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Secretary Johanns, I appreciate this opportunity to comment on the next Farm Bill. I speak from the perspective of the Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center, a nonprofit organization committed to ending hunger, reducing food insecurity and promoting healthy eating. This is what I see from where I stand.

First, we have a growing problem of food insecurity, driven by an increase in the number of families in which the parents are working but earning wages that are not sufficient to keep food on the table. Food insecurity is making inroads into the working class. Given the overall direction of the global economy, there is every indication that this problem will get worse in the years ahead.

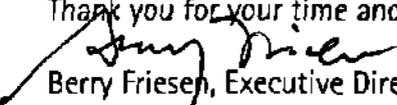
Our second problem is an abundance of food. Your Economic Research Service reports that American agriculture provides us with 3,800 calories per person per day. Even after spoilage and waste, we consume an average of 2,700 calories a day, 20 percent more than we need and 20 percent more than we consumed 30 years ago. For long-term public health, we need a food policy that strengthens the agricultural sector while encouraging us to consume less than we do now. That will be challenging.

This leads directly to a third problem: the foods we eat too much of are relatively inexpensive while the foods we eat too little of tend to be more expensive and are becoming more so. In part, this explains why we sometimes see the problems of food insecurity and overweight within the same household unit, indicating that family members are able to access more than enough calories through inexpensive or free food, but are not able to access the variety (especially fruits and vegetables) needed for a balanced diet and a healthy weight.

Here are three recommendations that speak to these issues.

1. The Food Stamp Program is an integral part of the foundation that supports other vital efforts related to education, economic opportunity and rural development. It is important that this program remain strong, that you continue efforts to make it more accessible to the low-wage worker, and that we retain the Program's national structure.
2. Provide a mechanism to better integrate what we know about nutrition and nutrition education into the USDA's food programs. Here in Pennsylvania we have worked at that in a variety of ways with your agency and have often found ourselves swimming upstream. I hope the next Farm Bill will enable much more of this work to happen.
3. Develop price support mechanisms that are consistent with your dietary guidelines. We need USDA farm program that will better align production agriculture with the public health needs of our people.

Thank you for your time and for your consideration of these suggestions.


Berry Friesen, Executive Director

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Statewide leadership to end hunger