



BREAKING BREAD TOGETHER · INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA · OCTOBER 6, 2026

Indianapolis has the food. The work is getting it to people.

What the tables said about food security,
and a plan for the hosting organizations.



BREAKING BREAD
— TOGETHER —
with Governor David Beasley

presented by
ACT NOW

ABOUT BREAKING BREAD TOGETHER

Through Breaking Bread Together, Governor David Beasley is listening to neighborhoods in cities across the United States. In each one, neighbors with different views share a meal, talk about what matters most to them, and decide together what to do about it. The conversation in Indianapolis on October 6 was one of these.

Breaking Bread was inspired by the way Governor Beasley has worked for decades. As Governor of South Carolina, and later as Executive Director of the United Nations World Food Programme, he brought together people with very different perspectives to solve shared problems. Under his leadership, the World Food Programme received the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize for meeting human need across conflict lines.

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AT A GLANCE

There is enough food. The barriers are everything around it.

On October 6, Elanco and Shepherd Community Center hosted Breaking Bread Together at Elanco. People from food banks, schools, health care, business and community groups shared a meal, answered five questions about food security, and ended by sharing big ideas with the room. Governor Beasley joined several tables and closed the evening.

11

table conversations, each recorded and transcribed

5

common themes raised at every table

40+

programs and services named in one evening

What we heard: the city has enough food and many strong programs, but money, transportation, time and cooking know-how keep that food from reaching people in a form they can use. The five common themes: there is enough food, and poverty is the barrier; healthy food matters, not just calories; people need help using the food they get; getting to food is hard; and relationships are what make help work.

Big ideas shared with the room

- Bring business leaders and clergy to the State House with Indy Hunger Network. Table H
- Keep Nutrition Secure Indianapolis going, and study what a living wage does for workers and employers. Table K
- Grow a movement of people breaking bread with people who are different from them. Table D
- Rescue more excess food, give hidden hunger a face, and consider a housing basic income. Table C
- Teach children how the food system works, starting in school. Table A

THE CONVERSATION

Food banks, schools, health care and business, sharing a meal

In Indianapolis, the topic was Stronger Together: Food Security. Elanco and Shepherd Community Center hosted the evening at Elanco. Each table had a facilitator, including Elanco staff, who recorded the conversation.

WITH THANKS TO JAY HEIGHT

Jay Height of Shepherd Community Center brought Elanco into this work and has driven the conversation on food security in Indianapolis.

Who was at the tables

Food bank and pantry leaders · A food rescue nonprofit leader · A hunger network leader · Community center staff and board members · A school family engagement director · A charter school board member · A physician · Hospital and health system leaders · A former city food policy director · Farm and food industry staff · Business and professional sports leaders · A banker · Congressional staff · Church members and volunteers

The questions

01

How do we define food security? What are the components of food security we should be looking at?

02

What does food security look like in Indianapolis, and specifically in your community?

03

What are the barriers to achieving food security for everyone?

04

What can we do together to remove the barriers in Indianapolis?

05

What are the intersections between global food security and food security in Indianapolis?

06

Come up with a big idea that came out of your discussion.

“...you begin to understand the power of breaking bread with someone you don’t really know.”

Governor David Beasley, closing remarks



WHAT WE HEARD

Five common themes came up at every table

Across the questions, the same ideas kept coming back. Each dot means at least one person at that table raised the theme. Tables are labeled A to K. The counts show what came up, not how many people in Indianapolis share a view.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	Tables
Enough food; poverty is the barrier	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	11 of 11
Healthy food, not just calories	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	11 of 11
People need help using the food they get	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	11 of 11
Getting to food is hard	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	11 of 11
Relationships make help work	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	11 of 11
Policy cuts are making it harder	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	10 of 11
Hunger is often hidden	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	10 of 11
Schools are where many children eat	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	10 of 11
Immigrant families face new barriers	○	○	●	●	○	○	○	●	●	○	○	4 of 11

The next pages describe six themes. “Hunger is often hidden” is covered under theme 01, schools under theme 05, and immigrant families under theme 06.

01 ALL 11 TABLES

There is enough food. Poverty is the barrier.

Every table said the city has the food. Food banks, food rescue groups and pantries move large amounts of it every week. What stands in the way is money and time. Rent, gas, child care and medicine come out of the same budget, and food is often what gets cut. Many people who go without work full time, sometimes at two jobs, so their need is easy to miss. People said hunger is in the suburbs too, and that many middle-class families are one emergency away from it.

“It’s not a lack of food. It’s that people don’t have enough money to cover their expenses.”

Former food bank leader, Table K

02 ALL 11 TABLES

Healthy food matters, not just calories

Tables drew a line between filling a stomach and staying healthy. The cheapest food is often the least healthy: chips from a dollar store, a gas station meal, shelf-stable cans from a pantry. Health care leaders tied poor diets to diabetes, high blood pressure and costs that show up later for hospitals and employers. Several people used the term nutrition security instead of food security.

“...all food is not good food, and all food does not make you healthier.”

Former city food policy director, now in health care, Table B

03 ALL 11 TABLES

Food only helps if people can use it

A box of food does not help if there is no stove, no refrigerator or no can opener, or if the food is unfamiliar. People described turkeys too big for small apartment ovens, dry beans no one knew how to cook, pork given to families who do not eat it, and fresh produce that went to waste. Food that fits a family's culture and comes with a recipe gets used. Some programs now ask families what they want and change the box.

"Son, what am I gonna do with that? I don't live anywhere."

A veteran offered ground beef at a food pantry, as told by a volunteer, Table E

04 ALL 11 TABLES

Getting to the food is hard

Indianapolis is built for cars. Without one, a short drive can become a long bus ride with a limit on what you can carry. People named food deserts on the near east and west sides, on the far east side, and in rural towns where a dollar store is the only store. Some pantries are open only a few hours a week, at times when working people cannot come.

"You're only allowed 2 bags of groceries on the bus."

Community center staff member, Table E

05 ALL 11 TABLES

Relationships make help work

The strongest programs people described start with a relationship. Volunteers who deliver food every week learn what else a neighbor needs. At one community center, staff each walk alongside a few families. Many people said they want to help but do not know where to start, and that the first volunteer visit is the hardest. Schools came up at 10 tables as places where families are already connected and where many children get most of their meals.

“...food is like the one, the one thing where it breaks you into that person’s life.”

Community center staff member, Table E

06 10 OF 11 TABLES

Policy cuts are making it harder

People described cuts to SNAP, Medicaid and federal food and aid programs, new rules that make benefits harder to get, and the state’s decision not to take part in a federal summer food program for children. Pantries are seeing more people and cannot make up the difference. At four tables, people said immigrant and refugee families face new barriers: fewer services, and fear of immigration enforcement that keeps some families from picking up food.

“...when government funding gets cut, the private sector and the nonprofits can’t keep up.”

Food rescue nonprofit leader, Table C

The themes show what people agreed on. The conversations also showed two things to know before acting: how much help is already in place, and where people see things differently.

Many programs already exist

People named more than 40 in one evening, only in passing, so there is far more. Each tile shows how many were named in that area, with a few examples. The problem is not a lack of programs. It is that they are hard to find and do not add up to one plan.

13 FOOD SUPPLY AND DELIVERY



- Gleaners Food Bank
- Second Helpings food rescue
- Indy Hunger Network, which tracks need and brings partners together
- Box trucks that move pallets from food banks to pantries (913 Sports)
- The Community Compass app for finding help

12 PANTRIES AND MEALS



- Shepherd Community Center pantry and home deliveries
- Healthy Veterans and Families food bank
- Dayspring Center meals
- A food pantry at Butler University
- Emergency coolers of eggs, milk and cheese opened with an anonymous card

7 NUTRITION AND HEALTH



- Nutrition Secure Indianapolis: weekly protein and produce boxes, with a health study
- A choice grocery market run by a health system
- Free health screenings and mobile clinics at food pickups
- Food Is Medicine produce for seniors
- A teaching kitchen at Shepherd

7 SCHOOLS AND YOUNG PEOPLE



- A Longer Table, bringing scratch cooking to school cafeterias
- Weekend food packs and school break food boxes
- School pantries, including a choice pantry at Arsenal Tech
- Beef in the Classroom grants for teachers
- Food “scholarships” for adult students at an Excel Center

5 PEOPLE, CONGREGATIONS AND ADVOCACY



- Shepherd staff who each walk alongside a few families
- Family Promise
- Corporate volunteer days and paid volunteer hours
- Indy Hunger Network’s State House Day
- Bread for the World state organizers

WHAT IS MISSING

One plan that ties it together.

Families find these programs one at a time, and the groups behind them often work on their own. The tables asked for groups to work together and to measure what works.

Four tensions any solution needs to address

People did not always agree. These are not problems to solve. They show where any solution needs care.

01 TENSION

Is the system scattered, or well organized?

ONE VIEW

A family can get food in many separate ways: "we have 25 different ways that one family can get food." Some pantries hold back from working together for fear of losing funding.

ANOTHER VIEW

People who have worked in other cities said Indianapolis is better organized than most: "this may be the only city that it feels organized" between the large groups and the small ones.

What a solution needs: Build on what already works, especially Indy Hunger Network. Add coordination, not another new group.

02 TENSION

Government or neighbors?

ONE VIEW

SNAP reaches far more people than pantries can. "We need to expand SNAP access, not reduce SNAP access." (Table H)

ANOTHER VIEW

A hospital leader at Table I said that "we've transferred the responsibility to the government and taken it off of all of ourselves."

What a solution needs: Both. Public programs set the scale. Neighbors, congregations and employers reach the people those programs miss.

03 TENSION

Feed people today, or end the need?

ONE VIEW

Groups are so busy meeting daily need that “you’re always responding to the acute need and not the chronic problem.” (Table J)

ANOTHER VIEW

A former food bank leader at Table K described food as a way out of poverty: free groceries let one couple save for a truck and a job. “We’re in the poverty alleviation business.”

What a solution needs: Keep feeding people, and track whether families move forward. Nutrition Secure Indianapolis is one place to start.

04 TENSION

Are dollar stores a problem or a partner?

ONE VIEW

In many small towns and city neighborhoods, a dollar store is the only store, and most of what it sells is not healthy.

ANOTHER VIEW

A charter school board member at the same table called them “a very effective distribution system” that could stock better food with the right incentives.

What a solution needs: Work with what is already there. Ask stores what it would take to carry fresh food.

THE GLOBAL QUESTION

Most tables named the same links. Fuel and fertilizer prices set by events overseas raise food costs here. Cuts to foreign aid hurt families abroad and the Indiana farmers who sold to aid programs. And Indiana farms mostly grow corn and soybeans for feed, fuel and export, not food for nearby families. Several people said Indianapolis could become a model other cities learn from.

“...they are feeding the world, but they’re not necessarily feeding home.”

Communications professional, Table C



ACTION PLAN

Six actions the hosting organizations can take

These actions respond to what we heard. Each one comes from ideas raised at the tables.

FIRST STEP

Form an Indianapolis food security coalition

The tables agreed that no single group can do this alone, and that many strong groups already exist. We suggest Elanco and Shepherd Community Center form a small coalition and invite Indy Hunger Network, which already brings food partners together, so this work adds to what exists. They could also invite groups named at the tables, such as Gleaners Food Bank, Midwest Food Bank, Second Helpings, Hatch for Hunger and A Longer Table. The coalition chooses which actions to take on, who leads each one, and when.

Choose one member to convene the group, or rotate the role every few months.

“Let’s talk about that neighborhood right there. What are you going to do right there? Because if you can do it right there, then you can scale it.”

Governor David Beasley, at Table B

Then start with actions 1 to 3. The others build on them. Target dates and leads are left blank on purpose. The coalition should set them together at its first meeting, so each action has an owner who agreed to it.

01

START
HERE

Join the State House Day in January

RESPONDS TO: POLICY CUTS ARE MAKING IT HARDER

"We're going to have to make the jump from this is a food security issue to this is like an economic security issue."

Participant, Table H

Raised at Table H

First step Indy Hunger Network invited everyone in the room. Share the January date with all attendees, and ask each host to bring business leaders. This is time-sensitive and can start before the coalition first meets.

Already doing this Indy Hunger Network, which organizes the State House Day

How you'll know Hosts and business leaders from this event attend.

Target date _____ Lead _____ (coalition fills in)

02

START
HERE

Keep Nutrition Secure Indianapolis going

RESPONDS TO: HEALTHY FOOD MATTERS, NOT JUST CALORIES

"...we can't let this thing fail."

Business leader, Table K

Raised at Tables D, E, H and K

First step Share the study results with everyone who attended when they are ready. Invite employers to take part in the proposed study of what a living wage changes for workers and businesses.

Already doing this Hatch for Hunger, Elanco and their partners, who run the program

How you'll know Results are shared with everyone who attended.

Target date _____ Lead _____ (coalition fills in)

03

START
HERE

Make it easy to stay involved

RESPONDS TO: RELATIONSHIPS MAKE HELP WORK

"Keep your good people going."

Participant, Table G

Raised at Tables A, B, E, G and J

First step Follow up with everyone who filled out a sign-up card at the event. Offer simple first roles and a second gathering. Invite congregations and employers to each adopt a few families, as Governor Beasley did in South Carolina.

Already doing this Shepherd Community Center, whose staff each walk alongside a few families

How you'll know Everyone who signed up hears back, and a second gathering is set.

Target date _____ Lead _____ (coalition fills in)

04

Help pantries work together

RESPONDS TO: GETTING TO THE FOOD IS HARD

"...if you work together, you know, there's an economy of scale here, right?"

Food delivery nonprofit leader, Table F

Raised at Tables C, F and J

First step Pick one part of the city. Ask its pantries to share deliveries and keep their hours current in one place, such as the Community Compass app.

Already doing this Indy Hunger Network, which brings partners together, and 913 Sports, which moves food from food banks to pantries

How you'll know Pantries in one area share deliveries and list current hours in one place.

Target date _____ Lead _____ (coalition fills in)

05

Send recipes and cooking help with the food

RESPONDS TO: FOOD ONLY HELPS IF PEOPLE CAN USE IT

"...the number one problem we had is that they didn't know what to do with it."

Hospital leader, Table I

Raised at Tables A, B, E, F, I and J

First step Put a simple recipe card in each food box, matched to what is inside. Ask families what they would like instead. Expand lessons that teach children where food comes from.

Already doing this Shepherd's teaching kitchen, and Nutrition Secure Indianapolis, which works with chefs on recipes

How you'll know Recipe cards go out with boxes, and feedback changes what is in them.

Target date _____ **Lead** _____ (coalition fills in)

06

Bring fresh food to stores already in food deserts

RESPONDS TO: GETTING TO THE FOOD IS HARD

"So how do we leverage the fact that they're already there?"

Hospital leader, Table I, on dollar stores

Raised at Tables F, I and K

First step Ask grocery and dollar store operators what it would take to stock fresh food in food deserts. One table suggested property tax breaks for grocers that open in those areas.

How you'll know A store in a food desert adds fresh food.

Target date _____ **Lead** _____ (coalition fills in)

Other ideas raised at the tables

These did not become actions here, but the coalition may want to take them up.

- **Measure and reduce food waste**, including at events like this one. (Table C)
- **Give hidden hunger a face**, so people see it could be a coworker or neighbor. (Table C)
- **Consider a housing basic income**, since rent drives so much of the need. (Table C)
- **Focus on a few main ways families get food**, instead of many separate ones. (Table C)
- **Ask the Lilly Endowment to fund a shared, citywide plan**. (Tables B and K)
- **Show legislators and city leaders** how rules slow down groups that want to help. (Table B)

Order of work

NOW

Share the date, form the coalition

Send all attendees the State House Day date (action 01). Invite one representative from each host and Indy Hunger Network.

AT THE FIRST MEETING

Choose leads and dates

Fill in the blank lines on each card together, and choose who convenes.

AFTER

Study, connect, reach

Actions 02 to 06, with short progress updates to everyone who attended.

For participants

- Come to the State House Day in January, and bring one business or community leader with you.
- Host a meal with people who are different from you. One table noted that far fewer people host dinners at home than a generation ago.
- Volunteer once, then go back. People said the first visit is the hardest, and that it gets easier after that.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

How this report was made

- We recorded 11 table conversations, labeled Tables A to K.
- AI was used to transcribe the recordings and find common themes. The Center for Design Kindness reviewed the findings and shaped the analysis and narrative.
- A theme counts once per table. Quotes use people's exact words, sometimes shortened, and speakers are named by role, not by name.
- Limits: one recording ends early. Where people talked at the same time, we took care to keep each person's comments with the right speaker.

Does this match what you heard?

Please bring corrections and additions to the coalition's first meeting. This is a working plan, and it should change as you use it.

HOSTED BY

Elanco and Shepherd Community Center

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