

# **2nd Opinion: Make Texas children's health and food security a priority**

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Children today are being robbed of time. While academic opinions vary about life expectancy, they all acknowledge our length and quality of life is shifting due to chronic illnesses associated with diet.

It is unfortunately no surprise Texas children are suffering from diet-related disease at a higher rate—and younger—than they have in the past. The early onset of diet-related conditions, such as obesity, is bringing about many health problems children do not typically suffer, such as Type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure.

These high rates of diet-related disease clearly are connected to the 26 percent of Texas children who live in food-insecure homes. Our network of food banks serves more than 980,000 of these children annually. We know firsthand they need assistance, not just accessing enough food, but receiving healthy foods in particular.

## **Change supply, habits**

As reports about poor nutrition became more and more frequent, our food banks decided to evaluate the food we were distributing to clients. We realized we were in a good position to change not just food supply, but lifelong habits.

In 2001, the Texas food banks succeeded in obtaining a grant from the state to help acquire more fresh produce for distribution to hungry families. Since then, we have worked to increase this funding slowly. Last year,

these funds helped our food banks move more than 17 million pounds of surplus produce from field to fork at an average cost of just 10 cents per pound. This year, we expect to do even more.

The research is clear: Increased consumption of fruits and vegetables helps to alleviate diet-related illness. Our goal is to expand our statewide, public-private partnership by pairing the distribution of free produce with evidence-based health interventions in low-income Texas communities. This new approach gives families the education and tools they need to make healthy changes, as well as the food resources to do it risk-free. We call this approach Feeding With Impact.

### **Your part in the process**

Supporting our efforts is as simple as telling your state legislator you support the work of food banks to tackle child hunger and improve child health. You also can sign up for news and alerts at our website, [FeedingTexas.org](http://FeedingTexas.org).

Join us in making the health and food security of Texas children a priority in the next Texas legislative session.

*Betsy Kerrigan is director of community engagement for [Feeding Texas](http://FeedingTexas.org), formerly known as the Texas Food Bank Network. The [Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission](http://TexasBaptist.org) distributed her column in its CLC Today digital newsletter.*