

**The People vs. The Virus:**

**Food Insecurity in the U.S. and the Impacts of COVID-19**

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**Abstract**

When thinking about Human Needs Theory most immediately jump to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and the idea that needs are ranked in order of importance: food, water, shelter and then move up to self-actualization. What many do not realize is that things like security also fall within human needs. This paper takes a deeper dive and explains that the need for security can also be tied to the need for food. The two go hand in hand. It does so through the conflict of food insecurity and the greater impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on our food system. The author works at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro assisting with the quarantine program and feeding the students placed into quarantine. The author witnessed this impact firsthand, sought to bring to light this unique moment in our collective human history, and help offer solutions to combat the conflict. It should be noted that the statistics used were current at the time of submission.

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#### **Introduction**

Humanity. What does it mean? Merriam-Webster defines it as, "compassionate, sympathetic, or generous behavior or disposition: the quality of being humane" (Webster, 2020). So how do we show our humanity? We could show it by donating money or clothes or spending our time volunteering in service to others. We could also show it through food. Often overlooked, food is a symbol of power and a source of conflict. The current global pandemic caused by the COVID-19 viral outbreak has put this conflict into the spotlight.

The CDC confirmed its first Coronavirus case on January 21, 2020. By January 31, the World Health Organization (WHO) had declared a Global Health Emergency due to the rapid spread of the virus. On February 3, 2021, the U.S. declared a public health emergency, and on March 11, 2021, the WHO officially labeled the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic (AJMC, 2020). Countries began shutting down borders, and, in the United States, state governments began issuing lockdown/stay-at-home orders. Over a year later we have a vaccine and infection rates seem to be dropping. Yet, we still find ourselves struggling to get back to "normal".

There are the lasting health implications of COVID infection, and the mental and emotional toll of the pandemic. There are the myriad economic impacts including job loss and, for those still working, the shift to a virtual world. Many are still wearing a mask and staying six feet apart, but many do not know about the impacts on food systems and food insecurity. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) puts the food insecurity rate for 2019 at 10.5% of the U.S. population (USDA, 2020). Feeding America predicts that by the end of 2020 this rate will be at 15.6% of the U.S. population or 50.4 million people (Feeding America, 2020). Before the

pandemic, 2019 was the lowest the rate had been in over 20 years (Feeding America, 2021). Now this rate is growing at an alarming speed with no end in sight.

The food insecurity rate is connected to the unemployment rate. At the height of the quarantine period (April and May of 2020), the United States Bureau of Labor reported the unemployment rate to be 14.7%. At the end of November 2020, it had dropped to 6.7% (USDOL, 2020). While this number does show a decrease, it is still 3.2% higher than it was in February 2020. Historically, African American, Latino, and Native American communities are disproportionately impacted by high rates of unemployment (EPI, 2021).

This paper will provide a historical background on food insecurity in the United States. It then applies two theories, Human Needs Theory (Maslow, 1943) and Structural Violence (Galtung, 1969), to further explain the conflict in question. Next, it will discuss the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the conflict of food insecurity and provide some discussion on the health implications of food insecurity. Finally, John Paul Lederach's (2003) Inquiry Model will be applied to frame a plan for conflict intervention and transformation (Lederach, 2014).

### **Historical Background of Food Insecurity in the United States**

Food insecurity in the United States is not a new issue. It traces its roots back to the founding of the country, and, in fact, even further back to before colonial times. Historian Jill Lepore recounts how in the first settlement at Roanoke in 1585 the settlers became so desperate for food that when Sir Francis Drake offered them passage home on his ship, they all said yes causing Drake to dispose of the enslaved people that he had on board to make room (Lepore, 2018, p. 29). Lepore recounts the infamous story of the second settlement at Roanoke in which future Governor John White left the settlement to seek more supplies (food) from England. When he

returned the colony had disappeared (Lepore, 2018, p. 29). There is much speculation as to what happened to the colony, but all seem to connect to food insecurity.

As we continue along the timeline, we arrive in 1607 and the colony of Jamestown. Here the colonists became food insecure, and their numbers began to dwindle. Lepore (2018) writes that the colony's population was 500 in 1607, but by 1610 the population had fallen to 60 people as the only food they could secure came from neighboring villages of indigenous peoples with whom they were in conflict (Lepore, 2018, p. 37). The American Revolution saw its share of starving colonists who had their crops and goods forcibly taken to feed starving soldiers (Cost, 2019). There were accounts of food insecurity on both sides of the divide during the Civil War, with stories of soldiers eating "...whatever they could find, be it rats, dogs, cats, even downed mules and horses. It was not uncommon for soldiers to raid the local farms and steal what they needed" (Berdanier, 2015, p. 213).

During the Great Depression of the 1930's, around twenty-five percent of the country's workforce was unemployed. This totaled more than 12 million people. Many factories and mills were closed, and farms were foreclosed (FDR Library, 2016). This trend continued throughout our history with the rates of unemployment and food insecurity ebbing and flowing based on factors like economic impacts, wars, and other conflicts. In the 1980's, President Reagan established a task force to study the issue of hunger and assistance programs. Finding no issue of malnutrition in the U.S., the taskforce did recommend that a method should be created to define and report hunger (National Research Council, 2006, pp. 24-25). Finally, by the 1990's, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Congress created working definitions of food security/insecurity and crafted a way to measure and report these rates among the U.S. population (National Research Council, 2006, pp. 26-30).

For over 400 years, food insecurity has been a driving force in the story of our nation's history. We still have not been able to figure out how to meet the basic needs of *all* our people. From the first settlements to modern day, food insecurity continues to plague us and leave a dark stain on our history. Described as the land of plenty, millions within our borders continue to go without food and adequate nutrition. Crises such as the pandemic exacerbate the issue.

### **Human Needs Theory**

John Burton's (1979) approach to Human Needs Theory provides an analytical framework to investigate this issue. As an extension of Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs, this theoretical approach helps expand the theory in order to better analyze how to resolve conflict. Maslow posits that there are five levels of basic needs that humans will progressively fulfill, moving on to the next level of need when achievement of the previous has been realized (Maslow, 1943). These levels are physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). Burton (1979) expanded this scale and contends that these needs are not met progressively but rather are sought simultaneously and not hierarchically. For Burton, the needs most notable for conflict transformation include the need for identity, recognition, security, and personal development (Rubenstein, 2001). For the purposes of this paper, we will primarily focus on the need for security.

The need for security can be expanded to "the need for structure, predictability, stability, and freedom from anxiety" (Marker, 2003). The ideal day for anyone might include an alarm clock going off on time, following the same routine each morning, clean clothes for the day picked out, a nutritious breakfast, catching your bus/train/ride on time with no delays, getting to work a few minutes early to settle in, having a normal productive morning, a nutritious lunch, the same normal afternoon, getting home on time, sneaking in a workout, a nutritious dinner, shower, catching an

episode of your favorite show or sporting event, and finally in bed at your ideal time. Each day repeats, never deviating unless by choice. This repeated schedule seems to leave one with structure, predictability, and stability. A day like this is predicated on a number of things, including access to electricity, private access to clean and safe water, mental health stability, access to heat and air conditioning and to nutritious food, access to a vehicle or reliable public transportation, a stable job, access to a public gym or home gym, strong physical health, cable television, the internet, safety where you work, travel, and live, and money to be able to afford and support these things. For many, these are not reality.

The reality is very different for many people. Reality looks like picking and choosing between which bills get paid this month and which get paid next month, hoping during this time your service is not cut. It could involve having to walk through a war zone and facing the chance of being raped to get water that ultimately won't be sufficient to fulfill your needs. It involves living in and growing up in a state of constant fear and trying to survive so that your mental state is never stable. It means skipping meals, and the ones you do get are probably not even close to nutritious. Those other luxuries of cable television, internet, heating and air, a gym, a stable well-paying job, and a vehicle also are not always accessible. This reality looks more riddled with anxiety and instability, lack of structure, and constant uncertainty in how your day will play out.

Persistent unmet needs are the reality for many around the world. People will struggle to survive and even fight to have their needs fulfilled. If people cannot find structure or stability, they will engage in conflict in hopes of finding a situation where they can find structure or stability. If they cannot find food, they will migrate to where food is more likely to be available. People will do what they need to do in order to fulfill their survival needs.

## **Structural Violence**

Structural violence is "any scenario in which a social structure perpetuates inequities, thus causing preventable suffering" (Lewis, 2021). This suffering can be experienced at multiple levels including symbolically, legally, economically, politically, and culturally. Examples of structural violence can be seen in the continued existence of Confederate Statues in the United States, lack of access to vaccines for parts of the world, or disparities in access to fresh fruits and vegetables. There is a lack of outright violent action in these examples. However, in analyzing the social structures at play in these situations, inequities can be found which lead to violent outcomes. Typically, this analysis involves a dive into history to see how the structures have been set up to cause this violence. Galtung sums this up best by saying, "The important point here is that if people are starving when this is objectively avoidable, then violence is committed..." (Galtung, 1969, p. 171).

Food insecurity is also a form of structural violence. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), food insecurity is, "the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways" (USDA, 2020). Interestingly, food security is also defined as, "The ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods. Assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (that is, without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies)" (USDA, 2020).

Those who suffer from food insecurity tend to be from primarily Black and Hispanic communities and tend to live in areas considered food deserts. In 2014, the percentage of white households that were food insecure was around 10.5%. The percentage of Black and Hispanic households experiencing food insecurity was 26.1% and 22.4% respectively, with this trend

staying consistent through the 2000's (Balistreri, 2016). Historically, these groups have also been discriminated against in the United States and are still being subjected to forms of structural violence. These forms include underfunded primary schools which limit students from pursuing higher education and higher earning potential, historic white flight coupled with discriminatory urban development which has led to decreased property values, and the lack of business development and urban growth (Ostrander, 2015). The lack of business development creates an additional obstacle of a lack of affordable nutritious food within an accessible area. The lower earning potential impacts access to personal transportation to seek this food from other areas (Gordon, 2011).

Structural violence disproportionately impacts minority groups continuing to fuel their unmet needs. These unmet needs then in turn open up the potential for conflict to occur. Impacts from COVID-19 on food insecurity have further ingrained these continuing issues of unmet human needs and structural violence.

### **Impacts of COVID-19**

Impacts associated with COVID-19 and the ensuing pandemic are widespread. Job losses, shifting to working from home, threat of infection, contraction of the virus, loss of loved ones, loss of major life moments together, and inability to pay bills, are just a few examples. This paper focuses on the impacts of COVID-19 on food insecurity, food waste and food access.

#### ***Part A: Food Insecurity***

Both theories mentioned above, Human Needs and Structural Violence, articulate realities being experienced by COVID across the United States and the entire world. Needs already not being met include the need for food, safe drinking water, adequate education, and adequate shelter. Food insecurity is a very dangerous reality for large percentages of the population. As mentioned,

in 2019, the USDA reported the food insecurity rate to be 10.5% of the U.S. population (USDA, 2020). Millions of people were already experiencing unmet needs and suffering from structural violence.

At the beginning of 2020, COVID-19 exacerbated the issue. The virus brought the world as we knew it to a grinding halt. The United States Department of Labor (DOL) put the unemployment rate at 14.7% for April of 2020 (USDOL, 2020), with many having lost their jobs if they were not in a position that could be transitioned to online or remote work. Jobs have also been lost to budget reductions and business closings. Workers have seen drastic cuts in their hours because of the need for social distancing while in the workplace. The underlying theme here, less money.

What does less money mean? It means less resources for purchasing things like fresh fruits and vegetables. It means skipped bills, water access and electricity being shut off, vehicles being repossessed, and even eviction. It means less time or money to focus on mental health and physical health, skipped meals or having to pick foods that are not providing adequate nutrition. It looks like the day mentioned above, plagued by instability, and resulting in unmet security needs.

Feeding America predicts that through the end of 2020, food insecurity will remain around forty-five million people with slight improvement to about forty-two million people in 2020 (Feeding America, 2020). Though a slight improvement, this number is still seven million more than the 2019 pre-COVID number. Within this number of forty-five million people, Feeding America predicts fifteen million will be children (Feeding America, 2020). Black and Hispanic communities are disproportionately impacted with 16% of each population reporting that they were food insecure compared to only 6% of white adults reporting the same during 2020 (CBPP, 2021).

***Part B: Food Waste***

Similar to food insecurity, food waste is not a new issue impacting our society. It also has been made exponentially worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) estimates that 30-40% of the food supply in the United States ends up as food waste (FDA, 2021). It also estimates that in 2010 this percentage translated to about 130 billion pounds and \$161 billion in food (FDA, 2021). Not only is this food that could create food security being wasted, but there are huge economic impacts as well.

These numbers are pre-pandemic. The start of the pandemic saw a sudden and hard close for every aspect of our society. This included restaurants, bars, sporting venues, college dining halls, farmer's markets, production and processing plants, event venues, and so many other facilities. All these facilities play a role in our food production system, but these facilities are only a small part of our entire food system. Other parts of this system include food production facilities, processing plants, farms (produce and livestock), dairies, shipping and holding facilities, and wherever the consumer intercepts the product (i.e., grocery stores and restaurants). When the pandemic forced a shutdown, every one of these pegs in the food system was impacted. Restaurants found that they had to suddenly shift to offering only to-go options (if they were even able to stay open at all). Sporting and entertainment venues had to suddenly close their doors even in the middle of tournaments and conferences. College dining halls had to close or convert to take out only options while also shifting to greatly reduced numbers of students. The three major food service operating companies in the U.S. all reported significant revenue losses for the year and contributed this to closures in restaurants, sports venues, health venues and college campuses (Buzalka, 2021). All these places were also left with surplus food, much of which was left where it lay, beginning to rot or approaching its expiration date. Other food was left in coolers and

freezers with anxious chefs and managers praying that their refrigerators and freezers would hold and not cause them to lose more product and money, creating more waste. Additionally, there was the food that had not even "hit the shelves". With the sudden halt in the need for fresh fruit, vegetables, meats, dairy products, bread, and dry products, our distribution centers found themselves with products they could not sell or move but would soon expire. The Dairy Farmers of America estimated that 3.7 million gallons of milk were being dumped a day from April 2020 through June 2020, and the U.S. National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) estimates that 1.2 billion pounds of pork was disposed of during the same time because of these disruptions (ReFED, 2021). All these levels on the food chain relied very heavily on the American restaurant and entertainment systems to move their products.

What could we have done? All these places found themselves with products that had to be moved quickly. Average citizens found themselves in an uncertain situation not knowing if they would lose their jobs, how dangerous or serious the virus was, how long they would be locked down, or for how long they would need to stock up on food. Across the country, farmers, distributors, restaurants, and companies sprang into action. In Greensboro, North Carolina, a local produce distributor, Foster-Caviness, teamed up with a local church and set up a food distribution drive-thru for the public. They unloaded fifty thousand pounds of food and were able to help about ten thousand people access food, including eggs, avocados, and pineapples (Wilson, 2020). In other parts of the country, World Central Kitchen, a relief organization, stepped up and partnered with local restaurants and distributors to get food to those in need. They donated money to restaurants in cities to "buy" meals that would then be distributed to health care workers, the elderly, those in voting and food bank lines, and others that needed a meal. In March of 2021, it was estimated that World Central Kitchen had serviced more than four hundred cities, worked with

over 2,400 restaurants, and had provided over 11 million meals (Fast Company, 2021). World Central Kitchen also created boxes with produce and other fresh ingredients for distribution to areas like Fort Defiance on the Navajo Nation's Reservation (World Central Kitchen, 2020). Similar stories can be found throughout the country over the last year. Stories of companies, individuals, chefs, restaurants, and others stepping up to do the right thing and helping those who needed help by feeding those in need while keeping people working and helping to cut down on food waste. These were unexpected heroes in unexpected places. However, despite humanity's best efforts, we still had countless stories of tragedy and suffering.

Dairy farms across the United States are an example that had two major issues. First, with the majority of the country being under a stay-at-home order, retailers saw a sudden demand increase for dairy products followed by a sudden slump. People had stocked up and were now staying locked down at home. Schools and restaurants are some of the major purchasers of dairy products in the food service sector. With their sudden closure, there was a halt to moving these products through those parts of the food service sector. This left the farms and processing plants with an overflow of milk and other dairy products (ReFED, 2021). Unfortunately, this left the farmers with no choice but to dump the milk and dispose of their other dairy based products. On one farm in Wisconsin 25,000 gallons of milk were dumped per day during April of 2020 (Kottke, 2020). In one day, from one farm, 25,000 families could have been provided a gallon of milk which would have provided them with sixteen servings (one cup) of protein and other vitamins. Other examples of wasted food included eggs and produce. It was estimated that one chicken farmer alone had to dispose of 750,000 unhatched eggs a day while another farmer had to bury one million pounds of onions (Yaffe-Bellany and Corkery, 2020). This was not for lack of trying. Many farms, distributors and restaurants did everything they could to repurpose materials. In cases similar to

the Greensboro example, the food was set out in a parking lot for people to pick up. Restaurants were activated to cook fresh meals offered for free. Despite best efforts, the U.S. was still left with more food than could be used, waste and people going hungry at night.

It has not yet been determined what the full impact of this sudden increase in waste will be on the environment. The main focus of this paper is on the human element, but the environmental impact should not be forgotten. These impacts might not be felt in the immediate future, but they will be felt over time.

### ***Part C: Food Access Measures***

The last major area to explore is food access measures. This was covered above in reference to how we adapted to shifts in getting food to those who needed it while also reducing food waste, but there are a few other aspects worth discussing that were also impacted by the pandemic. These aspects are school meals for children in K-12 education and college students living on their respective campuses.

School meals can serve as a primary source of food and were among the aspects of the food system interrupted by the pandemic. Feeding America estimates that twenty-two million children a year rely on meals provided by schools each day (Feeding America, 2021). These meals are either provided for free or at a reduced price, and students receive them when they are physically present at school. As the pandemic forced schools to close, students who relied on these meals no longer had access to them. A need that already existed was made exponentially worse.

Many school districts across the country sprang into action and implemented new models for meal distribution. These models have been outlined by the CDC. Typically, schools delivered meals to the students' homes, set up drive through locations for parents to pick up their student's meals, or a combination of both (CDC, 2021). In one Virginia school district they set up five

distribution sites for families to pick up meals. For those who could not make it to one of these distribution sites, the school district employed school bus drivers to deliver meal boxes along their normal bus routes to families in need (Taylor, 2021). The Broward County (FL) school system created food boxes with meals (breakfast and lunch) for every day of the week including Saturdays and Sundays, and they offered parents an opportunity to purchase extra meals for themselves for less than three dollars a meal (Buzalka, 2021).

College students placed in quarantine on their college campus also struggled with food access. During normal times, these students would have access to their campus dining hall. The dining hall is the primary way for many living on college campuses to get food (Laska et al., 2020). However, once placed in quarantine, students are locked down in a room and cannot go and get their meals. Again, a gap was created, and people sprang into action to take care of those in need. A new model for food distribution was created to solve this problem. Individually, pre-packaged meals were delivered to the students in quarantine. Some schools delivered each meal separately while some sent breakfast, lunch and dinner together at one time. Others gave students the option of ordering what they wanted from a set menu while some just picked the same daily meal for each student (McCorquodale, 2020). At the University of North Carolina-Greensboro, the students were given a special meal for Thanksgiving consisting of typical Thanksgiving meal items and some school spirit items (Winters, 2020).

### **Health Implications from Food Insecurity**

The USDA has created a way to measure the status of food security and insecurity for each household. After answering a series of questions, each household falls into one of the following categories (USDA, 2020):

- 1) **High Food Security:** households had no problems, or anxiety about, consistently accessing adequate food
- 2) **Marginal Food Security:** households had problems at times, or anxiety about, accessing adequate food, but the quality, variety, and quantity of their food intake were not substantially reduced
- 3) **Low Food Security:** households reduced the quality, variety, and desirability of their diets, but the quantity of food intake and normal eating patterns were not substantially disrupted
- 4) **Very Low Food Security:** at times during the year, eating patterns of one or more household members were disrupted and food intake reduced because the household lacked money and other resources for food

Homes that fall within the category of High Food Security or Marginal Food Security have very little to worry about. However, those that fall within the categories of Low Food Security or Very Low Food Security lack access to food or nutritious food and have unmet needs.

There are other health impacts as well. Medical experts have found that those who are living in these households tend to have higher rates of obesity, increased cases of diabetes and other weight related conditions (Caporuscio, 2020). Additional health issues include cognitive problems, anxiety, higher risk of having asthma, behavioral problems, depression, or other mental health issues (Gundersen and Ziliak, 2015). The most obvious health issues do not require fancy medical terms or a unit of measurement. If you are food insecure you are hungry, do not have the energy to work or look after yourself, might get desperate enough to commit a crime to acquire food, or have severe malnutrition that can lead to serious health conditions which can be fatal (Ayala and Meier, 2017). As your body is shutting down and you are not getting the proper

nutrition and vitamins you need to stay healthy, you also become more susceptible to disease as your immune system weakens (Ayala and Meier, 2017). In a pandemic triggered by a virus that primarily attacks the respiratory system, having a weakened immune system or a higher risk of respiratory issues decreases your ability to fight the virus.

### **Suggested Resolutions**

John Paul Lederach's (2003) Inquiry Model provides an analytic framework for addressing issues with food insecurity. The Inquiry Model focuses on relationships and their role in transforming conflicts (Lederach, 2003). The conflict is separated into three components (Inquiries) in order to examine their interconnectedness and further broken down into subcomponents (Lederach, 2003). Each Inquiry is explained below through the lens of food insecurity and used to present a resolution to the conflict.

Inquiry One, known as the Presenting Situation, contains the subcomponents: issue, patterns, and history (Lederach, 2003). These subcomponents are better explained as the issue being the conflict, patterns as the events related to the conflict, and history which "includes factors, relationships, and events that provide context..." (Reimer et al., 2015, p. 25). The issue in question here is the existing problem of food insecurity, and the impact of COVID-19 on this problem. The patterns are seen in certain groups that have always been disproportionately affected by the causes of food insecurity, and COVID is causing this cycle to repeat and deepen. Finally, history is the unstable way in which the system is being operated. Some of this instability comes from overproduction, improperly regulated supply and demand, and improper handling techniques (Raak et al., 2017). The way this system has been historically operating does not protect against such a sudden disruption causing food to go to waste while many go hungry.

Inquiry Two, known as the Horizon of the Future, contains the subcomponents: solutions, relationships, and systems (Lederach, 2003). Reimer et al. (2015) explain that solutions are responses that provide one or more answers to the problem, and relationships are between people, institutions, and/or organizations that constitute part of the desired future. Systems are the social groupings or networks of organizations and institutions that form part of the desired future (Reimer et al., 2015).

When applied to this conflict, the solution's subcomponents presented include donations to food banks, use of restaurants by nonprofits to make meals for those in need and delivering school meals to students' homes, among other things. The existing relationships include those between neighbors, voters and representatives, the general public and those working for government institutions, nonprofits and businesses, farmers and the public and schools and students/families. The systems include the networks of charities and nonprofits who work to get resources organized for food banks or distribution, the kitchens and restaurants who have stepped up to provide meals, and the communities across the country who have worked tirelessly to help distribute meals or bring food to those in need.

Inquiry Three is the Development of Change Process and contains six subcomponents: personal, relational, cultural, structural, episode and epicenter (Lederach, 2003). Reimer describes personal as "the cognitive, affective, behavioral, and spiritual aspects of change" (Reimer et al., 2015, p. 26). Relational is also a take on relationships and the patterns found between relationships and conflicts. The structural subcomponent is the role of institutions and organizations in the conflict. The cultural subcomponent refers to changes aimed at the group as a whole and how this impacts their meaning. The episode subcomponent looks at conflicts that have taken place within a certain time frame. Lastly, the epicenter subcomponent "reflects the relevance and accountability

of all relationships surrounding conflict and what might be useful to shape the future." (Reimer et al., 2015, p. 27).

There are many subcomponents and most of them have already been touched upon throughout this entire paper, but a brief recap helps frame the resolution plan. Food insecurity is connected to historic structural violence within the U.S. from which some groups benefit, and others suffer. History is littered with episodes and examples of food insecurity and when it has been made worse. It is also rich in episodes and examples of when we have come together to support our neighbors and help each other through these times.

The epicenter subcomponent will now be the focus to present a working resolution to this conflict. At the end of the day, we can crunch numbers, present data, and analyze formulas, but we end up leaving out the most important element in solving this crisis, the human element. The human element is composed of all the relationships needed to combat this epidemic. It contains the creativity, the compassion, the empathy, the ingenuity, and the grit to overcome this plague. A human driven conflict requires a human driven resolution.

Resolution starts with a lesson from the work of World Central Kitchen. The primary strategy of their work is using resources that already exist. They hook into kitchens and restaurants that are already running and operational meaning they already have the needed equipment, resources, and operational space, including connections with distributors and employees to run food operations. There is no need to scramble to find a building, kitchen equipment or staff. These already exist and are ready to go. Paying local businesses instead of outsourcing the work leaves money in the community and, more broadly, the local economy.

The next step involves relationships with farmers, vendors, and others along this part of the food supply chain. It is creating a relationship or series of relationships that would link farmers,

vendors, and other markets/stores with a redistribution network. This redistribution network would take extra produce that farmers or vendors are having trouble selling or produce that was currently at markets but nearing the end of its shelf life and redistributes it to food shelters, restaurants partnering with World Central Kitchen or organizations that create produce boxes for those in need. Ideally, the government would provide the funding for such a program so that it could be equally implemented across the entire country. By using existing resources like restaurants and their staff, money can be saved that could be utilized to sustain the program. Money would also be saved by reusing produce that is being thrown out instead of buying the same product twice. Farmers and vendors could be offered tax cuts for donating the product. However, some may just be convinced to donate because it is the right thing to do. This plan would reduce the strain placed on the environment, help to alleviate food waste, and eliminate food insecurity. If the government is not the primary funder, this plan would still be feasible with the assistance of nonprofits and other charities. Regardless of who is providing the money, the model would be affordable, efficient, and effective. This model could also be replicated in refugee camps. World Central Kitchen has proven that the model works, not just in response to the pandemic in the United States, but in the work, they do all over the world responding to disasters. Ultimately it comes down to connecting relationships and resources and keeping the human element in the spotlight.

### **Conclusion**

In 1906, an earthquake rocked the city of San Francisco and left in its wake countless fires and endless destruction. The fires left three thousand people dead, \$524 million in property damages, twenty-eight thousand buildings destroyed and numerous citizens without shelter, food, or water (Scawthorn, 2006). Historian Rebecca Solnit (2009) recounts in her book, *A Paradise Built in Hell*, how these citizens came together and created a makeshift community in Golden Gate

Park. Within this community, resources such as stoves, produce, tents, utensils, and food were acquired by citizens contributing whatever they could find or had salvaged from the destruction (Solnit, 2009). They came together and gathered resources to help fulfill unmet needs.

In 2020, the entire world was presented with a new crisis, the COVID-19 virus, that triggered a pandemic. This new crisis came about in a time when we were already fighting against food insecurity. The pandemic took a very serious pre-existing issue and cranked up the heat. It caused levels of unemployment to increase, levels of food insecurity to increase, caused disruptions to supply chains (which are still struggling to catch up), closed businesses, put lives at risk and changed life in a way that may never be repaired for some. The entire world was presented with a challenge. A challenge to overcome this virus and the evils it brought with it. Humanity has started to rise to that challenge and is working to overcome it. Humans have stepped up to help other humans. New ways of bringing food to those who needed it were created. New ways to interact with each other were designed. New ways to care and fight for each other have been constructed. There is still a long road ahead and much work to be done, but we have proven that when we band together and work as a collective, we can begin to overcome conflict.

This paper looked at the issue of food insecurity. It argued that food insecurity has been present in this country from the beginning. Two theories, Human Needs Theory and Structural Violence, were presented to provide a deeper explanation of the conflict in question. Next, it highlighted the impacts COVID-19 has had on this conflict and explained some of the deeper health implications of food insecurity. Finally, the Inquiry Model was used to present an intervention and plan for transformation. This conflict is one that is deeply ingrained, and the full impacts of the pandemic on food insecurity are still being studied and realized. However, in the fight of the people versus the virus, the chances seem to be favorable for the people.

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