

Arise Town Hall Tuesday – Feeding our families August 18, 2020

We explored ways to increase household food security during and after the recession.

Kim Clark's Breakout Session

Discussed several different communities and their response to COVID 19

- The United Way in Huntsville has increased capacity
- Several churches in Montgomery are assisting with food boxes
- Birmingham's faith community has provided a resource list for people in the community
- Anniston's food banks have increased services

Discussed the impact of increased need on local food banks and services due to COVID

- Unable to hold fundraisers due to restrictions
- Supplies becoming scarce
- Fresh food becoming more sporadic than usual which impacts nutrition

Food Bank in Northern AL has "Double up food bucks" that can be used to increase SNAP benefits at farmers' market

Would like to eliminate or decrease the number of restrictions in obtaining food benefits
Encourage school districts to apply for CEP

Increase the types of food that WIC approves, remove those restrictions

Presdelane Harris' Breakout Session

Participants began discussions by sharing issues about which they were passionate and/or what motivated them to register for this meeting. Here are highlights of issues discussed:

- Several expressed an overall concern/passion about social justice issues.
- Great concern about how families are able to eat with the pandemic and loss of jobs and income. General concern about joblessness, low wages.
- Lot of concern about children and students accessing free meals since many schools are virtual. Some school feeding programs are erratic which can also limit food opportunities people/children have.
- Many were concerned about food insecurity before the pandemic. With the pandemic, many are even more food insecure.
- Churches, schools and other organizations that help provide food to people/families have depleted resources during this time of greatest need. Many work/volunteer with these organizations and see needs first hand.

Solutions highlighted by group:

- Full implementation of CEP (Community Eligibility Provision)

- Delivery of school meals to the children at home in their neighborhoods. It was discussed that in Birmingham, buses have been delivering meals to children.
- Expansion of Farm to Table type programs. Organizations/farmers can sign up with the USCA to be a distributor. Also includes gardens/community gardening type projects.

Other issues raised:

- Can Arise work with legislature to unwind restrictions on unemployment compensation? We need to undo the time limits places on length of time to receive UI benefits, etc.
- Economic security, economic development and workforce development are needed to truly remove barriers to prosperity.
- Voting and the Census are huge.

Stan Johnson's Breakout Session

1. **Tax on Groceries** was the first topic discussed. Taking the tax off groceries was strongly felt a key to a better fed Alabama. The discussion also entertained how to fund education if the tax is taken off of grocery.
2. **Double Bucks program** was offered as a solution for those individuals receiving SNAP. Some participants were not aware of the program so a walk through was provided by one of the breakout participants. Basically, a SNAP recipient would go to a farmer's market and buy an eligible food with their EBT Card and it would be matched by the Double Buck for more fruits and veggies up to \$20 free per day.
3. **Food Deserts** was a concern of the group. They were interested in obtaining a map of food deserts in Alabama. A participant shared the USDA link in the chat for [food deserts throughout the country](#): Interactive web tool.
4. **Community Gardens and Farmer Markets** were discussed as ways to feed cheaply low-income neighborhoods. A grower in the group from Auburn, Nancy Adams, made the point it still comes down to the choices people make. She used the example of a low-income family given the choice to come out to her farm and pick health organic produce for free would more than likely choose the corner Taco Bell for convenience over driving out to her farm.
5. **Cooking class for bag babies ...** we have generations of grown folk who do not know how to cook. So, when we are talking about food security, we need to address teaching young folks to cook. They used to have cooking classes in public school. This is something we may need to go back to teaching in our schools.

Mike Nicholson's Breakout Session

- My breakout room had several grassroots activists as well direct service providers, so our discussion was very much structured around their experiences and ideas.
- One of the participants began a discussion of the impact that nutrition has on a variety of issues with low-income people.
 - She seemed to be implying that many mental health issues, as well as some uncommon physical problems, were the result of poor nutrition.
- Someone who worked for the Birmingham area foodbank was interested in connecting to and working with folks in the area who could help them reach more people.
- There were also questions about food security in general, and who within the state bureaucratic system was in charge of food security and how we can influence them.

- There was a suggestion that if we couldn't get rid of the grocery tax, maybe we could find a way to funnel the revenue raised into food security programs.
- A participant very passionately advocated for a livable wage and how it would address a number of issues, but especially issues of food security. SNAP isn't enough.
- Someone else suggesting working towards a partnership between food security advocates and the state Medicaid program.
 - Improving the nutrition of children will save Medicaid in the long-term.
- One participant doesn't have a car, so she talked about the challenges she's faced with food security, as well as being an advocate for food security.
- One participant also suggested the possibility of using trucks/vans that schools and churches already have to work with the food banks to take food to people so they can get food even without transportation.

Debbie Smith's Breakout Session

- Ways to expand access to fresh, healthy foods
 - SNAP double up benefits - People can double their SNAP benefits if they use them at a farmers market
 - Backpack program - churches, nonprofits, and other organizations work with schools to send food home in children's backpacks.
 - YMCA brown bag bus
 - Canned foods delivered by mail
 - Fund community gardens at the statewide level
 - Create an incentive program for farmers markets to set up in food desert areas
 - Hold more cooking classes with people. Many people don't even know how to use fresh fruits and vegetables in their cooking, so simply giving them greater access to healthy foods will not be enough.
 - Farm delivery programs, co-ops, and farm shares could be expanded to include people with low-incomes
- Food distribution during COVID
 - Food banks have lifted restrictions on who can get food. They're not examining people's household income any longer. They're just helping everyone who says they have a need.
 - Food distribution has been somewhat haphazard. People are not really sure where they need to go to get help.
 - Applying for SNAP benefits online/over the phone should be the new normal