

Research Article

A Study of Food Bank Impact on China's Charity and Food Security System

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Abstract: The U.S. food bank is famous for its food security system and operation model. While China is in some food safety problems and business credit crisis, it needs a transparent operating process to lead it to a sound development. This study tries to analyze the running pattern of food bank and offer some suggestions to Chinese charity and strengthen its supervision of food security.

Keywords: Charity, food security, food bank

INTRODUCTION

Guo Meimei's flaunting wealth raised a hot discussion about China's charity among people and caused the discontent of the public (Zhou, 2011). Some people comment on the current situation of China's charity by saying that there are three reasons why China's charities suffer the enormous trust crisis. First, it is not transparent in the operating process. Second, it does not have a sound operation system. Last, there is no particular law in this area. And they think if the charities want to win people's confidence again they must adjust their operating system and let people know how they use the donated money, meanwhile, the government should get involved in the legislation on charity. It seems that people's feelings about charity or donation is a little sensitive now, so under such circumstances China needs a charity with good reputation and sound operation systems. The U.S. food bank is just one in need.

Food bank is a non-profit, charitable organization in the U.S. that mostly distributes donated food to a wide variety of agencies who can deliver to the poor. The main sources of food donation are from manufacturers, distributors and retailers who have excess food that they cannot sell. There is considerable overlap with food salvage, food rescue and gleaning although not with freeganism or dumpster-diving. After sorting and inventory, a food bank distributes the food to non-profit community or government agencies. Through training, sharing of best practices, building relationships with the global food and grocery industry and bringing together a global community, Global Food Bank Network is ensuring more communities using the powerful solution of food banking to feed the hungry.

Now food banks operate on six continents in every region of the world successfully. And its success could not be separated from the contributions from the two sectors-the Global Food Bank Network (GFN) and Food Bank Leadership Institute. While, under the guidance of the GFN and food bank Leadership Institute it will be easier and more professional to set up a food bank in China.

And it is well-known that donors now have a conflicted emotion toward donating money even if charity organizations guarantee they will spend all the money in charitable activities and show the public detailed accounts listing where the donated money goes (Powell and Steinberg, 2002). However, donating money can be stopped; doing charity can not be stopped. In any way, to help the needy ones is the truth of charity whatever one can do. So donating food may be a perfect way of doing charity at present, for this could both ensure the continuation of charities and eliminate donors' wariness step by step as long as citizens are clearly told what a food bank is and how it works. And this could help China's charity go through a hard time.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A brief introduction to the U.S. food bank: Food bank is a non-profit, charitable organization in the U.S. that distributes mostly donated food to a wide variety of agencies that in turn feed poor people. The largest sources of food are for-profit growers, manufacturers, distributors and retailers who in the normal course of business have excess food that they cannot sell. There is considerable overlap with food salvage, food rescue and gleaning although not with freeganism or dumpster-diving. After sorting and inventory, a food bank

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distributes the food to non-profit community or government agencies, including but not limited to food pantries, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, orphanages and schools. With nearly 1 billion people suffering from hunger worldwide food banks are an essential part of the solution for alleviating hunger and improving food security. Through training, sharing of best practices, building relationships with the global food and grocery industry, leveraging our resources and bringing together a global community, Global Food Bank Network is ensuring more communities are using the powerful solution of food banking to feed the hungry (About the food bank, 2012).

Now there are over 20 countries with active food bank groups under the umbrella of the Global Food banking Network. And in recent years food bank has spread into Asian countries such as Japan, Canada and Hong Kong of China etc. And most food banks brought to other countries develop well there with a bright future.

In 2010 GFN offered Gabrielle a scholarship to attend food bank Leadership Institute. During the week long training she learned about creating relationships with food donors, food safety, identifying and creating partnerships with community agencies that feed the hungry and the first steps to creating a new food bank system. She also had the opportunity to network with food bank professionals from all over the world; some just starting out like her and others from the most mature and successful food bank systems in the world.

The operation system of the U.S. Food Bank: With thousands of food banks on six continents there are many different models. However there are some elements that food banks share. There is typically one food bank in a city which runs a centralized warehouse. Like a blood bank, that warehouse serves as a single collection and distribution point for food donations. A food bank operates a lot like a for-profit food distributor, but in this case it distributes food to charities not to food retailers.

The largest portion of donated food comes from food leftover from the normal processes of for-profit companies. This food can come from any part of the food chain, e.g. from growers who have produced too much or whose food is not visual appealing enough, from manufacturers who overproduced, or from retailers who over-ordered. Often the product is approaching or past its "expiration", "sell by" or "best by" date. In such cases, food bank works with food industry and regulators to make sure the food is safe and legal to distribute and eat.

Other sources of food include the general public in the form of food drives and government programs that buy and distribute excess farm products mostly to help support higher commodity prices. Food banks can also buy food either at market prices or from wholesalers and retailers at discounted prices, often at cost (Paul, 2007).

The food is then distributed to food aid agencies which could be private or public, religious or secular. The type and nature of the recipient agency varies depending upon the policies of food bank, the nature of their community and the laws of where they operate. Each year the Feeding America network of member food banks distributes over three billion pounds of food and grocery products to hungry and needy Americans in communities across the country. While, food bank members maintain the highest standards of food safety, which means not every product is suitable for donation. The local food bank will need to sort and inspect all donated items to ensure that they are absolutely safe. If people choose to donate food or grocery he should contact the Feeding America national office (telephone/email) with the following information: product location and address, contact name and phone number; product description; current condition of product; total number of cases and/or pallets available; case weights and configuration/number of cases per pallet; transportation and storage specifics (dry, refrigerated, frozen); reason for donation (code date issue, unlabeled, etc.); contact name and address for person receiving the receipt; extended shelf-life if product is out of or close to code.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Actually, the break out of social confidence crisis not only reveals the flaws of China's charitable organizations but also Chinese' deficiency of charitable concept.

Although Chinese traditional culture advocates unity, mutual aid and anti-poverty, most Chinese people participate in charitable activities being aimed at winning a brighter future, gaining a longer life, atoning for one's crime, avoiding disaster or raising one's prestige. Some professors classify donors' motivations as the followings: sympathizing the weak, gaining mutual affection, establishing a good image, winning economical benefits, stabilizing political standard, aspiring unselfish dedication and saving capitulation. In order to collect money, charitable organizations neglect the donors' donating motivations and this is one of the reasons that Chinese are in deficiency of charitable concept. For what people notice is no longer the charitable activity itself but who donates and how much he donates. Of course, the ones donating with impure purposes are always the rich while ordinary donors are the ones who really want to do something for the society, which is the minority of the society.

Some questionnaire survey shows that over half of people under survey consider social charity as

government relief and the majority say they have taken part in charitable activities at work or at school but they donate passively. It is obvious that China's charity has gone into a cognitive mistake. In the eyes of the donors when referring to charity activities they will think of natural disasters and man-made calamities. They think it is the government's responsibility to do charities, but not their duty. However, charity aid is an institutionalized and socialized volunteer mutual aid behavior between social members (Hall, 2003). These are the evidences that China's charity organizations pay too much attention to emergency services rather than daily assistance and donors are quite inadequate of charitable conception.

Under such circumstances, it is quite wise to bring in the operation system of the U.S. food bank. Food and grocery are the main donation of food bank, which is very close to daily life. It needs everyone to participate in, as it is the charity for the people and by the people. What's more, by the way of donating food and grocery instead of money, donors who donate with an impure motive will not succeed. Then, day by day people will get to be aware that it is every citizen's responsibility to help the needy and doing charity is a glorious but necessary thing. And it also solves the problem of daily assistance because the donated foods are largely distributed to people who are in need of food no matter he is an ordinary people in poor condition or just survived from a disaster.

And it is well-known that donors now have a conflicted emotion toward donating money even if charity organizations guaranteed they will spend all the money in charitable activities and show the public detailed accounts list where the donated money go. In any way, to help the needy ones is the truth of charity whatever methods you take (Odendahl, 1990). So donating food may be a perfect way of doing charity at present, for this could both ensure the continuation of charities and eliminate donors' wariness step by step as long as citizens are clearly told what a food bank is and how it works. And this could help China's charity go through a hard time.

Leaving Chinese' charity's current situation aside the operation system of food bank is also advisable. Firstly, food bank has an overall leader institute the Global Food Bank Network (GFN). GFN works within a country to introduce food banking concept to key leaders in all three sectors (public, private and civil society), conduct a feasibility analysis, convene a broad based planning forum and build a business plan and resource development strategy to launch food bank operations. It means that food bank has had a mature operation system, so as long as any organization applies to establish a food bank, GNF would give it a strong support technically. Secondly, food and grocery donation may be more acceptable than donating money. Donating with an impure purpose cannot be avoided, therefore, donating food and grocery may restrain

unhealthy ways and customs in charities more or less and the purpose is to create a good charitable environment.

However, considering the charity environment of China at present, there are still some problems in bringing in the operation system.

Firstly, food and grocery security is a problem to be solved. Food and grocery security here includes two parts. One is security of the food or grocery donors choose to donate. No matter the food or grocery is bought from the supermarket or grown by the donor himself or from any other sources the donor needs to ensure its security. Food security has been a severe problem in China in recent years, but buyers' food security consciousness is not high enough. A survey shows that 50% of 1863 people under survey say they do not pay much attention to food security in daily shopping while above 70% say they do not even know how to tell whether the food is safe. So, how to strengthen buyers' food security consciousness is a key point that brooks no delay not only for the charitable activities but also for the buyers themselves. The other is security of the food or grocery donated to food bank. After the food or grocery is donated to food bank, its staff needs to make sure that the food is safe at the moment; next they should do something to protect the food from going bad before it is sent to the needy. But this wouldn't be a problem under the guidance of GNF.

Secondly, professors in this area would be needed to perform as leaders of different institutions which are essential in a charity organization (Pharoah, 1996). And large numbers of well-trained volunteers are needed in the process of collecting, storing and distributing the donated food and grocery. What's more, food bank should also ensure the number of volunteers is enough at any time, for this would be a huge project and both the professors and volunteers need to get trained ahead. Then in the beginning of the foundation organization also needs to persuade food producers or distributors to donate food or groceries. These all need a lot of preparation work.

Thirdly, food bank should formulate a clear criterion ruling who can accept the food and there should be a specialized department doing examine and verify work rigorously so as to make full use of the donated food and grocery and to make sure that the ones who get the donation are really needy ones (Fianchetto, 2011). At the same time, food bank should ensure that food donating activities won't have an economic impact on local economy. The problem in Shenzhen is a typical example. It is reported that in recent years, Hong Kong and Shenzhen people are facing the problem of high price. Being under high pressure Hong Kong has brought in food bank to distribute food or groceries to poor people directly while Shenzhen choose to do the people-benefit project through exploring the field of circulation through

government intervention aiming at stabilize commodity prices. Although, the two take different measures, they share something in common, that is to benefit the poor.

On September 29th, Shenzhen Municipal Government announced that in order to cope with inflation and carry out the people-benefit project the government will rely on large-scale agricultural enterprises of Shenzhen and agricultural products companies to support flow selling cars selling agricultural and sideline products by intensively processing and distributing. Afterwards 300 flow selling vehicles and 30 supply trucks were sent to the market setting up 900 floating point of sales, forming the agricultural and sideline products sales network covering the whole city. Most citizens who got preference spoke highly of the project while this aroused fierce dissatisfaction of the greengrocers and proprietors' of vegetables market. On October 15th, a proprietor of vegetables market conflicted with the employee on point of sales and even hit the employee a slap in the face, according to what the proprietor of vegetables market said after the flow selling vehicles appeared vegetables of the market became slow selling and their vegetables even decay. Then Long Weiwen from Hong Kong Food Bank says that as long as the organization ensures that the food or grocery is provided only for the poor it will not have an influence on the local economy, then this kind of problems will not occur.

Fourthly, food bank should be established and win the public's recognition in quite a short period of time. The operation system of food bank is definitely reliable so what food bank needs to do is to carry on publicity progressively to promote the popularity so as to make the public know what a food bank is, how it operates. As long as the public know well of food bank will they participate in charitable activities held by food bank. So propaganda work is a very important part. Actually, there has already been a food bank in inland China Food bank in Wuhan. On 31st Oct 2010 food bank in Wuhan held its opening ceremony and He Yunjie from Wuhan Charity Federation and a representative from food bank of the U.S. attended. In the first day they distributed rice, edible oil and clothes to 20 needy families and Huang Lei who's in charge of food bank said that they planed to subsidize 300 needy families in the following one to one and a half year and he was quite confident. One and a half year's later, by surfing the official website of food bank in Wuhan the author finds that food bank in Wuhan is better organized and has a clearer division of labor comparing with before and it had never interrupted its charitable activities since its foundation but what's disappointing is that the dimensions of it is still diminutive. However, they didn't do the propaganda work well is one of the most important reasons.

CONCLUSION

Food wasting has become a serious social problem in recent years, while donating food plays the most important role in food bank's system. Although living standard is rapidly improved, people should not forget Chinese traditional virtue of frugality. So calling on people to donate food can avoid food waste and foster social responsibility and saving consciousness of citizens and enterprises. By the way, as part of donors may choose to donate food bought from the market, therefore, their behavior will promote the economic growth of local food industry. What's more, it can provide opportunities for more workers: food bank may have an extensive involvement in supporting employment options (both paid and unpaid) for people.

Ultimately, to win the public's confidence in China's charity is the most important task. Introducing the operation system of the U.S. Food Bank at such a sensitive time may be a wise choice. For both its reputation and its operation system are reliable. And its donation ways may make it more acceptable. Meanwhile, it could help donors in China get a better charitable concept. Because food bank focuses not only on assistance in disasters but also on daily assistance, this could make people be aware that charity is not only the responsibility of the government but also everyone's duty. We should do when bad things happen charity is necessary, even in peaceful time. Finally, food bank also play an important role in the reforming process of Chinese charity and it is the time for the change.

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