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HFPA Marks Executive Director's 30 Years of Fighting Hunger
Agriculture, USDA officials, state and federal officials help to celebrate her achievements at surprise ceremony

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. --- Sheila Christopher, executive director of Hunger-Free Pennsylvania (HFPA), today marked 30 years of exemplary service in the fight to feed families, unite communities, affect policy and change lives. Her achievements were celebrated during a surprise ceremony at the statewide association's annual meeting attended by HFPA partner organizations and recognized by representatives of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

"Sheila Christopher is Pennsylvania's true anti-hunger champion," said Karen Seggi, executive director of the Second Harvest Food Bank of NW PA in Erie and president of HFPA's board of directors. "Fighting hunger is a year-round battle. For Sheila, it has been a lifelong commitment."

"For three decades, Sheila Christopher has been steadfast in her dedication to ensuring that all Pennsylvanians have access to the food resources they need," Pennsylvania Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding said. "It is largely due to Sheila's direction and determination that innovative feeding programs, such as the Pennsylvania State Food Purchase Program and the Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System, were enacted into state law and continue to receive annual funding. I commend Sheila for her work and look forward to our continued partnership in the fight against hunger in the Commonwealth."

"Sheila Christopher is a valued, long-time partner in the fight against hunger. Her leadership and dedication have had a tremendous, positive impact on communities across Pennsylvania," said Patricia Dombroski, administrator for the USDA's Mid-Atlantic Region.

Both agencies presented Christopher with proclamations for her decades of service. She also received citations from the state House and Senate, as well as expressions of appreciation from Gov. Tom Wolf, U.S. Senator Bob Casey and Congressman Tim Murphy.

Hunger-Free Pennsylvania launched in 1983 as the Pennsylvania Association of Regional Food Banks (PARF). The organization formed to respond to the incredible need families faced at the peak of the national recession. Christopher joined PARF in 1987 as a volunteer helping to deliver healthy meals --- and maybe a bit of hope --- to some of the state's neediest residents.

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In 2001, Christopher was named executive director of PARF and led a seamless transition in both name and objectives when the organization changed in 2011 from the Pennsylvania Association of Regional Food Banks to Hunger-Free Pennsylvania. Today, HFPA supports a network of 21 food banks that serve food pantries, soup kitchens, homeless shelters and other hunger relief organizations in all 67 counties.

Christopher's leadership has won HFPA acclaim. In 2011, USDA's Mid-Atlantic Regional Office recognized the association for dramatically increasing the number of Pennsylvanians served by the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, which provides life-sustaining meal deliveries and nutrition services to low-income and homebound seniors. Participation has grown from 5,000 recipients in a few counties in 2002 to nearly 40,000 recipients in every county --- a more than sevenfold increase.

Christopher also initiated and oversaw the effort to establish the Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System (PASS), which was created in 2010 following unanimous passage in both the state House and Senate. PASS leverages Pennsylvania's agricultural surplus and charitable food distribution infrastructure to the benefit of farmers, packers and Pennsylvanians struggling with hunger.

Throughout her career, Christopher also has been one of the most outspoken advocates for the State Food Purchase Program (SFPP), formally adopted into law as Act 129 in December 1992. It became one of Pennsylvania's most important tools in the fight against hunger. SFPP provides cash grants to counties for the purchase and distribution of food to low-income individuals.

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Hunger-Free Pennsylvania comprises a network of food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, charities and other hunger relief organizations working together to end hunger in Pennsylvania. The network has 21 members serving all 67 counties. Learn more about Hunger-Free Pennsylvania online: www.hungerfreepa.org, or via Facebook: www.facebook.com/HungerFreePA.