

A Place at the Table (outline)

Hunger and food insecurity - why it must be eliminated

- Because food is necessary to life.
- Because “Food is a human right” [statement is also on Boulder County DHHS webpage]
- Because malnutrition affects children’s physical and mental development. (In film, Rosie, age 10 in Collbran, CO, can’t focus on school work, imagines her teacher as a banana, other students as oranges and apples.)
- For our national strength, national security. Malnourished children grow into 19–24-year-olds, 75% of whom are unfit for military service, says then-U.S. Sec of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, with obesity a major factor.
- To save millions of dollars on U.S. health-care costs - with the obesity epidemic (children and adults) has come an alarming increase in diabetes, heart disease, and other diseases.

Causes of hunger and food insecurity

Poverty— Food insecurity is not because of a shortage of food but because of poverty. Why are people poor? is a political question about power, class, and persistent inequality in America. Americans are in denial.

(End of film:) We talk about America as the land of opportunity and about caring about one another, but we also talk about self-reliance and liberty, and “we worry that someone else is getting something for free.”

- Poverty owing to various misfortunes. Unemployment. Inadequate minimum wage. Low wages.
- Good, nutritious food is more expensive (per calorie) than processed food, junk food, snacks.
- Schools cannot afford to serve healthy lunches.
- Good food may not be available to shoppers (food deserts) - no time and \$ to travel to good grocery store (Jonestown, Mississippi, restaurant cook-&-factotum, mother of four boys, drives 45 mins. each way).
- Individual doesn’t want to seek help - internal sense of failure, fear of social stigma. Police officer with inadequate salary says “sometimes you just need extra help,” but needing the food bank is “very grounding.”
- Cliff effect - Barbie Izquierdo in N. Phil. lands job, loses child care benefit, SNAP, and free school meals.
- Congress underfunds safety-net - cuts funding for SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly food stamps), Child Nutrition program, school lunch program, and other assistance programs.
- **Money in Politics:** Congress subsidizes corporate processed-food industry, responding to expensive lobbying. Congress does not subsidize producers of fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods.
- Americans are not insisting on improved policies and legislation. (Denial? Ignorance and apathy?)

Toward food security

Provide financial resources

- Adequate wages - Living wage laws - and adequate employment. Realistic minimum wage laws.
- Cash assistance for buying food - SNAP (Boulder County DHHS calls it Food Assistance).

Provide food itself, esp. nutritious food

- Free and reduced-price school lunch, breakfast.
- Food banks - Food Bank of the Rockies, where Pastor Bob fetches food for Collbran, CO.
- “Soup kitchens” (generic term) - Pastor Bob’s Wednesday night meals, after-school Kids’ Cafe.
- ‘Chefs Move To Schools’ Launch organized by Tom Colicchio; Mrs. Obama greets 600–700 chefs on White House lawn. Mission is to improve school lunches, increase funding.
- Jonestown teacher introduces honeydew melon to her 2nd-graders, as “better than chips.”

Comment in the film: Churches and nonprofits, originally providing “emergency” help, are now dealing with a chronic problem. We have “a broken system with no one accountable.”

Lobby Congress - Witnesses to Hunger: 40 Philadelphia moms speak at U.S. Senate hearing.

U.S. Rep. (now Sen.) James McGovern (Mass.) says he was hungry living on food stamps for one week. Jeff Bridges in film asserts that in the 1970s hunger was almost eliminated after Americans insisted that Congress act.