

## Fair Food and Farm Bills Make for Good Friends

### FEEDING INDIANA'S HUNGRY INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

On National Hunger Awareness Day in 2005, Indiana's then lieutenant governor announced the state's support of the newly formed state food bank association, Feeding Indiana's Hungry. Jane Avery, our founder and former head of Community Harvest Food Bank, often told the story of the lieutenant governor introducing our food bankers to agriculture leaders with asks of, "What can your organization do to help them?"

Nearly two decades later, we find ourselves a tenant of the state's pork producers in a building owned by the corn and soybean associations. The beef cattlemen are down the hall, and the dairy folks just moved in across from us. We often find ourselves at state and county fairs sampling fair food and admiring prize livestock. Any opportunity to thank a farmer is a good day. Every farmer we've met contributes to hunger relief through the county Farm Bureau or Future Farmers of America (FFA), their regional food bank or church pantry or by taking extra produce from their garden to someone down the road who could use a hand. Farmers understand they feed the whole world—no exceptions.

Working with the agriculture community doesn't make us a part of it, though. Dairy margins and crop insurance are issues food bankers don't contemplate. We don't lose sleep about rain or crop prices. But most everything we do in the food banking world relies on farmers.

We've been fortunate in Indiana to be welcomed to the ag family as a friendly neighbor, and we do our best to show it. Certainly, the thank yous go a long way, but the two-way conversations go even farther.

A great case in point: during the process leading up to the last two Farm Bill deliberations, we were invited to participate in the Indiana Farm Bureau's Task Force, which comprises farmers and ranchers from across the state who represent diverse commodities. We talk through every title of the Farm Bill and listen to national ag experts. We share what's in the Nutrition title of the bill: how programs like TEFAP benefit farmers;



CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

## ADVOCACY IN ACTION

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the economic multipliers of SNAP; and how the Thrifty Food Plan works. We routinely advocate federally for TEFAP with our federal delegation. In Indiana, we talk about how great TEFAP product is, thank the farmers who produce it and explain that TEFAP isn't the only source of food the food banks distribute, just part of it.

Ultimately, we educate ag partners on our anti-hunger programs, and they share thoughts with us on their issues such as crop insurance, conservation and dairy prices. The mutual appreciation goes far, and in the long run has gained us support for federal nutrition programs from their leadership.

The last Farm Bill, we were fortunate to do joint Hill visits with Indiana Farm Bureau staff and hope to do so again. Walking together into a room of elected officials with mutual respect and understanding has been a win-win every time for Hoosier farmers and our clients.

Along the way there have been challenges and wins. The biggest challenge has been fundraising, as our target audience are pork producers themselves. Their industry has had so much uncertainty the last few years and that uncertainty has been complicated by price fluctuation and inflation.

However, for every challenge, there's a win. One example is the **Million Meals program**, an ongoing campaign for Indiana pork producers and industry leaders to donate pork products to Indiana residents experiencing hunger. This was our first big partnership with the ag community, and not only has it been a major success, but it has also led to many other partnerships.

## CONTACT

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