



## INTERNATIONAL PANEL

7 May 2021

Paul Henrys, Chief Financial Officer, Feeding America

Full speech

1) **Looking back at 2020, what are the most important lessons learned, challenges and solutions that helped your organisation to face this unexpected year?**

Thank you, Laura, and thank you to everyone participating this morning or this afternoon or evening, depending on where you're joining us from and it's an honour for me to have this conversation with my colleagues, or as Jacques said, my friends on this morning.

I appreciate the question, right, and it had me thinking about three things in particular that we have been talking a bit about in the United States relative to the impact of the pandemic. The first thing really revolves around the impact on food supply. So, prior to the crisis the charitable food system relied heavily on salvageable food waste rescued from predominantly retail and manufacturing food channels. And those two channels in particular represented roughly 70% of the food that was rescued in any given year. The risk in that is that it's an overreliance and, in the United States, once the pandemic hits the volume, the donated volume from those channels began to dissipate, primarily because of consumer demand.

So, you saw families and individuals do what they needed to do, which was to access food from retailers and groceries, etc., but that put a constraint on the food that was available to be donated to the Food Bank network. And it really put us, the Feeding America network, and our Food Bank partners in a position where we needed to think differently about how we were accessing food. And we engaged partners, an example being manufacturers who had once focused on restaurants or food service operations that were idle roughly at the moment because a number of restaurants were closed, and we began conversations that we hadn't had



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before about how we could think about differently about accessing the food. We also made sure that we reinforced our efforts to partner with our government and really understanding what they could do to ensure that they were extending the resources that are available today to those struggling with hunger.

Another area that we spent a lot of time thinking about was around volunteers. Food Banks have historically been reliant on volunteers for repacking and distributing of food. During the pandemic, given the nature of social distancing, Food Banks in the United States reported an average of 67% decline in their volunteer base, which is dramatic. And it meant that they quickly needed to enervate and move to low-contact and or no-contact food packing and distribution models. From a solution perspective we spent time thinking about how can the food be packed differently or earlier so that it can be distributed easily and without contact to those who need it. In addition to thinking differently about partners, we were fortunate that in many cases members of our National Guard were able to step-in and act as volunteers to support the Food Bank network, as well as partnering with other organisations who are experts in volunteering.

The third area that we have spent a lot of time talking about as well is unfortunately not new for us, but the pandemic really shed light on the fact that communities of colour in the United States are more likely to face hunger. One in 13 white households face hunger, in contrast one in six Latino households face hunger, one in five black households face hunger and one in four native American households face hunger. And as we thought about our response to the pandemic and our response broadly to hunger in the United States, we recognised that we needed to further invest in our ability to reduce that disparity. As we think about the long-term and our need to end hunger in the States, not only do we need to do that currently, but we need to make sure that we are focused on addressing and reducing those disparities in those communities.

## 2) **What are the key aspects or elements that you see in the future of your organisation?**

Thank you, Laura. The pandemic and our response shed light on some of the greatest needs and the enormous potential for a lot of future solutions. I want to touch on something Nicola said around the fact that we're still in it, right, and we think the impact and the effects of the pandemic will continue. For hunger in the United States prior to the pandemic the Feeding America network provided access to over four billion meals a year, close and connected with and engaged with close to 40 million Americans. In the middle of the pandemic, both in terms of providing access to meals and as relates to connecting with Americans, both numbers increased from 40% to 50%. That, something Lisa talked about, has put an incredible strain on the network itself both as relates to its physical infrastructure and its people. And our focus as we look ahead into the future is just making sure we're doing everything possible that



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strengthens the capacity of the network and its ability to meet the demand that's out there and support and partner with communities across the country.

The second area that we're really focusing on and I'm going to repeat myself a little bit from my previous comments, is really making sure that we're leaning into the government's role in the response. We continue to engage, engage every single administration, whether it's the prior administration at the beginning of a pandemic or the current administration as we continue to respond to the pandemic, and talk about what's possible as relates to the nutrition programmes supported by the government, in addition to other legislation that supports incentives for other private sector partners to continue to work with us.

Third area we are focused on is around public engagement. As, in the United States in particular, if you think back over the last 12 or 16 months, the awareness of the issue of hunger, the engagement of individuals, foundations, private sector corporations have increased dramatically. You know, prior to the pandemic I would say we were grateful and fortunate for partners like General Mills and CAF. As we continue through the pandemic, I would say that we are blown away by their continued generosity to everyone, not only in the States but globally. And we know that in order for us to ensure that we sustain the response that we want to make sure that we're working closely together moving forward.

Our focus also continues to be on what more we can do to engage and elevate the experience of people who are accessing support through the network, making sure that we understand and leverage their expertise and knowledge. We are merely vessels in supporting what they're doing, their efforts and so as we think about how we engage communities across the country we are ensuring the network putting them at the centre of everything that we do in all of our decision-making.

- 3) **FEBA Annual Convention is a recognised UN Food Systems Independent Dialogue and this is a very precious occasion to ask you this question: what message would you like to share as a contribution to the United Nations Food Systems Summit? So, what's the message you would like to share with the UN Food Systems Summit?**

Thank you, Laura. I'd like to build on Lars' and Jacques' comments. Just in, I'd really like to talk about partnerships, right. This is an opportunity for all of us collectively to continue to work together. You've heard me talk at length about partnerships with governments and the critical role that they play not only in the United States but that they can play globally to support responding to not only the pandemic, but the longer-term issues related to hunger and the food system.

As well as finding opportunities to strengthen public/private partnerships, there's value for both parties to continue to work together and strengthen and build communities; it's what



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we're all trying to do. And lastly, I think touching a little bit upon what I mentioned before, just ensuring that we continue to not forget about the disparities that exist in communities across our country in the United States and across the globe and making sure that we're doing what we can to intervene and reduce gaps like this. Thank you.



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