

# Hunger News & Hope

A Seeds of Hope Publication

## Focus on the Farm Bill:

*Bread for the World's 2023*

*Offering of Letters*

by Katie Cook

**N**ote: As this issue nears press time, many people in the US are facing what anti-hunger activists call a "hunger cliff." A few months ago, millions of US Americans were notified that the nutrition assistance they received during the pandemic is about to be cut. And that time is almost here, just as food prices have increased by 10 percent since last year. Organizations like Bread for the World (Bread) and Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) have been warning us that food insecurity will spike and the national poverty rate will soar. FRAC's Ellen Vollinger is quoted in the New York Times as saying, "It is a very large and abrupt change."

We had already planned to feature Bread's 2023 Offering of Letters campaign, which centers on this year's Farm Bill, in this issue. The impending hunger cliff gives us even more compelling reasons to bring this to the attention of our readers and to urge your support.



### *Working against Hunger Since 1983*

**S**ince the early 1980s, Bread for the World has been working to increase the political will among US Americans necessary to bring about real change for food-insecure people in the US and the world.

Last year was no exception.

In December, Bread President/CEO Eugene Cho issued this statement about progress made in 2022 against great odds:

Please see "Offering of Letters" on page 12.

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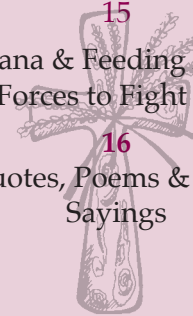
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art by Erin Kennedy Mayer

# Take What You Need; Leave What You Can: *The Community Fridge Movement*

by Jessica Foumena Kempton

**D**o you use a fridge? Of course, you do! Have you ever shared a fridge with someone else? Hmm, most likely, right?

Now imagine this. Imagine you're actively using a fridge which is accessible to your neighbors.

Through this fridge, you and your neighbors enjoy safe and free access to fresh, healthy, food items. In this fridge, anyone can drop off fresh produce, dairy and prepared meals. Fridge users are expected to follow this motto: "Take care of what you need, leave what you can't." Pretty cool idea but is this for real?

To be honest with you, the idea sounded too good to be true for me as well. About a year ago, I heard about the concept of a "community fridge" for the first

time, while checking out the website of Reunity Resources<sup>1</sup>, a nonprofit that operates a regenerative two-acre urban farm as well as a soil and compost yard in Santa Fe, NM.

According to Juliana Ciano, the program director for Reunity Resources, this community-based organization operates several distinct yet symbiotically entwined programs: the recycling of used cooking oil into biodiesel; a commercial or residential food waste collection the soil yard; the farm; and educational programs like farm camp, field trips and compost trainings—as well as offering immediate food access solutions through fresh produce donations, double-up food bucks, and the 24-hour, seven-day Santa Fe (SF) community fridge.

"We are working toward a future where everyone in our community is part of resilient, nourishing food systems," Ciano said.

Reunity Resources counts 13 core staff members and adds approximately 10 more in the summer season. About 80 restaurants participate in the used-cooking oil collection. Thirty restaurants, 25 schools and 450 households participate in the food scraps collection. About 315 children enroll in the summer farm camp. Each season, about 100 volunteers work in the fields, at the farm stand or for the SF community fridge. And every year, a couple of thousand people shop at the farm stand or come to the organization's events such as concerts, talks and workshops.<sup>2</sup>

Through the SF community fridge, which has a budget of about US\$6,000 per year, Reunity Resources addresses a growing need to fight hunger.<sup>3</sup> While hunger affects individuals in all walks of life, Feeding America reports that the coronavirus pandemic has increased food insecurity in groups who already faced hunger at much higher rates before the pandemic: families with children, seniors, and rural communities



*Left: Neighbors make sure the Santa Fe Community Fridge is well stocked. Photo courtesy of Reunity Resources.*



such as many located in the state of New Mexico.<sup>4</sup> Seniors who identify as Black, Latino or Native American have lower incomes or disabilities and are more likely to face hunger due to racial and economic inequality.<sup>5</sup>

Due to systemic racial injustice, hunger hits Native American, African American, Asian American and Latino households and communities at higher rates in the United States.<sup>6</sup> A long history of harmful federal policies has generated high rates of impoverishment and food insecurity amongst Native populations.<sup>7</sup>

Compared to their counterparts of European descent, people of African descent are more likely to face

*With 100 percent of US counties facing food insecurity, community fridges, such as the one maintained by Reunity Resources, come across as solutions to fight hunger locally and beyond.*

discriminatory policies and practices leading to unemployment and limited financial resources such as savings.<sup>8</sup> Hunger is also overlooked amongst Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders because of harmful racial stereotypes. Immigrants from some Asian or Pacific Island nations such as Bhutan, Afghanistan, Nepal and Myanmar are more likely to experience food insecurity and hunger.<sup>9</sup> Individuals who identify as Latino or Latina face socio-economic inequalities rooted in racial prejudice, language, education and cultural barriers.<sup>10</sup>

Keeping in mind that the US population was estimated at around 332 million people in 2021, it is worth noting that more than 34 million people in the US, including 9 million children, were food insecure the same year, according to USDA.<sup>11</sup> With 100 percent of US counties facing food insecurity,<sup>12</sup> community fridges, such as the one maintained by Reunity Resources, come across as solutions to fight hunger locally and beyond.

Created and maintained by volunteers who clean the fridge every week, the Santa Fe community fridge has been “a mutual aid food support system available to anyone, no questions, 24/7” since 2021.<sup>13</sup> All food and hygiene items are accepted as long as they are clearly labeled, unopened and not expired. In addition to being filled by community members’ financial and in-kind donations, the Santa Fe community fridge con-

tains seasonal produce donated to Reunity Resources and bulk goods purchases.

“We believe strongly in the anonymity of the fridge and don’t monitor who/how many folks are coming, but we know the fridge fills/empties usually in 24 hours or less. Need is high right now, and the fridge fills in the gaps of food security for a lot of families,” Ciano shared.

She also added that the need for food items is currently higher than the donations and the volunteer capacity to keep it stocked. Yet, Reunity Resources hopes that the Santa Fe community fridge is the first in a network of fridges—one in each neighborhood!

Regionally and internationally, community fridges are created to support one’s neighbors who may struggle to choose between paying a utility bill and purchasing healthy food items. Elsewhere in the United States, there are numerous community-based and volunteer-run fridges or “freedges,” such as the individually operated Houston Community Fridges,<sup>14</sup> the Chicago-based Love Fridge,<sup>15</sup> the Florida-based Village (FREE) DGE<sup>16</sup> and the Atlanta-based Free99fridge,<sup>17</sup> the Davis, CA-based Freedger,<sup>18</sup>—just to name a few.

Please see “Community Fridges” on page 4.



*Right: This sign in Santa Fe says, “Welcome to the community fridge. Take what you need; leave what you can.” Photo courtesy of Reunity Resources.*

## Community Fridges,

*continued from page 3*

Neighbors in other countries, such as the United Kingdom<sup>19</sup> and Japan,<sup>20</sup> have taken upon themselves to reduce food waste and food disparities through community fridges.

To know that my financial or in-kind donation to a neighborhood community fridge would contribute to the fight against hunger has been very empowering and humbling. Far from being a pandemic fad,<sup>21</sup> community fridges give us the blessed opportunity to really be our sister's keeper.<sup>22</sup>

*—Dr. Jessica Fomenna Kempton was a Seeds of Hope editorial intern in 2013 as part of her work for a master's degree in International Journalism at Baylor University. Hailing from Cameroon, Dr. Kempton has written several articles about Africa and anti-hunger efforts since then. She now teaches communications courses at various universities while managing her family business, Wild Leaven Bakery, alongside her husband from their home in Chimayo, NM. In 2021, she founded the consulting and marketing agency Kempton Communications.*

### Endnotes

1. For more information, go to [www.reunityresources.com](http://www.reunityresources.com).
2. Information from an interview with Juliana Ciano.
3. Statistics collected from an interview with Juliana Ciano.
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5. Feeding America, "Too Many Seniors Face Hunger" ([www.feedingamerica.org](http://www.feedingamerica.org)).
6. "Facts about Hunger in America."
7. Feeding America, "Hunger Impacts Native American Families and Communities" ([www.feedingamerica.org](http://www.feedingamerica.org)).
8. Feeding America, "Hunger Hits Black Communities Harder" ([www.feedingamerica.org](http://www.feedingamerica.org)).
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11. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA),

*Household Food Insecurity in the US in 2021* ([www.ers.usda.gov](http://www.ers.usda.gov)).

12. "Facts about Hunger in America."

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14. Houston Community Fridges (Instagram/[htxcommunityfridges](https://www.instagram.com/htxcommunityfridges)).

15. The Love Fridge, Chicago, IL ([www.thelovefridge.com](http://www.thelovefridge.com)).

16. Village (FREE)DGE, Inc., Miami, FL ([www.villagefreedge.com](http://www.villagefreedge.com)).

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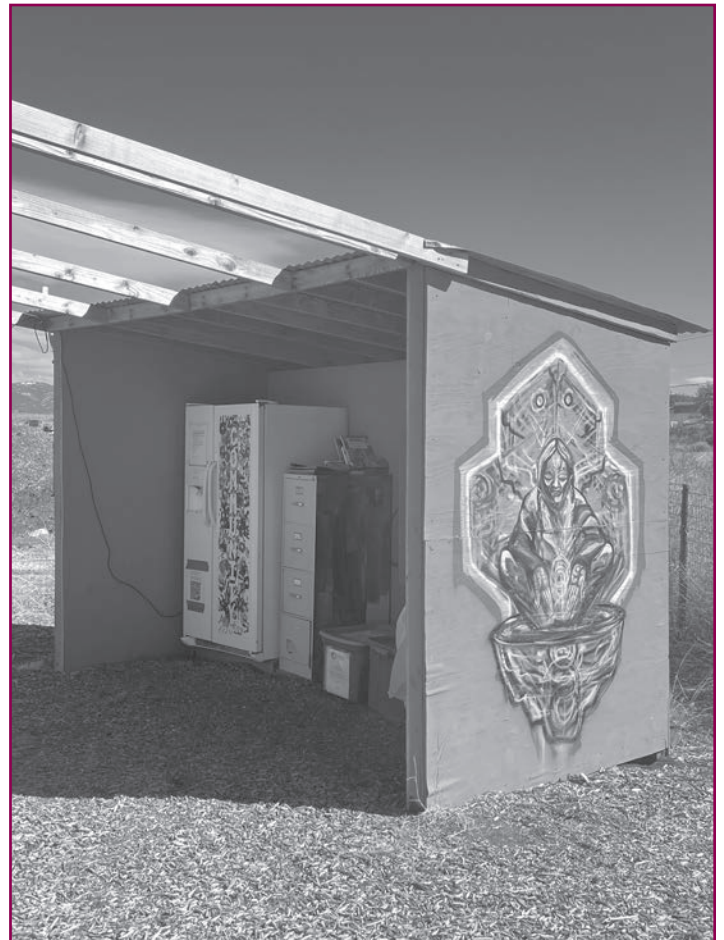
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19. Hubbub, "Community Fridges" ([www.hubbub.org.uk](http://www.hubbub.org.uk)).

20. Yuki Hanano, *Asahi Shimbun*, Osaka, Japan "1st 'Community Fridge' Opens in Okayama for People in Need" ([www.asahi.com](http://www.asahi.com)).

21. Matthew Sedacca, "Community Fridges Are Not a Pandemic Fad. They've Become Entrenched in Neighborhoods as a Way to Fight Hunger," *The Counter*, Scottsdale, AZ ([thecounter.org](http://thecounter.org)).

22. Matthew 25:31-40.



*Right: The Santa Fe Community Fridge.  
Photo courtesy of Reunity Resources.*



# Turning the Tide of Climate Change in Oromia, Ethiopia:

## *Building Livelihoods for Resilience*

by Sara Alexander

### Climate Change is Not Going Away

The Government of Ethiopia and the United Nations say more than 10 million people are facing severe hunger in several regions of Ethiopia, including Oromia. More than 7.4 million people require food assistance and 4.4 million people need potable water. The lack of clean water has increased the risk of disease in the drought affected areas. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission is calling for more assistance and attention to those who are vulnerable.<sup>1</sup> According to a report by the Commission, thousands of people have been displaced or are living in precarious conditions in the lowland regions including Oromia, and livestock are dying by the thousands.

Climate change in the Nile Basin region has caused complex ecological imbalances—increased disease burdens, widened social inequalities, exacerbated environmental degradation, intensified competition for resources and threats to diminish progress in health conditions. In addition, human rights violations in the Oromia region have resulted in further environmental degradation. Oromia is the primary water source for the Nile River; hence, any social problems and ecological imbalances in this region create a ripple effect over an extended area.<sup>2</sup>

Environmental and social imbalances contribute to environmental degradation through increased soil erosion, deforestation and increased water evaporation, which may also cause decreased water flow to the tributary rivers of the Nile. Climate change is altering the biochemistry and microbiol-

ogy of the water and soil, creating favorable conditions for certain microorganisms and pathogens that may lower soil fertility, food production and aggravate water scarcity—and is ultimately causing food insecurity and other scarcities.<sup>3</sup>

Until we identify what is going on in Oromia and take appropriate actions to prevent, mitigate and manage the impacts of climate change and to advance human rights, public health problems will further multiply and threaten the security of people in this and other regions within the Nile Basin.<sup>4</sup>

Residents want government intervention. Disaster management authorities have strongly advised the public to exercise caution. Some residents complain that the government is not doing enough to prevent the problems caused by the drought and the rains. “There doesn’t seem to be any systematic approach across the whole country...when it comes to dealing with flooding,” one resident maintains. “I urge the authorities to invest and work on the water system. If not, we risk everything.”<sup>5</sup>

Please see “Training in Oromia” on page 6.



*A focus group meets in Ethiopia to make plans for health clinics.  
Photo by Sara Alexander.*

## Training in Oromia,

*continued from page 5*

“The impact of the drought is devastating,” said a UNICEF Ethiopia representative in 2022. “Children and their families are struggling to survive due to loss of livelihoods and livestock and it is projected that more than 6.8 million people will be in need of urgent humanitarian assistance [this year]. We are also witnessing major displacement out of affected areas.”<sup>6</sup>

“In drought-affected areas in Oromia and Somali, around 225,000 malnourished children and more than 100,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women need urgent nutrition support,” a UNICEF statement said. “The lack of clean water is further exacerbating the situation for children and women. If children are forced to drink contaminated water, it puts them at risk to various diseases, including diarrhea.”<sup>7</sup>

Children are also missing out on an education. More than 155,000 children in the lowlands have dropped out of school so they can help fetch water—often travelling long distances—or look after other children while their caregivers try to find water. Children who are out of school are at risk of exploitation or are being pushed into dangerous coping mechanisms. It was projected in 2022 that an estimated 850,000 children would be severely malnourished across the four regions due to multiple causes namely conflict, drought, and economic downturn.<sup>8</sup>

### Reducing Risks and Fostering Resilient Livelihoods

USAID’s Feed the Future (FTF) program, implemented in the Oromia region between 2017 and 2021 and called Livelihoods for Resilience (L4R) was founded on a project designed to achieve sustainable development goals using the government’s Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP). The overriding goal of L4R was to address the chronic drought conditions with initiatives designed to reduce food insecurity and increase resilience for households in nine PSNP *woredas*, or districts, in Oromia. Priority areas focused on (1) increasing on-farm income by diversification in crop and livestock systems; (2) increasing off-farm income with nonfarm livelihoods and enterprise development; and (3) increasing innovation, scaling and sustainability of livelihood pathways.<sup>9</sup>

The program was designed to support household participation in income-generating activities, create market linkages and employment opportunities, link

beneficiaries to financing, and help PSNP members increase their incomes, build assets and reduce risk. The intent was to facilitate abilities to sustainably “graduate” from the safety net. L4R also supported the cross-cutting areas of nutrition, climate adaptation, gender empowerment and youth with a wide range of innovative initiatives.

### Success “On the Ground”

The atmosphere outside the health center crackles with energy, despite the relentless midday heat. Two dozen young men and women are standing in a circle, hunched over notebooks. In the center, a woman uses white chalk to draw lines in the sand while someone else positions small rocks and sticks around the lines. Students hovering over the scene step back swiftly as the map in the sand takes shape. They look over shoulders and use each other’s backs as writing surfaces. Everyone vies for the best spot to see what’s happening in the middle. Ethiopian communities are learning to map resources so they can live with climate change, and plan for disasters that cause malnutrition and other problems.<sup>10</sup>

This is a mapping exercise for a typical village experiencing many of the harsh effects of climate change: recurring drought, water shortages, erratic rainfall and flooding. The group is mapping resources like rivers, streams, stone, rocks and forests. Community members then teach their neighbors about climate-smart agriculture and other techniques to reduce the life-threatening impact of changing weather patterns. It’s part of a new, three-year project called REAAP (Resilience through Enhanced Adaptation, Action-learning, and Partnership) that Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and its partners have launched to help nearly half a million people.

“Environmental degradation, deforestation and water-supply problems expose most communities to food insecurity,” says the program director at Hara-rghe Catholic Secretariat, who oversees the project. “There are many cases of malnutrition as a result.”<sup>11</sup>

“In this area, disaster risks are floods and drought,” explains a program coordinator who specializes in disaster risk reduction. “The rainy season in the last 30 to 40 years has been fluctuating year after year. We now have a drought every two to three years. That’s been a trend for at least 30 years.” CRS is leading the project—with funding from the US Agency for International Development (USAID)—working hand-in-hand with communities in six vulnerable districts, in Ethiopia’s Oromia State.<sup>12</sup>



On day two of the weeklong training, participants learn about agricultural practices. Examples include nutrition and keyhole gardens, as well as food preparation, preservation and storage techniques. The young men and women gathered around the village map have met specific qualifications, including a 10th-grade education, but they were also hired because they live in the communities that will benefit from the program. They understand the challenges, culture and politics.

"I was born and raised in the community and I have acceptance," says a mother participating in the training. "They know what I can do. It won't be difficult. I'm very happy to be working in my own community."<sup>13</sup> A male participant is responsible for mapping villages, including determining the existence and location of resources such as forests, water, springs, health facilities, schools, land and livestock. A community committee then identifies the most vulnerable people in the community and how to use village resources in ways that benefit everyone equally.

By day two, our male leader has learned how to work with program staff and his community to help manage resources and cope with climate change. "Before the training, I thought only the government or humanitarian organizations can solve communities' problems, but now I understand that we can solve our own problems," he says with a confident smile. "I also understand that disaster or risks may vary from community to community. Before, I thought it was all the same."<sup>14</sup>

"We use a *community-driven approach*: From the bottom up is our basic principle," says the coordinator. "But we need the support of local government for the project to operate smoothly. We've had close relationships with local government since the beginning."

"My community has traditional knowledge. They didn't know how they could use this knowledge to plan better. But with what I've learned here, I can show them the way," he says. "We have to teach the next generation—my child—the

knowledge of how we can address climate change. We have to show others, practically, how change can be brought so future generations can learn in a better way."<sup>15</sup>

—Sara Alexander is a professor in the Department of Anthropology at Baylor University and a consultant with TANGO International (an NGO that provides technical assistance). As a social anthropologist, she has worked in Central America, West and East Africa, and Appalachia. Her research focuses on developing countries in such matters as livelihood security and vulnerability, food security, ecotourism, natural resource management, the human dimensions of climate change and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. She is also a member of the Seeds Council of Stewards.

Please see "Training in Oromia" on page 11.



*Above right: a map showing the Oromia region in Ethiopia (courtesy of Golbez).  
Below right: a map showing the location of Ethiopia on the African continent.*

# Innovations in Food Distribution:

## *Shepherd's Heart Takes the Food Where the People Are*

by Dawn Michelle Michals

*"It all starts with food."*

When you think of a food pantry, you probably imagine the traditional model: clients show up at a central building, fill out some paperwork, then leave with some food. Shepherd's Heart Food Pantry in Waco, TX, has changed all that.

Shepherd's Heart is now everywhere.

"When COVID hit, we were no longer able to distribute food via the walk-in pantry model. We had over 600 cars lined up throughout the nearby neighborhood. It was time to rethink what we were doing," remembers executive director Robert Gager. "When we began the mobile pantries, we had been serving the community for 12 years. We noticed immediately that over 50 percent of the clients we were serving had never been to Shepherd's Heart before. Their main issue was transportation."

Now, instead of families requesting food onsite, the only walk-ins the staff sees are from local agencies that rely on Shepherd's Heart to help them serve their clients.

"Being a faith-based ministry, it is natural for us to work with churches. We are a hub for food to flow through us into the community and are in partnership with about 40 churches." Shepherd's Heart mobile pantries serve 19 sites each month scattered through-

out Waco and its surrounding communities, reaching people who do not have easy access to a stationary pantry or a grocery store.

With this mobile food pantry model, food is brought to known food deserts in the community, where grocery stores and food pantries are not easily accessible and nutritious food items are not readily available—and are usually overpriced or not available at all at nearby convenience stores.

In 2020, Shepherd's Heart served 41,533 families 2.8 million pounds of food via a drive-through, the traditional distribution concept based at their original location.

In 2022, its staff served 74,646 families with a total of 3.9 million pounds of food. Many past clients were getting increased amounts of aid from the government and no longer needed the pantry, yet the agency saw a 17 percent increase in new clients for the year.

**"Food insecurity isn't really about food, it's about income."**

Since implementing the mobile approach to food distribution, the staff has noticed a changed in clientele. No longer are only those living below the poverty line their main receivers of services. Now, middle class families with children seek out pantry services as multiple car payments, house payments, sky-rocketing bills and a period of inflation make it harder to make it through the month.

"We hope the food we provide to a family helps them with one expense, allowing them to pay for rent, utilities or other expenses. People show up in our lines because food is generally their most flexible expense, and food assistance is the most readily available form of help," Gager said.

*The photos on pages 8 and 9 show volunteers from Waco's Christ the King Church preparing for distribution day at a Shepherd's Heart site. Photo by Rod Aydelotte, courtesy of the Waco Tribune-Herald.*





He added, “Food insecurity isn’t really about food, it’s about income. The families struggling with food security are almost always struggling with other expenses as well.”

### Food Rx: A Prescription for Health

To further get food out into the community, Shepherd’s Heart partners with Waco Family Medicine with its “Food Rx” program. In it, doctors “prescribe” nutritious food to patients visiting each of its 14 clinic sites scattered throughout the community. A prescription box typically contains fresh fruits and vegetables and a frozen protein packaged and ready for the ride or walk home. Waco Family Medicine provides quality and affordable healthcare to underserved residents in two counties. The organization assisted 59,435 residents last year with medical, dental, and mental-health needs. Currently, its staff is in the process of studying the results of the Food Rx program and analyzing the benefits for the thousands of patients who have taken part.

### Connecting with Students Inside the Classroom

Shepherd’s Heart’s network of mobile pantries includes six local schools where the staff serves more than 3,000 children each month.

Counselors Keli Jackson-Freeman and Mary Olivarez both understand the impact Shepherd’s Heart has had on their schools.

“At University High School, it has had a major impact in our attendance and our behavior,” shares Mary Olivarez. “I’ve always said that in order to get to a student’s heart, and in order to try to connect with them—especially in our community—and in the Hispanic minority community, food is our love language.”

She continues, “Sometimes they’re upset. They’re having a bad morning where they haven’t eaten. They’re going through a lot of things at home and sometimes we just need to take that time to get to know them. I would say 95 percent of the time it always has to do with lack of resources; lack of food. Food is your number one thing.”

Ms. Olivarez remembers one student who was having a hard time and misbehaving in the hall. “I said, ‘Hey, come with me. I want to show you something,’ and took him to the pantry. Our pantry looks a little bit like a convenience store with food on the shelves. I said, ‘You see this?

Is there anything you would like?’ That’s how I started that relationship with that student. He would come almost every day to the pantry, and it was a way to start communicating with him. Then, we put him in a mentor group. Then we just saw a complete turnaround, and it all starts with food. You know, food does something to you.”

“I think that when we see that they’re not hungry, it makes the education atmosphere so much better. We know that they’re striving for a goal, and they don’t have to worry about food because we have that taken care of,” adds Keli Jackson-Freeman, a counselor at Waco High School.

“If it wasn’t for Shepherd’s Heart—I can’t say it enough—we would not be able to build those bridges,” shares Mary Olivarez with University High School.

Shepherd’s Heart also serves 1,100 homebound seniors by delivering groceries twice each month with a fleet of volunteer drivers. These are people who don’t let challenges stop them from helping people in need. And their outside-the-box thinking continues to push them forward as anti-hunger advocates. They are ready to take the food where the people are.

—Dawn Michelle Michals is a freelance writer and social media specialist living in Waco, TX. She is the Seeds of Hope Social Media editor and an award-winning reporter for Hunger News & Hope. Our readers will have also seen her work under the name Chelle Samaniego. Please visit [www.dawnmichellemichals.com](http://www.dawnmichellemichals.com) to check out her writings.

SOURCES: Interview with Robert Gager, Executive Director of Shepherd’s Heart Food pantry in Waco, TX. Shepherd’s Heart YouTube Video, “Homeless and Hungry—Feeding Students at Waco ISD. Shepherd’s Heart Podcast Ep. 2”



## Widespread Flooding in Pakistan Takes Food Insecurity to Another Level

**W**idespread, continuous flooding in Pakistan over several months in 2022 is still taking its toll many months later. Caused by unusually heavy monsoon rains and melting glaciers that followed a severe heat wave, the flooding began last June and continued into October.

Many scientists attribute the disaster to climate change. According to *Inside Climate News*, the Indian Ocean, whose Arabian Sea touches Pakistan, is warming at a higher rate than the other oceans of the world. Scientists believe that this rise in sea-surface temperatures increases monsoon rainfall. According to *The Conversation*, a network of not-for-profit media outlets that produce scientific reports, the back-to-back heat waves last spring and summer brought a “strong thermal low” that brought heavier rains than usual. It also triggered glacial flooding in Gilgit-Baltistan, a territory adjacent to Pakistan.

According to the *Washington Post* and *The Guardian*, Pakistan contributes less than 1 percent of global greenhouse emissions, but is one of the places most vulnerable to climate change. However, deforestation, which is internal to the country, has also been a factor worsening the floods.

The United Nations issued an emergency appeal in September for the 33 million people affected by the devastation. Asad Khan, the Pakistani ambassador to the European Union, told a Devex reporter at that

time—three months into the monsoons—that workers were still having trouble rescuing people from flooded areas, partly because helicopters were unable to land in some areas.

One of the threats caused by flooding is the spread of waterborne diseases and chemicals. Another factor is disruption of roads and infrastructures that enable various supplies to move from place to place. Yet another is crop loss. Wheat and cotton crops have been devastated. Wheat, of course, is a supply of food, and cotton is both an important export and a source of raw material for the country’s textile industry.

Vince Chadwick of Devex wrote that Ahsan Iqbal, the Pakistani planning minister, told a Reuters reporter that it could take five years and more than \$10 billion to rebuild the country. An extremely long list of agencies and countries have responded with aid of various kinds for the 200 million people of Pakistan, but the situation is still bleak.

According to Simmone Shah of *Time Magazine*, the food crisis continues to worsen because the country is “cash-strapped.” The previous prime minister, Imran Khan, was forced in 2018 to borrow \$6 billion from the International Monetary Fund, and funds were suspended in 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This caused spiraling inflation, which was exacerbated by delays in food shipments. Doctors are reporting increasing cases of malnutrition in people who are only eating one meal a day.

Khan was ousted in a no-confidence motion, but the new government has not been able to stop the crises, even though Shehbaz Sharif, the present prime minister, is endeavoring to organize the relief operations himself.

—Katie Cook. Sources: Devex Wire (“Pakistani Ambassador to EU Warns of Looming Health, Livelihood Crises” by Vince Chadwick), Inside Climate News (“After Unprecedented Heatwaves, Monsoon Rains and the Worst Floods in over a Century Devastate South Asia” by Zoha Tunio), The Conversation (“Pakistan Floods: What Role Did Climate Change Play?” by Ben Clarke, Friederike Otto and Luke Harrington), World Economic Forum, Daily Pakistan, Washington Post, The Guardian, Time Magazine (“Why Pakistan’s Food Crisis is Getting Worse” by Simmone Shah).



Left: This map shows Pakistan’s location on the globe. Page 11: This map shows Syria (in black) and Turkey (in dark grey).



## Turkey and Syria Hit by Deadly Earthquakes

In early February, a series of massive earthquakes and aftershocks struck southern and central Turkey, and northern and western Syria.

At press time, according to reports from the Turkish television news channel TRTHaber and the United Nations disaster relief portal ReliefWeb, more than 55,700 deaths had been confirmed—more than 48,440 in Turkey and more than 7,200 in Syria. Many more were displaced and/or injured. This is being described as the deadliest natural disaster in modern Turkish history (since CE 526), the deadliest in Syria since 1882, and the deadliest worldwide since the 2010 Haiti earthquake.

Relief organizations from around the world immediately scrambled to respond to the widespread damage that caused massive medical and humanitarian crises, but efforts have been hindered by damaged infrastructure, winter storms and disruption to communications—among other factors. According to *Time Magazine*, the only border crossing where international aid could cross into Syria was damaged in the quake.

In many of the affected areas, the situation was already dire. In Northwest Syria, more than 60 percent of the population was already internally displaced. A cholera outbreak has worsened the situation. Some critics are pointing to ongoing United States sanctions against Syria for weakening the population's ability to recover.

Also, the initial response by the Turkish and Syrian governments were accused of being sluggish. But the international response has been swift and almost overwhelming. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, 141,000 people from 94 countries have joined the effort. Some 60,000 of those people went to the region specifically as part of a search-and-rescue operation. Other than the “usual suspects” of humanitarian groups, agencies represented included the Arab League, the European Union, members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a plethora of United Nations agencies and the World Bank.

—Katie Cook. Sources: TRTHaber, ReliefWeb, Wall Street Journal (“Turkey, Syria Mourn Losses as Earthquake Death Toll Climbs above 24,000” by Stephen Kalin, David S. Cloud and Rory Jones), National Public Radio (“Aid Groups Help Turkey-Syria quake survivors amid global crises and donor fatigue” by Aya Batrawy), Time Magazine

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## Training in Oromia, continued from page 7

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## Offering of Letters,

*continued from page 1*

*Any success is extraordinary under these circumstances. Because of the pandemic, conflict, climate change impacts, and inflation, the world is moving backwards in its efforts to end hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition in all its forms. Our partnerships—with God and each other, in church and in Congress, in the public and private sectors—have made it possible to weather this storm.*

Last June, the US Congress passed the Keep Kids Fed Act, which extended pandemic school-meal waivers and increased funding for school meals through the 2022-23 school year. In October, the Global Malnutrition Prevention and Treatment Act was signed into law. This allowed for several important steps in providing nutrition and health care, especially for mothers and children with severe malnutrition.

Bread staff members worked with bipartisan Congressional sponsors, sometimes even helping with the

creation of the bills, and Bread members and partner congregations across the US contacted their representatives to support them.

More recently, Bread and its partners helped to secure legislation addressing global malnutrition with the reauthorization of the Global Food Security Act, which was signed into law in January.

The organization also spent much of 2022 helping to set a foundation for the 2023 Farm Bill campaign.

### *The 2023 Offering of Letters*

Each year, Bread for the World asks people of faith to contact US Congress members, urging them to support bipartisan anti-hunger legislation that is carefully researched and chosen by staff policy teams.

These lay-led, clergy supported efforts take many forms. Sometimes church groups write letters together at regular meeting times, such as Wednesday evenings. Sometimes people write letters on their own and then bring them to a special service for a prayer of blessing. Children's groups have written letters, sometimes drawing pictures on paper pie plates.

Years ago, US Senator Paul Simon, brother of Bread for the World founder Art Simon, said that writing a letter to Congress on behalf of hungry people is almost certainly saving someone's life.

This year the Bread for the World Offering of Letters is centered around the 2023 Farm Bill. *(See the story on page 14 for more information about this legislation.)*

Bread is urging faith communities to write letters to US legislators and urge them to support programs that build "healthy, equitable, and sustainable food systems."

The sample letter on Bread's Offering of Letters website ([bread.org/ol](https://bread.org/ol)) includes this statement: "The farm bill is our nation's most important national food system legislation. It is critical to the work of ending hunger at home and abroad. Indeed, the farm bill impacts each one of us."

Letter writers are encouraged to request the following specific measures in the bill:

- Increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables by increasing support for produce-specific Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits in the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP). This provides resources on top of monthly SNAP benefits for the pur-

*Left: Efforts like the Bread for the World Offering of Letters bring about important nutrition programs. Photo courtesy of Caritas of Waco.*





chase of fresh fruits and vegetables, primarily at farmers' markets, for a limited number of households.

- Elimination of barriers to SNAP for marginalized populations, including the ban on former drug offenders, work requirements for college students. This would also include permission for Indigenous communities to administer SNAP and other federal nutrition programs on reservations.
- Increased support for post-harvest food recovery efforts, thereby keeping food out of landfills.
- Measures addressing the threat to food security posed by extreme weather.
- Support for funding of international food aid programs such as Food for Peace.

These emphases came from a year of listening sessions with 730 grassroots advocates and meetings with stakeholders, including Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous farmers and food system leaders, Historically Black College and Universities, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) officials, and local food system leaders (including recipients of USDA grants). These listening sessions were designed to learn what these people are planning to advocate for in the 2023 farm bill, and to build and strengthen relationships.

Bread staff also met with Congressional offices in leadership positions on Senate and House Agriculture committees and subcommittees to introduce Bread's farm bill policy team to them and gain insight on what Senate and House members can be expected to prioritize in the farm bill.

Information about the Farm Bill, what these advocates and stakeholders hope will happen can be found on the Offering of Letters website ([bread.org/ol](http://bread.org/ol)), along with step-by-step instructions for holding an Offering of Letters. The site includes fact sheets, bulletin inserts, posters, sample letters, social media posts, and infographics.

Southwest Regional Organizer Lupe Conchas said that handwrit-

ten letters are the most effective, hand-delivered to the legislator's district office. He said that participants could also mail them to their regional organizer, who could then deliver them in person. Interested congregational leaders can find information there about their regional organizers on the Offering of Letters site.

—Katie Cook is the Seeds editor. Source: Bread for the World.



*Right: The Farm Bill affects farmers (see top photo by PixDelux, courtesy of iStock) and children whose families are at risk for food insecurity (see bottom photo by Susan Mullally, courtesy of the Gospel Cafe (Waco, TX).*

# About the Farm Bill

When the 2023 Farm Bill is signed into law (hopefully this year), it will affect US agriculture policy and spending for five years. Initiated in 1933 to help farmers get through the Great Depression, the Farm Bill is an omnibus law that guides a wide array of food and agriculture programs. The Farm Bill helps farmers weather downswings in commodity prices. It also protects waterways and forests and supports the development of markets for local food.

The US Congress has enacted 18 Farm Bills. The 19th is expected to be enacted during the 90th anniversary of the original. In recent decades, the bill has increasingly affected more than just farmers. Since 1973, nutrition programs have been an increasingly major part of the legislation.

The Farm Bill now in effect is the \$28 billion Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018. According to the USDA, the 12 titles in the 2018 farm bill, in effect until September 30 of this year, include farm commodity revenue supports, agricultural conservation, trade and foreign food assistance, farm credit, research, rural development, forestry, bioenergy, horticulture and domestic nutrition assistance.

Most of its funds have gone to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp Program.

According to the Bipartisan Policy Center, based in Washington, DC, the “nutrition title,” the portion of the funds for nutrition programs like SNAP, is projected to make up 84 percent of the 2023 bill. This increase reflects pandemic assistance, as well as changes in nutrition program participation and adjustments to benefits. According to the Congressional Budget Office’s May 2022 baseline for the legislation’s major programs, the 2023 Farm Bill is estimated to cost \$1.295 trillion over the next 10 years.

Anti-hunger advocates such as Bread for the World are asking that the bill include three major components—Nutrition, Equity and Sustainability. Under the Nutrition banner, advocates hope that SNAP and other programs will be protected and even expanded. The Equity component calls for designers of the programs to be mindful of marginalized groups who experience food insecurity and to end inequities in services. Under Sustainability, concerns addressed include food waste and environmental sustainability.

Some of the federal nutrition programs included in the 2023 bill include the following:

- SNAP,
- The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP),
- Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR),
- Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP),
- Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP),
- Seniors Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP),
- Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) and
- Community Food Projects.

Advocates for food security might be surprised to find that the Farm Bill does not include the Women, Infants and Children program (WIC) or the National School Lunch Program. Those programs come under separate legislation—the Child Nutrition Reauthori-

Please see “Farm Bill” on page 15.

*Left: The 2023 Farm Bill includes a number of programs designed to provide healthy foods to people to need them. Photo courtesy of Caritas of Waco.*





# Humana and Feeding America Join Forces to Fight Hunger

“What we eat plays a significant role in both our physical and mental health, and we know economic constraints can take a toll on the ability to access and purchase healthy foods,” said George Renaudin, Medicare President for the medical insurance company Humana.

That’s why, for the past 23 years, Humana has partnered with Feeding America. This year, Humana pledges to help end food insecurity with a \$625,000 grant, which will support mobile food pantries in nine states: Ohio, Michigan, Missouri, Texas, Mississippi, Georgia, Tennessee, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

“One in 10 individuals—including one in eight children—in the United States are food insecure. Every community in the country is home to families who face hunger,” said Casey Marsh, Chief Development Officer for Feeding America. “Mobile food pantries provide access to healthy foods for neighbors living in underserved areas. We are grateful to Humana for supporting our efforts of expanding mobile food pantries to better serve communities, including seniors, experiencing food insecurity.”

Mobile food pantries bring the food to where it is most needed by partnering with churches, organizations, community center schools and businesses to provide a safe drive-up or drive-thru option for those seeking assistance. These locations are normally located in areas known as food deserts, where grocery stores and food pantries are not easily accessible and nutritious food items are not readily available. On top of providing food, some locations provide personal care items such as toilet paper, hygiene care and more, since these items are usually overpriced or not available at convenience stores in the area.

In addition to supporting Feeding America’s Mobile Food Pantry Program, the Humana Foundation also provided support for the launch of an online grocery ordering system called OrderAhead—a “fast, convenient, private way for you and your family to get the food you need.”

This pilot program, which launched in October of 2020, works to reduce the physical and social barriers too often encountered by those facing hunger.

The premise is simple: Go online to [www.orderahead.org](http://www.orderahead.org) on your desktop, tablet or smartphone, type in your zip code to see if your area is covered, order

the food you like from the list provided, then pick it up at a participating food pantry. And the best part? It’s all completely free. The 26 food bank partners have provided food for close to 54,000 people equaling a food distribution of 1.3 million pounds.

Since Feeding America and Humana’s partnership began, Together Humana Inc. and the Humana Foundation have given \$6.7 million in support of Feeding America’s national hunger-relief programs.

—Compiled by Dawn Michelle Michals. Sources: Humana, Feeding America.



## *Farm Bill,*

*continued from page 14*

ization Bill. Congress has been working on this bill as well as the Farm Bill. According to *Lancaster Farming*, both bills go through the Agriculture Committee in the Senate, but in the House, the children’s bill falls to the Education and Labor Committee. However, although it is not directly responsible for school meals, the Farm Bill can have an impact on that program, because the USDA foods program provides a significant portion of the food in school lunches, as well as the Farm to School and healthy snack programs.

Any way you look at it, the Farm Bill will have a profound impact on food security in the US.

—Compiled by Seeds staff. Sources: Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), Bipartisan Policy Center, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Congressional Research Service, Lancaster Farming (Ephrata, PA), *Bread for the World*.

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## Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings

Whatever else the true preaching of the word would need to include, it at least would have to be a word that speaks from the perspective of those who have been crushed and marginalized in our society. It would need to be a word of solidarity, healing and love in situations of brokenness and despair and a disturbing and troubling word of justice to those who wish to protect their privilege by exclusion.

—Letty M. Russell,  
*Church in the Round*



art by Sally Lynn Askins

### Statement of Purpose

Seeds of Hope is a private, independent group of believers responding to a common burden for the poor and hungry people in God's world, and acting on the strong belief that biblical mandates to feed the poor were not intended to be optional. The group seeks out people of faith who feel called to care for poor and vulnerable people; and to affirm, enable and empower a variety of responses to the problems of poverty.

### Editorial Address

Seeds is housed by the community of faith at Seventh & James Baptist Church. Mailing address: 602 James Ave., Waco, TX 76706; Phone: 254/755-7745; Fax: 254/753-1909; E-mail: seedseditor1@gmail.com. Web: www.seedspublishers.org. Copyright © 2023; ISSN 0194-4495. Seeds of Hope, Inc., holds the 501(c)3 nonprofit tax status.

Seeds also produces *Sacred Seasons*, a series of worship materials for Advent, Lent and an annual Hunger Emphasis—with an attitude “toward justice, peace and food security for all of God's children.” These include litanies, sermons, children's and youth activities, bulletin art and drama.

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