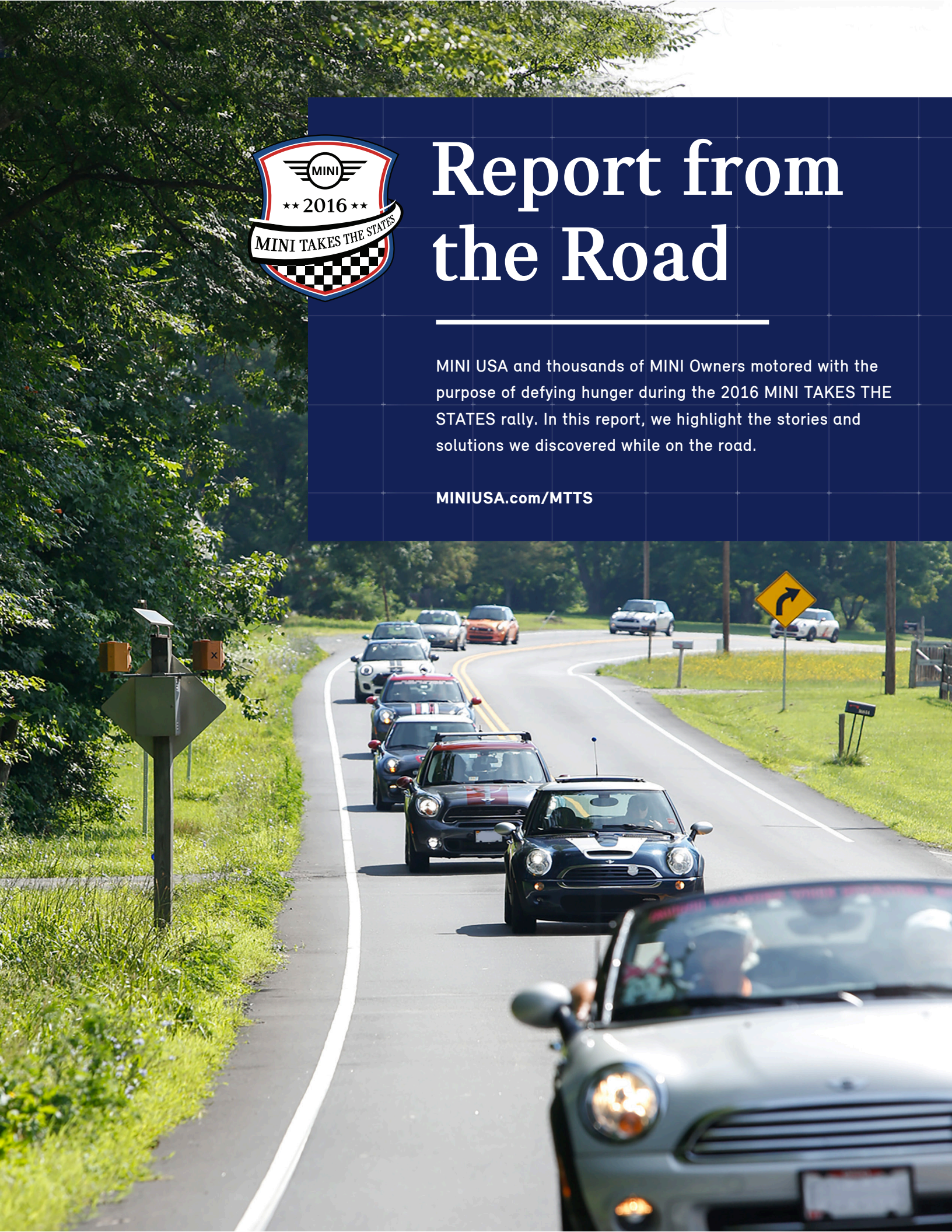




Report from the Road

MINI USA and thousands of MINI Owners motored with the purpose of defying hunger during the 2016 MINI TAKES THE STATES rally. In this report, we highlight the stories and solutions we discovered while on the road.

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In July 2016, MINI USA and thousands of MINI Owners motored with the purpose of defying hunger during the 2016 MINI TAKES THE STATES rally. We traveled over 4,300 miles through 15 cities from Atlanta to Palm Springs raising funds to provide more than 1.3 million meals for our philanthropic partner, Feeding America. We far surpassed our goal of donating 825,000 meals to the national network of food banks.

But MINI USA wanted to go beyond raising money. We wanted to raise awareness of the innovative solutions to hunger we learned about in the communities we traveled through on the rally. The hundreds of people we met helped us better understand how we help solve the food insecurity issues that face 42 million Americans, or 15 percent of the country's population, according to statistics compiled by Feeding America.

On our journey, we uncovered a core trend that is helping to drive the smart, scalable solutions we discovered along the route. Food banks — traditionally a last resort for Americans going through temporary hard times — have become a main source of nutrition for some people for months, if not years. This shift has required

dramatic changes and solutions in the way food relief organizations have operated as they prepare to serve populations for longer periods of time.

In this Report from the Road, we share three solutions that come from thinking more long-term about hunger and food insecurity. More food banks are placing a greater emphasis on fresh food over processed foods so people receive more nutrition over a longer time. Non profits in Detroit, Charlotte and Pittsburgh focus on cooking classes and nutrition education to help people eat better all the time. And finally, we highlight a major shift for food banks in going to where the hungry are with mobile pantries and school outreach programs.

Fresh Food for the Long Haul

On the first day of the rally, a Saturday morning in early July, volunteers gathered outside an Atlanta furniture store. They weren't there to shop — the store wasn't open yet for the day. They were there to harvest apples from a tree tucked behind the strip-mall store. After shaking and climbing limbs to pick apples on high branches, they gathered the apples in plastic bags and moved on to an old orchard whose fruit was already beginning to rot on the trees. The organization leading the volunteers, Concrete Jungle, exists for the sole purpose of salvaging food that grows throughout tree-covered Atlanta, and then getting what amounts to thousands of pounds of "found" food to food banks and other organizations.

"This is just food that would be going to waste, and there's so many hungry people in our city," says Concrete Jungle executive director Katherine Kennedy.

One of their biggest drop-off points is the Atlanta Community Food Bank, which last year received more than 1,500 pounds of produce from Concrete Jungle. That's an important source of fresh produce for the food bank, which like many around the country, has placed increasing emphasis on fresh foods in recent years, supplementing the canned and shelf-stable foods that were once the hallmark of most food banks.

It's a crucial shift in this new era of hunger and food relief. As more people have become dependent on food pantries for months or years instead of days or weeks, a greater percentage of what they and their families eat every day is coming from food banks and the pantries they serve. But food banks historically have been focused on providing shelf-stable products that often come as surplus from large supermarkets and food producers. Fresh produce like that harvested by Concrete Jungle adds to what food banks can offer to their clients.

In Minnesota, farmers are offering innovative solutions to bringing more fresh fruits and vegetables to those in need. In Minneapolis, Second Harvest Heartland food bank pays farmers a marginal fee to take their harvesting equipment back through fields of corn and other produce to harvest food that would not be acceptable to sell at supermarkets. But there is nothing wrong with the produce, and it can be absolutely vital to bringing nutrition to people who depend on the food bank. In 2015, Second Harvest recovered 6.3 million pounds of produce from farmers and also was able to send produce to other food banks nationally.



In Baltimore, the local government decided years ago to use its role as policymaker for both local farming and healthy food access. It provides property tax credits for supermarkets to open in "food desert" neighborhoods and finds ways to make it easier for urban farmers to grow food within the city, including turning otherwise unused city land into productive farms while paying very little in rent through its land-leasing initiative. The produce is then sold to local grocery stores or through mobile farmers market trucks, including in neighborhoods that usually lack fresh produce or where immigrants and refugees live — making it easier for them to get fresh vegetables that might otherwise be out of reach.

From simply purchasing produce to forging arrangements with local partners — including nearby farms that donate farm surplus and large supermarkets and restaurant chains that donate unsold or "ugly" produce or extra bread — food banks are finding ways to not only keep their clients from going hungry, but to keep them nourished as well.



Education to Help Ensure a Lasting Impact

In Detroit, Gleaners Community Food Bank helps its clients eat nutritious food and lead healthier lives. Its Cooking Matters classes, for example, invite adults to learn simple tips for cooking in healthy, family-friendly ways that are also easy on the budget. One Thursday morning in July, a group of Latina women in Detroit sat around a table learning about hidden sugar and fat in food — and then chopped veggies alongside a volunteer chef to make a veggie quesadilla. The chef usually leads the cooking lesson, but in this class, the women had the quesadilla expertise, so the chef let them teach her how they cook the dish — her role was to show that by simply adding a few veggies, a classic recipe could deliver a lot more nutrition to them and their families.

While other food banks around the country offer classes of their own to cater to the unique needs of the populations they serve, efforts to incorporate education into plans to boost food security do not stop there. In Charlotte, North Carolina, for example, The Males Place works with young African-American men to develop life skills while also teaching them to grow food in a small organic garden; the trainees not only gain access to fresh produce in a neighborhood that doesn't have much available, but they also receive mentorship and a role model for responsibility and community engagement. In Western Pennsylvania, Community Kitchen Pittsburgh prepares healthy meals for places like schools and hospitals while also giving people with barriers to employment — often because of a prison record or struggle with addiction — job training to develop skills that can help them land long-term employment once they finish the program. Through this model, Community Pittsburgh Kitchen aims to not only get nutritious food to people who depend on it and who may not eat anything else the rest of the day, but to also “shorten the line” at the local food pantry, hoping to provide a longer-term solution to some of the root causes of hunger.



Getting Food to People Where They Are

Celeste Zogas, a retired school teacher and volunteer at the food distribution in Warren, outside Detroit, remembers when students there showed up to school dressed nicely and knew they would end the day with a family dinner at home. But as more and more factories have closed, leaving joblessness in their wake, some children now enrolled in school rely as much on the meal assistance they get here as they do on the education they receive in the classroom. Zogas now volunteers to help the school operate the on-site food distribution for families in need. Just getting to the school can be a challenge for some — without the mobile distributions, those families might not be able to get that food at all.

“The families come here rain, shine, snow, cars that are almost out of gas — but they’re still coming,” says food distribution volunteer Celeste Zogas.

Facing similar circumstances across the country, food banks have stepped up their distribution efforts, working to bring food to people who may have trouble getting to traditional food pantries. In Appalachia and some western states, coal mine layoffs have left families unsure what to do next to earn a living, and in rural areas around the country, low-wage jobs don’t pay enough to support a family. Many of these communities are tens or hundreds of miles from each other or from the nearest city, making it hard for them to access any food assistance that might be available to them. Feeding South Dakota, for example, the main food bank for the entire state, is tasked with getting food to communities that are spread across a sprawling geographic region. It provides food assistance to about 21,000 people every week — adding up to more than 10 million pounds of food in a year — and to get that much food to people requires a variety of programs. One of the crucial ways for reaching the rural areas has proven to be its mobile pantry program, in which a specially-equipped truck is on the road much of the week bringing nonperishable dry goods as well as produce and sometimes frozen meats (the truck has a refrigerated section) to 13 communities in 11 different counties — many of which are Native American reservations, where the need is especially great.

“Starvation is different than I think what people actually perceive it as. It’s not so much a week of hunger as it is months without a fruit or vegetable,” says Tonya Derald, former Boys & Girls Club director on the



Lower Brule reservation. “Our kids have food. You will see our kids walk around with full-sized bags of cheese puffs, full-sized bags of candy, but they do not have access to fruits and vegetables.”

The reservation, like much of the whole state, she explains, is considered a food desert, with grocery stores that sell quality produce an hour or more away — and few families have access to cars. When produce does become available, whether through the Feeding South Dakota mobile distributions or some other sources, it’s an instant hit. “Our kids, when we bring in fruits, vegetables, meat and cheese trays, they love it. They absolutely love it,” Derald says.

From Detroit to rural South Dakota to Palm Springs, food banks now operate mobile food distributions. Sometimes it’s in a school parking lot, other times it’s out of a customized truck that operates like a food truck, but for groceries instead of hot meals. The logistics vary from state to state, but they all provide a lifeline for the communities that now depend on them.

These are three of the key ways that food banks have adapted to the changing face of hunger in America in recent years — and they mark a shift that recent headlines indicate seems to be working. According to the latest numbers from the Department of Agriculture, the number of hungry children in the U.S. is at its lowest since before the Great Recession — according to the department’s statistics the number of children who went hungry in 2015 was 274,000 compared to 422,000 in 2014 — the biggest one-year drop in a trend that had been shifting higher. Experts think economic growth may have helped with that decline, but the real key seems to have been in higher participation in food assistance programs — just like the ones Feeding America and other partners waging the long fight against hunger have been working so hard to provide.



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