

Testimony

**Barbara Prather, Executive Director
Northeast Iowa Food Bank**

Mr. Chairman and Committee members, my name is Barbara Prather, I am the Executive Director of the Northeast Iowa Food Bank in Waterloo, IA. I want to first thank you for giving me the honor of testifying today on Flood Relief in Iowa and our Food Bank's response to it.

To give you some background on our organization, the Northeast Iowa Food Bank is a nonprofit organization that provides food and grocery products to organizations and individuals in Northeast Iowa, while offering hunger education to the community and those in need. We are members of Feeding America, formerly known as America's Second Harvest. Nationally our network of 205 food banks provides emergency food assistance to over 25 million Americans each year. In Northeast Iowa, we distribute nearly 5 million pounds of food each year through 200 charitable agencies.

Disaster Relief for us began the day after the EF5 tornado hit Parkersburg and New Hartford, Iowa and traveled through northern Black Hawk County. We were called out on Memorial Day to provide food and water to northern Black Hawk County. In the week that followed, working with The Salvation Army, the American Red Cross along with the Parkersburg Food Pantry, New Hartford and City of Dunkerton we provided food and water to relief workers as well as the victims. Working with our national organization, we were able to gather donated food and water to provide for those who needed it.

Two weeks after the tornado, we felt the first impact from many days of hard rain, On Monday June 9th, we received a call from a Pastor in Greene, IA informed us that the water was rising and there were no resources available to help this small town. We made arrangements to bring product up there the next morning. Greene is a community that had not used our services before. Here is one story from Greene, IA.

A family in Greene, IA turned for help to the newly stocked food pantry. The husband has a good job, but drives 34 miles one way to it and the mother does in home day care. They lost everything in the flood. The water started coming up on Sunday night and by Tuesday they had to evacuate their home. They had always helped the local food pantry, but never thought they would need their help. While the family had flood insurance, they knew it would be a struggle to pay their rent, and mortgage. They eventually applied for and received food stamps, but they really needed the help from the local food pantry until they were able to receive their food stamps. As you can imagine, it was very hard for these hard working people to go in and ask for help, but they were grateful that it was there when they needed it.

By Tuesday, June 10th, we knew we were in for very serious flooding in Waterloo/Cedar Falls. The Food Bank was called to Black Hawk County's Emergency Operations Center (EOC). Our truck made it to Greene with product, but what should have been a 90 mile round trip ended up being 240 mile round trip, because all the roads were flooded. That day, we began trucking food to Cedar Falls, Waterloo, Buchanan County, and Butler County. At the same time, we began making arrangements to secure our facility, which was right along the Cedar River. Thanks to local support we emptied our warehouse and kept the product on trailers for a few days.

Throughout the week we worked with officials in Waterloo, Cedar Falls, Waverly, Finchford, LaPorte City, Parkersburg, New Hartford, Independence, LaMont, Waukon, and other areas to get food and water out to relief centers. We followed the Black Hawk County Health Department:

when they did their immunizations we took food and water for people. Later in the week, parts of Waterloo on the East Side began to have water back up. This is a low income area and many residents in that area had water in their basements.

Here is one story from a family in Waterloo:

A woman had recently switched jobs and was offered her first vacation in over 3 years, she expected nice weather and relaxation. Mother Nature had other plans. This single mother from Waterloo, was affected by the Iowa floods just days into her vacation. She and her nine-year-old daughter spent the first two days of their vacation together helping others nearby sandbag before they were evacuated from the area. Upon their return home, they found that their own neighborhood was in the path of the flood. She went to bed at 11 pm that night with a half inch of water in the basement and woke up with 4 feet of water.

This mother's basement was in ruin and she needed help immediately. She attributes much of her personal flood recovery to agencies like the Salvation Army, Red Cross and the Northeast Iowa Food Bank. These organizations provided and prepared meals for herself and her young daughter. The Northeast Iowa Food Bank provided much needed food, as well as other important items including toilet paper, and cleaning supplies.

As for the aftermath, this mother explains that insurance coverage did not pertain to her situation because her home is not in a flood zone, so flood insurance was not required. However, FEMA did step in replacing almost everything that was lost by the flood disaster.

This mother and her daughter received a great deal of assistance from friends, family, neighbors and organizations like the Northeast Iowa Food Bank. Still, despite her own hardships, she was quick to respond to the call of others when they were in need. She continues to volunteer as president of her neighborhood association.

What worked well for the Northeast Iowa Food Bank in providing disaster assistance was the many partners and organizations we worked with. Partnering at local relief centers to provide food made it much easier for us to drop product off for many people to pick up. For example, on the Saturday after the flood, alone, we delivered product many times to the North Cedar area of Cedar Falls, in addition to other areas. This was just one of many areas. It went out as fast as it was brought out there.

To highlight what we saw during the disasters:

- There was considerable press coverage about the availability Disaster Food Stamp Assistance. In the state of Iowa, over 13,000 households and 35,000 people received Disaster Food Stamp Assistance. I was extremely impressed with how the outreach took place and people knew that they could apply for them. I believe our area did an exceptional job in regards to getting the word out about their availability.
- Many people accessed its service. Working with FEMA, we were able to access MRE's and water. When our warehouse couldn't handle the load, we partnered with the Salvation Army.
- Our state staff who are responsible for TEFAP were on the phone with us during the flood asking what type of extra resources we needed. I know that they were working closely with USDA officials. We were offered our July shipment in June, but we decided

to hold off, because we did not want to short ourselves on product in the long term, when we knew we would need the product even more.

- I would also like to stress the importance of the 211 system. For us, FEMA began giving our number out to people in need of food assistance, it wasn't just locally it was statewide. Because of the 211 referral system, we were able to give people that number to access for food needs in their community.
- FEMA assisted us in getting two trucks and drivers for a week after the flood waters had receded. These were used for us to deliver out regular delivery of food products.
- Since last spring we have seen the amount of TEFAP foods increase substantially due to increased support from USDA and the increased support from the Farm Bill. This increased funding from the Farm Bill is critical to our food bank and others in Iowa and throughout the United States. In addition to our continuing need for more food, we are really in need of additional storage and distribution funds as authorized in the Farm Bill. Increased food and fuel prices have left food banks in Iowa and throughout the country with a shortage of funds to pay for storing and distributing food to the agencies we serve. I want to thank you Senator Harkin for your leadership in getting that vital funding included in the bill.

What would be helpful in the future is to be able to access USDA TEFAP foods immediately, rather than taking our July allotment of entitlement food early, from day one of the crisis without having to worry about them counting against future shipments. We know that once the waters recede, we need to have product available immediately for people, to meet their immediate needs and that future needs will also be greater as people work to recover from the disaster. We had product, thanks to what was stocked in our warehouse, but we estimate that we served 5,000 people that week alone, which depletes an inventory really fast.

The HACAP Food Reservoir in Cedar Rapids, provided over 120,000 pounds of product to relief centers that first week, this went to help the Salvation Army and other places to provide meals for people. In addition, it went to other pantries to help fill the gap during the height of the flood. The Food Bank did make up 1200 emergency food boxes that were sent to various Resource Centers in the community.

The need is real. Many people are too proud to ask for help. Families are reaching out to Food Banks and Food Pantries like never before, because of the tragedies they have faced as well as high food and gas prices. In total, just in Black Hawk County there have been 4300 FEMA applications. In our service area alone, which covers 16 northeastern counties there have been nearly 10,000 applicants.

To date, the Northeast Iowa Food Bank has provided over 280,000 pounds of disaster assistance product to nearly 60 organizations. It was a small part in a much larger picture of what is happening and continuing to happen in Northeast Iowa. Because of the increased need due to the struggling economy and the impact of our tornado and flood disasters, as fast as this product comes in, it is gone. The need is there. Even before these tragedies we had seen an increase of 25% in the numbers of clients our agencies are serving. With winter coming and some families paying a mortgage payment and rent payment, because they can't live in their house that was flooded, we are anticipating seeing many more people through the doors of food pantries in Iowa. As you know, recovering from disasters does not happen over night. Recovery takes many years. We are going to need ongoing help to help these families along with families who are working and living on a limited income. With high food and fuel prices their budgets are already stretched, adding a disaster to mix does not help. Both of these families are trying to do the best

they can, and will bounce back. These are just two examples of many similar faces in Iowa. Please continue to help us.

Thank you again Mr. Chairman for giving me the opportunity to share our experiences in helping to meet the food needs of people in Northeast Iowa following our back to back tornado and flooding disasters.