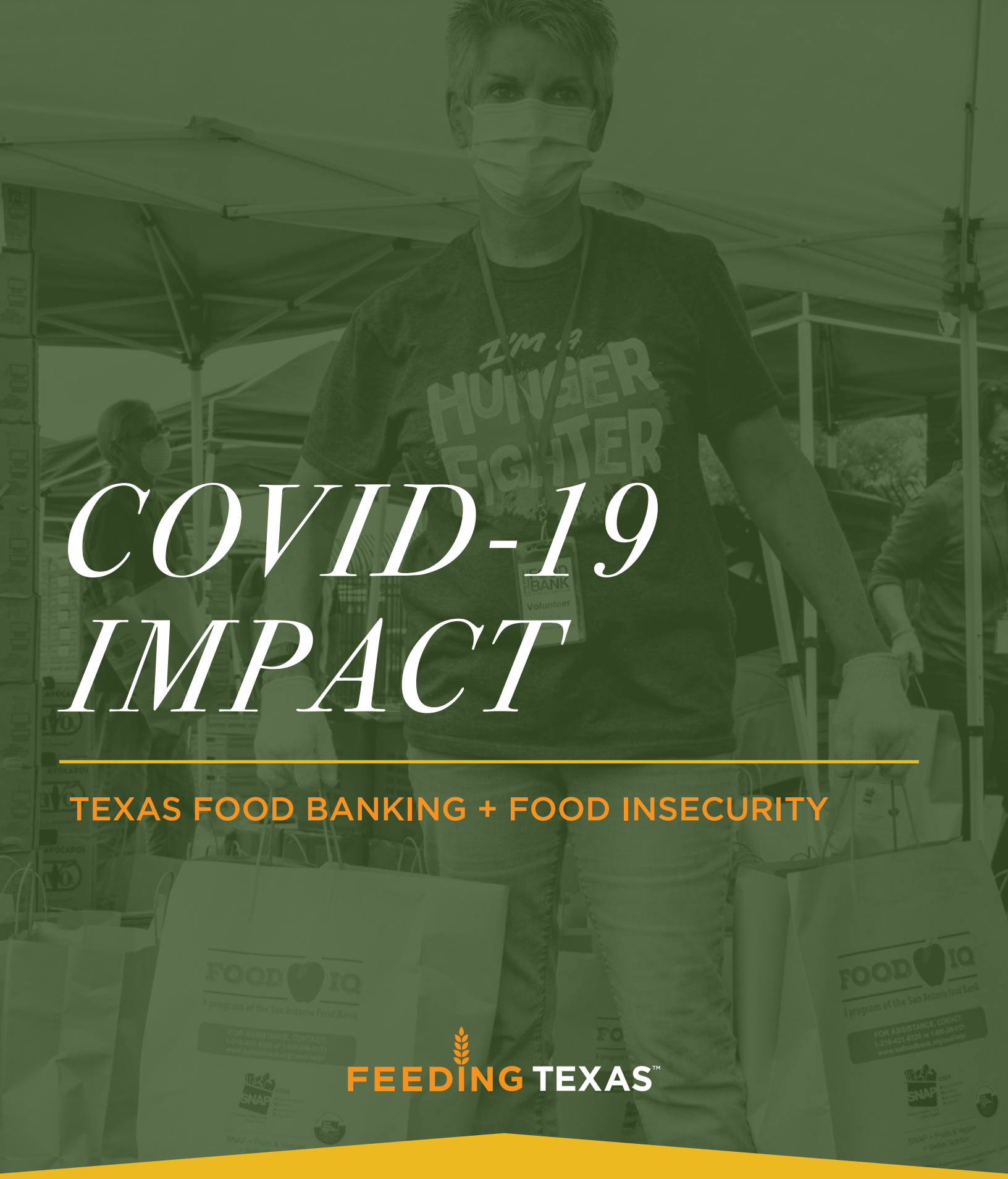



# COVID-19 IMPACT

## TEXAS FOOD BANKING + FOOD INSECURITY

FEEDING TEXAS™

*NOVEMBER 2020*

# A NOTE FROM THE CEO

It feels like a lifetime, but it was just eight months ago that the 21 food banks in the Feeding Texas network jumped on an emergency call in response to the growing news of a pandemic. A week later, COVID-19 was declared a national emergency. Texas food banks are no stranger to disaster, having helped Gulf Coast residents through Hurricane Harvey and supported our neighbors in Louisiana following Hurricane Katrina—two of the worst disasters in U.S. history. Still, looking back on that first call, I don't think any of us could have predicted the dramatic and devastating impact this pandemic would have on our network and the people we serve. As businesses shuttered their doors and grocery stores struggled to keep enough food on their shelves, millions of Texans turned to food banks for help feeding their families. Facing a perfect storm of surging demand, a sharp decline in food and monetary donations, major disruptions to the supply chain, and the significant loss of volunteers so critical to their operations, food banks adopted a new distribution model that enabled them to meet the growing demand safely and efficiently.

Our food banks could not have acted as quickly and effectively without the generous and timely support of the philanthropic and business communities. As our elected officials met to determine the appropriate level of federal aid, the immediate financial support we received from private donors helped food banks keep pace with the rapidly increasing demand. This private support continues to be essential to our ability to adapt and respond, but without the federal stimulus funding for hunger relief in the Families First Coronavirus Relief and CARES Acts, food banks alone would not have been able meet the elevated need in their communities.

Although immediate hunger relief will always be the primary focus of the Feeding Texas network, COVID-19 reminds us that ending hunger is about more than filling bellies, just as food banks are but one part of a larger anti-hunger ecosystem. In fixing its spotlight on the disproportionate impact of the virus on people of color, COVID-19 also teaches us that food justice is not possible without racial justice. While our economy will rebound from the ravages of COVID-19, and a vaccine will protect us from its recurrence, hunger will persist until we correct the racial inequities that perpetuate poverty and injustice. Feeding Texas is committed to addressing the root causes of hunger while continuing to ensure access to food for people experiencing hunger. We are excited to work alongside the thought leaders in our communities to meet both challenges in the months and years to come.

We are humbled by the support from our communities and for the faith that has been placed in our network. Although this crisis is far from over, we pause for a moment to express our gratitude to our donors and partners, share the impact of your support and leadership, and reflect on the challenges ahead.

*SINCERELY,*
*CELIA COLE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER*

# *COVID-19 IMPACT + LOOKING FORWARD*

# IMPACT ON FOOD INSECURITY

## AN INCREASE IN FOOD INSECURITY LEADS TO HIGHER DEMAND AT FOOD BANKS

**1 in 4**

**TEXAS FAMILIES IS FACING HUNGER DURING THE PANDEMIC**

- **Since COVID struck, the rate of food insecurity in Texas has more than doubled, from 13% of Texas households in 2019 to 31% in July.**
- **Latinx and Black community members are more likely to hold jobs that have been affected by the pandemic**, and thus, are more vulnerable to the COVID-related economic downturn—a driving force of food insecurity.
- **The number of families seeking assistance from Texas food banks has doubled since March.** Food banks served, on average, 400,000 families weekly in the first six months of the pandemic. Over half of these families were seeking food assistance for the first time.
- **Texas food banks distributed over 400 million pounds of food to their communities from March to August**, a 60% increase over the same period in 2019.

*"The kids are at home, and they are eating the whole day. We do need help."*

**MARIA, CENTRAL TEXAS MOM**

# IMPACT ON FOOD BANKING

## LOSS OF VOLUNTEERS AND LOCAL PARTNERS LEAD TO NEW DISTRIBUTION MODEL

- **Food banks lost 70% of their volunteer base due to the pandemic.** Their two most reliable sources of volunteers—employer-sponsored events and retirees—were disrupted due to shelter-in-place orders and health concerns.

- Traditionally, food banks rely on a network of more than 3,000 local partners, such as church pantries, Boys and Girls Clubs, and senior centers to get food to their communities. Many of these sites shut their doors during the pandemic, and **in some areas of the state food banks lost three-quarters of their local distribution partners.**

- **Large drive-through distributions became the safest and most efficient way to meet the demand.** Food banks expect to continue this model for at least the next six months.

- **Texas deployed 1,000 National Guard members to food banks** to make up for the lack of volunteers, providing a critical resource to manage the mass distributions.

**MOST FOOD BANKS ARE USING VOLUNTEERS AGAIN, BUT AT ONLY TWO-FIFTHS OF THE VOLUME AS BEFORE THE PANDEMIC.**

# SPOTLIGHT: THE NATIONAL GUARD

In April, the Department of Defense authorized Governor Greg Abbott to activate the National Guard to respond to COVID-19 at a 100% federal cost share. Over the summer, the Texas Military Department deployed over 1,000 National Guard members to food banks across the state to make up for the loss of volunteers. In September, the Texas Military Department mobilized a second round of troops. From packing boxes to directing traffic at distribution sites in 100-degree weather, the Guard worked tirelessly to support our food banks, virtually ensuring their ability to get food out the door and volunteering over 400,000 hours. We are grateful to these Texans for their service and contributions to our mission.

*"When I come to the Food Bank's distribution, it makes me happy and gives me hope. And that's hard to come by during this pandemic."*

**TENA, SOUTH TEXAS SENIOR**

# ROLE OF FEDERAL AID

## FEDERAL AID IS CRITICAL TO MEETING THE NEED FOR FOOD ASSISTANCE

Federal stimulus funding for hunger relief—in the form of increased funding for food banks and direct aid to families—has been critical to meeting the elevated need for food assistance during the pandemic.

**SNAP**—the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—is our nation's most important hunger relief program, helping millions of low-income Texans put food on the table. Congress increased funding for SNAP during the pandemic to allow States to provide the maximum benefit to all recipients. The USDA, which administers the program, also granted temporary flexibility to States to help them expedite benefits to families and manage the increased caseload.

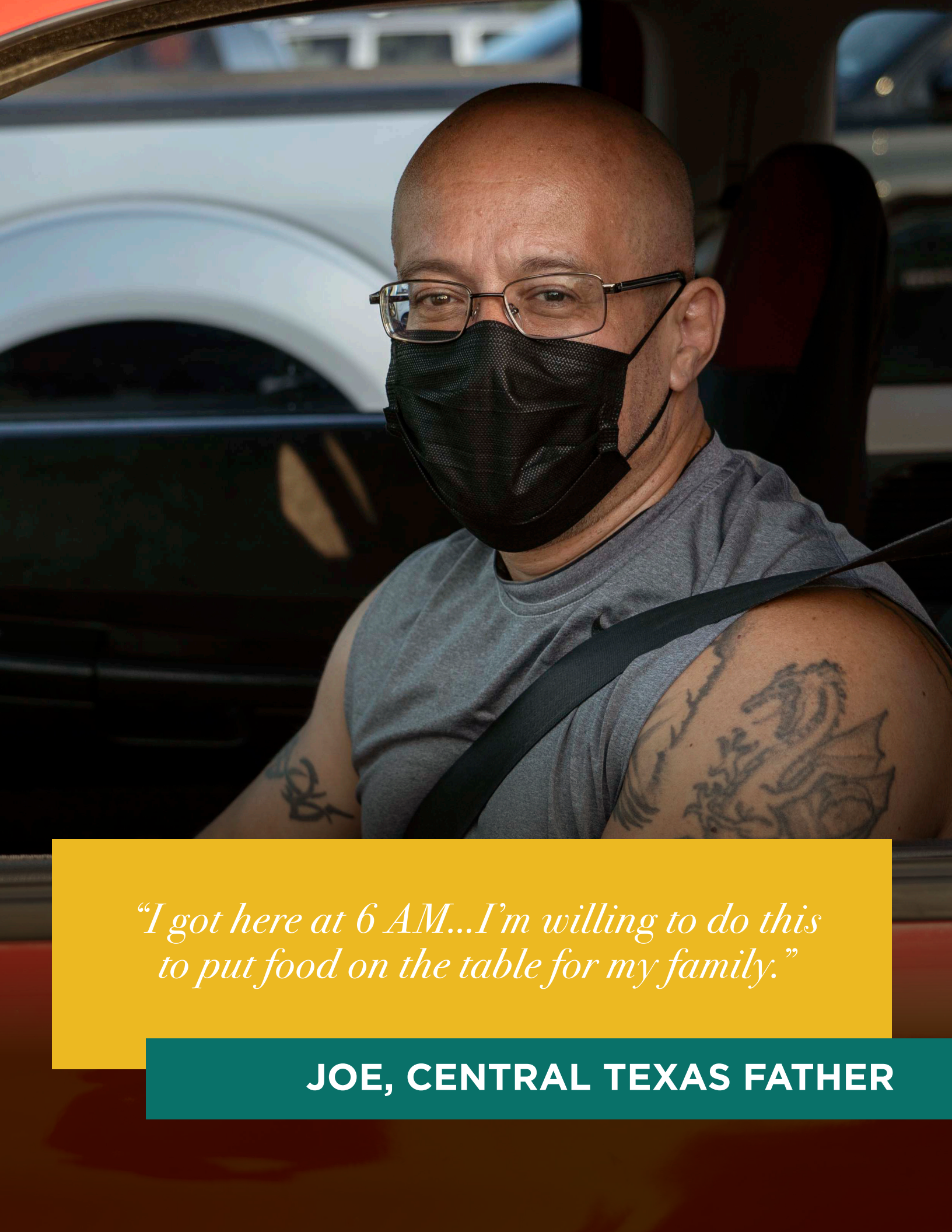
**The Child Nutrition Programs** include school meals, summer feeding, afterschool snacks/suppers, and WIC. In response to school closures and public health guidelines for social distancing, the USDA approved numerous changes to the Child Nutrition Programs to make it easier for government agencies, schools, and nonprofits to get meals to children safely and efficiently. These waivers are approved through the end of the 2020-21 school year.

**Pandemic EBT (P-EBT)** is a one-time replacement benefit for low-income families with children in the Nawtional School Lunch Program (NSLP) that missed school meals in the spring due to school closures. Eligible families received $285 per child on a debit card this summer. Congress approved a second round of P-EBT for low-income children who can't attend school this fall, and Texas is working on a plan for distributing these benefits.

The primary source of federal funding for charitable food assistance is **The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)**. USDA uses TEFAP funds to purchase surplus commodities from U.S. producers. These commodities are then distributed to States based on poverty and unemployment rates. Congress appropriated a total of $850M in additional funds for TEFAP purchases in the Families First Coronavirus Response and CARES Act. Texas food banks expected to receive ~$80M of these TEFAP purchases, but disruptions in the supply chain have delayed some shipments.

The USDA established the **Farmers to Families Food Box Program** as part of a broader Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) to support growers and producers who are hurting due to the disruption in the food supply chain. Since May, the USDA has awarded $4 Billion in contracts to distributors to purchase fresh produce, dairy and meat products from American producers and package these products into family-sized boxes for distribution by food banks and other non-profits to people in need. Although Texas food banks received far less product than they had anticipated, and the program has faced significant logistical challenges, the food boxes have contributed to a steady pipeline of nutritious food for people in need. The program is set to wrap-up completely by the end of December.

In May, Governor Abbott directed Chief Nim Kidd, head of the **Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM)**, to apply for FEMA "Public Assistance, Category B" funding to help food banks respond to COVID-19. TDEM provided a total of $133 Million in funding to the 21 food banks in our network to help them replenish their food supplies this summer. Texas used funds from the CARES Act for the 25% cost-share required to draw down these funds.



*"I got here at 6 AM...I'm willing to do this to put food on the table for my family."*

**JOE, CENTRAL TEXAS FATHER**

# LOOKING AHEAD

## ADAPTING, RESPONDING, AND SECURING CRITICAL FEDERAL FOOD ASSISTANCE

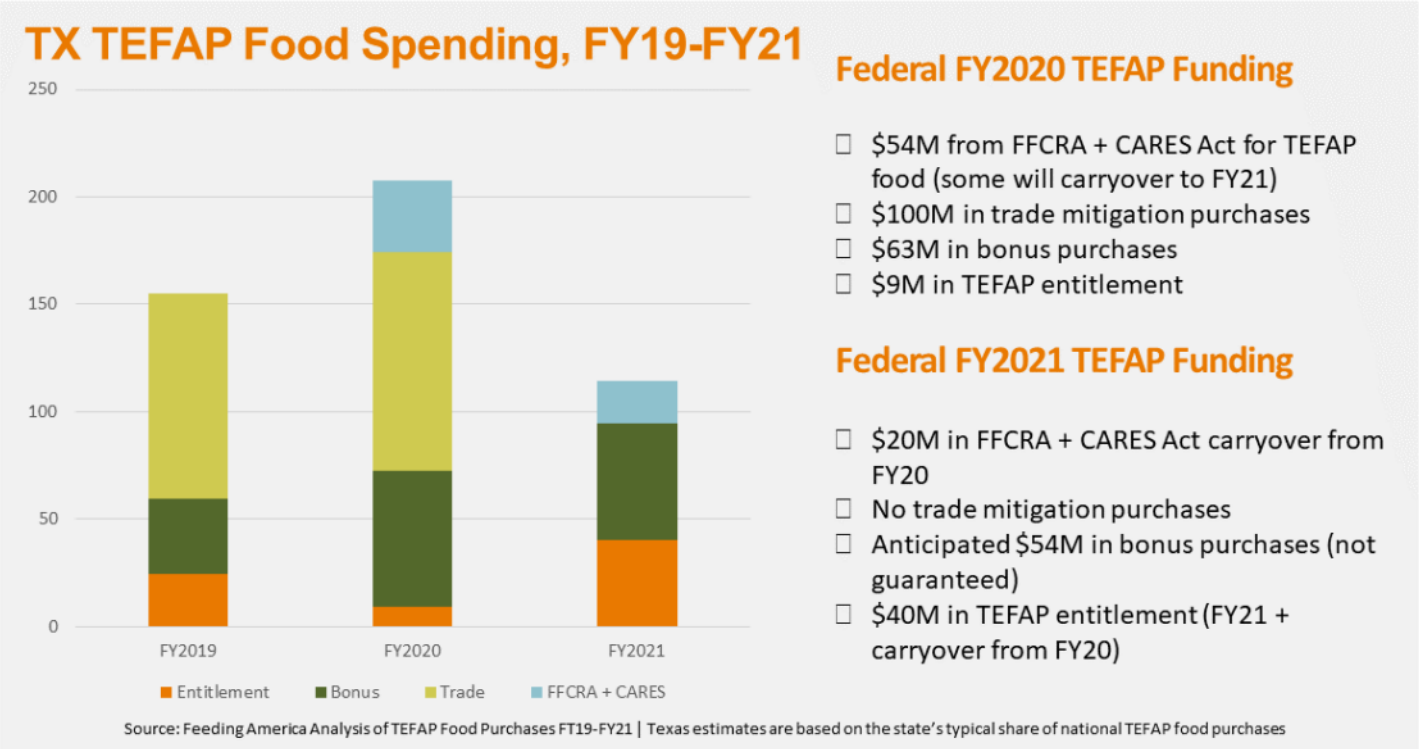
The economic fallout of COVID-19 is projected to continue for many months, with no decrease in demand for food assistance in sight. Texas food banks estimate they will need to distribute approximately 80 million pounds of food per month over the next six months to keep pace with the demand. A potential resurgence in Coronavirus cases could increase demand further. At the same time, the sharp decrease in federal funding for commodities and potential State budget cuts in 2021 will create a "food cliff" that could significantly impact the ability of Texas food banks to meet the need in their communities.

**FOOD BANKS ARE BRACING FOR A "FOOD CLIFF" IN JANUARY DUE TO THE END OF FEDERAL STIMULUS RELIEF AND A SHARP DECLINE IN FEDERAL CHARITABLE FOOD ASSISTANCE SUPPORT. DESPITE PERSISTENTLY HIGH FOOD INSECURITY AND DEMAND FOR FOOD ASSISTANCE, FOOD BANKS EXPECT TO RECEIVE HALF AS MUCH FEDERAL FOOD AID NEXT YEAR AS THEY DID IN 2020, AND 25% LESS THAN IN 2019 BEFORE THE PANDEMIC HIT.**

# TOP CONCERNS AMONG FOOD BANKS

COVID-19 has presented a perfect storm of increased demand, declines in donations of food, and disruptions to the food bank operating model. Feeding Texas recently surveyed its network to learn about their top concerns and needs over the next six months. These themes emerged:

- **Higher than normal operating costs and ongoing volunteer shortages** are straining food bank resources.
- **Sourcing enough healthy, nutritious food to meet the demand** is a top concern
- **Food banks worry about their capacity to meet the increased demand**, with many noting the need for additional cooler space and refrigerated trucks for distribution of perishable foods.
- **A high degree of concern for the mental health and morale** of food bank staff.




Public / private partnerships will be critical to support the millions of Texans facing food insecurity and economic uncertainty in the year to come. Securing more federal commodities and food donations will help to fill the gap, but we also need to increase investment in the federal food assistance programs to reduce the need for charitable food. With more than 3.8 million Texans having filed for unemployment benefits and schools struggling to stay open, families are juggling to pay rent, put food on the table, and meet basic needs. We need critical, short-term assistance for these families—we need SNAP.

**WITH MILLIONS OF TEXANS FILING FOR UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS AND SCHOOLS STRUGGLING TO STAY OPEN, FAMILIES ARE JUGGLING TO PAY RENT, PUT FOOD ON THE TABLE, AND MEET BASIC NEEDS. WE NEED CRITICAL, SHORT-TERM ASSISTANCE FOR THESE FAMILIES. WE NEED SNAP.**

# *OUR COMMITMENT*

The Feeding Texas Network will continue to adapt and respond to the challenges presented by COVID-19. Our food banks, their volunteers, and local partners will remain on the front line ensuring our neighbors have the food they need during this difficult time. We are confident in our elected officials to lead us through this crisis, and grateful for the ongoing support of our communities.

FEEDING TEXAS™

www.feedingtexas.org