



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
October 20, 2006

Access to Healthy Foods Coalition
Contact: David Bobanick
Phone: 206.236.0408

Trucking Capacity Study Recommends Improvements for Food Banks

Fresh produce and other nutrient-dense foods, while the most important, are also the most difficult items to distribute effectively to food banks. In an effort to counter this problem, the Access to Healthy Foods Coalition, a Washington State based organization promoting policy and environmental changes designed to increase access to healthy foods, commissioned a revolutionary trucking capacity study to determine how to maximize distribution of donated produce to food banks serving people in need across Washington state.

The study, funded through the Washington State Department of Health from a grant by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, revealed the current system of moving donated fruits and vegetables from growers to the hungry, while effective, must be improved to bring significantly more healthy food to those who need it most.

“For years, we’ve focused on finding new ways to collect and process produce donations for the food banks” said David Bobanick, Executive Director of Rotary First Harvest, an agency that collects millions of pounds of produce annually for Washington’s food banks. “Recently though, challenges like high fuel costs are making it increasingly difficult for our trucking

donors to participate. This new study gives us valuable insight into how we might make it easier for trucking companies to help us.”

The study, conducted by Hebert Research of Bellevue, revealed technology is the key to coordinating available food, trucks and food banks. With non-profit food banks throughout Washington facing increasing numbers of people who need help, even small improvements in the distribution system can mean the difference between having enough food to distribute to people in need and being forced to turn them away. According to the study, opportunities for improving the current “farmer to food bank” process include:

- Developing an online system to consolidate and simplify the sharing of information, including schedules, timing, routes and loads, to trucking companies
- Increasing the speed of loading produce at the donor’s location, and at the food bank warehouse to make it easier for trucking donors to schedule their trucks.
- Identifying truck routes that typically have excess trucking capacity available, finding appropriate produce for that space, and ensuring the load can be retrieved along existing truck routes efficiently.

Web-based dispatching as described above would allow food banks to declare a need, food donors to meet that need, and trucking companies to donate the delivery of that food utilizing existing space on the trucks closest to the food and the delivery points. Ultimately, such a system could span the west coast, and even the nation, as new strategies to deliver produce to food banks are developed. The first step might be to develop a pilot program to test the findings of the study in real-world situations here in Washington State.

According to those who have been working in the hunger response community, the pilot project could provide a timely tool for their daily efforts. Rotary First Harvest’s Bobanick noted the proposed program represents “A new approach to solving an increasingly difficult problem that we face on a daily basis: finding enough trucking to get fresh produce and other food items from the donor to the food banks. Efforts to develop new ways to improve the way we connect

those farmers and truckers who want to help with the food banks will greatly benefit hungry individuals and families.”

Information about the study is available at: www.accesstohealthyfoods.org.

###

AHFC

Access To Healthy Foods Coalition, a 501(c)(3), is a group of businesses, industries, government agencies and non-profit organizations working together to positively influence health and nutrition in Washington state by improving the access to healthier foods where we live, learn, work and play. Access increases the availability of healthier foods by changing the environment where food is available and by working with policy makers and decision makers to promote change. See www.accesstohealthyfoods.com

RFH

Rotary First Harvest acts as a conduit between farmers and the programs that serve hungry individuals and families. Farmers are occasionally left with surplus fruits and vegetables that can't be sold due to minor imperfections (such as carrots with two legs or apples that are the wrong size or color), or might not be harvested because of a glut on the market. Traditionally, this nutritious produce would be sent to a landfill or left to rot in the fields. Instead, RFH directs it to those in need. Rotary First Harvest has collected and distributed over 100 million pounds of produce.

DOH

The Department of Health works with its federal, state and local partners to help people in Washington stay healthier and safer. Our programs and services help prevent illness and injury, promote healthy places to live and work, provide education to help people make good health decisions and ensure our state is prepared for emergencies.

CDC

The Center for Disease Control is the nation's premiere health promotion, prevention and preparedness agency and a global leader in public health. It is one of the 13 major operating components of the Department of Health and Human Services, which is the principal agency in the US government for protecting the health and safety of all Americans and for providing essential human services, especially for those people who are least able to help themselves.