

Written evidence submitted by City Harvest London

City Harvest Overview

City Harvest is an organisation located in London that collects nutritious surplus food from all segments of the food industry including restaurants, grocers, manufacturers, wholesalers, hotels and caterers in order to rescue food that otherwise would have been wasted. City Harvest regularly delivers high quality, nourishing food to organisations that provide meals to vulnerable people including homeless shelters, soup kitchens, after school programmes, centres for veterans, and charities that assist people with alcohol or drug addictions.

Differentiated from other food rescue organisations that donate food with several days of shelf life, City Harvest focuses on the “last mile” – short life, perishable food which otherwise would have been wasted in the food supply chain. Properly situated to react in real-time with a refrigerated fleet operating seven days a week, City Harvest is uniquely equipped to collect and redistribute food expiring the same day. The organisation eliminates food donation obstacles by working with individual food donors and recipients to determine a customized and reliable schedule of visits each week. City Harvest focuses on collecting healthy food, including large quantities of fresh fruit and vegetables, meat, poultry, fish and dairy enabling our community food programme partners to serve more nutritious meals. This is vitally important as those individuals facing food poverty who seek meals at our charity partners are often in fragile health and need nourishment in order to rebuild their lives.

City Harvest's Impact in Fighting Hunger

The food City Harvest delivers helps our 270 charity partner organisations serve over 250,000 healthy meals each month increasing the number of people they can feed as well as providing healthier options for greater nutrition. Additionally, the donated food City Harvest provides to our community partners reduces their annual grocery bills, freeing up funds that can be reinvested in other vital support services such as medical care, housing, and counselling. The value of free food City Harvest has delivered to charities has reduced their annual food budgets by £4.7 million to date. With over 1,600 tonnes of rescued food to date, City Harvest continues to serve the food insecure population with over 3 million meals served on an annual basis.

City Harvest has immense influence on the communities we serve and can quantify the various impacts including reduced food expenditures for charity partners, benefits to the environment, improved health and nutrition, and improved prospects for employment amongst recipients. Through a social impact study, factoring in all community benefits, City Harvest has determined that for every £1 invested, there is a £8.10 social return. In addition to the social impact of food redistribution, diverting edible surplus food from the waste stream reduces greenhouse gases that would have otherwise been emitted as food spoils in landfills. Since inception, City Harvest has reduced over 6,100 tonnes of greenhouse gases from polluting the environment.

City Harvest is dedicated to understanding every aspect of food insecurity to better adjust services aimed at combating hunger. Developing mechanisms to collect data

such as surveys has been an important aspect for City Harvest. Surveys are administered to current and prospective organisations in order to capture the need for food services in food insecure communities. It cannot be overly stressed that data plays an important role in many ways, such as dictating increased efficiency in implementing services, clearly explaining the amount of food that should be rescued and illustrating the vast numbers of those who are food insecure.

Estimates on Food Insecurity in London

Surveys that our partner charities complete as well as growing requests to City Harvest for food from new community food programmes indicate an increasing need for surplus food to combat hunger in the community. Our strategic plans for growth rely on understanding the needs of those facing hunger in London, yet there is a paucity of reliable data on food poverty in the UK.

In November 2018, City Harvest developed estimates that delineate the severity of food insecurity in the UK, particularly in London. In addition to highlighting food insecurity, the estimations also illustrate the egregious levels of wasted food that could instead be rescued in order to feed those experiencing hunger. We believe these new estimates on hunger and waste are a wake-up call for businesses and government alike to support the case for food redistribution. Both funding and policies should align to ensure that as much edible surplus food as possible is rescued for the benefit of people in need, rather than wasted.

Food Insecurity Definitions

To quantify the issue of food insecurity in London, we used the internationally recognised Food Insecurity Experience Scale from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The scale assigns individuals to one of four groups, depending on the severity of food insecurity that they experience:

- **Marginally food insecure individuals** worry about running out of food and/or have limited food selection due to lack of money or access to food
- **Moderately food insecure individuals** compromise in quantity and/or quality of food due to lack of money or access to food,
- **Severely food insecure individuals** miss daily meals, reduce food intake, and during extreme times, go day(s) without food
- The rest of the population is considered to be **food secure**

Food Insecurity Estimates in London

- **~1.5 million people live with food insecurity** (roughly 1 out of 8 people in London)
 - 1 million people are suffering moderate or severe food insecurity
 - 0.5 million people are suffering marginal food insecurity
- **~9 million meals a month needed to alleviate hunger** for food insecure populations
- **~13 million meals a month of commercial food waste that is technically recoverable and currently being wasted** (equating to 145% of the food demand of the food insecure)
- **~1 million meals a month are currently being distributed** to those in need by food organisations such as City Harvest and others

Methodologies and Assumptions

Given that food insecurity data is scarce in the UK, we relied on the experience of another comparable jurisdiction, Canada, to estimate the overall level of food insecurity in the UK. Using income and poverty figures available at the local authority level, we then estimated the geographic distribution of those experiencing food insecurity inside and outside of London. We used Canada as a comparable jurisdiction because it has a wealth of publicly available data on food insecurity from national health surveys using the FAO Food Insecurity Experience Scale. Equally important, Canada has similar wealth, income levels, income distribution, and institutions as the UK, and so we can reasonably assume that levels of food insecurity in the UK would be comparable.

We estimated the breakdown of different food insecurity groups in London specifically, using local income and poverty data. We know from the Canadian experience that the prevalence of food insecurity is tightly correlated to income levels and reliance on social security benefits. We used local census statistics on income deprivation and rates of relative poverty (after housing costs) to project the national estimates onto local authorities. Unsurprisingly, London has a greater share of people living in food insecurity given that it has higher rates of poverty than the rest of the country.

The number of meals that we estimate would be needed to alleviate hunger comes from comparing food spend among households with different levels of food insecurity in Canada (from survey data). Average food spend by severely food insecure and moderately food insecure households was found to be 20% and 4% lower than food spend by marginally insecure ones, respectively. Given that marginally insecure households are already compromising on quality and variety, and are one step removed from compromising on quantity, we assumed that the difference in food spend must translate directly into fewer meals. A severely food insecure individual would therefore only be able to afford 80% of the three meals per day, seven days per week that a marginally food insecure individual would consume.

Self-reported results of large food charities were used to estimate the amount of food being delivered in London to those in need. There are many small organisations as well that provide similar food redistribution services and do not report results. We assumed that these smaller charities distribute approximately 50% of the amount of food that larger charities distribute.

The data highlighted above are estimates that rely on several assumptions that we feel confident reflects the order of magnitude of the food insecurity issue in London. To further increase confidence in these numbers, we could conduct many tests in the field, with the affected populations and the organisations that serve them:

- *Overall food insecurity in the UK*: implement similar surveys to those used in other jurisdiction and cross-check them with our estimates
- *Meals needed per month*: test how often individuals in different degrees of food insecurity skip meals and compromise on intake
- *Food distributed to those in need*: survey smaller food charities to quantify the contribution of small local organisations

Ultimately, key organisations that are close to beneficiaries such as food banks, soup kitchens, and homeless shelters should be actively involved as they can provide much needed insight and data as well as the needs of those who experience food insecurity.

Recommendations for Achieving SDG2

It is very clear that across all sectors of society there must be consensus to acknowledge that hunger and food poverty exist in the UK. Without this acknowledgement it will be increasingly difficult to work together to combat food insecurity. City Harvest recommends the following actions to fight hunger.

Increased Funding and Awareness

More funding for food rescue organisations, such as City Harvest, is vigorously needed to scale-up and grow in order to match surplus food with those currently facing food insecurity as well as for the working poor whom are one pay-check away from becoming food insecure. In addition to traditional charity donations and funding, the government needs to play a larger role in combating hunger by contributing more funding to fighting food insecurity. Government and society have much to gain by investing in food rescue organisations such as City Harvest.

Government funding can be maximized by investing in City Harvest and other similar entities as food redistribution organisations can deliver services such as collecting, storing, and delivering food more efficiently. For every financial contribution by the government to organisations like City Harvest, there are not only financial returns but social and environmental returns. Building on the financial benefits, the return on social investment strengthens community through improved health, employment support, reduced crime, and a cleaner environment for all.

City Harvest is always searching for additional food donors from which to collect healthy food and redistribute to the food insecure. There is always a need of increasing funding for fleet management, warehouse expansion, and general core operations. Similarly, as

cities fund council services such as fire, police, and ambulance, increasing funding for feeding people in poverty should be a priority as well. Food redistribution organisations need financial support to continue providing these vital services throughout the UK.

Data Collection and Standardization

Data acquisition on food insecurity in the UK is insufficient and as a result minimizes effective management of food insecurity. As the government currently does not measure household food insecurity, a standardized approach must be developed, and the government needs to continuously generate realistic data on food poverty if we are to tackle the hunger issue. It is dramatically difficult to fight hunger when data is ambiguous, not collected, and cannot be clearly articulated.

The UK government, in tandem with food organisations, should develop a comprehensive approach using targeted questions in order to identify those living with food insecurity. Methodologies and assumptions from existing studies throughout the world can be adapted here in the UK to develop a customized survey of questions that households can answer with regards to food insecurity. Standardizing such field studies and data modelling will overwhelmingly help illustrate the vast numbers of people living with food insecurity and provide the much-needed context to fight hunger.

Comprehensive Systems Approach

When food is wasted, other aspects are wasted as well such as the embedded energy, money, and time it takes to grow, transport, pack, manufacture, and sell such food. The UK needs to better understand the amount of waste that occurs throughout the food system and identify that hunger can be minimized by rescuing and redistributing food. A comprehensive approach must be developed to combating food insecurity that simultaneously and actively engages multiple sectors of society, government, and business.

Government: Government intervention needs to be at the forefront of alleviating hunger with MPs championing the fight to end hunger throughout the UK. Additionally, at the local level, councils must work to customize effective solutions that can be applied in their communities. Departments within the government need to play a vital role in contributing a systems-approach to solving hunger and must take a more proactive stance to minimize food insecurity.

Food Systems: Those operating in the food system need to openly communicate and discuss the roadblocks to achieve the necessary goals of minimizing waste and ending hunger. The various entities within the food supply chain must take a greater responsibility to minimize waste while growing, manufacturing, packaging, and selling food. Farms need additional support with subsidies to divert more food while creative programs such as gleaning should be widely incorporated. Manufacturers and packagers can cultivate effective relationships amongst food rescue organisations to better identify food products that can be redistributed or donated. Supermarkets are uniquely situated as end users in the food supply chain to identify the “last-mile” food needing to be distributed, and through the development and maintenance of key relationships with food redistribution organisations ensure that food is rescued.

Community, Education, and Health Services: As community, youth, and health service organisations often serve food insecure populations, it is crucial to better equip these systems with the necessary information and support to fight hunger. There is a need to develop more comprehensive ways to connect people to housing, education, health services, and healthy food. It is vital to strengthen and support the engagement between local communities with targeted outreach for youth education, housing for homeless, and medical systems to better refer people to local services. When these systems work in tandem, health disparities are minimized, more people are educated, and communities are better equipped to succeed in ending hunger.

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