Our world is not always beautiful; our society does not always offer opportunity to each of its inhabitants—certainly not in an equitable way.

When I lived and worked in other time zones, on other continents, in other places—I saw the devastation of war, the effects of pervasive poverty, the anxiety around failed crops, the futility of contaminated water sources. Somehow it felt easier to diagnose the issues in the lands where I was a foreigner—but perhaps it was only that I was not as emotionally connected to the challenges, nor the solutions.

Now after a year back home in Washington, I am recognizing the profound challenges that so many people face in our cities, towns, and rural areas across our state. There is no randomness to poverty, no haphazardness to hunger. People of color and rural communities face disproportionately high rates of food insecurity. This is happening for a reason. Our society operates within a relatively stable equilibrium which allots privilege unequally.

There is no need to blame people for being hungry; it’s not compelling to fault those who struggle with hunger for failing to be successful. The people I meet at food banks are hard-working single mothers and fathers. They are seniors. They are veterans. They are students. They are striving to make ends meet and improve their lives.

There is something bigger at work which underlies our current reality.

The hypothesis that food insecurity can be eradicated by giving surplus food to hungry people has not borne out as a long-term solution—though it does make an important contribution to households in need right now.

Based on the premise that community leaders are the best people to collaborate with to find solutions, Northwest Harvest is linking with small businesses, farming communities, universities, local nonprofit groups, and others to identify scalable hunger-fighting initiatives—especially those focused on efforts to end practices that widen opportunity gaps across our state.

The human experience has many peaks and valleys—this is true for everyone. In the hardest moments of my life—the ones marked by tragedy—the people I am closest to cared for me when I found it hard to continue. I am, and will always be, grateful for their promise to be present, their compassion to listen, and their willingness to support me when I needed it. I believe that is the role of Northwest Harvest—to be an organization that stands unflinchingly with those who experience the oppressive effects of sudden tragedy or the lasting impact of inequality.

I invite each of you to stand with us.

Best regards,
Thank you, Governor Inslee and all those who participated in the Climate Justice Roundtable at our Kent warehouse. So much spirited conversation and great ideas on how sectors of all kinds can come together to improve the lives of disenfranchised communities throughout Washington.

FOCUS ON COMMUNITY

GOVERNOR JAY INSLEE HOLDS CLIMATE JUSTICE ROUNDTABLE AT NORTHWEST HARVEST’S KENT DISTRIBUTION CENTER

“One family’s story stands out: They travel from Bellingham to Seattle 3-4 times a week for a medical treatment for one child. The treatment lasts several hours. The family does their laundry onsite at the hospital in our free laundry room, and picks up groceries every week. I think we are truly making a difference for this family. I wonder what they used to do before having access to our food pantry.”

—Seattle Children’s Hospital, King County (MOBILE FOOD BANK)

Nationally, we have an important opportunity use the 2018 Midterm elections to challenge our current and future leaders to commit to ending hunger in the U.S. and worldwide.

Northwest Harvest joins our friends at Vote To End Hunger in the belief that it will take a combination of public and political will to make ending hunger a priority. We are working together to elevate the issue of hunger with candidates during the next election cycle. “We are committed to asking candidates for public office: ‘If elected, what will you do to end hunger, alleviate poverty, and create opportunity in the U.S. and worldwide?’”

In Washington, our next opportunity to be heard is the November 6 general election. The deadlines for Washington voter registration are October 8 for mail or online and October 29 for in-person. Contact the county elections department where you are currently registered to request a ballot if you haven’t received yours by October 25. Return your ballot to a ballot drop box, no stamp required. Your ballot must be returned to a ballot drop box by 8 p.m. election day. Find more details and resources at www.sos.wa.gov/elections/.

Northwest Harvest works to support and encourage the engagement of all communities in the democratic process through education and awareness efforts, including helping food bank participants register to vote and collaborating with other organizations on candidate forums. Follow our advocacy updates at northwestharvest.org/take-action, and learn more about voting against hunger at votetoendhunger.org.
WHY THE FARM BILL MATTERS

LEGISLATION’S DEEP, FAR-REACHING IMPACT ON NUTRITION ACCESS

The Farm Bill is a comprehensive piece of legislation that authorizes most of our federal agricultural and nutrition programs. Congress must pass a new Farm Bill every five years. This is Congress’s opportunity to make structural changes that can impact access to programs that help low-income people put food on their tables, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP or “food stamps”), The Emergency Food Assistance Program (federal commodities distributed at food banks), and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (commodities used to supplement senior nutrition).

The current Farm Bill is set to expire on September 30, and both Senate and House leadership are determined to pass a new bill before then. With both a House bill and a Senate bill that have passed their respective chambers, Congress must negotiate a bill that resolves the differences and that can pass out of both chambers before it can go to the President to be signed into law.

Complicating the process is the fact that the two bills are vastly different from one another, especially when it comes to SNAP. The House bill (which passed on a very narrow vote of 213-211) threatens to take food off the tables of over 2 million low-income people nationwide. Here in Washington, the proposed cuts in the House bill could eliminate benefits for 60,000 individuals, mostly working families with children.

The Senate bill, however, protects SNAP benefits and nearly doubles the investment for states to test out innovations in employment and training that will move people off SNAP and into good paying jobs. The Senate bill also protects and strengthens key programs that help small and mid-scale growers so they can keep their farms in business. The bill does all of this without harming SNAP for our neighbors in need.

Protecting and strengthening SNAP is at the top of our federal policy agenda: SNAP is our first line of defense against hunger. SNAP is used to buy food at grocery stores, farmers markets, and farm stands, generating economic activity and creating jobs in our local economies. Since SNAP provides 12 meals for every one meal provided by a food bank, we know that charity is not enough: without SNAP, the hunger relief system would be overwhelmed.

Throughout the Farm Bill process, Northwest Harvest has been meeting with members of our Congressional delegation, both in DC and throughout our state. We’ve been raising public awareness about the importance of SNAP through our advocacy alerts, interviews with newspapers and television stations, and press statements. We’ve shared stories about the difference SNAP makes for struggling families that we learn from talking with food bank and focus groups participants.

For more information and to find out how you can help speak up to protect SNAP, follow our advocacy updates at northwestharvest.org/take-action.

FOCUS GROUPS INFORM ANTI-HUNGER WORK IN SHARING LIVED EXPERIENCES

Since 2007, Northwest Harvest has published our annual Focus on Food Security reports, documenting the stories of people living with hunger and poverty throughout Washington state. We use this report to tell the story of hunger in our communities, identify barriers to service, and recommend policy changes and budget investments to provide equitable access to nutritious food for all Washingtonians.

We collect these stories through a series of focus groups held every summer. Each year, we choose five different food banks from our statewide network and interview participants at those programs about their barriers to food and other basic needs, including housing, health care, transportation, and economic stability. We also ask our focus groups for their advice to lawmakers about what they can do to alleviate hunger and poverty in their communities.

Our next report will come out in January 2019 and will relate stories from food banks in Spokane, Kennewick, Orcas Island, Ocean Shores, and Orting. But starting next year, we hope to improve our focus group process: our focus groups will kick off a two year cycle that puts people with lived experiences of hunger and poverty in the driver’s seat of our policy development process.

Next summer, we plan on returning to three of our focus group locations to convene regional policy summits. We’ll invite back our focus group participants to a meeting with representatives from nearby food banks, human services agencies, advocates, and lawmakers. Our goal will be to work from the issues identified in our focus group to find policy and programmatic solutions. In the time between our focus groups and our summits, we will hold in-person meetings with our focus group participants, providing public speaking training and advocacy opportunities. We want them to feel prepared and empowered to lead us in identifying how we can all work together to end hunger in Washington.
Northwest Harvest firmly believes that access to food is a fundamental social element that drives opportunity. From an individual level, a family level, and a community-wide level—food is a central ingredient in social justice. Our “Food Justice” vision of equitable access to nutritious food for all in Washington cannot be separated from combined efforts to provide each of our state’s residents with equitable access to education, housing, employment, and economic opportunities. Nutritious food lays the foundation for good health, and good health opens up opportunity for the mental and physical capabilities to focus on learning or to find work and keep striving to open pathways for greater economic stability.

We have a unique opportunity to make a measurable difference in reducing the injustices and inequities that far too many of our communities face when it comes to both our local food system and other structures that systemically repress communities—keeping them from reaching their full potential.

“Every day, we see hunger persist because our neighbors are skipping meals in order to keep a roof over their heads, or they’re paying for life-sustaining medications, or choosing to keep the water from being shut off,” said Thomas Reynolds, Northwest Harvest’s CEO. “We must collectively agree that these cycles must be broken. Achieving food justice in communities that have systematically been shut out is perhaps the greatest avenue to social justice and greater economic opportunities.”

This core belief is just one of the reasons Northwest Harvest is excited about partnering with Living Well Kent and King Conservation District on a local greenhouse farming project just south of Seattle. Together, we’re reactivating a commercial-grade greenhouse—with the potential to expand that to eight greenhouses along with 15 acres of quality adjacent farmland. With the generous support from Arnie Hall and the Hall Family Foundation, we are working toward transforming a once idle farm in Auburn into a thriving agriculture enterprise. This project not only brings quality farm land and valuable farm infrastructure back to productive use and provides quality training opportunities and land access for immigrant farmers, we are increasing access to healthy local produce in South King County.

This truly unique project utilizes the agricultural skills of South King County’s growing immigrant communities to provide nutritious, diverse, and culturally favored foods directly where the need is greatest. The produce grown in these greenhouses is sold in local farmers markets, as well as donated to community food banks.

“We know that this project alone is not the answer to solving all the hunger issues in our state,” says Jim Procopio, Northwest Harvest’s Operations Director. “But it’s ideas like this, that when spread across Washington, can help communities have more control and gain sovereignty in the food they access.”

This multi-organizational initiative is a product of Northwest Harvest’s vision of bringing engaged organizations, food justice allies, and a diverse community of volunteers together—all with the goal of improving access to nutritious food for those in our communities who struggle against hunger.

If you would like to know more about this project, please visit www.livingwellkent.org/projects.
Northwest Harvest is so grateful for our ongoing partnerships. Thanks to our friends at CENTURYLINK, THE SEATTLE MARINERS, KCTS 9, and HERITAGE BANK (just to name a few) for their efforts to raise food and funds in support of the community this summer.

Our work would not be possible without you!
“Although we’re seeing an uptick in our clients who are employed, they are [at] lower paying jobs and continue to not receive full-time work. Many of the retail jobs seem to be capping at below 40 hours a week. Clients are finding some relief but express that they are grateful the food bank continues to help them fill the gap in their nutritional needs.”

—Ferndale Food Bank, Whatcom County

YOU MAKE OUR COMMUNITY STRONGER

This year we have established a bold goal of cutting hunger in half in Washington state by 2028. We are working with service providers, business leaders, policy-makers, growers, advocates, civic organizations, volunteers, and food bank guests to identify innovative, hunger-fighting initiatives to bring equitable access to nutritious food to all in Washington.

As we work on long-term solutions to hunger by growing food justice across our state, we must also remain focused on providing nutritious food to our hungry neighbors. At some point this year, 1 in 6 Washingtonians will have to rely on a local food bank for groceries in order to provide food for themselves or their families. And, 1 in 5 Washington kids live in a household that struggles to put food on the table.

We rely on contributions of time and resources from thousands of supporters to provide access to nutritious food for all in Washington.

Whether you contribute as a volunteer, advocate, or donor, Northwest Harvest so grateful for your investment. Your concern for others makes our community stronger for all, and your gifts of money, time, energy, and passion allow our important work to be done.

Thank you.

REAL PEOPLE, REAL STORIES: PROTECTING SNAP

Representative Adam Smith came to the Cherry Street Food Bank to talk to the Participant Advisory Council, a group of people who use the food bank who meet regularly to provide ideas and feedback for our work. We talked about how to strengthen and protect SNAP in the Farm Bill and how to make health care more affordable and accessible for everyone. Representative Smith, thank you so much for listening to our stories over lunch and please tell the rest of Congress that #SNAPmatters!