



By Karen Waldbillig Kasich

Better Beginnings for a Better Future

Our children deserve a healthy start. The benefits of good health affect every facet of a child's life, from his or her ability to learn, to the prevention of illness and disease—both early in life and later, as an adult. The hunger and health of Ohio's children are two issues that stand to impact both our children's future and the economic future of our state. They are inextricably linked, and together warrant our attention and compassion.



There are more than a half million children in Ohio who don't know when or where they will get their next meal—that's one in four children.

This is known as "food insecurity." Research by Children's HealthWatch, which studies the impact of food insecurity on children—especially those living in poverty—shows that food-insecure children are more likely to get sick and more likely to suffer poor health, developmental delays and hospitalization—all of which limit their future achievement and produce high health care costs for their families and government programs. Additionally, children from food-insecure homes are 50

percent more likely to miss days of school, nearly twice as likely to be suspended, and almost 50 percent more likely to repeat a grade.' They suffer higher rates of diabetes and other chronic disease, and researchers are currently studying a possible link between food insecurity and childhood obesity. For these children, the stage is set for a range of challenges in both physical health and productivity that could potentially last a lifetime. They deserve better.



Fortunately, Ohio has a strong tradition of awareness and action on hunger issues, and my husband, Governor John Kasich, has preserved Ohio's commitment in his work. Since he took office in 2011, Governor Kasich and the Governor's Office of Faith-Based Initiatives have issued five executive orders to provide \$6.5 million for emergency food and direct support to foodbanks, innovative summer meal delivery programs, mobile farmers' markets for food-insecure families and the backpack program, which provides weekend meals for children in need. This is in addition to the \$12.5 million per year in the 2012/2013 biennium budget, supporting Ohio Food and Agriculture Clearance Programs.

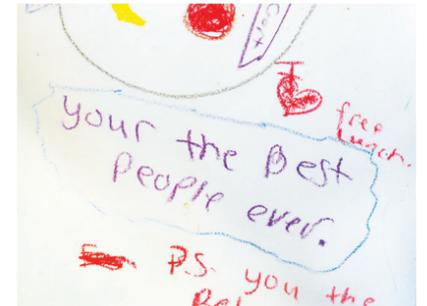
Our state's well-organized network of foodbanks is what makes it possible to place these resources in the hands of Ohio families.

The programs they operate prevent food from going to waste, reduce losses for Ohio farmers and growers, create jobs, and most importantly, distribute food to well over 2 million Ohioans who rely on the hunger-relief network.

Together with the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, since 2011, Ohio has provided 224,441 weekend backpacks containing 1,446,146 meals—feeding about 10,000 food insecure children each weekend during summers 2012 and 2013, as well as over 120 million pounds of healthy, wholesome food through the Ohio Food and Agriculture Clearance Programs. That's about 3,000 semi-tractor trailers of food provided to Ohio families.

Investments that provide access to adequate and nutritious food are not only good for children and families, but also for our state's future. Children who are threatened by hunger are part of Ohio's next generation of workers, entrepreneurs, and innovators. Ohio's future strength and prosperity depends, in part, on whether or not we make investments in Ohio foodbanks today. The benefit provided by something that so many of us take for granted—a nutritious meal—can provide food-insecure families and children with the right ingredients to protect their health and support their future.

Ohio is getting back on track—and the more we lend a hand to the most vulnerable Ohioans, the more we ensure that every corner of Ohio benefits from our recovery.



Strong nutrition efforts and investments in our foodbanks are smart and compassionate ways to offer a helping hand and to protect our state's most precious natural resource: our children. ♡

Karen Waldbillig Kasich is the First Lady of Ohio. Child and family nutrition and health and wellness have long been a priority for her. She is working with FeedOhio campaign this August and September to collect donations of goods and funds for Ohio foodbanks. More info can be found at www.ohiofoodbanks.org/feedohio. Additionally, Mrs. Kasich is launching a program in partnership with Nationwide Children's Hospital this fall that provides free exercise videos to K-5 classrooms statewide. Learn more at www.TimeFor10.org.

1 Kleinman, R. et al. (1998). *Hunger in children in the United States: Potential behavioral and emotional correlates. Pediatrics 101(1):e3.* And Alaimo, K. et al. (2001). *Food insufficiency and American school-aged children's cognitive, academic, and psychosocial development. Pediatrics 108(1):44-53.*