

This is personal



Community and
Membership Outreach
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After months of planning and making lists and phones calls, branch food drive coordinators, local leaders and letter carriers know it all comes down to our special Food Drive Day: Saturday, May 13.

But why do we do all of this? The simple answer is that it's personal.

To best illustrate the issue of hunger in America, I'd like to share some important statistics about those who need and find help at food agencies around the country. The numbers are alarming.

One in six Americans is "food insecure," which means that they are living at risk of hunger, not knowing where their next meal is coming from. Next time you're out on your route (or, if you're retired, smile and imagine the last time you were out on your route), count off every sixth house and pretend that household is food insecure. Do that for a whole day and you'll have a vivid idea of the pervasive problem that exists in all neighborhoods throughout the United States.

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Let that sink in a bit while we now look inside those households.

More than 13 million of those household members are children. These kids aren't just experiencing being hungry; rather, their little lives are being affected in ways that can last throughout their lifetimes. Their physical, intellectual and emotional development is limited. Children from families struggling with hunger often repeat a grade in elementary school and have language and motor-skill impairments, and many times they have social and behavioral problems. These challenges adversely affect these kids every day, setting up horrible circumstances for an expectation of healthy growth.

Another vulnerable group is seniors who are age 60 and older, many of whom also struggle with hunger and poverty. More than 5 million are forced to choose between paying for groceries and buying medicine. They are someone's parents, grandparents or great-grandparents, and they are less likely to ask for help than any other demographic because they are embarrassed. We see these folks every

day as they hurry to the door to say "Hi!" when we deliver their mail. The reality is that many of these people who love that personal contact with their letter carriers also need help acquiring food for nutritious meals.

Another category in the true story of hunger in America is adult students. One in 10 adults served by Feeding America food banks is an adult student. Many who are working hard to further their education in hopes of achieving a better future are also dealing with food insecurity. I have received a huge increase in calls this year from college campuses around the country asking to have a food shelf on their campus included as a recipient of the food we collect on Food Drive Day.

And there's one section of American society dealing with food insecurity that ought to give pause to us all: military veterans. One in five households served by a Feeding America food bank has a member who is a veteran. We give these men and women parades, medals and monuments, as well we should—they sacrificed for and served our country. But often what they need help with is the basic human need for food. The help our Food Drive gives veterans provides real-life recognition and thanks, going well beyond displaying "support the troops" bumper stickers.

Those in need are on our routes, in our extended families and in our neighborhoods. It's what makes the issue of hunger especially personal for letter carriers, and our fight against it must be personal, too.

Saturday, May 13, represents a year's worth of planning and work and culminates in the biggest day of giving in the U.S. That makes you a "Food Drive Warrior" and No. 1 in my book. Thank you.

Now, let's do this thing!

