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## MN Food (In)Security: Are Anti-Hunger Interventions in the Twin Cities Perpetuating Food Insecurity and Poverty?

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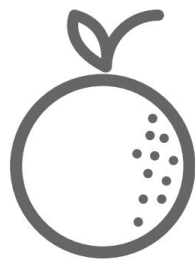
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# MN FOOD (IN)SECURITY

**ARE ANTI-HUNGER INTERVENTIONS IN  
THE TWIN CITIES PERPETUATING  
FOOD INSECURITY AND POVERTY?**



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## **Abstract**

While anti-hunger organizations across the nation have been doing important work to address this issue, we have yet to see a significant decrease in food insecurity or poverty. This project uses a literature review and interviews with Twin Cities anti-hunger organizations to answer the following questions: How are anti-hunger interventions and the root causes of food insecurity mismatched? And what would it look like if anti-hunger organizations who are heavily engaged in the ‘feeding movement’ shifted their understanding to see food insecurity as a symptom of poverty, rather than an isolated issue? Working through themes of food charity models, privatized philanthropy and giving, long-term systemic models for change, we can see that anti-hunger organizations generally realize that they are stuck providing immediate services, but are unsure of how to navigate the complexities of the anti-hunger movement and may not know exactly how to shift their mission towards a more holistic, poverty focused approach to addressing food insecurity.

## Introduction

Over the last 20 years, national food insecurity has only been very slowly decreasing (USDA 2017). 1 in 10 Minnesotans are still food insecure (Hunger Solutions 2019), and the number of visits to food shelves remains unchanged from 5 years ago (Hunger Solutions 2019). While anti-hunger organizations across the nation have been doing important work to address this issue, we have yet to see a significant decrease in food insecurity or poverty. This points to a gap between the work of anti-hunger organizations and long-term, systemic solutions to hunger and poverty.

To further explore this gap, I researched the following questions: How are anti-hunger interventions and the root causes of food insecurity mismatched? And what would it look like if anti-hunger organizations who are heavily engaged in the ‘feeding movement’ shifted their understanding to see food insecurity as a symptom of poverty, rather than an isolated issue? I believed that if this shift occurred, anti-hunger organizations might reconsider their theories of change, relationships with charity and corporate funders, and refocus on long-term poverty solutions. Upon speaking with anti-hunger organizations working in the Twin Cities I realized that a mindset shift might not be the next necessary step because many organizations already see the bigger picture, but they struggle to shift their focus to more transformational change. Anti-hunger organizations generally realize that they are stuck providing immediate services, but are unsure of how to navigate their close relationship to charity models, privatized philanthropy and giving, and may not know exactly how to shift their mission towards a more holistic, poverty focused approach to addressing food insecurity.

To work through some of these questions, this project is structured as a resource guide, providing readers with reviews of literature, additional context and framing of the issue, and content from my interviews with Twin Cities anti-hunger organizations. During my time working with various food organizations in the Twin Cities, I have continued to hear community organizers and food justice advocates call for more radical change, yet the anti-hunger movement as a whole has not been particularly responsive. I hope that this guide will serve as a resource for current and future anti-hunger and food justice organizations, encouraging them to ask critical questions about their mission and methods, as well as the larger system they are working within. Reflecting on their connection to larger efforts of poverty alleviation may support anti-hunger organizations in refocusing their goals and missions to see food insecurity as just one facet of poverty.

This document is structured like a resource guide, and styled similar to a foundation report, for a variety of reasons. My intended audience for this project is individuals and organizations involved in the anti-hunger movement. Based off my sources and interview content, I identified four major sections that address the questions and concerns that surfaced during my work. These sections should be easily identifiable and useful to the reader who may flip to the section they are most interested in. So much of this resource guide is a literature review because intelligent scholars and activists have been writing about the emergency food system for many years. My hope in this project is not to come to any revolutionary conclusion, rather to revisit, synthesize, and curate their arguments in a way that can restart conversations about the long term sustainability of the emergency food movement.

Writers such as Andy Fisher and Janet Poppendieck, as well as my academic advisor Valentine Cadieux, have all greatly influenced my theoretical orientation. I began this project with an understanding that poverty and food insecurity are rarely an accident, and that they are both part of a much larger system of inequality. As a graduating senior, still invested in my academic studies but also heavily involved in food access efforts on my campus and around my campus, I see my position as one that allows me to fuse the necessary scholarly writing on the anti-hunger movement with language and context that allows for understanding and usefulness outside of the ivory tower of higher education. With one foot still rooted in academia, and the other foot navigating the anti-hunger movement, I believe that I can be gracefully critical of the anti-hunger movement while also acknowledging that real people, including myself, are not blind to the complexities that come with the desire to meet immediate food needs while simultaneously creating a more just future. My methodology also mirrors my position in academia as well as my involvement in the anti-hunger movement.

## **Methodology**

The purpose of this research project was to collect information from Twin Cities anti-hunger organizations regarding their theories of change and work to address food insecurity and poverty. My methods include a selective literature review as well as personal interviews with representatives from anti-hunger organizations grounded in Minneapolis and St. Paul, MN. As previously mentioned, much of this resource guide is a review of scholars who have been discussing these issues. The literature review in this resource guide is not comprehensive, rather, I selected sources written by people with

history in the anti-hunger movement, and a unique and critical perspective on its progress. I also chose sources that relate to the themes that surfaced in my interviews.

My interview process was assessed and approved by the Hamline University Institutional Review Board. I contacted organizations via email explaining my project, and asked to set up interviews. The date, time, and location were all negotiated between myself and the interviewee. Interview locations included local coffee shops, and organization work offices. Each interview lasted roughly one hour, and was recorded to assist in transcription, and then deleted within 24 hours. Interviews were entirely voluntary and participants were free to end the interview and retract their participation at any time. All participants were assured that their refusal to participate would not influence their current or future relationships with Hamline University in any way.

The four anti-hunger organizations I spoke with are all similar in that their brick and mortar sites are all located within the Twin Cities metro area, and the people they serve are largely Twin Cities residents. The goals of all four organizations address food insecurity, though their approaches are each unique in some way. For example, one organization I spoke with is focusing their efforts specifically on food deserts, while another is more focused on large-scale food distribution and lobbying.

One organization's model is very similar to a traditional client choice, food pantry model where clients are able to 'shop' at one of the pantry locations once per month. To use their services, clients must be within 200% of the federal poverty line. Another organization was structured more similar to a social enterprise, focused on selling healthy affordable food in areas of the Twin Cities designated as food deserts. I also spoke with an organization that is working to address food insecurity by increasing nutrition education and food skills in low income families. Lastly, my final interview was with a larger organization that works with smaller food pantries on lobbying for governmental funding.

Before beginning the interview, participants were notified that their names, and their organizations, would remain confidential unless they requested otherwise. This was an intentional decision and is an important part of the anti-hunger movement dialogue. Talking about hunger and poverty raises challenging issues, and I wanted to create space for interviewees to talk freely about the work that their organizations do, as well as their personal thoughts on their organizations and the anti-hunger movement as a whole. Additionally, I am choosing not to identify the organizations I interviewed because, for the purposes of my project, they represent the local anti-hunger movement as a whole. In general, the four organizations I spoke with are not especially isolated or unique in their

approaches to address food insecurity/hunger, and my intention is not to be critical of any specific institution.

## **Framing The Issue**

In order for local anti-hunger organizations to catalyze change, it may be helpful to be working from a shared definition of food security and food justice. Our definitions and understandings of food insecurity, and its causes, shape how we go about anti-hunger work. How organizations relate food insecurity and systemic poverty shape the characteristics and methods of their anti-hunger interventions. Furthermore, how varying stakeholders understand food insecurity may advance or hinder progress towards reducing food insecurity. In *Want Amid Plenty*, Janet Poppendieck explains, “sociologists have long argued that the definitional stage is the crucial period in the career of a social problem. Competing definitions vie for attention, and the winners shape the solutions and garner the resources” (*Poppendieck 1998*).

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Recognizing that not all definitions of food insecurity are compatible is an important starting point when discussing the emergency food system because we cannot expect anti-hunger organizations to collaborate effectively if their expectations for the future vary. The most substantial difference in definitions is the inclusion or exclusion of a food sovereignty/agency/self determination clause. Examples of varying definitions include:

The Community Food Security Coalition, which operated from 1996-2012 and was instrumental in supporting a shared set of priorities and practices in the United States through its communities of practice and activities around the Community Food components of US federal funding programs, defined community food security as "a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice" (“About”).

Alternatively, the United States Department of Agriculture, which houses the Farm Bill where the majority of SNAP, WIC and other food assistance programs are held, notes that “Food security means access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life” (USDA 2017).

On a more global scale, the 1996 World Food Summit, hosted by the Food & Agriculture Organization established that, “Food security exists when all people, at all times, have



physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO 2016).

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**Bastian, Amber, and John Coveney. “The Responsibilisation of Food Security: What Is the Problem Represented to Be?” *Health Sociology Review*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2013, pp. 162–173., doi:10.5172/hesr.2013.22.2.162.**

In *The Responsibilisation of Food Security*, Bastian and Coveney explain, “The way food security is understood by policy makers impacts how it gets addressed in public policy” (162). The same can be said for various food insecurity stakeholders. Published in 2013, this South Australian study’s goal was to understand how multiple stakeholders conceptualize food insecurity. There are varying definitions of food insecurity in published literature, and this study sought to identify connections among these definitions. Stakeholders involved in food insecurity work were interviewed -- stakeholders included public servants, directors and employees of non-government organizations, local government officials, and private enterprises (164 [table 1]). Themes including food insecurity definitions, determinants of food insecurity, and potential solutions to improve food insecurity were explored in the voice recorded interviews (164). The interviews pointed to common themes including individual responsibility and government intervention. Community action and corporate social responsibility were also common threads (164). Not only did the stakeholders propose varying solutions/interventions for addressing food insecurity (165 [table 2]), they also had varying definitions of food insecurity itself. This points to the relationship between a stakeholder’s understanding of food insecurity, and their proposed interventions. For example, Bastian and Coveney explain that ‘the neo-liberal perspective supports a reduced role for government whereas the social determinants of health perspective calls for greater government intervention” (171).

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Bastian and Coveney also point to the significance of issue framing, “direct[ing] attention towards certain elements while simultaneously diverting attention away from others...” (163). This is important to consider as we discuss how certain hunger/food insecurity frameworks may actually hurt an individual or community more than they helps, and how government may use issue framing as a tactic to appear ‘on board’ with anti-hunger interventions.

As it is presented to the general public, hunger appears to be a bipartisan issue. To gather the funding and resources currently required to sustain the emergency food system, hunger is framed as an issue of compassion and charity-- something that someone on either side of the aisle can get behind. One Twin Cities organization pointed to this rhetoric stating that “most folks are compassionate and don’t want to see families struggling with hunger ...”. This organization went on to say that “The differences come in how do we make that happen... how much we can afford and where we want to spend our money in the state”. They went on further to say:

“As much as we try to maintain that hunger is a bipartisan issue, it’s always helpful to have the Democrats in power in order to be hopeful about actually making changes happen rather than just trying to defend or maintain the status quo”.

This bipartisan rhetoric is important to consider because it not only affects how hunger is branded and sold to government and to the general public, but because it is also a result of a larger understanding of the role of nonprofits. Nonprofits with a 501c3 status are allowed to lobby for bipartisan policy, but they are not allowed to back candidates on either side of government (Heyman 2011). Additionally, lobbying is only allowed to be a small part of what they do (Heyman 2011). Hunger organizations that hold this tax status must shape their mission and values to be universal enough to appeal to both sides of government. This in turn, contributes to the framing of hunger as a bipartisan, non threatening issue, and it continues to be addressed as such.

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**Gundersen, Craig, and James P. Ziliak. “Childhood Food Insecurity in the U.S.: Trends, Causes, and Policy Options.” *The Future of Children*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2014, pp. 1–19., doi:10.1353/foc.2014.0007.**

Published by The Future of Children, this policy report written by Craig Gundersen, professor in the Agricultural and Consumer Economics at the University of Illinois, and James Ziliak, business economist and Founding Director of the Center of the Poverty Research, at the Gatton College of Business and Economics, University of Kentucky, calls for significant policy change, due to the stable, and high, rates of childhood food insecurity in the United States. They argue that one of the reasons childhood food insecurity has remained so high is that ‘we don’t fully understand what causes food insecurity or how food assistance and other programs can help alleviate it’ (1). To fill this understanding gap, this report highlights research to explore important questions about childhood food insecurity, triggers of food insecurity, and the public policy responses.

This report also includes information about food insecure family coping methods, as well as future policy considerations. Gundersen and Ziliak explain that while “a natural assumption is that childhood food insecurity is caused by poverty... other factors contribute to children’s food security” (3-4). Some of the factors noted were mother’s health, mother’s substance abuse, residential instability, immigrant parents, and additional familial circumstances (13). This report points to the complexity surrounding childhood food insecurity, explaining that this complexity results in a ‘stubborn policy challenge for the nation...’ (12). Gundersen and Ziliak call for increased access to government assistance programs including SNAP and WIC, as well as increased capacity of school breakfast programs. They also call for changes in the SNAP program in order to fully meet the needs of participants. These changes include changing the ‘one size fits all’ fixed benefits model, increasing participation for working people, raising the minimum benefit to incentivise participation, as well as moving away from ‘30-percent rule’ that requires families to contribute one-third of their net income to food (14). These program changes would be effective because they strengthen the safety net that supports individuals and families when they need additional assistance.

**Riches, Graham. “Hunger, Food Security and Welfare Policies: Issues and Debates in First World Societies.” *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*, vol. 56, no. 1A, 1997, pp. 63–74., doi:10.1079/PNS19970010.**

This paper written by Graham Riches, professor in the School of Social Work at the University of British Columbia, examines the complexities of First World hunger, food insecurity and welfare policies. Riches draws on research from five “advanced liberal welfare states” including the U.S, New Zealand, Canada, UK, and Australia (63). Upon exploring the issue of hunger and food insecurity in these countries, Riches’ conclusion is that hunger ‘has become depoliticized as a public policy issue with profound... consequences not just for those in need but for the society as a whole’ (63). Riches<sup>1</sup> notes that ‘hunger’ may not be the appropriate word for First World food insecurity, as this term conjures up images that we often do not associate with more developed countries.

He explains that a person’s experience with hunger or food insecurity is related to the relative circumstances of the country they live in (65), and that that while ‘hunger’ looks very different depending on the country, all hunger should be understood as a result of

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<sup>1</sup> Riches is not the only author to explain the danger of using the word ‘hunger’ in affluent nations. ‘Food insecure’ tells a different story--one of individuals and families in affluent countries who don’t have access to enough healthy food.

inequality. Lastly, Riches claims that the key to improving food security in First World countries is to reestablish food as a basic human right. Riches states, “Achieving food security should be a central goal of public policy and should engage questions not only of critical welfare policy and social security reform, but of basic human rights, community health, food policy, agricultural reform, community development and local control of food supply” (65).

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Here, I situate Riches’ and Gundersen and Ziliak’s arguments in conversation with one another. Both Riches’ and Gundersen and Ziliak’s sources bring up important questions about who we see as the ‘deserving poor’ and how we decide who will receive assistance, especially in the form of government funded support. In Gundersen and Ziliak’s piece, the focus is on childhood food insecurity warranting discussion about why we tend to focus on poor children rather than poor families or communities. Children may be easier to empathize with because their situation is no fault of their own, but this rhetoric also assumes that adults in poverty must be at fault somehow. This assumption is directly related to the pervasive ‘pull yourself up by your bootstraps’ narrative that insinuates that adults in poverty must not be working hard enough.

Riches article also points to this connection. Riches discusses the relationship between food assistance and labor and explains, “In such welfare states... people’s entitlements to welfare assistance are directly related to their capacity to sell their labour power in the market place”(63). We can see a practical example of how this plays out in the anti-hunger field through food assistance requirements especially in federal programs such as SNAP and WIC services. This controversy was most apparent in the recent Farm Bill proposals. The opposing Farm Bill proposals point to the importance of how hunger and poverty are framed, and more importantly, the impacts it has on policy and social welfare programs. The majority of today’s Farm Bill details SNAP, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, benefits. In 2017, 42 million people nationwide received benefits from SNAP. More specifically, 454,000 or 8% of Minnesota residents received benefits in 2017 . The average SNAP benefit in 2017 was a monthly allowance of \$211, which works out to be only \$1.21 per meal (Cai 2018). The 2018 Farm Bill proposed by the House of Representatives, called for stricter “work for welfare” requirements, requiring able-bodied individuals ages 18-59 to work, or be in a work program, at least 20 hours a week. The elderly, folks with disabilities and those with children under 6 years old would be exempt from these specific work requirements. The proposed bill also “eliminates states’ ability to increase income eligibility threshold and waive asset tests for households reporting an income above the eligibility cutoff” (“A Comparison”).

Supporters of the stricter Farm Bill use rhetoric and language to frame work as an important piece of the American dream--one that helps foster independence and dignity. Their reasoning then for requiring SNAP participants to work is to help them grow and learn the values of work experience, while also hoping that their job will lift them out of poverty. The Foundation for Government Accountability, a major non-governmental organization backing the House bill stated:

*“Reforms that seek to move able-bodied adults from welfare to work and improve program integrity are necessary for ensuring resources are preserved for those who truly need them...The bill also seeks to improve program integrity by eliminating loopholes and abuse that rob the truly needy of resources and keep able-bodied adults trapped in welfare” (2019).*

Those who oppose the House Farm Bill may be more in line with the changes that were proposed by the Senate. This proposal does not impose stricter work requirements. There are some work requirements, but they are more accommodating to folks who may have young kids, disabilities or other circumstances that prohibit them from working. This proposal seeks to maintain the number of recipients of SNAP benefits and avoid cutting government spending on this program. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a nonpartisan research and policy institute, stated:

*“...experience suggests [the House Farm Bill] would leave substantial numbers of low-income people who have various barriers to employment — such as very limited skills or family members with illness — with neither earnings nor food assistance.” (Bolen et al. 2018)*

## **Solving Hunger Through Charity**

**Poppendieck, Janet. “Want amid Plenty: From Hunger to Inequality.” *Monthly Review: An Independent Socialist Magazine*, vol. 50, no. 3, July 1998, p. 125. EBSCOhost, [search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=pwh&AN=792686&site=pov-live](https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=pwh&AN=792686&site=pov-live).**

Published in 1998, Janet Poppendieck’s work on food insecurity and assistance is highly regarded and cited numerous times in major food insecurity works. In this article Poppendieck recalls the formation of public and private food assistance programs. She notes that in the United States, “Collectively, and for the most part individually, we have too much food, not too little”(Poppendieck 1998). Poppendieck explains that, for the most

part, America has had an abundance, even surplus, of food. Food *scarcity*<sup>2</sup> is not the problem in America. At a time when more than a quarter of food produced in the U.S went to waste, Poppendieck also points to a cycle of wasting food, and finding outlets to divert that waste, thus surplus is often given to the ‘needy’. These systems in combination with a strong belief that *hunger is solvable* has resulted in numerous public and private organizations working to get surplus food to folks in poverty. Poppendieck explains that “For Americans reared as members of the “clean plate club” and socialized to associate our own uneaten food with hunger in faraway places, such programs have enormous appeal”. We are drawn to hunger organizations for several reasons, two reasons being hunger’s obvious ‘absurdity’ and its emotional salience<sup>3,4</sup>. Poppendieck explains that the emotional response to hunger yields ‘token solutions’; solutions which we might call band-aids to a larger problem, but make the well-fed feel better. The persistence of these programs often masks the need for more long-term, fundamental changes to systems of food and income distribution. Some organizations with “relatively sophisticated critiques of the structural roots of hunger in America have engaged with the feeding movement” as a way to serve immediate needs and start conversations about larger, structural issues. Poppendieck explains, “It is time to find ways to shift the discourse from undernutrition to unfairness, [and] from hunger to inequality” because “hunger, like homelessness and a host of other problems, is a symptom, not a cause, of poverty”.

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This sentiment of engaging in the ‘feeding movement’ while aware of the structural issues of food insecurity also holds true in the Twin Cities. A St. Paul organization working to address food deserts noted that social services agencies “are just a food support system, so they are not supposed to be providing everyone's food resources for their life, or their entire month.” They went on to explain the unsustainability of the emergency food system noting that there isn’t the funding or resources to be providing the majority of a household’s food. All of this being said, this particular organization also

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<sup>2</sup> This is often the rhetoric associated with food insecurity, as if we do not have enough food to go around-- hunger gets written off as a production problem, and not a problem of inequity and distribution.

<sup>3</sup> Food insecurity is also often the most visible symptom of poverty, making it easier for people to think about addressing than poverty itself.

<sup>4</sup> Poppendieck argues that these are universal. That even with differing opinions about causes and solutions, every rational person will agree that hunger/food insecurity is bad. And it pulls at the ‘heartstrings’. It’s important to not here, however, that while anti-hunger may be *presented* as a unifying cause, some people do rationalize that it is ok for some to go hungry, especially those who benefit from a system of inequality.

mentioned the danger of focusing solely on theoretical solutions because the immediate food needs of individuals and families cannot be ignored<sup>5</sup>. So while many anti-hunger organizations realize that there are larger issues at play, they often focus on immediate food needs because it is increasingly difficult to turn a blind eye to acute needs in the name of a more just future. Therefore, the system of rallying Americans to donate their time, food, and money to this 'feeding movement' continues.

If organizations are hyper focused on hunger then the solution is food. If they are hyper focused on poverty, then the solutions become much more complicated and diverse including increased minimum wage, affordable housing, food sovereignty, etc. My research and time talking with anti-hunger organizations shows that there are a few clear reasons for this tunnel vision. Firstly, hunger is often the most visible symptom of poverty, and secondly, hunger and/or food insecurity *feels* the most solvable. When talking about their decision to focus on food insecurity, one organization noted that "food is the first thing people cut because it is the most flexible bill, per se". For this reason, this organization feels like food is a proper starting point to begin working to address poverty. As Poppendieck explains briefly in *Want Amid Plenty*, people organize around hunger because it feels especially absurd and easily doctored. One organization I spoke to stated that their main goal, in general, is to end hunger in Minnesota and that they aim to do this by "chipping away at it a little bit at a time". While this particular organization recognized that 'ending hunger' will take time, their general sentiment was of relentless incrementalism pointing to their faith in the emergency food system combined with federally funded social welfare programs to fully address the problem of food insecurity.

This focus on food seems to also stem from worries of mission creep. Organizations I spoke with mentioned the problem of most social justice work being very siloed, but they are all intentional about focusing their work and advocacy on food in order to maintain a clear mission and pursue straight forward goals. One organization mentioned taking "more of a leadership position on the things directly related to food, but [that they] are ... always supportive of issues whether that's living wage work or paid family leave".

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<sup>5</sup> In this interview, the representative I was speaking with explained that folks who are food insecure are often hyperfocused on their immediate needs, and theoretical, long-term solutions don't always consider this.

**Poppendieck, Janet. *Sweet Charity: Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement* ( New York: Viking 1998).**

In her piece, *Sweet Charity*, Poppendieck explains the origin story and history of the emergency food system up until the late 1990s<sup>6</sup>. Poppendieck notes that the emergency food sector started by accident-- a quick response to a circumstance that people were unsure how to deal with. Simultaneously, a growing environmental movement focused on food waste was emerging, and a growing need for food and other resources in individuals and families in poverty was identified. This led to small groups of people, especially churches, setting up 'food banks' in order to redistribute recovered food that would have otherwise gone to waste (Poppendieck 111, 123).

Poppendieck explains that once the time and energy was invested in the mechanisms and infrastructure of emergency food, there was no way to halt the services without leaving struggling families in dire circumstances. A network of food banks and charity food donations has been created keeping food insecure folks in a cycle of consistently relying on these services, not because they were not working to change their economic status, but because the very services claiming to be 'fighting hunger' were not pushing for the social, political and economic changes necessary to interrupt poverty. Although Poppendieck's reflections of the emergency food system are now over 30 years old, the same argument can be made for our current emergency food system, that still focuses on consistent food distribution, and lacks the teeth to make any headway on long-term systemic changes.

In Poppendieck's *Sweet Charity* introduction, she explains, "The resurgence of charity is at once a symptom and a cause of our society's failure to face up and deal with the erosion of equality" (5). Poppendieck explains that emergency food services are now considered a part of long-term hunger interventions in the same category as government assistance such as SNAP and WIC food programs. We now consider 'damage control' practices as part of the solution because we have given up on the idea of creating long-lasting change. A system of meeting immediate food needs has been so heavily invested in, both financially and emotionally, that more radical alternatives to solving the problem of food insecurity often go unexplored.

To further explain this point Poppendieck uses the well known public health story of the babies in the stream (288-296). Poppendieck sets the scene in a fictional community

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<sup>6</sup> Poppendieck's radical comments largely come from the time she was writing. Since the late 1990's we have seen an explosion in anti-hunger organizations and charities with the same diagnosis Poppendieck prescribes nearly 30 years ago.



where, unexpectedly, babies begin to flow down the stream. Although they are uncertain what is causing this, the neighbors begin to save the babies from the stream as the number of babies in the stream increases. Finally, one community member decides to take a trip upstream to find out what the cause of this phenomenon is, but the rest of the community members are “afraid to take time and energy away from the immediate rescue project...”(288). Over time, saving babies from the stream becomes a part of everyday life for this community: people are hired full-time for rescue efforts, equipment is invested in to streamline the rescue process, and the community stops planning for a future in which the babies will no longer be flowing downstream.

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In the next several paragraphs, I will discuss how Poppendieck’s arguments in Sweet Charity are more prevalent than ever in the anti-hunger field. Most generally, this well-known fable is used to point to the danger of focusing too heavily on after-the-fact interventions rather than preventative measures. That is, if the time and energy would have been used to find out why the babies were in the stream in the first place, the flow of babies could have been prevented upstream. In the anti-hunger context, the use of this story is powerful because it asks us to consider what systems and structures of the anti-hunger movement have been created to ‘rescue’ those who are chronically food insecure, and how much has been invested in addressing the upstream causes of hunger and food insecurity.

Very few times in my interviews with Twin Cities anti-hunger organizations did the topic of poverty get brought up without me prompting the connection. In one interview, however, the representative I was speaking with explained that their focus on food stems in part from the notion that “food is the first thing people cut because it is the most flexible bill”, and that hunger is “really a symptom of the larger issue of poverty”. This representative went on further to explain a spectrum where:

“One side is the social service, providing direct and immediate relief for the symptoms of the larger issue... but then there are all of these systematic issues that [are] causing this to happen, so then there's this other side where you have to address the systems change and the policy...”.

It is generally understood that systems change and policy work take time, and that in the meantime, the immediate needs of food insecure families and individuals cannot be ignored. In the Twin Cities however, there seems to be an increasing number of organizations working on the social services, or emergency food end of the spectrum,

and not as many working on the social change. Furthermore, the organizations focusing on policy, are often intentional about focusing solely on *food policy*, as to maintain a bipartisan agenda and avoid mission creep. As previously mentioned, one interviewee mentioned their organization's focus on food policy, but also spoke about leaving more loosely related political advocacy work to other city leaders. This same sentiment was shared by another organization who said in an interview, "If you are trying to address everything, you are addressing nothing". This points to the complexity of anti-hunger work, as it works to match the complexities of the food system, poverty, and social and economic equity which also intersects with health, housing, employment, and transportation disparities.

These complexities may in fact be why many organizations focus on the emergency food system, as a way to maintain a clear mission with measurable impact, even if that impact is not long-term. In *Sweet Charity*, Poppendieck names this conundrum, the "paralysis of scale" (290) explaining that anti-hunger organizations may not see the benefit in transitioning "from this arena of success to the frustrations of uncertain politics"(291). Poppendieck goes on to explain, "The more [emergency food organizations] analyze the pathways that lead to the food pantry door, the bigger the task appears, and the less sure they are that we can do anything to stanch the flow"(290).

In the final chapters of *Sweet Charity*, Poppendieck, while recognizing this fear of the unknown, calls for a shift in the way in which we talk about hunger, promote it to donors, and in the way we create and reproduce systems to solve it. She explains that we need to shift away from addressing symptoms of hunger and homelessness, and start diagnosing the deeper issues of poverty and inequality (307). Poppendieck writes that "tutoring programs are good, but they are not a substitute for good schools. Friendly visitors for AIDs patients are good, but they are no substitute for medical care or access to pharmaceuticals. Volunteer advocates for abused children are good, but they can not replace adequately staffed and accountable systems of foster care"(7). In *Sweet Charity*, Poppendieck makes the claim that emergency food programs are also good, but are no match for robust systems that directly address social and income inequality.

Furthermore, Poppendieck explains that our 'anti-hunger' goals are just not radical enough. She writes: "We need to aim for the creation of a just and inclusive society that taps everyone's potential and makes us all better off in the long run, not just a society where no one starves" (315).

## Philanthropy & Corporate Giving

To do the work they aim to do, anti-hunger organizations often rely heavily on funding from larger organizations, businesses, and corporations. Funding may be consistent through partnerships, or yearly support, but grants and one-time donations are less predictable. Kathryn Moeller in her novel, *The Gender Effect*, works through the challenges of relying on corporate funding for social justice work. She explains, “There is a profit to be made in pursuing the social good. Thus, as a practice, philanthrocapitalism rests comfortably upon a foundation of inequality” (Moeller 9). Anti-hunger work is an increasingly popular cause for corporations and businesses to associate with. From the public eye, anti-hunger work is apolitical and a cause worthy of spending money on, making it the ideal marketing tool. As we consider how nonprofit anti-hunger organizations are funded, it may be important to consider who benefits most from the business/nonprofit relationship.

“The reason there will be no change is because the people who stand to lose from change have all the power. And the people who stand to gain from change have none of the power.” --Machiavelli<sup>7</sup>

### **Stole, Inger. “Cause-Related Marketing’: Why Social Change and Corporate Profits Don’t Mix.” *PR Watch*, Center for Media and Democracy , 14 Dec. 2012.**

Written by Inger Stole, an author and assistant professor at the Institute of Communications Research at the University of Illinois, *Cause-Related Marketing* works through the complicated relationships between ‘social change’ nonprofits and beneficiary corporations. Stole begins by clarifying that Cause-Related Marketing is at its core a market-driven system, and a “non-profit organizations’ chance of obtaining CRM funding hinges on its ability to complement sales messages” (Stole)<sup>8</sup>. Causes are not chosen because of their potential to do good, but by their potential to bring in revenue. Weaved through this article, Stole uses the fight against breast cancer as an example of corporations selling (literally) the cause. Companies sell product with the promise of donating a portion of the proceeds to breast cancer research-- in this case, companies were selling pink ribbons, yoghurt, and stuffed animals. Generally, consumers will choose

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<sup>7</sup> Found originally from *The Prince* by Machiavelli--found in the documentary, *Poverty Inc.*

<sup>8</sup> Corporations are looking to sell their message and/or product to as many people as possible-- an organization with a mission viewed as too radical may hinder this.

a product connected to an important cause over a product with a similar price but with no cause-related marketing. Thus companies still come out on top with more consumers and increased profits. Stole explains, “Imagine the impact if the companies instead, or in addition, advocated for a more equitable healthcare system. After all, inadequate health insurance keeps many women from detecting breast cancer in its early, and most curable, stage”. Perhaps working on the root causes of an issue isn’t as glamorous. The ‘fight’ against breast cancer is such a popular and successful marketing ploy because, as Stole explains, it is completely noncontroversial. Stole explains that corporations do not want to partner with an organization that might rock the boat, so in order to receive funding, non-profit organizations may ‘water down’ their mission in order to fit the marketing of the company.

Lastly, Stole notes, “CRM may fairly be seen as a clever ploy to mask problems that the very same corporate forces are directly or indirectly responsible for”. Stole is not alone in her thoughts on this connection between corporations and structural social issues. As we consider the relationships between big business, food insecurity, and poverty, it will be important to note what specific anti-hunger organizations big companies choose to endorse, and why.

*“They ‘check out hunger’ at their local supermarket counters and ‘dine out to help out’ with their American Express cards. They ‘tee off against hunger’ on their golf courses and run against hunger in their marathons” (Poppendieck, Sweet Charity 4).*

**“Private Philanthropy and the Self-Help Myth .” *The Self-Help Myth: How Philanthropy Fails to Alleviate Poverty*, by Erica Kohl-Arenas, University of California Press, 2016, pp. 1–36.**

An assistant professor at the Milan School of International Affairs, Management, and Urban Policy at The New School in New York, Erica Kohl-Arenas’ novel asks the question, ‘can philanthropy alleviate poverty?’. The first chapter, *Private Philanthropy and the Self-Help Myth*, introduces the ideas and framework that she uses in the following chapters. There are two main themes in this introductory chapter. The first is that philanthropy often asks organizations to ‘stick to the status quo’, and the second is that they fail to alleviate poverty by promoting a ‘self-help’ model, asking “the poor to help themselves, while avoiding the structural causes of poverty and inequality”(2)<sup>9</sup>. Kohl

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<sup>9</sup> This self-help model is not to be confused with other models of self-determination and empowerment, where the structural issues are confronted in order for those in poverty to be able to lift themselves out of poverty in a more equitable system.

Arenas also makes a point to discuss how philanthropic corporations and foundations intentionally, and sometimes unintentionally, maintain power by ‘negotiating’ the terms of their financial support (6). Kohl-Arenas echoes Stole’s sentiment when she says, “radical social movement ideas are translated into non threatening understandings of self help acceptable to funders...” (40). Not only are foundations hoarding power and turning a blind eye to structural problems, but they are often the ones who are also contributing to the problem. In this chapter, Erica Kohl-Arenas speaks with Peter Buffet, son of well-known philanthropist Warren Buffett, who explains that foundations are “searching for answers with their right hand to problems that others in the room have created with their left” (Buffet 2013).

**“The Politics of Corporate Giving .” *Big Hunger: the Unholy Alliance between Corporate America and Anti-Hunger Groups*, by Andy Fisher, MIT Press, 2018, pp. 77–103.**

Andy Fisher, a researcher, writer and worker in the anti-hunger field, spends chapter three of *Big Hunger* honing in on corporate giving, its history, and its direct relationship to anti-hunger work. Fisher writes that over 150 businesses and corporations donate money or other items to the top anti-hunger organizations in the United States (85-86). He has similar ideas as Stole does, saying that the most suitable causes for corporate philanthropy are those that are apolitical. They are unlikely to alienate customers, and they do not bind the corporation to any political agenda (87)<sup>10</sup>.

Fisher uses Walmart and Snickers as case studies to explain how responses to social problems have become privatized (77) and how big corporations use cause-related marketing in their favor, while ignoring their hand in creating the problems they aim to solve<sup>11</sup>. In his analysis of the Walmart Foundation, Fisher explains that the motivation of increased giving from the foundation stemmed from their desire to disassemble their bad reputation, and break way for expansion in areas that were actively opposing their business (90-92). Because of this, organizations funded by the Walmart Foundation are required to follow the Community Giving and State Giving programs which “state that opposing Walmart (the corporation, not the foundation) disqualifies a group from Walmart Foundation giving” (94). Fisher explains that because of the counteractive agendas of

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<sup>10</sup> This means that organizations that are advocacy oriented, with a clear political agenda pose as risks to larger corporate funders who do not want their business criticized.

<sup>11</sup> Walmart is an easy target. This corporation often gets brought up in conversations about economic and social inequality, and rightfully so. They are, however, not alone in their business practices (product sourcing, low employee wages, anti-union practices).

many corporations, and because of the power imbalances that stem from the giver/recipient relationship, "...nonprofits may be faced with unsavory compromises and collateral damage from their association with corporate philanthropists" (89).

Fisher also makes a call to non-profit organizations, explaining that "what is necessary for any nonprofit... is a conscious and deliberate consideration of the ethical and strategic implications of accepting any funds, but especially those from the corporate sector" (100).

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Funding seems to consistently be the most difficult, and sometimes most frustrating, aspect of nonprofit work, and this notion was echoed in my conversations with Twin Cities anti-hunger organizations. While the organizations I spoke with did not seem to be especially focused on their corporate funders, they did express frustrations with the general funding process. I spoke with an organization whose model is partially funded by grants and partially through their social enterprise revenue. This particular organization explained that funders "only fund one thing for a couple of years and then they want you to change it even if its working... they want innovation...". They went on to say that funding sources are not always mindful about what kind of models are working well, resulting in 'flashy new projects' being funded rather than the ones that have been consistently making positive changes. This organization explained, "Agencies are forced to adapt and change so they can get [the] funding, and it becomes more money chasing than mission driven". This was particularly frustrating for this organization whose model was very popular for a couple of years, and now they are having a harder time finding consistent funding.

While raising funds proves to be time consuming and challenging, nonprofits are required to spend a lot of time reporting back to their funding sources. One organization mentioned that all of the data they collect is almost entirely for the purpose of their major funding source, and that this is the case for most food shelves. This data is almost entirely quantitative data including number of 'clients' served and number of pounds of food distributed.

Of the anti-hunger organizations I spoke with, some had an easier time with funding than others did. One organization I spoke with has a different funding situation than the usual anti-hunger organization. This organization's funding source is much closer in relation and proximity, and is on board with their goals and mission. They have an easier time reporting back to their funders, because they are not asked about statistics but about the community perception and input related to their programming. This means that they have a larger role in shaping what the success of their program really looks like. They are

given the autonomy to focus on community connections. This presents to a possible entry point as we begin to re-think what the long-term goals of anti-hunger work should be. If larger funding sources can think about ways to shift their reporting models to ask organizations what specific actions they are taking to move the needle towards food security, maybe smaller organizations will have the space to prioritize long-term planning. Additionally, it seems as though most anti-hunger organizations would benefit greatly from having the additional capacity to gather internal data, rather than being bogged down by all of the details their funders require which often ends up being a form of institutional surveillance.

## **Long Term Planning & Social Change**

As stated above, our understanding of food insecurity in relation to poverty and larger systemic issues affects what we see as viable solutions to the problem. In the same vein, anti-hunger organizations' theories of change shape their mission statements, long term goals, and measures of success. For example, a food bank may be measuring their success or 'reach' based on the number of people who visited their facility within a year. Increased numbers may be used to indicate success, rather than indicating a problem that is *not* being improved. Additionally, the framing of hunger interventions as charity and emergency food work may signify "our society's failure to grapple in meaningful ways with poverty" (Poppendieck Sweet Charity 5). In this section, we will explore how the mission statements, long-term goals, and measures of success used by anti-hunger organizations could be contributing to cycles of food insecurity and poverty rather than interrupting them. We will also look at what food scholars and activists have proposed for a possible future beyond the emergency food system and federally funded social services.

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### **Local Case Study: The Sandwich Project, Minneapolis Homeless Ministry**

The Sandwich Project is a notable case study for a variety of reasons. With a relatively straightforward goal, their mission is clear and their impact is easily measurable, and the similarities The Sandwich Project shares with numerous anti-hunger organizations allows for its critiques and/or shortcomings to be applicable to many more organizations. The Sandwich Project represents a 'brand' of anti-hunger organizations. This organizations

serves as an opportunity to reflect on the long-term sustainability and impact of emergency food models.

Founded in 2007, The Sandwich Project's initial goal was to "help feed 150 homeless people in Minneapolis as many times a year as possible, with the ultimate goal of doing it everyday of the year" (Sandwich Project). Today, The Sandwich Project makes and distributes approximately 400,000 sandwiches per year to food pantries and soup kitchens in Minneapolis and St. Paul including Minneapolis Waite House, Simpson United Methodist Food Shelf, Keystone Midway Food Shelf, and several Loaves and Fishes meal sites (Sandwich Project). This organization relies completely on donations and volunteers for its everyday functions, not unlike other anti-hunger nonprofits across the country. Groups of volunteers are able to purchase the sandwich supplies at their local grocery store, follow the sandwich making instructions, and drop them off at one of several drop locations where they are then frozen before getting distributed to the food banks/pantries.

The Sandwich Project is not unique in its approach to addressing hunger in the cities. Numerous anti-hunger organizations rally donors and volunteers around making meals and other food items. Donating food like canned goods, meal kits, and sandwiches is often seen as a more direct response to hunger-- one that volunteers can immediately feel good about. This is one reason why larger organizations such as Feed My Starving Children are such a popular place for large groups of do-gooders. This may also be why food banks in general are more successful in acquiring food donations, rather than monetary donations. Donating a can of food is promoted as, and is interpreted as the part everyone can play in ending hunger. Donating food, whether it be to a food bank or directly to someone who is in poverty and/or homeless also plays into the mistrust and stigma associated with people in poverty. Many donors would prefer to donate food because there is only one thing you can do with it: eat it. When you donate cash, you leave the spending of that money to the discretion of the food bank or the person in poverty. Folks who are food insecure and in poverty are often thought to be irresponsible with their money. For donors who hold this biased assumption, donating food and in this case, sandwiches, gives the donor peace of mind knowing that their contribution is going to the betterment of the recipient, rather than to an assumed 'frivolous' spending habit.

Thinking about the ways in which an anti-hunger organization measures their success may also provide some insight into their long-term goals, and how they situate themselves within a larger social and political framework. For example, if the goal of The Sandwich Project is to continue to feed people who are homeless or in crisis, then an increased number of distributed sandwiches *is* a success. But if the goal is to address the



problem that is causing people to go hungry in the first place, then an increase in sandwich distribution is actually a measure or indicator that the intervention is unsuccessful.

The assumption here is that every anti-hunger organizations' true long-term goal is to end food insecurity/hunger. It may be that the Sandwich Project and other organizations recognize that the extent of their mission and impact is to provide emergency relief to those struggling with food insecurity. In this case, the problem still remains that this message is rarely conveyed to the general public, and the emergency food relief efforts are conflated to be seen as the solution to ending hunger. In *Sweet Charity*, Janet Poppendieck explains, "...by promoting charitable giving, and by enlisting celebrities to endorse one's charitable activity, the message is loud and clear that [emergency food provisioning] is an appropriate response to poverty"(303). In the case of The Sandwich Project, promoting the idea that making and distributing meat and cheese sandwiches is addressing the hunger needs of poor folks in the Twin Cities, only reproduces a system in which charitable individuals can send away sandwiches and wash their hands of bread crumbs and responsibility.

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**Kivel, Paul. "Social Services or Social Change?" *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: beyond the non-profit industrial complex*, edited by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence. South End Press, 2007, pp. 129- 149.**

Written in 2007 by Paul Kivel, an educator, activist and writer, *Social Service or Social Change?* is an essay published in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: beyond the non-profit industrial complex* edited by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence. The question Kivel works to address is if our collective efforts to provide social services work against our efforts to work towards social equity<sup>12</sup>. Kivel's conclusion is that not only do systems of social services work against social change, but that there are systems and people in power that want to keep it this way. To begin, Kivel explains that social service work "addresses the needs of individuals reeling from the personal and devastating impact of institutional systems of exploitation and violence" while social change work "challenged the root causes of the exploitation and violence" (129).

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<sup>12</sup> This is a very brief overview of this piece by Kivel. Kivel also reviews in depth the creation of the non-profit status as a tool for wealth accumulation, the co-optation of community leaders, and ideas of 'getting ahead' or 'getting together'--all crucial aspects of anti-hunger work.

Kivel takes a radical approach to explain the social and economic systems that affect non-profit work. Systems of inequality are created and maintained by those in power and are created to maintain the status quo, making work for social change increasingly difficult. He explains that the ruling class' tactic to maintain social order is to fund social welfare programs-- programs they know will 'keep the peace' but won't actually move individuals up the social and economic ladder (136)<sup>13</sup>. This 'co-optation' is described as the appearance of a responsive government, "creating an illusion of progress while recruiting buffer-zone agents from the groups of people demanding change of the system" (136)<sup>14</sup>.

Kivel's call to non-profit workers is this: "We need to examine the impact of our work very carefully to make sure that it does not perpetuate a narrow social service perspective and that we ourselves have not been co-opted by the jobs and privileges we have been given in the non-profit industrial complex" (137).

**"Innovation within the Anti-Hunger Movement" *Big Hunger: the Unholy Alliance between Corporate America and Anti-Hunger Groups*, by Andy Fisher, MIT Press, 2018, pp. 215–242.**

In this chapter, "Innovation within the Anti-Hunger Movement", Andy Fisher explains that what it means to be an anti-hunger organization needs to change. He lays out several changes anti-hunger organizations have made to transition away from the transitional emergency food model, and towards a more holistic food system. Fisher explains that anti-hunger organizations have been "running on an endless treadmill just trying to meet immediate needs"(216) and some are beginning to realize that changes need to be made. These changes include:

- Focusing on the quality of food distributed in food pantries.
- Pushing the food policy agenda.
- Involving community members in planning and decision making processes.
- Focusing on and confronting institutional racism in the food system.
- Incorporating community farming and gardening into food bank operations.

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<sup>13</sup> Programs that then go underfunded and overregulated (Kivel 136).

<sup>14</sup> Kivel describes the 'buffer-zone' as compromising of occupations and individuals who exist between the ruling class and the people at the bottom. Buffer-zone agents carry out the work of the ruling class with low 'ruling class visibility'. These agents are often recruited from the bottom of the economic pyramid, as to appear trustworthy. The main work of buffer-zone agents is to keep hope in the system alive!

- Focusing on job skills and employment opportunities.
- Focusing on nutrition education and community defined health.

Fisher also writes that one major change anti-hunger organizations can make is to reframe hunger as an income issue rather than a food charity issue. By shifting the narrative to be about poverty rather than food, organizations can start to confront larger systemic issues within the food system. Fisher uses the organization Freedom 90 to illustrate how these changes can be made. A group made up of elderly women who have been working in an Ontario food bank for many years, Freedom 90 was created as a call for a shift in emergency food-- so that these women could retire by the time they were 90 years old. The union launched in 2012 with 3 demands. They requested they get laid off and that retirement before 90 be mandatory (237). While this union was created as more of a joke to point out the ridiculousness of the emergency food system, it raised important questions about the reality of future emergency food systems if no changes are made. Freedom 90 now operates on the shared understanding that “poverty is being re-branded as hunger to mask its cause: inadequate incomes, which are due to low wages, precarious work, and social assistance levels too low to provide adequate housing and food”(236).

**Frieze, Deborah, director. *Two Loops: How Systems Change* . Vimeo, The Berkana Institute, 16 Dec. 2010, [vimeo.com/17907928](https://vimeo.com/17907928).**

In *Two Loops: How Systems Change*, Deborah Frieze explains the two loop theory as a means to caring for a dying system, while nourishing a new one. Frieze uses a robust illustration to show that new systems are often emerging near the peak of an old, dying system. She explains that “when alternatives start to appear, the system is inclined towards self preservation...”. To withstand this system self preservation, Frieze stresses the importance of the new alternatives connecting and collaborating with each other. This collaboration will also yield a smoother, and more timely transition to the new system.

Frieze explains people will likely fall out of the old system faster than the new system can catch them and many people may be hurt and damaged during the change. This is why dying systems are places in need of hospice, care, and compassion-- we need to be thinking about how to make the transition as painless as possible.

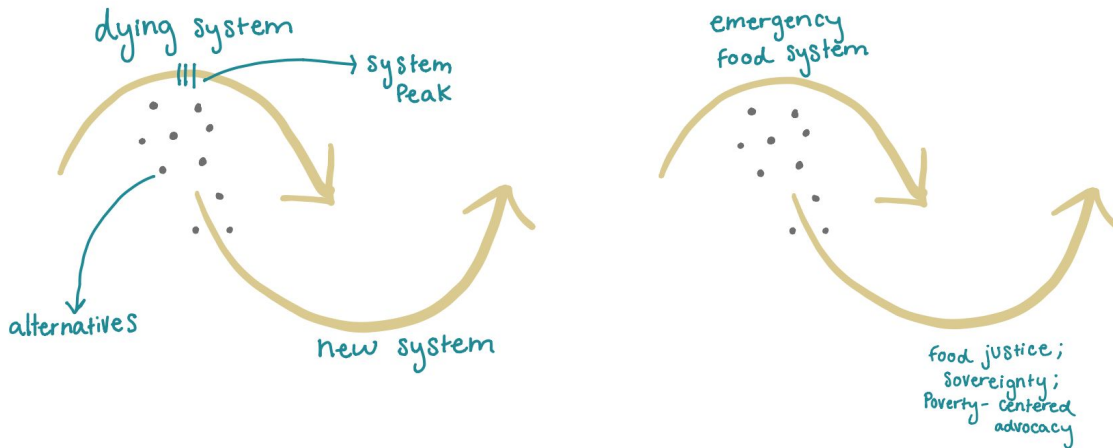
Lastly, ‘protectors’, people working within the dying system to make the transition, use their position of power to create and protect space for the pioneers to do their work. And

as new systems become more robust, the new systems need to be illuminated so people know that they can abandon the old system. Protectors are also helpful in this transition, as they can mediate fear of abandoning the old system. Finally, the two loop system leaves us to decide if a totally new system is *a/ways* needed and we can only alleviate the pain while moving forward, or if there can be pioneering work within the dying system to transform it.

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While the two-loop theory is arguably simplified for better understanding and application, the idea of caring for a dying system, while working on building a new system provides a strong model for the emergency food system.

Like a kid swinging from one monkey bar to another, enough grip, weight and trust must be put towards the next bar before completely letting go of the previous bar. This cannot happen, however, if both hands are still on the first bar. For a robust, and socially just, food system, this means putting more time, human capacity, and financial resources for a new system so that we can eventually let go of the dying emergency food system.



*“Every system is exquisitely designed to produce the results it gets. If you want to change the results, you have to change the system”. -- Mary Beth Cooney*

## Closing Thoughts

The emergency food system in the Twin Cities is a well oiled machine. Millions of individuals are served per year, the ‘client choice’ model is the new normal in an attempt to restore client dignity , and there has been a steady increase in the push for more fresh, healthy foods in food pantries and other food assistance programs. Still, the system is not currently suited to address the systemic barriers that keep people food insecure and in poverty. Anti-hunger work is still perceived as a movement that can be supported solely by charity. In turn, the missions of many organizations are watered down in order to appeal to a wide range of people, including corporations and large funders who do not want to align with a threatening message, but are interested in a large tax break.

Like Poppendieck’s re-telling of the ‘babies in the river’ story, it is clear that the intent to serve food to those in need is noble. Community members working in food banks, soup kitchens and within other types of food distribution models are more dedicated than ever to meet the immediate needs of individuals and families in the Twin Cities. But because this need is so high, organizations struggle to shift away from the emergency food system, even if it would mean a long-term decrease in food insecurity in the future. As one of my interviewees explained, direct service agencies are “very limited in the amount of resources, time and money, to be investing in the big picture issues”. It’s not that anti-hunger organizations are unaware of their circumstances, but that they are unsure of how to shift their mission and operations to be addressing systemic food insecurity and poverty.

I see this resource guide as a first step in re-introducing a conversation about the complexities of the current emergency food system. I hope that this project will leave anti-hunger organizations with a more comprehensive understanding not only of what scholars are writing about systemic food insecurity, but also of the barriers their neighbor organizations are encountering, so that their work may be better situated to plan for a future with increased food security, sovereignty and justice.

*“The persistence of poverty and hunger in America is a political choice: the fruit of our political, economic and social systems. We have the power to change these systems, end poverty and abolish hunger, but it will take more than charity to do this. Fundamental change requires political and economic reform... Hunger is not just about food, it is about justice and power, and together we have the power to do something about it” (Just Harvest 238-9).*

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