COVID-19: The Rise of Food Insecurity at Home and Abroad

EVENT SUMMARY

Online via Zoom
When: Thursday, May 14, 2020 | 11:30 AM - 1:00 PM

Moderator
Rebecca Middleton | Executive Director, Alliance to End Hunger

Speakers
Jim Flock | Chief of Party, Feed the Future Tanzania NAFAKA II Activity, ACDI/VOCA
Kim Ford | President and CEO, Martha’s Table
Radha Muthiah | President and CEO, Capital Area Food Bank
Carrie Stoltzfus | Executive Director, Food & Friends

Event Description

The COVID-19 pandemic is poised to have a profound effect on the food security of millions of people globally. The World Food Program predicts that there will be more than a quarter of a billion people suffering from acute hunger by the end of the year, almost double the pre-pandemic level. Efforts to contain the virus, both here in the United States and around the world, have resulted in the unprecedented loss of livelihoods, disruptions to food systems, and massive demand for social safety nets. Domestic and international organizations have long worked to respond to food insecurity – both chronic and as a result of acute shocks. However, the covariate risk of COVID-19 and its global scale has resulted in urgent needs at home and abroad. In this special session we considered the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic both overseas and in the DC metro area. We heard from a panel of experts working to respond to the massive growth in hunger, and we discussed practical ways to improve our work overseas and help our neighbors here at home.
How are organizations responding?

Jim Flock (ACDI/VOCA) discussed how ACDI/VOCA is forming partnerships with major agricultural actors to increase the food supply during the current period of global pandemic. Mr. Flock added that ACDI/VOCA is responding to COVID-19 by encouraging farmers to focus on growing indigenous crops, as they are more suitable during extreme climate events, provide a long-term food security option, and help to curb poverty in rural areas during drought and other crop failure events.

Kim Ford (Martha’s Table) stated that Martha’s Table is working around the clock to register clients through its COVID-19 food relief program. At the same time, Ms. Ford is also committed to maintaining the same team members and not reducing salaries or working hours to protect her employees from food insecurity.

Carrie Stoltzfus (Food and Friends) highlighted that Food and Friends is delivering 5,000 more meals per week than it was before the pandemic started. Ms. Stoltzfus added that Food and Friends has introduced eleven meal plans that are medically tailored to client needs. This has helped individuals who are not able to prepare high nutritious meals on their own.

Radha Muthiah (Capital Area Food Bank or CAFB) mentioned that CAFB is responding to the pandemic using three phases: response, recovery, and rebuilding. According to Ms. Muthiah, CAFB uses data to determine where food- insecure clients reside and create drive-through models and food trucks based on those locations. CAFB is also working closely with producers, farmers, and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to further provide food from farms to trucks.

How is COVID-19 affecting food insecurity?

Mr. Flock expressed his concern about how food insecurity affects small farmers in the context of COVID-19. Mr. Flock mentioned that farmers are currently facing difficulties in finding markets for their products and potential customers. School feeding programs have also had to decrease the number of meals that they can provide due to the lack of communication between farmers and processors.

Ms. Stoltzfus shared the difficulties of creating tailored, medically-specific meals for people suffering from serious illnesses. Ms. Stoltzfus mentioned that immunocompromised persons are currently facing difficulties due to the need for social distancing and minimal access to health providers. Ms. Stoltzfus added that health care providers face food insecurity at home because they are at a much higher risk of contracting COVID-19 and therefore need to be more frequently isolated.
How is COVID-19 affecting food insecurity? (Cont.)

Ms. Muthiah mentioned that there are about 400,000 food insecure individuals in the greater DC metro area. CAFB distributed over 30 million meals per year through a network of more than 450 regional nonprofit partners and 300 direct distribution partners. Ms. Muthiah highlighted that in addition to providing food through partners, CAFB also distributes food directly to the community. The direct food programs include after-school meals for kids, free produce markets, and emergency food distributions. However, there has been a dramatic decrease in the distribution of food due to increased demand. Ms. Muthiah expressed her concerns surrounding the number of food donations that CAFB has received since the start of the COVID-19 crisis, as there may not be a return to normal until late December in the best-case scenario.

Ms. Ford briefly shared that Martha’s Table has changed its operations due to high demand from the COVID-19 pandemic. Ms. Ford mentioned that Martha’s Table changed from distributing 500 to 2,500 bags of groceries per day. Martha’s Table also introduced ten community drop off sites in the northwest and southeast DC to support families who are unable to afford essential needs like groceries.

What are the future solutions?

Ms. Muthiah mentioned that CAFB is already thinking about the long-term effects of COVID-19 so that it can build better and more resilient delivery services for its clients. Financial support is and will continue to be critical in delivering resource-intensive food acquisition. As an example, CAFB will continue to engage in public-private partnerships to increase its reach in the community. Ms. Muthiah also emphasized the importance of having regional development conversations regularly to discuss food insecurity and protecting vulnerable populations.

Additionally, Ms. Stoltzfus highlighted that Food and Friends expects the demand for its services to increase in the coming years. As a result, Food and Friends is planning to expand its partnerships with other food network organizations to accommodate its client’s needs in the future.