Reflections On A Half Century Fighting Hunger

A message from Chief Executive Officer Shelley Rotondo

A 50th anniversary is often a time for reflection. For Northwest Harvest, our anniversary has been a call to a future at the intersection of food and health. There is a movement to address the health of our community, and we are proud to take a leadership role in that movement.

At our 50th anniversary kickoff event at Benaroya Hall on April 22nd, we considered what it would mean for us to build “A Culture of Health and Wellness”. I had the opportunity to share the stage with a panel of passionate leaders from across our state and nation. Each came from a different perspective but shared a common commitment to our friends and neighbors in need.

Like many panel participants, Sam Kass reminded us of the need to continue to engage and win new audiences for our work. “A huge part of the reason why our politics fail on these issues is because the people who have a stake in them aren’t voting. As long as that continues to be the case, we’re going to continue to fail to meet the needs—on a politics and policy level—on these issues which are effecting so many people. We have to get more engaged on these issues.”

The call to action—volunteering, advocating, donating, or just speaking with friends about critical issues of hunger and poverty—was clear and inspiring throughout the event.

“We’re not just talking about change in the food box but change in the ballot box,” Gerald Wright, the Director of Hunger and Food Resources at Solid Ground, reminded the audience. We cannot focus only on solutions like food distribution, critical as they are. We must also actively engage the public. It’s why we are proud of this, our fiftieth year leading the fight to end hunger in Washington.

“We had two new families come in—and the children were so excited to see fresh fruit and yogurt. Brought a smile to all of our faces at their joy for something so healthy.”

—Cusick Food Bank, Pend Oreille County

Creating a Culture of Health & Wellness for Everyone

On April 22, Northwest Harvest kicked off our 50th anniversary year at Benaroya Hall in Seattle.

White House insider and NBC analyst Sam Kass and a panel of thought leaders and change agents focused on “Creating a Culture of Health & Wellness for Everyone,” examining the intersection of food and health in our community. The event was sponsored by The Boeing Company and Alaska Airlines.

Kass set the tone of the evening, reminding attendees that the fight to end hunger must include the political process. Kass, who also led the Let’s Move initiative, declared that letter writing and “showing up” is not enough: activists must also vote.

Panelists included Dr. Benjamin Danielson, Medical Director at Odessa Brown Children’s Clinic; Scott Forslund, Executive Director, Providence Institute for a Healthier Community; Rep. Marcus Riccelli, State Representative from Washington’s 3rd Legislative District, Spokane; Gerald Wright, Director of Hunger and Food Resources at Solid Ground; Christina Wong, Public Policy Manager at Northwest Harvest; and Shelley Rotondo, CEO of Northwest Harvest.

The video is available at www.northwestharvest.org/kickoff.
“Our senior population is growing again. I am convinced it is tied with the extra cuts to food stamps and the high cost of medicines that are so necessary for them... I feel frustrated that I cannot do anything to help them except make sure they have nutritional food. That is where Northwest Harvest comes to the rescue.”

—Brinnon Food Bank, Jefferson County

Since our founding in 1967, Northwest Harvest has grown from a project of local activists to a position today as the leader in fighting hunger in Washington. With industry-leading distribution systems, we efficiently provide healthy food to every corner of our state through a network of more than 380 partner programs and work on the root causes of hunger and poverty in our state.

Along that fifty year journey, we had a moment of clarity: Northwest Harvest needed to think big to truly effect change. That “think big” perspective has led to an organization that today:

▪ Provides healthy, culturally appropriate food to every corner of our state through a network of more than 380 food banks, meal programs, and high-need schools that reach hungry children, seniors, the working poor, rural residents, the homeless, and more in a manner that respects their dignity.

▪ Spearheads a larger movement—in partnership with donors, volunteers, food producers, social service agencies, and public officials—to make an impact on the root causes of hunger and poverty in our state.

A 50th anniversary is often a time for reflection. For Northwest Harvest, the anniversary is a call to a future at the intersection of food and health, where we work with clients and community partners to form a movement to address the health of our community and become an ever more efficient, inspiring, and impactful leader in the fight to end hunger in Washington.

To learn more, visit www.leadingthefight.org.
A New Home for Cherry Street Food Bank?

This year, Northwest Harvest is commemorating 50 years of leading the fight against hunger in Washington. Over five decades, Northwest Harvest has grown from a project of local activists to a leader in the region. Today, our campus in Seattle—including Cherry Street Food Bank and administrative offices—has grown to include distribution centers in Kent, Yakima, and Spokane. Together, these facilities serve a statewide network of over 380 food banks, meal programs, and high-need schools.

Cherry Street Food Bank is the flagship of the statewide Northwest Harvest partner network and the only program owned and operated exclusively by Northwest Harvest. The food bank provides critical insights into the world of food banking and of the need in Washington State.

Like any organization or business that seeks to stay relevant, we are committed to making the necessary changes to ensure we continue to provide the food and support needed for our communities to thrive. Cherry Street Food Bank has faced mounting pressure to relocate and enhance our offerings as the Seattle real estate market has boomed and need has remained at record levels since the Great Recession. One of the busiest food banks in the state, it has also struggled with its small, crowded footprint, aging electrical system, and difficult location on a steep hillside. As a recent Seattle Times article noted, Trinity Parish Church is also looking to redevelop the site.

Northwest Harvest sees a potential move as an exciting opportunity and a natural outgrowth of our 50th anniversary plans. To continue to lead the fight to end hunger in Washington, Northwest Harvest must adapt to a changing climate. In doing so, we will continue to focus on serving the needs of our clients, partners, volunteers, and community.

The agency is committed to a model food bank, serving as a testing ground for exciting new programs and an educational opportunity for our statewide partners, volunteers, staff, and community. It is also working to ensure that the Northwest Harvest-owned food bank does not unnecessarily compete with existing hunger response infrastructure in the Seattle area but supplements and builds an even better network in an underserved area of the city.

In the event that the food bank leaves the First Hill neighborhood in Seattle, Northwest Harvest is committed to filling the gap by enhancing food distribution to partners in the neighborhood. As always, these partners will provide Northwest Harvest food free of restrictions.

Though a move is often difficult, careful planning and a commitment to ending hunger will continue to guide our work. Our leadership is needed now more than ever, and we are proud to meet the challenge.

Tough Legislative Session Yields Mixed Results for Anti-hunger Advocates

This year’s legislative session ended on a disappointing note for many advocates who felt that the final budget agreement missed opportunities to make much needed improvements in basic education, mental health treatment, and services for a growing crisis of homelessness in our state. Nonetheless, there were many legislators whose commitment to our issues really shone in this tough year, and we would like to recognize them for their work and leadership.

Rep. Zack Hudgins (D-11th LD) has championed efforts to increase access to school breakfast with legislation that would require high need schools to serve breakfast after the start of the school day. Washington currently ranks 45th in the nation when it comes to school breakfast participation. Rep. Hudgins worked closely with advocates and sought workable solutions to secure co-sponsors on the other side of the aisle, including Sen. Steve Litzow (R-41st LD) who sponsored similar legislation in the Senate and Rep. Chad Magendanz (R-5th LD) who championed this issue with his caucus, securing additional support with amendments intended to ensure that breakfast items are made with nutritious, locally grown ingredients and are low in sugar.

We are also grateful for the leadership of Sen. Steve Hobbs (D-44th), Sen. Brian Dansel (R-7th), and Rep. Brian Blake (D-19th), all of whom championed a budget request to increase funding for the Farm to School and Small Farms Direct Marketing programs. These are two programs that are critically underfunded after seeing some of the worst cuts from the recession, yet are highly valued by Washington farmers for their assistance with training, resource manuals, and educational opportunities to help growers expand and diversify their marketing opportunities.

Many lawmakers announced their retirement with the end of this session, including Sen. Jim Hargrove (D-24th) who championed the heroic partial restoration of the TANF cash grant that helps families with children purchase basic necessities including rent, clothing, hygiene products, and diapers.

We are grateful to all of these legislators for partnering with advocates on important initiatives and strategic investments to help make Washington a better place for all.
Be a Hunger Hero!

**Participate in our monthly giving program**

**gratitude**—noun.

1. The quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness. *Synonyms:* gratefulness, thankfulness, thanks, appreciation, indebtedness.

Most of us are lucky. We don’t have to choose between prescriptions or food, a car repair or rent, a new pair of shoes for a growing child or a big Sunday dinner for our families. But, with 1 in 5 children living in a household that struggles with hunger, many of us in Washington have experienced difficult times at some point in our lives or at least know someone who has.

Here at Northwest Harvest, we feel lucky, and we are grateful for all of those who choose to give back—to return the kindnesses that they’ve experienced in life. So to return that favor, we’d like to invite you to become a **Hunger Hero** and support Northwest Harvest with a monthly or quarterly gift. Giving this way allows you to give a little more (which is significant to those who need our help) and at the same time makes it a little easier on your checkbook throughout the year. It’s a win-win for all of us. This program allows Northwest Harvest to spend less on fundraising and to better plan ahead, while allowing you to split your annual giving into smaller, more manageable pieces.

Participating in our Hunger Heroes monthly giving program truly benefits our community and is a great way to express your values on a regular basis. We are thankful for all of your gifts—whether time, food, or money—and whether you give once a year or monthly. To thank you for taking your giving to another level, we would be proud to call you one of our Hunger Heroes.

Please sign up at **www.northwestharvest.org/recurringgiving**, or call 206-923-7480.

**Growing Connections, Resilience In Our Community**

In April, a team from Northwest Harvest hosted a Growing Connections workshop at the Pullman Community Action Center in Whitman County. The workshop provided an opportunity for farmers and food banks to come together and discuss farm to food bank initiatives in their area.

The bulk of the workshop was focused on strengthening the relationships among community members. Many local food banks spoke of their desire to purchase food from local farmers, often building existing relationships based on gleaning and donations.

“It’s hard to get people nutritious food,” Paige Collins, director at Council on Aging and Human Services, said. “I’d like to be able to offer some fresh produce of some sort each month.”

There were 26 attendees from food banks, WSU extension, farmers, and community organizations. Attendees discussed distribution, storage, and marketing and advertising to the agriculture community. Participants also developed action plans that included funding coolers, consolidating grant writing for food banks, developing a regional network, and working with growers to increase wholesale business by utilizing EFAP funding.

“We continue to have increased demand for fresh food... onions, fruit, potatoes and other veggies. I would say that fresh food is our greatest need.”

—BG Adventist Community Services, Clark County

**Celebrating a Community Champion**

Christina Wong was recognized with the 2016 Ally in Advocacy Award from the Washington Low Income Housing Alliance for her work. Wong is the Northwest Harvest Public Policy Manager. “It’s an honor to be recognized for this effort,” noted Wong, “especially as we continue to encourage our networks to focus on housing issues as a critical part of our work. The award really recognizes our efforts to be a good ally, which, to me, is recognition of being a strong partner on a common cause. I think that’s a core value and strength for Northwest Harvest.”
A woman came to meet with me last month about making a donation. She was the shift manager at [a nearby bakery], and knew that [her employer] sometimes donated bread at the end of the day to food banks; she was hoping she could arrange a donation for us to receive.

We talked a while and worked out some options, but before she left she said there was one more thing she wanted to say: she had hoped to arrange a donation for our food bank because back when she was still looking for work, she and her daughter had come to us and felt they had received a lot of help. It was great seeing a client who had managed not only to get back on her feet, but was even coming back to pay it forward. Her daughter was also with her and adorable! It was a really bright spot in my week, I’m glad she came to talk to me.”

—Jewish Family Services Food Bank, King County
Hunger Doesn't Take Summer Break

Fruits, vegetables, and well-rounded meals are crucial to helping our kids grow big and strong through the summer months. Without the meals provided throughout the school year, families are left picking up the pieces. Summer meal programs are here to help.

Summer meal programs across the state provide nutritious meals to kids ages 18 and younger. Northwest Harvest works with partners around the state to help families locate the nearest summer meal site. These sites, usually in park settings, provide areas for kids to congregate and eat a healthy meal together.

Unfortunately, there are many communities without these summer meal sites. To combat this problem, Northwest Harvest started the Kids Summer Food Club. Working with hunger relief partners located in areas with no summer meal sites, Kids Summer Food Club provides kid-friendly food bags in those areas. This summer, 18 programs around the state will provide summer meals through this program, ensuring that health, not hunger, is part of summer break.

"Many of our homeless are mentally challenged and there is no place for them to go. It is heart wrenching that we do not have group homes for people with counselors to administer medicine and help take care of people. We saw 149 homeless people last month. Our homeless numbers are staggering."

—Our Place Food Bank, Spokane County