

**Farm to Food Shelf Testimony**  
**MN House Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee**  
**February 15, 2021**

**MDA Budget Presentation**

Good afternoon, I'm Allison O'Toole, the very proud CEO of Second Harvest Heartland. I am here today to discuss the Farm to Food Shelf program, which has provided millions of pounds of needed produce, milk and protein to hungry Minnesotans since 2015.

Historically, Farm to Food Shelf has covered two categories of food: produce and milk. Both are essential to keeping the state fed and running. The produce grant allows farmers to donate produce that would otherwise go unharvested or unsold. It's a clear win-win as they support the hunger fight while this funding covers their costs to harvest, pack and move unneeded crops.

At Second Harvest Heartland, we oversee the produce portion of the program on behalf of Minnesota's six Feeding America food banks. The scale of our operations make this relationship a good fit, as we can manage the outreach and finances of this work, while ensuring state-wide reach.

While Farm to Food Shelf participants work across the state, most are focused within the Second Harvest Heartland service area—which covers central and southwestern Minnesota—and that of Channel One

Food Bank, in southeastern Minnesota. A member of the Second Harvest Heartland sourcing team works with farmers to coordinate produce donations. Our finance team manages the invoices and reimburses costs farmers incur in harvesting and transporting the produce.

The current funding base provides the network, on average, 7 million pounds of Minnesota-grown produce each year. From July 2019 to June 2020, we sourced 6 million pounds of produce. So far in the second grant year, which runs from July 2020 to June 2021, we've sourced 4 million pounds of produce out of an expected 6 million pounds.

Over the program's history, we've sourced more than 37 million pounds of produce, made up of 25 different varieties of fruits and vegetables from 120 different growers across the state. This produce reaches people living in all 87 Minnesota counties.

Minnesota's Feeding America food banks receive additional funds through MDA to purchase milk each year from Minnesota processors. This is the Milk Grant I mentioned a moment ago. Our sourcing team conducts a low-cost bid process to choose our dairy processor, as outlined in the program bill language. Currently, Second Harvest Heartland sources our milk from Prairie Farms, based in Woodbury. Each food bank works with a processor in their own region of the state.

At the current funding level, the state's Feeding America food banks use Farm to Food Shelf funding to source 280,000 gallons of fluid milk annually, which is just over half our needed milk for the year. In just the

last five years we've provided over one million gallons of fluid milk to families in need across the state.

In April 2020, we received an additional infusion of Farm to Food Shelf funding that was intended to purchase low-cost protein and additional milk from Minnesota producers. It was a just-in-time delivery of support for this vital program, and enabled food banks to ramp up our protein sourcing at a time when need was at historic levels. We are on track to source 400,000 pounds of protein and 260,000 gallons of milk with this additional support.

Thank you for your time and your support of this work. Milk, produce and lean protein are among the most-requested items at food shelves and they are consistently very challenging to source. Farm to Food Shelf funding makes it possible for us to fill more fridges with these staples that power Minnesota.