent) schools say hunger is a problem, compared to 35% of suburban teachers.
- Similar to 2009, four in ten teachers say that children coming to school hungry because they have not had enough to eat at home is a serious problem at their school (43 percent rate the problem between 6 and 10 on a scale where ten means it is a very serious problem and zero means not a problem at all; 44 percent rated it 6-10 in 2009).
- Middle school teachers are especially likely to say this is a serious problem (50 percent saying 6-10, compared to 41 percent of elementary school teachers).
- Nearly half of urban (48 percent) and rural (48 percent) teachers believe this is a serious problem (rate it 6-10), compared to four in ten suburban teachers (36 percent).
- Very few teachers say the problem of children coming to school hungry has decreased. Instead, over six in ten teachers (63 percent) say the problem of children coming to school hungry has increased in the past year (19 percent a lot; 44 percent a little), and another

three in ten say it has stayed about the same. Very few, only four percent, say the problem seems to be decreasing.

- Compared to 2009, K- 8 teachers are less likely to report seeing increases in child hunger (77 percent report increase in 2009) but the drop is largely among those who see the problem increasing a little (55 percent a little in 2009; 21 percent a lot; 2 percent decreasing).
- Around two-thirds of teachers (65 percent) say there are children in their classrooms who regularly come to school hungry because they are not getting enough to eat at home (64 percent of elementary school teachers; 69 percent of middle school teachers).
- For nearly half (46 percent) of K-8 public school teachers overall, 25 percent or more of their students come to school hungry on a weekly basis (29 percent: 25-50 percent of students come to school hungry; 17 percent: 50 percent).
- Teachers attribute students coming to school hungry to the following reasons:
  - Unstable home environment (72 percent);
  - Parents or caregivers not having enough money to buy food (55 percent);
  - Parents or caregivers working or not around to prepare food for children (50 percent, and this is a particularly big problem seen by middle school teachers: 57 percent); and
  - Not having any food at home (45 percent).

Some Conclusions:

- ✓ At least three quarters of public school teachers in elementary and middle schools put a high priority on school systems working to address the problem of child hunger. Teachers prioritize working at both the local and national levels.

- ✓ Teachers believe schools and the education community have a role to play in addressing child hunger, and want to see it made a priority. A strong majority are willing to join in the "No Kid Hungry" Campaign.

Hunger In Our Schools: Share Our Strength's Teachers Report
www.strength.org/teachers

"Children who eat breakfast have been shown to get higher grades and are less likely to be described as depressed, anxious, fidgety, or irritable by parents and teachers," says Dr. Debby Demory-Luce, a registered dietitian with the USDA/ARS Children's Nutrition Research Center.

They also think faster and more clearly, concentrate better, suffer less fatigue, and are less likely to end up in the nurse's office complaining of tummy aches and dizziness. Breakfast should provide one-fourth to one-third of the day's energy and nutrient needs. A balanced breakfast should provide some protein, fat and carbohydrate, as well as important nutrients that kids often miss, such as fiber, vitamin C, folate, iron and calcium.

http://www.bcm.edu/cnrc/consumer/archives/breakfast-fuel.htm

Approximately 17 percent of American children live in households defined as "food insecure," that is, the families face "difficulty providing enough food for all its members due to a lack of

resources." For African American and Latino children, the percentages are higher: 22 percent and 20 percent respectively. Troublesome as these numbers are, they likely underestimate the degree of children's hunger because, according to the Food Research and Action Center, "only households experiencing substantial food insecurity are so classified"; less intense levels are not.

And if these conditions weren't bad enough, they actually grow worse by the day. With the economy slumping, a recent CNN poll found that Americans are spending less on groceries and are likely to shift to cheaper, poorer quality food, in order to reduce spending.

Research on young children in several U.S. cities found that food insecure children were two thirds more likely to experience developmental risks in expressive and receptive language, fine and gross motor control, social behavior, emotional control, self-help, and preschool functioning.

Other data from a study of 1,000 poor families identified associations between food insecurity and children's behavior problems, such as temper tantrums, fighting, sadness, depression, anxiety, and loneliness.

With the start of school, early developmental problems evolving from food insecurity are likely to progress into an array of psychological, behavior, and social skills difficulties. For example, food insecure children are more likely to miss more school days, repeat a grade, see a psychologist, and be less able to get along with other children.

Not surprisingly, food insecure children are, in the early grades, also more likely to have academic problems, particularly in reading and arithmetic. A longitudinal study found that food insecurity significantly lowers children's test scores for word identification, passage comprehension, and arithmetic tests. Other studies show similar outcomes. Following a sample of 21,000 nationally representative children from kindergarten through 3rd grade, researchers found that throughout these grades children in food insecure families at kindergarten made smaller gains in mathematics and reading than did children in food secure families.

Food insecurity need not start at the beginning of a child's life for its severe effects to emerge. Research on children who began kindergarten in food secure homes and at that time were doing well academically, found that when the children began experiencing food insecurity in later grades, their reading development slowed in contrast to children whose homes remained food secure.

Some good news is that, conversely, a change from food insecurity to food security can bring concomitant improvements: the study also found that poor reading performance for food insecure children in the beginning grades was reversed if the household became food secure by 3rd grade.

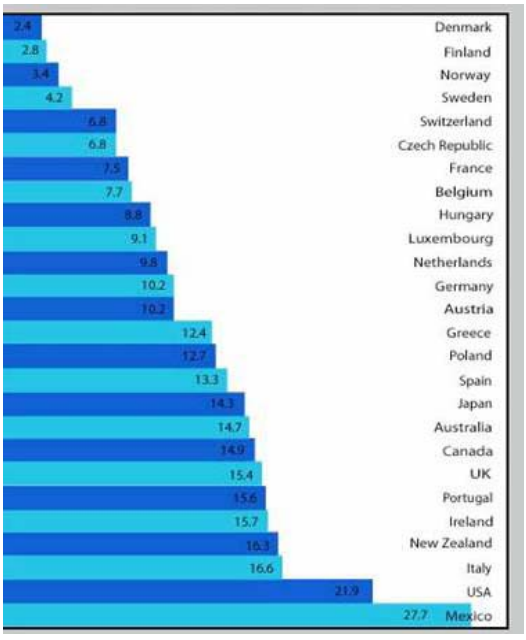
(Source: "Hunger, Academic Success, and the Hard Bigotry of Indifference" By Gerald Coles
http://www.rethinkingschools.org/restrict.asp?path=archive/23_02/hung232.shtml

POVERTY AND SCHOOL—FIVE FACTORS

1. *First, that poverty in the US is greater and of longer duration than in other rich nations.*
2. *Second, that poverty, particularly among urban minorities, is associated with academic performance that is well below international means on a number of different international assessments. Scores of poor students are also considerably below the scores achieved by white middle class American students.*
3. *Third, that poverty restricts the expression of genetic talent at the lower end of the socioeconomic scale. Among the lowest social classes environmental factors, particularly family and neighborhood influences, not genetics, is strongly associated with academic performance. Among middle class students it is genetic factors, not family and neighborhood factors, that most influences academic performance.*
4. *Fourth, compared to middle-class children, severe medical problems affect impoverished youth. This limits their school achievement as well as their life chances. Data on the negative effect of impoverished neighborhoods on the youth who reside there is also presented.*
5. *Fifth, and of greatest interest, is that small reductions in family poverty lead to increases in positive school behavior and better academic performance. It is argued that poverty places severe limits on what can be accomplished through school reform efforts, particularly those associated with the federal No Child Left Behind law. The data presented in this study suggest that the most powerful policy for improving our nations' school achievement is a reduction in family and youth poverty.*

AMERICA'S POVERTY PROBLEM.

The UNICEF report from the Innocenti Foundation, (UNICEF, 2005), which regularly issues reports on childhood poverty, is among the most recent to reliably document this problem. The entire report is summarized quite simply in one graph.



In this set of rich nations, The US is among the leaders in childhood poverty over the decade of the 1990s. The only nation with a record worse than ours is Mexico. Our rank has been remarkably steady.

The USA likes to be # 1 in everything, and when it comes to the percent of children in poverty among the richest nations in the world, we continue to hold our remarkable status.

One bit of good news about poverty in the US is that over the decade of the 1990s we lowered our embarrassing rate of poverty a great deal, almost 2.5 %.

So in the graph presented to the left you are seeing a measure of childhood poverty in the USA after years of improvement!

But there is also some bad news. First, the expansion of jobs and income growth in our nation stopped at the end of the 1990s, and the gains that had been made have been lost. With the sharp increase in housing prices that has occurred since then, no noticeable increases in the real wages for the poor, an economic expansion that has failed to create jobs, and a reduction in tax revenues (resulting in a reduction of aid to the poor), it is quite likely that our rate of childhood poverty is back to where it was. That would be about 2 or more percentage points higher than the figure given in this UNICEF report. Apparently this is about where we as a nation want the rate to be, since the graph makes it abundantly clear that if we cared to do something about it we could emulate the economic policies of other industrialized nations and not have the high rate of poverty that we do.

Poverty and Student Achievement

U.S. childhood poverty rates are high and that those who once get trapped in poverty have a hard time getting out of poverty. But what does this mean for us in terms of student achievement? There are, of course, thousands of studies showing correlations between poverty and academic achievement. And yet we ignore them. Instead we look for other causal mechanisms, like low expectations of teachers, or the quality of teachers' subject matter knowledge, to explain the relationship.

Since the relationship is well known let us look briefly at how US poverty is related to student achievement in just the international studies, since it is our international competitiveness that worries so many in industry and government, and it is those worries that kindled the reform movement in education.

Poverty level of school (percent free or reduced lunch)	Fourth grade math scores	Fourth grade science scores	Eighth grade math scores	Eighth grade science scores
Less than 10% in poverty (schools with wealthy students)	567	579	547	571
10% - 24.9% in poverty	543	567	531	554
25% - 49.9% in poverty	533	551	505	529
50% - 74.9% in poverty	500	519	480	504
75% or more in poverty (schools with poor students)	471	480	444	461
US Average Score	518	536	504	527
International Average Score	495	489	466	473

Fourth and eighth grade mathematics and science scores from TIMMS 2003

(Gonzales, et al., 2004).

In the five categories presented, schools with the wealthier students had the highest average score, the next wealthier set of schools had students who had the next highest average score, and so forth, until we see that the schools with the poorest students had the students who scored the lowest. This pattern is common.

The second thing to note is that the average scores for the schools with less than 50 percent of their students in poverty exceeded the US average score, while the average scores for the schools with greater than 50 percent of their students in poverty fell below the US average score. This tells us who is and who is not succeeding in the US.

The third thing to notice pertains to the schools that serve the most impoverished students, where 75% or more of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. That is, almost all the students in these schools live in extreme poverty and those are the students that fall well below the international average obtained in this study. In general, this Table informs us that our poor students are not competitive internationally while our middle classes and wealthy public school children are doing extremely well in comparison to the pool of countries that made up TIMSS 2003.

From recent international studies, and from literally thousands of other studies both domestic and international, we learn that the relationship between social class and test scores is positive, high, and well embedded in theories that can explain the relationship. This suggests a hypothesis that is frightening to hear uttered in a capitalist society, namely, that if the incomes of our poorest citizens were to go up a bit, so might achievement scores and other indicators that characterize a well-functioning school.

School reformers are doing their best. But they are often planting in poor soil. While you can eek out a living doing that, and occasionally you even see award winning crops come from unlikely places, we all know that the crops are consistently better where the soil is richer. Healthy trees do not often grow in forests that are ailing, though there are always some resilient ones that thrive, making us forget that most do not. Resilient children and the occasionally exemplary school that exists amidst poverty should be lauded and supported.

The simplest way to get a healthier environment in which to raise children is to provide more resources for parents to make those changes for themselves. Despite the shortcomings of many parents at every level of social class, I still believe the proper place to begin solving the problem of low achievement among poor families is by making those families less poor.

Zip codes matter. Zip codes can determine school achievement as much or more than does the influence of a persons' family, and they often have more power then the quality of the school a child attends. While family involvement and school improvement programs are each to be supported, and some have
garnered success (Comer, 2004), they cannot be expected to do all that needs to be done. Most low performing schools serve poor children who live in neglected neighborhoods and we pay a price for our communal neglect.

The rates of hunger among the poor continue to be high for an industrialized nation (Nord, Andrews & Carlson, 2004). In 2003 about 12.5 million households, around 36 million people, suffered food insecurity. About 4 million of those households, or around 9.5 million people, actually went hungry some time in that year. And sadly, one-third of this group experienced *chronic* hunger. Seventeen percent of the households with food insecurity have children, and these children do not ordinarily learn well. Perhaps equally unfortunate is the fact that the neighborhood norms for people who are poor promote non-nutritional foods and diets that lead to medical problems. Anemia, vitamin deficiencies, obesity, diabetes and many other conditions that affect school learning help to keep the academic achievement of poor children lower than it might otherwise be.

We need to face the fact that our whole society needs to be held as accountable for providing healthy children ready to learn, as our schools are for delivering quality instruction. One-way accountability, where we are always blaming the schools for the faults that we find, is neither just, nor likely to solve the problems we want to address.

Our Impoverished View of Educational Reformby David C. Berliner
Published by *Teachers College Record*, August 02, 2005
Retrieved from: http://www.tcrecord.org/content.asp?contentid=12106

SOME INTERESTING FACTS
#1: "Share Our Strength" fact sheet stats:

- 16.2 million kids in America struggle with hunger. (Source: USDA Household Food Security in the United States)
- 10.5 million kids eligible for free or reduced-price school breakfast do not get it. (Source: Food Research and Action Center, School Breakfast Scorecard)
- More than 20 million kids get a free or reduced-price school lunch on an average school day. (Source: Food Research and Action Center, School Breakfast Scorecard)
- Six out of 7 eligible kids do not get free summer meals. (Source: Food Research and Action Center, "Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report)
- In 2010, 40.3 million people in over 18.6 million households across America got help through SNAP (food stamps); about half of those households (8.9 million) were households with children. (Source: USDA Food and Nutrition Services)
- 15.7 million children (21.6%) in America live in poverty. (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports).

http://www.strength.org/pdfs/2011-childhood-hunger-facts.pdf

#2: Feeding America Fact Sheet Stats:

- Nearly 14 million children are estimated to be served by Feeding America, over 3 million of which are ages 5 and under.
- According to the USDA, over 16 million children lived in food insecure (low food security and very low food security) households in 2010.

- 1 in 5 children, or 20% of the child population in 40 states and D.C. lived in food insecure households in 2009.
- Proper nutrition is vital to the growth and development of children. 62 percent of client households with children under the age of 18 reported participating in the National School Lunch Program, but only 14 percent reported having a child participate in a summer feeding program that provides free food when school is out.
- 54 percent of client households with children under the age of 3 participated in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).
- 32 percent of pantries, 42 percent of kitchens, and 18 percent of shelters in the Feeding America network reported "many more children in the summer" being served by their programs.
- In 2010, 16.4 million or approximately 22 percent of children in the U.S. lived in poverty.
- Research indicates that hungry children have do more poorly in school and have lower academic achievement because they are not well prepared for school and cannot concentrate.

http://feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/hunger-facts/child-hunger-facts.aspx
http://feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/hunger-facts/rural-hunger.aspx
http://www.childhungerendshere.com/Html/About.html

WHY CHILDHOOD HUNGER IS IMPORTANT

Health

- Children who struggle with hunger are sick more often, recover more slowly, and are more likely to be hospitalized.
- They are more likely to experience headaches, stomachaches, colds, ear infections and fatigue.
- Children who face hunger are more susceptible to obesity and its harmful health consequences as children and as adults.

Cognition and Academics

- Undernourished children 0-3 years of age cannot learn as much, as fast or as well.
- Lack of enough nutritious food impairs a child's ability to concentrate and perform well in school.

Emotional and Social Well-Being

- Children who regularly do not get enough nutritious food to eat have significantly higher levels of behavioral, emotional and academic problems and be more aggressive and anxious.
- Teens who regularly do not get enough to eat are more likely to be suspended from school and have difficulty getting along with other kids.

Map the Meal Gap 2011

Missouri Child Food Insecurity by Congressional District, 2009 1

Congressional District	Food Insecurity Rate (full population)	Child Food Insecurity Rate	Estimated Number Food Insecure Children (rounded)	% food insecure children income-eligible for federal nutrition assistance (at or below 185% of poverty line)2	% food insecure children NOT income-eligible for federal nutrition assistance (over 185% of poverty line)2
1	25.7%	23.4%	34,750	100%	0%
2	14.4%	18.9%	32,800	28%	72%
3	18.6%	23.5%	35,060	57%	43%
4	18.9%	25.9%	41,230	66%	34%
5	21.8%	25.3%	41,000	75%	25%
6	15.8%	21.3%	35,300	53%	47%
7	20.5%	28.4%	47,220	67%	33%
8	21.6%	29.9%	45,180	74%	26%
9	18.3%	24.3%	37,920	61%	39%

For additional data and maps by county, state, and congressional district, please visit www.feedingamerica.org/mapthegap .

Gundersen, C., E. Waxman, E. Engelhard and J. Brown. *Map the Meal Gap: Child Food Insecurity 2011.* Feeding America, 2011. This research is generously supported by ConAgra Foods Foundation and is based on *Map the Meal Gap: Food Insecurity Estimates at the County Level* , supported by the Howard G. Buffett Foundation and The Nielsen Company.

1) Map the Meal Gap's child food insecurity rates are determined using data from the 2009 Current Population Survey on children under 18 years old in food insecure households; data from the 2009 American Community Survey on median family incomes for households with children, child poverty rates, and race and ethnic demographics among children; and 2009 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics on unemployment rates. Because congressional district estimates use a three-year average of unemployment data (2007-2009) and county-level estimates use unemployment data from one-year (2009), congressional district estimates are not directly comparable with county estimates.

2) Numbers reflect percentage of food insecure children living in households with incomes above or below 185% of the federal poverty guideline for 2009.

Eligibility for federal child nutrition programs is determined in part by income thresholds which can vary by state.

Title: Youth Hungry At School: What Can Be Done?

As you can tell from the information provided, hunger is a major problem in our country and the world; in addition, research shows that hunger and poverty also can have an effect on a child's performance in school. Hunger is definitely a problem in Missouri. Why has this happened? What can be done to remedy this problem? This Issue Paper is an invitation to discuss this problem and consider possible courses of action. The following are three (3) different approaches to talk through this problem and try to solve this very troublesome issue:

Approach #1: Communities should take more ownership for solving the hunger problem at school.

What can be done?

- Communities can bolster local food programs that reach out to children and students in and out of school (youth can help start programs)
- Communities can raise funds to support school and afterschool programs
- Communities can encourage volunteering with local food pantries/banks, farmers markets, food share programs, etc.
- Communities can support private citizens in taking responsibility, neighbors making "random acts of kindness"

Trade-offs

- Communities have a limited resource base (i.e. one grocery store, rural grocery stores may be adversely affected)
- Asking too much from same audience; other funding opportunities (outside the community) may be missed
- Youth and adult volunteers are already busy with many other activities, would have to let go of something else
- To reach more hungry children, schools and community organizations need to be involved

What critics say

- The hunger issue is bigger than the community, requires government and business participation
- Raising money alone won't solve the problem, does not address the root causes of hunger
- Volunteering provides short-term relief, but does not offer a long-term solution
- It takes more than good neighbors, actions by citizens are hard to keep going

Approach #2: Schools should provide greater access to food/hunger programs for their students.

What can be done?

- Schools can ensure government-sponsored meal assistance is received by all eligible students
- Schools can apply for existing Federal, state, and local hunger/food programs
- Schools can adopt school policies that improve food access and local food consumption
- Schools can support students in raising awareness and educating school and community leaders, fellow students, and their families about hunger programs

Trade-offs

- Government-sponsored programs do not always provide the most nutritious food that kids need
- Schools have limited ability to apply for and manage food program grants, could be directed more toward helping students learn and succeed in school

- Improving access to food and local food consumption can be more costly for schools, taxpayers
- Raising awareness of school programs takes time away from students focusing on their grades and test scores

What critics say

- Relying on schools for food encourages a "hand-out" mindset and makes families more dependent on the government
- Schools are being asked to do too much already, feeding children is the responsibility of families
- Kids eat more than just at school, policy changes need to be more far-reaching than just schools
- Awareness and education is not enough, people can know about something but choose not to use it

Approach #3: The agricultural industry should see hungry students as an investment in their future workforce, and do more to ensure food is accessible to children at school.

What can be done?

Farms, agribusinesses, food processing and distribution centers, and big agricultural corporations can:

- Play a larger role in making food more affordable and accessible to children
- Direct more private sector dollars to directly combating school hunger
- Offer gleaning programs, donate produce to schools and afterschool programs
- Sponsor community holiday meals and other events to feed children

Trade-offs

- Farms and ag businesses cannot solve hunger alone, requires responsibility of families and communities
- Corporations may wind up passing the cost of additional programs on to consumers, driving up food prices
- Gleaning and donation programs are seasonal at best, while hunger is year-round
- One-time events or short-term efforts may improve the image of companies, but do not build capacity to end hunger

What critics say

- Businesses exist to make profit, they are not responsible for solving big social issues like hunger
- Companies deciding how to invest in school hunger programs leave schools and communities without a voice
- Just donating food to schools does not mean that schools would know how to prepare it or that kids would actually eat it
- Companies tend to only give in the communities where they are located, meaning other communities would be left out