



TRANSCRIPT

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4 IN THE MATTER OF:)

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6 FARM BILL NUTRITION FORUM Atlanta, Georgia - November 2, 2005

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TRANSCRIPT OF

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PUBLIC HEARING

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9:00 a.m.

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Atlanta Community Food Bank
732 Joseph E. Lowery Boulevard, N.W.
Atlanta, Georgia

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Christopher M. Artman, CCR B-2325

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1 APPEARANCES

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3 On behalf of the U.S. Department of Agriculture:

4 ERIC M. BOST, Under Secretary

5 DONALD E. ARNETTE, Regional Administrator

6 CLARENCE CARTER, Food Stamp Program -- HQ

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8 On behalf of the Atlanta Community Food Bank:

9 BILL BOLLING, Executive Director

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11 Guest Speakers:

12 LESTER CYPHER, The Volunteer Way
13 TERRY VORHEES, Southeast Produce Council
14 DON WAMBLES, Alabama Farmers Market Authority
15 CHARLES HALL, Georgia Fruit and Vegetable
16 Association
17 KATHY PALUMBO, Atlanta Community Food Bank
18 RAJONIA ROBERTS, DHR/DFCS
19 BARBARA HOPKINS, American Dietetic Association
20 TONY FLORES, Flores Consulting Services
21 ERIC DARRACQ, Georgia Department of Natural
22 Resources
23 TAMI WILLADSEN, The Nature Conservancy
24 TIM LOWRIMORE, Georgia Forestry Association
25 DENISE GRIEWISCH, Second Harvest of the Big Bend
Food Bank
MARY CARR, Southern Alliance for Clean Energy
DOROTHY INMAN-JOHNSON, Capital Area Community
Action Agency
DEBRA A. SUSIE, Florida Impact
EARLINE E. MIDDLETON, Food Bank of Central and
Eastern North Carolina
JOYCE P. O'HEAL, Food Bank of Central and
Eastern North Carolina
LARK HAYES, Southern Environmental Law Center

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1 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: Good morning.
2 First of all, welcome. We're glad that you're
3 here. I'm Eric Bost, the Under Secretary. I
4 would first like to thank Bill Bolling and his
5 staff for allowing us the opportunity to come to
6 this wonderful facility.

7 Actually, I had the opportunity to be here
8 for the ground breaking when it was just some
9 mud out there and actually to come back and see
10 it after it was completed. It's a beautiful
11 facility, and I would encourage all of you, at
12 some point in time, to come back and volunteer.
13 It affords all of us an opportunity to make a
14 positive difference.

15 And speaking of differences, this is my
16 11th forum. And the purpose of these forums is
17 essentially this -- it's very simple: It is an
18 opportunity to hear from all of you about what
19 your thoughts, recommendations, and suggestions
20 would be to us as we look in terms of putting
21 our ideas into the old 7 Farm Bill.

22 You are afforded a wonderful opportunity
23 to share with us what you think, and we would
24 encourage you to do so. Of the Farm Bill, there
25 are six programs that are part of the nutrition

1 type, the largest, of course, being the Food
2 Stamp Program and the CFSP and TEFAP and people
3 on Indian reservations; those are all part of
4 it, too. The farmers markets; those are all
5 part of it, too. But the issue for us is to
6 hear from you.

7 The one thing that I would say to you is
8 that there are some guiding principles that will
9 be constant. First and foremost, since I've
10 been Under Secretary, there has been a move on
11 our part to ensure that people that are eligible
12 to participate in our programs have the
13 opportunity to do so; that they have easy access
14 to our programs.

15 And on the other side, that our partners
16 who have the responsibility for implementing
17 those programs, that we make it easy for them to
18 carry those programs out.

19 But the third piece that's also very
20 important to me is to ensure that we maintain a
21 high level of integrity in our programs.

22 So there are three pieces that will still
23 remain constant as we move forward.

24 The one thing that I would say about the
25 largest of our nutrition programs is the Food

1 Stamp Program. Right now we're serving
2 approximately 25 million Americans every month.

3 And I mention it not because it's the
4 largest but because as we look at what occurred
5 to our sister states down in the Gulf and how it
6 adversely affected a significant number of
7 people, the Food Stamp Program did what it was
8 supposed to do: It quickly and efficiently got
9 food in the hands of hungry people and their
10 children and their families. And in many
11 instances, people that never, ever thought that
12 they would participate in the Food Stamp
13 Program -- never thought -- but it did what they
14 were supposed to do.

15 In addition to that, with our Commodity
16 Distribution Program, in concert with our
17 partners, America's Second Harvest and the food
18 banks, that worked exceptionally well. And I'm
19 here to congratulate Bill and all of his
20 partners in the food bank industry to say thank
21 you for the outstanding job that they did in
22 working with us, in coordinating with us, and in
23 partnering with us in terms of getting food
24 quickly to a significant number of people.

25 It would not have been possible if it had

1 not been for the work that they did. And that's
2 why I wanted Bill here for my intro, to thank
3 him and all of his folks, because we're just so
4 pleased and happy with the partnerships that we
5 have. It's about working together. It's about
6 making a positive difference in the lives of
7 people that we have a responsibility of serving.

8 My parents, who are very close to me, they
9 have this saying that I always try to keep in
10 the back of my mind: "You never know when
11 you're going to need someone else's help." You
12 know, you might be on top today. Many of those
13 people were doing quite well in New Orleans.
14 Actually, some of them you would say were fairly
15 rich, wealthy. They lost everything, and now
16 they have an EBT card. You never know, do you?

17 And so the issue for us is to be there so
18 that we're able to respond to the needs of
19 hungry people in this country quickly. With
20 your help, with our partnership with folks at
21 America's Second Harvest and the food banks,
22 we're here to hear from you about what we can
23 continue to do to, one, strengthen those
24 relationships, and to make it better, to make it
25 more efficient, more efficient to respond more

1 quickly if need be. That's why you're here.

2 This is not a dialogue. I'm going to
3 listen. We're going to listen. There might be
4 instances where we might ask a couple of
5 questions in seeking some clarification, but
6 this is an opportunity for you to talk with us.

7 As I said, this is the 11th forum that
8 we've had. The last one was scheduled for
9 Columbia, South Carolina, on the 17th of
10 November. And what we will do is that we will
11 take all the comments that we've gotten and
12 compress them and put them on the website toward
13 the end of the year, the first of the year, so
14 that everyone can see what everyone else had to
15 say.

16 We'll take all of those comments, and over
17 the course of the next several months, we will
18 review them and make some determination as to
19 what we believe -- "we" being the
20 administration -- what we believe needs to be
21 done in terms of addressing many of the issues
22 that I've talked about.

23 So with that in mind, I'm going to sit
24 down. But I wanted Bill to be here to make a
25 couple comments, and then we'll turn it over to

1 Don to go through the ground rules, and then
2 we'll go ahead and get started.

3 Don is going to tell you this, but I'm
4 going to add a little bit to it. We have a time
5 keeper, and I think that there are people that
6 will give you the little yellow "Yield" sign
7 that you have so many minutes, and then they'll
8 put up the "Stop" sign. But there are a couple
9 people that keep talking after they see the
10 "Stop" sign. If you do, I'm going to tell you
11 to sit down. You don't want to have me to do
12 that, because it is so embarrassing. And it's
13 embarrassing on purpose.

14 You do have the opportunity to submit
15 written comments. And after you've heard
16 everybody else, and you say, "I wanted to say
17 that, too," later on you can send those to us.

18 Bill?

19 MR. BILL BOLLING: Thank you. I want to
20 also thank you for being here. This is exactly
21 what we wanted. We didn't have a ground
22 breaking, we had a ground blessing. And it had
23 been raining all night and it was muddy out here
24 when we put the tent up. Eric came, the mayor
25 came, and you can see the outcome of that

1 effort.

2 We consider the Under Secretary our top
3 food banker in the country. I know the
4 President considers him the Under Secretary of
5 Ag., but as far as food banking, we have never
6 had a better friend. We've never had as much
7 support as we've had, and I think we've never
8 had as much flexibility.

9 One of the difficult things in handling
10 the USDA food is that there's a lot of
11 accountability. There should be. The two
12 hurricanes that we just experienced, I think,
13 was an example for us of, as soon as it
14 happened, sitting down with the regional office,
15 sitting down with the national office, and
16 saying, "How are we going to go forward?" And
17 the answer was, "What do you want to do? How
18 are we going to get the food out?" And that's
19 what we've done.

20 So for that, we thank you for your
21 leadership, we thank you for your friendship,
22 and we thank you for your partnership with the
23 food bank.

24 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: Thank you.

25 MR. BILL BOLLING: I've been called a few

1 times where the Secretary said, "That's time."
2 I think I'm getting the signal right now. Thank
3 you for being here --

4 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: Thank you for
5 having us.

6 MR. BILL BOLLING: -- so that we can
7 listen to each other. I mean, that really is
8 the basis of trust and having a partnership, and
9 we do that very thing.

10 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: Thank you.

11 MR. BILL BOLLING: So Don, Eric, thank you
12 very much.

13 MR. ARNETTE: Good morning, everyone. I'm
14 Donald Arnette, the Regional Administrator for
15 the Southeast region here in Atlanta, Georgia.
16 And I would like to introduce the Deputy
17 Administrator of the Food Stamp Program,
18 Clarence Carter, who is here, and we're here in
19 support of the Under Secretary.

20 In providing that support, there are
21 several things that all of you will need to do
22 to help us today, and I'll read them to you so I
23 don't miss anything at all. These are
24 housekeeping issues. Of course, the restrooms
25 are out the door to the left. Follow the signs,

1 and you'll be there. But for the forum itself,
2 do pay attention.

3 One: Attendees that have written comments
4 may leave them in boxes designated for written
5 comments. One is at the registration table, and
6 one is here in the forum area (indicating),
7 which is on the table here to my right.

8 Two: For attendees making oral
9 statements, you were provided a blue card with a
10 number and a location, either left or right. If
11 your card has "right," then you will speak from
12 the microphone on your right. If it has "left,"
13 you will speak from the microphone on your left.

14 Three: At the front of the room, Karen
15 Dean will hold up a card with a number on it.
16 That will be your cue to move to the cueing line
17 so that you are ready to speak when your turn
18 comes.

19 Four: Before you begin to make your
20 statement, please state your name, your
21 affiliation, and provide your city and state.
22 It's very important.

23 Five: Originally, we had allotted a time
24 limit of three to five minutes for each speaker.
25 However, it appears that we will have ample time

1 to accommodate everyone, even if your comment
2 exceeds five minutes, but watch the sign. If
3 your time becomes an issue, Karen will hold up
4 the "Yield" sign, and we ask that you cooperate.
5 And when she holds up "Stop," it means stop, or
6 the Under Secretary will do as he said.

7 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: It's embarrassing.

8 MR. ARNETTE: Six: We will not be taking
9 a break. We will not be taking a break. So if
10 you need to leave the forum area, please feel
11 free to do so.

12 And seven: Finally, I want to thank those
13 of you who have volunteered to participate in a
14 service opportunity here at the food bank. Our
15 goal is that the food bank continues to do its
16 work. There have been individuals who have
17 signed up saying that you would like to donate
18 time today, and we just want to thank you for
19 that.

20 And with that, we can start with our first
21 speaker.

22 MR. LESTER CYPHER: My name is Lester
23 Cypher. I'm the CEO of The Volunteer Way, which
24 is in Florida. It's a Florida faith-based,
25 hunger-relief charity located in New Port Richy,

1 Florida.

2 First, I would like to thank you for
3 allowing us to be here and express our concerns
4 with the new T-5 contracts that started
5 April 2004. I represent The Volunteer Way Food
6 Bank and approximately 2- to 300 faith-based and
7 community organizations in Florida.

8 The Florida Department of Agriculture,
9 FDA, tried to make sure that all the
10 nutritionally challenged in Florida had an equal
11 opportunity to receive their share of USDA
12 commodities. We also believe that there were
13 areas that were underserved that needed to have
14 an opportunity to receive these share of
15 commodities.

16 As you know, faith-based and community
17 charities have a long and tireless record of
18 helping people of their community and have been
19 applauded many times by government and the
20 business community for all the good works they
21 have done.

22 Our concerns are that these new contracts
23 put many small, faith-based and community
24 charities at risk of closing their doors. This
25 is already happening in Florida. The average

1 church, which most people do not realize, is
2 approximately 75 people, and they struggle just
3 to pay their overhead and their pastor. This
4 has not allowed many funds to pay for food or
5 handling fees to feed the nutritionally changed
6 of Florida.

7 These new contracts give the authority to
8 the contract holders to pick which food pantries
9 or soup kitchens will receive commodities and
10 which will not. We have many complaints from
11 small churches that they have been told by the
12 contract holder that they cannot receive
13 commodities because their communities are
14 covered by other food pantries and soup
15 kitchens.

16 When these contracts were given out,
17 85 percent of all Florida's counties were given
18 out to members of one Florida association, which
19 also met with FDA before the contracts were
20 written. FDA had good intentions when they
21 changed these T-5 contracts and were behind it
22 100 percent. But what they did not take into
23 consideration is that just like people, all
24 charities do not have the best of intentions.

25 FDA should have more control over the

1 contracted charities and an impartial board to
2 resolve complaints. At the present time, there
3 is no procedure if a problem exists. We need
4 your support for these small, faith-based
5 charities and community charities.

6 I've written a more-detailed report that I
7 put over there (indicating) with suggestions on
8 how to solve some of these problems. And they
9 are solvable, but they need to be addressed as
10 soon as possibly if you can in the new
11 contracts.

12 Thank you for your attention and for
13 giving me the opportunity to talk.

14 MR. TERRY VORHEES: Good morning. My name
15 is Terry Vorhees. I'm the Executive Director of
16 the Southeast Produce Council based out of Sun
17 City Center, Florida.

18 We are a regional trade association with
19 over 400 members. Membership consists of
20 growers in the Southeast, many of which are
21 second- and third-generation family-owned
22 farmers. Our membership also consists of
23 national companies like Dole, Chaquita, Fresh
24 Express, and Del Monte. Our retail members
25 include companies such as Kroger, Buy-Low,

1 Harris Teeter, and SuperValue, and also, we have
2 major food service distributors as members such
3 as U.S. Food Services.

4 Our primary goal is to promote the fresh
5 fruit and vegetable industry in the Southeast,
6 and we know of no better way than introducing
7 fruits and vegetables to children. Early
8 consumption of nutritious fresh fruits and
9 vegetables prepares a child for a lifetime of
10 healthy eating habits.

11 I am here today to ask for your continued
12 and expanded support for the Fresh Fruit and
13 Vegetable Snack Program. The 2005 dietary
14 guidelines issued by the U.S. Department of
15 Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Health
16 recommends that all Americans eat five to 13
17 servings of fresh fruits and vegetables per day.
18 These guidelines are the strongest statement
19 ever about the need to increase consumption of
20 fresh fruits and vegetables.

21 The Fresh Fruit and Snack Program
22 increases children's consumption of fresh
23 produce, and the program results in immediate
24 behavior change. Students started eating more
25 fruits and vegetables the first week the program

1 was introduced into their schools. We know the
2 children like fresh fruits and vegetables and
3 that they eat more if they are more accessible
4 and readily available where the children are.

5 On average, children eat less than
6 one-half the recommended daily amount of fresh
7 fruits and vegetables. We also know that
8 childhood obesity is increasing at an alarming
9 rate. Children's poor eating habits, including
10 inadequate intake of fresh fruits and
11 vegetables, contributes to becoming overweight
12 and in developing diabetes, high blood pressure,
13 and heart disease.

14 Students who participate in the Snack
15 Program ask their parents to buy more fresh
16 fruits and vegetables. And the program has
17 demonstrated that students ate more fresh fruits
18 and vegetables and consumed less soda, chips,
19 and candy.

20 The Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program is
21 currently available in 14 states. We would like
22 to ask and possibly see that this program be
23 expanded to all 50 states. I would just like to
24 say that, in addition to talking about the Fresh
25 Fruits and Vegetables Snack Program, the

1 Southeast Produce Council has supported other
2 programs in the Southeast. One of them we feel
3 is very important, and that is the EFNEP
4 program, the Extended Food and Nutrition
5 Education Program.

6 We currently work with the program in
7 South Carolina. And when we first started
8 working with EFNEP, we were surprised to learn
9 that the in-home educators had no specific
10 program dedicated to fruits and vegetables. We
11 have basically started a program with them in
12 which we fund a coupon where the low-income
13 families can go into their local supermarkets
14 and refund this coupon for fresh produce.

15 Thank you.

16 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: Are you aware that
17 I just spoke with Congress and that we've added
18 six additional states?

19 MR. TERRY VORHEES: Yes, I know. I've
20 mentioned 14 states now.

21 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: Okay. And then you
22 also know that it would be in excess of almost
23 \$10 billion?

24 MR. TERRY VORHEES: Let me just add that
25 if we could certainly be -- we have a lot of

1 growers who are members in the Southeast, and we
2 would be more than willing to work with you any
3 way we can and possibly work a program where
4 some of our growers/shippers could maybe work at
5 offering these fruits and vegetables at a
6 discount.

7 Thank you.

8 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: Thank you.

9 MR. DON WAMBLES: Thank you very much,
10 Mr. Secretary. My name is Don Wambles. I'm the
11 Director of the Alabama Farmers Market Authority
12 in Montgomery, Alabama.

13 I'm here to speak this morning on behalf
14 of the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program.
15 Albeit all of our programs that are up for
16 discussion this morning are extremely important,
17 as you so eloquently stated earlier, our Food
18 Stamp Program is the largest of all of these.

19 And I do not mean this in a negative
20 connotation, whatsoever, in regards to the Food
21 Stamp Program. I want to predicate that by my
22 remarks. I don't want to get any emotion
23 incited, but with the Food Stamp Program,
24 particularly here in the Southeast in years
25 past, it has had a negative connotation with

1 poor people. And the EBT Program has helped
2 overcome that significantly, and we greatly
3 appreciate that. However, at the same time,
4 what the EBT Program has done, it has precluded
5 the food stamp recipients from being able to
6 shop at farmers market. So we have an issue
7 with that, but I won't speak to that. But I do
8 want to put that on the record.

9 But coming back to the Senior Farmers
10 Market Nutrition Program, this is one of the
11 most creative, most innovative means of
12 providing fresh fruits and vegetables to a
13 sector of our citizenry that so greatly needs
14 them. You know, the USDA and all of our health
15 institutions in society have documented that
16 fresh fruits and vegetables in the diet greatly
17 increases our health. So whatever means we can
18 utilize to increase the consumption of fruits
19 and vegetables in our diet, we need to do it.

20 Through the Senior Farmers Market
21 Nutrition Program, we have not only done that
22 and we are having healthier seniors, we're
23 assisting our agricultural community to be
24 strong and viable, which is so extremely
25 important to us.

1 And when I speak about the agricultural
2 community, that might be a little far into the
3 Food and Nutrition Service, because you really
4 do not focus too much on production agriculture.
5 But without fresh fruits and vegetables that the
6 gentleman just prior to me was talking about, we
7 wouldn't have those vegetables for our school
8 programs or whatever if our farmers and our
9 agricultural community was not strong and viable
10 here.

11 And what's so important with the Senior
12 Farmers Market Nutrition Program is it is all
13 small farmers, small family farmers. These are
14 not individuals who are receiving any of the
15 government subsidies in the Farm Commodities
16 Program, whatsoever.

17 The Senior Farmers Market Nutrition
18 Program should not, and in my opinion, cannot be
19 viewed as a substantive program, because we're
20 providing food assistance to seniors that they,
21 in turn, have the choice to shop at farmers
22 markets and spend that food dollar on whatever
23 food and vegetable is of their choice.

24 And the farmer is selling a product that
25 he has got out there and has worked his land to

1 produce. So he's just getting paid for a
2 product that he's produced.

3 And you're putting that fresh product
4 directly in the hands of the consumer that no
5 other program that we have is doing. We're
6 putting someone with the food coupon and the
7 producer together at the same place at the same
8 time.

9 Now, the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition
10 Program, along with the WIC Farmers Market
11 Nutrition Program, but particularly the Senior
12 Program, is a very creative and innovative means
13 of providing that food to those elderly
14 citizens. It's been operated for the past four,
15 five years under the Competitive Grants Program,
16 and each individual grantee has written grants
17 and submitted those grant proposals telling the
18 USDA how they're going to implement and run
19 their programs, and the grants have been awarded
20 accordingly.

21 We have a proven track record that not one
22 size fits all. We have creativity and
23 innovation, and most importantly, Mr. Secretary,
24 we do have integrity. I encourage anyone in
25 this room to come to Alabama and look at the way

1 we're running our program. Is it perfect? No,
2 sir. But we're working on getting there.

3 But what we do not need is for the Senior
4 Farmers Market Nutrition Program in the next
5 Farm Bill or with the implementation of the
6 final regs that are coming out hopefully within
7 the next few months, we do not need to be put in
8 a box where one size fits all.

9 You know, this program is different from
10 most other programs. We're dealing with an
11 elderly population that we're having to work
12 within the elderly system that is set up across
13 America, which is quite different from most of
14 the programs that FNS is currently dealing with,
15 and we're also dealing with farmers and
16 agriculture.

17 And as we all have seen recently here in
18 the Southeast, we're at the mercy of the weather
19 with our production of crops. So we can't just
20 draw a box around this thing and say that we're
21 going to have to stay in that box. We need some
22 creativity and some ingenuity.

23 The one thing that the Seniors Farmers
24 Market and the WIC Farmers Market does is that
25 we are limited to only fresh fruits and

1 vegetables. There is a wide, vast array of
2 products available at farmers markets. And
3 there have been studies out that fresh nuts have
4 reduced cholesterol levels. Honey is a
5 tremendous thing that our seniors have asked
6 for.

7 And I would ask and encourage that you
8 give serious consideration to expanding the food
9 package in the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition
10 Program. It would not only benefit our
11 producers, but we would make those seniors a lot
12 happier than what we have right now. It's not
13 easy standing before an elderly lady and telling
14 her, "You can't buy that."

15 Thank you for your time, and we appreciate
16 you being here.

17 MR. CHARLES HALL: Good morning, Under
18 Secretary Boss and Mr. Arnette. My name is
19 Charles Hall. I'm the Executive Director of the
20 Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Association of
21 LaGrange, Georgia. Our association represents
22 30 growers, packers, and shippers throughout the
23 State of Georgia. The farm-gate value of
24 Georgia's fruit and vegetable industry in 2004
25 was \$830 million.

1 Mr. Bost, I want to express our
2 appreciation to you and the Secretary for the
3 effort that y'all are putting into the input and
4 comments for the 2007 Farm Bill. I've had the
5 opportunity to attend two of the other listening
6 sessions, and we certainly appreciate all your
7 time and effort on that.

8 As our Nutrition Under Secretary, I know
9 you recognize the important role that fruits and
10 vegetables have not only in America's
11 agricultural production but also in the
12 citizens' quality of life.

13 The timing of the new dietary guidelines
14 just issued by the USDA and DHH and the Farm
15 Bill sets the stage to focus on the need to
16 bring the United States agricultural policy in
17 line with these guidelines. One of the keys to
18 doing this is increasing consumption and making
19 fruits and vegetables more accessible and
20 readily available to the youth of our nation.

21 On average, children eat less than half
22 the daily allowance as recommended by the new
23 guidelines. Childhood obesity, poor eating
24 habits, and disease is contributing to this by
25 the inadequate eating of fruits and vegetables.

1 And as we look to the 2007 Farm Bill, it offers
2 us an excellent opportunity to address these
3 problems and encourage better nutrition by our
4 children.

5 One of the top Farm Bill priorities for
6 the produce industry is to expand the Fresh
7 Fruits and Vegetables Snack Program to all 50
8 states, and we realize there is a cost in doing
9 that. Unfortunately, as we know, and you
10 mentioned earlier, we are only in 14 states at
11 this time. And we certainly appreciate your
12 efforts and the conference committee's efforts
13 last week to have that expanded by the eight
14 states that were added last week during the
15 appropriation's hearings.

16 As you mentioned, we're now in 14 states
17 and three Indian tribal organizations. We
18 encourage this continued expansion of the
19 program because we know that this has effects.
20 We know that children eat the fruits and
21 vegetables when they're available and that they
22 look for more fruits and vegetables when they
23 get home. They're asking for additional fruits
24 and vegetables from their parents.

25 From our discussions with several members

1 of the Georgia Congressional Delegation, we hope
2 that this program will be expanded into Georgia
3 schools in '07. We're working on that
4 appropriation that we could get it into Georgia
5 soon. But short of that, if we can work with
6 the '07 Farm Bill and expand it to all 50
7 states, that would mean healthier and less obese
8 children in this country.

9 Our association also has, as a second
10 nutritional goal for the '07 Farm Bill, double
11 the funding of the Department of Defense Fresh
12 Program for schools. As you know, this is a
13 very efficient and cost-effective mechanism to
14 get fresh fruits and vegetables into DOD school
15 lunch programs. This is working.

16 The emphasis is placed on utilizing local
17 grower organizations. It's all of our producers
18 and suppliers. Now I believe there's 300
19 produce items now available to schools through
20 the DOD Fresh Produce Program. We believe that
21 more schools, of course, would participate in
22 this program if the funds were available, and we
23 would want to work in the 2007 Farm Bill
24 discussions to see that program expanded.

25 You also mentioned the Food Stamp Program

1 in the earlier comments, that it is a very large
2 program and touches a large sector of our U.S.
3 population. We support this discussion of farm
4 policy during the 2007 Farm Bill discussion.
5 They encourage food stamp recipients to eat a
6 healthy diet rich in a variety of fruits and
7 vegetables consistent with the 2005 dietary
8 guidelines.

9 We support the Farm Bill in providing
10 funds in the development and implementation of
11 innovative programs that would encourage food
12 stamp recipients to increase their consumption
13 of fruits and vegetables with some type of
14 incentive, whether it's an added deposit or a
15 bonus or additional funds added to the EBT cards
16 when those purchases are made.

17 The Georgia Fruits and Vegetables Growers
18 Association is committed to participate in the
19 Farm Bill discussions over the next two years.
20 We look forward to working hand-in-hand with our
21 nutritional consultants and other children's
22 healthcare advocates as we work to benefit our
23 children's youth.

24 Mr. Secretary, we appreciate you being
25 here. Thank you.

1 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: Thank you.

2 MS. KATHY PALUMBO: Good morning. My name
3 is Kathy Palumbo. I'm Community Services
4 Director here at the Atlanta Community Food
5 Bank. This morning I'm also representing The
6 Georgia Food Bank Association.

7 The first thing I would like to say,
8 Mr. Bost, is just compliments to the FNS Staff
9 Regional Office and the State Food and Nutrition
10 Unit for DHR on the work you all did during
11 Hurricane Katrina. It was exemplary. It was a
12 model for other federal departments. We can't
13 thank you enough. You got food to people when
14 they needed it in a timely way and released some
15 of the burden on the non-profits. Thank you,
16 everybody, so very much.

17 I do want to talk to you about two
18 specific programs: One is the Food Stamp
19 Program, and the other is the TEFAP Program.

20 The ability to respond so well during
21 Hurricane Katrina really exemplifies the
22 strength of the Food Stamp Program structure.
23 It is a national design, a national eligibility
24 standard, a funding mechanism that's central to
25 the program's success, and those things have to

1 State of Georgia right now that is absolutely
2 committed to fighting hunger and making sure
3 that people are food secure. But I think the
4 lack of some additional administrative money
5 prevents the innovation and expansion.

6 We would really like to see the USDA be
7 able to provide food stamps to all eligible
8 regions. Access to adequate food is just
9 absolutely necessary. It impacts health and
10 productivity. Our nation invites the same class
11 of residents to join our armed forces and fight
12 in our wars. Surely we can offer the families,
13 when they're eligible, some food stamps.

14 We would like to see the minimum food
15 stamp benefit for senior citizens increase to at
16 least \$50 a month and extend the certification
17 for older adults without earned income to \$40.

18 We would like to see the elimination of
19 the interview requirement for re-certifying
20 households in a face-to-face interview. Perhaps
21 these households could be allowed to reapply
22 either electronically or by mail. This would
23 conform to most states' Medicaid rules and would
24 allow folks that are working and have to take
25 time off work to do the re-certification to meet

1 their primary responsibility to their employer.

2 We would like to see the continued and
3 expanded funding for EBT services at farmers
4 markets. Several gentlemen have spoken about
5 this this morning. Access to locally produced
6 foods increases nutrition to poor people and
7 helps with getting some more value to the local
8 farmers.

9 We would really, really encourage you --
10 and I know this is nay impossible -- to
11 calculate the benefit allotments using the
12 moderate or low-cost food plan rather than the
13 food plan.

14 About two years ago, we did a random
15 sample of retail grocers in the metropolitan
16 area to see what the cost locally of the
17 distributed food plan was. It was nearly
18 30 percent more than the benefit level.
19 Certainly we take some responsibility as our
20 mission to make sure that people get food.

21 And we know that a lot of people that food
22 banks serve through our partner agencies are
23 food stamp recipients, but that 30 percent
24 difference seems extreme. So if we could think
25 about recalculating using the moderate or

1 low-cost food plan, I think it would be an
2 enormous help.

3 I could go on. I could be verbose, but
4 I've got written comments, so I'll move along.
5 Thank you.

6 MS. RAJONIA ROBERTS: Good morning. I'm
7 Rajonia Roberts, the TEFAP Project Administrator
8 with the Georgia Department of Human Resources
9 Division of Children and Family Services. I'm
10 here today representing our Unit Manager,
11 Batista Edwards, who is not able to attend due
12 to a scheduled conflict. However, I do have a
13 statement which she submitted concerning the
14 Food Stamp Program. She writes:

15 "Dear Under Secretary Bost: Thank you for
16 allowing us an opportunity to share our thoughts
17 on the administration of the Food Stamp Program.

18 "The 2002 Farm Bill enacted many positive
19 changes for the simplification of the Food Stamp
20 Program. The change we appreciate the most as
21 administrators of the program is the simplified
22 work requirement. This simplification relieves
23 clients of inadvertent errors that historically
24 reduce the monthly allotment of food stamps to
25 households often because of uncertainty about

1 the rules.

2 "Also, with consistent increases in
3 caseloads and decreased State revenues due to
4 high unemployment, this provision has helped our
5 state to maintain the respectable payment rate.
6 Please continue to implement program changes
7 along this line.

8 "Other Farm Bill options Georgia
9 implemented to help us improve our ability to
10 manage the program are simplified definitions of
11 'incomes' and 'resource.' While we did not
12 observe a significant increase in food stamp
13 participation because of these options, we have
14 enjoyed simplification in the program
15 administration. We greatly appreciate all
16 measures to reduce administrative burdens.

17 "Other challenges of the Food Stamp
18 Program we would like to see simplified are as
19 follows: We need a standardized medical
20 deduction for the elderly and our disabled
21 applicants and recipients. If we could use a
22 standard, similar process used for the Medicare
23 drug discount card, we could further simplify
24 the Food Stamp Program and relax some of the
25 verification requirements on one of our most

1 vulnerable population.

2 "Current resource policy, especially as it
3 pertains to vehicles, is not in line with
4 today's applicants and recipients. Is it
5 possible to exclude vehicles altogether, apart
6 from mechanical eligibility?

7 "The policy on able-bodied adults without
8 dependants, or A-BODs, the laws on the time
9 limit benefits has to be the most time
10 consuming, burdensome, and ineffective policy in
11 the Food Stamp Program. Most A-BODs accumulate
12 two to three months with the first violation.
13 Some accumulate three months not as a result of
14 noncompliance but due to the nature of our
15 business.

16 "If a state does not have any
17 discretionary exemption, the 15 percent
18 exemption is to be used. Then the A-BOD is at
19 risk of hunger and not as a consequence of his
20 or her actions. For example, a household that
21 has a simplified reporting requirement that has
22 an individual that unknowingly becomes subject
23 to the A-BOD provisions during the certification
24 period is at risk of losing eligibility for the
25 remainder of the 36-month period.

1 "If a state chooses to provide services to
2 assist these individuals with employment and
3 training opportunities, the pro rata share of
4 the 90 million ENT grant is not nearly enough
5 funding to provide the meaningful services that
6 will lead to self-sufficiency. And yet, so much
7 time and money is spent on such a small
8 population of food stamp recipients.

9 "Another concern about the effectiveness
10 of the ENT Program is the recent interpretation
11 that federal funds cannot be extended to support
12 acceptance of new employment. It seems that
13 acceptance of gainful employment should be the
14 focus of the program and that funds used to
15 support this goal is not only acceptable but
16 encouraged.

17 "Think of the scenario: An A-BOD has
18 applied and been approved for food stamp
19 benefits. He or she does not have any income
20 because he was laid off from his or her job at a
21 major airline a year ago. He has been in our
22 ENT Program in a training component. This A-BOD
23 attends a job fair and has been made an
24 acceptable offer. The only hindrance is that he
25 or she has to have his tools to begin work.

1 "If we do not assist this able-bodied
2 individual who has no income with the one thing
3 that stands between him and the respectful gain
4 of employment, we are violating the spirit of
5 the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 and the very
6 nature of the Food Stamp Employment Training
7 Program.

8 "Another concern is the \$10 minimum
9 benefit to all categorically eligible
10 households. In most cases, this is an elderly
11 or disabled person. This benefit needs to be
12 increased to be aligned with the current
13 inflation rates. If we could increase the
14 minimum allotment to \$25 monthly, it would make
15 the application process more attractive for this
16 at-risk population.

17 "Our final recommendation is for a system
18 for calculating eligibility for performance
19 goals and for accuracy. When determining
20 superior performance, the stylification of
21 paperwork should be taken into consideration.

22 "Respectfully, Batista Edwards, Unit
23 Manager, Food Nutrition Program."

24 Thank you.

25 MS. BARBARA HOPKINS: Good morning. My

1 name is Barbara Hopkins, and I am a dietician
2 here in the Atlanta area. I'm also an educator
3 at the university in the city of Atlanta, and
4 I'm submitting my comments on behalf of the
5 American Dietetic Association.

6 It is the opinion of the American Dietetic
7 Association that the public needs an
8 uncompromising commitment from their government
9 to advance nutrition knowledge and to help
10 people apply that knowledge to maintaining their
11 health. Millions of Americans benefit from the
12 USDA Food Assistance Program where we still see
13 hunger in the United States and coexisting
14 problems of overweight and obesity. In fact,
15 what we see is the largest manifestation of
16 malnutrition in the United States today.

17 We request that the next Farm Bill
18 addresses four key areas:

19 First, that the USDA Foods Assistance
20 Program be known to those in need and that it is
21 adequately funded.

22 Second, that improving the nutritional
23 status of Americans needs to combine priority in
24 food assistance programs and other food programs
25 in all states for all Americans.

1 Third, that increased investment in
2 nutrition education and nutrition research is
3 necessary, and it must be sustained.

4 And fourth, that having up-to-date
5 knowledge of the nutrition composition of the
6 food supply is essential for all that work in
7 food nutrition and health.

8 If we expect consumers to take personal
9 responsibility for making healthy choices, then
10 we have the responsibility to make sure that
11 they are adequately prepared. The government
12 must invest in the nutrition research and
13 nutrition education necessary to give Americans
14 the knowledge and ability to make their own
15 nutrition decisions. Those nutrition
16 recommendations and programs for the public must
17 be based on sound science.

18 Only the federal government has the public
19 mandate and resources to carry out research on
20 human nutrition needs and to develop dietary
21 guidelines that form the basis for all federal
22 nutrition programs. We believe federal research
23 exploring the relationship between diet,
24 particularly dietary patterns and health, is
25 particularly important.

1 On a personal note, I just want to thank
2 the USDA for all of its wonderful nutrition
3 education materials that our students can
4 benefit from.

5 And I also, on a personal note, want to
6 thank you for the comments that were made about
7 the Atlanta Food Bank because they provide
8 wonderful resources for my students. And I do
9 require my students to follow the Food Stamp
10 Program for a week, to keep a diary, and to do
11 the nutritional analysis to see and experience
12 why it is important for people in the United
13 States.

14 Thank you.

15 MR. TONY FLORES: Good morning. My name
16 is Tony Flores, and I represent Flores
17 Consulting Services. I'm formerly with the
18 Georgia Department of Human Resources. I was in
19 charge of implementing Title VI.

20 I would like to enlighten you about the
21 growing Hispanic community, not just in Georgia
22 but throughout the Southeast, with the exception
23 of Florida. This is a growing market which is
24 being ignored to a certain extent. When you
25 look at diversity issues and you look at

1 representation of Latinos in the State of
2 Georgia, even at the federal level and at the
3 State level, there's less than 1 percent
4 Hispanics employed in any management positions
5 to implement community outreach programs to make
6 all these USDA programs happen.

7 In Georgia, there are about 800,000 senior
8 citizens, and the percentage of Latinos is very
9 small. But you have a large Latino workforce
10 that could be trained to help senior citizens
11 down the road, like in New York City, where they
12 become nutrition assistants. They come to the
13 home and they cook. They take them to the
14 doctor. They take them for a walk. They go to
15 the pharmacy for them. And they take people and
16 they train them. And they make ten to \$12 an
17 hour. In Georgia, we don't have this.

18 The other thing is, a lot of the
19 promotional materials that we do and we
20 translate in different languages, most of them
21 go to the health clinics and to some of the DHR
22 offices. But they don't make themselves
23 available to faith-based associations or
24 non-profit associations where a lot of these
25 people come and go.

1 And you have to more or less train them to
2 eat nutritional food rather than wait till they
3 go to the clinic and have the doctor tell them,
4 "Hey, you're off your diet." We have to be more
5 proactive and think outside of the box. And if
6 the box is not right, let's create a new box and
7 come up with new ideas on how to promote health
8 and wellness.

9 I was talking to a colleague yesterday
10 from the WIC Program here in Georgia. I said,
11 "You know, the State of Georgia has so many
12 vehicles, and here we're promoting NASCAR. Why
13 can't we put a lot of this health and wellness
14 on some of these State cars that travel up and
15 down the state? People would see that."

16 The other thing is that for senior
17 citizens, there's only one day a week in the
18 supermarkets for them to buy and get a discount.
19 Why can't they extend that to at least Sunday?
20 A lot of minorities, they shop on weekends.
21 They don't shop during the week, especially if
22 you're a senior citizen that depends on a family
23 member to take them to the store.

24 Lastly, I represent and I'm a member of
25 MING, when is the Medical Interpreters Network

1 of Georgia. And they train people in eight
2 different languages. And a lot of them are out
3 of work because they're never called upon. A
4 lot of State agencies will call The Language
5 Line for interpretation services, which is very
6 costly.

7 Secondly, I'm also a member of The
8 Hispanic Health Coalition with major hospitals
9 in the area, and I'm also a volunteer with
10 (inaudible), which is a free cancer screening.
11 They have promotions where we go out and get
12 Hispanic food companies from New York to come to
13 Georgia to promote, because in Georgia, they
14 don't listen to Latinos.

15 And what's happening is that everybody
16 thinks that a large portion of us are illegal.
17 But the key players in this market are Puerto
18 Ricans, Cubans, and Mexican-Americans. And we
19 have to be thankful that a lot of the Mexicans
20 that are on our farms, they're short. They're
21 closer to the ground. They are the ones that
22 cultivate the crops and vegetables that we see
23 on our tables or the ones that work in the
24 poultry industry.

25 But you have to be aware. Right now

1 there's a concern among Hispanics about their
2 very food. And yet, a lot of them work in the
3 poultry plans. Nobody's getting to them. So
4 these are opportunities for you to think about
5 and rethink your strategies on how to market to
6 Hispanics in the Southeast.

7 There's no market research. We take data
8 from New York, Miami, Chicago, and Los Angeles.
9 Latinos here are different. I have a son that
10 grew up on WIC. He's a professor at Graves
11 College. His name is Anton Flores, and he's a
12 promoter of social work. He's the chair of the
13 sociology department at LaGrange College.

14 He works with community organizations. He
15 even has his own little farm for the community
16 in a black and white low-income area that's
17 being revitalized in the City of LaGrange. And
18 a lot of senior citizens live there.

19 We have to look outside of Atlanta,
20 because a lot of the same people that we're
21 trying to reach are being ignored and are being
22 denied services because of language barriers.
23 And I'm not talking about just Hispanics. I'm
24 also talking about refugees from Africa,
25 especially Ethiopia, which most of them are

1 vegetarians.

2 Well, with these remarks, I want to thank
3 you. And I hope you could focus on these areas,
4 because I think there's a large potential to
5 come up with good ideas.

6 And lastly, please shorten your food stamp
7 forms. You know, they're too long. A lot of
8 white Americans that have lost their jobs have
9 complained, while poor people that have been
10 filling them out for years never complained
11 because nobody listens to them. But the table
12 is turning. Thank you.

13 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: Let me respond to
14 one of the things you said about the food stamp
15 forms: We don't dictate the forms. It's the
16 states that --

17 MR. TONY FLORES: Well, you've got to get
18 on their case.

19 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: Well, hold on a
20 second. Hold on a second.

21 Clarence will tell you we've met with all
22 the states to have them reduce the forms. And I
23 know that in my state of Texas, the form went
24 from ten pages down to two when I was
25 commissioner. So it's a decision that's made by

1 the State. It's not made by the federal
2 government, okay? So maybe you should send
3 those comments to the State of Georgia, okay?

4 MR. TONY FLORES: I did, but...

5 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: Thank you.

6 MR. ERIC DARRACQ: Good morning. My name
7 is Eric Darracq. I work with the Georgia
8 Department of Natural Resources Wildlife
9 Resources Division. I'm the Private Lands
10 Program Coordinator working out of Social Circle
11 with statewide responsibilities.

12 The Georgia Department of Natural
13 Resources Wildlife Resources Division strongly
14 supports maintaining wildlife as a co-equal
15 objective with soil, water, and other natural
16 resources in the 2007 Farm Bill.

17 WRD encourages full funding of wildlife
18 conservation programs and practices and a
19 provision of funding for more adequate technical
20 assistance and program delivery in conservation
21 programs at the local level.

22 WRD fully supports the consensus
23 recommendations and guiding principles that were
24 recently submitted by the Southeast Forestry and
25 Wildlife Farm Bill Working Group, and we are

1 particularly supportive of maintaining and
2 enhancing programs and practices that provide
3 posture to establish native habitats to restore
4 American ecosystems and provide wildlife
5 habitats to wildlife like the northern Bob White
6 quail and any other grassland-dependent wildlife
7 species that are in serious decline.

8 For example, programatic funding is needed
9 to increase the establishment of native fuel
10 buffers like CRP Practice CP 33. This is a
11 great practice that benefits multiple resources
12 and should be continued and able to be expanded.
13 Additional producer enrollment can be encouraged
14 by increasing financial incentives for native
15 buffers or on irrigated fields, such as the
16 actual cash rental rates on these fields are
17 much higher than the dry land rental rates that
18 are currently being paid.

19 Programs and practices are needed for the
20 establishment and management of natural
21 vegetation in crop field corners for heavy
22 thinning and prescribed burning in pine stands
23 to restore prime savanna habitats and for
24 continuing the long-leaf pine conservation
25 priority areas.

1 We support the integration of Conservation
2 Title programs with comprehensive written
3 landscape-oriented conservation plans, such as
4 the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation
5 Strategy, Partners in Flight, and The North
6 American Bob White Quail Initiative and other
7 comprehensive conservation plans.

8 Farmers in the public at large need Farm
9 Bill conservation programs if we are to maintain
10 and pass along our great wildlife legacy to
11 future generations.

12 Thank you for this opportunity to provide
13 comments on this critically important issue.

14 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: Thank you. I pride
15 myself on being geographically informed, but I
16 don't think I know where Social Circle is. I
17 know that of every little town in this country,
18 I have some clue. But where is Social Circle?

19 MR. ERIC DARRACQ: It's about 40 miles
20 east on I-20 from Atlanta.

21 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: Okay. Is that the
22 place where the stop light stops working --
23 never mind.

24 MS. TAMI WILLADSEN: Good morning.

25 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: Good morning.

1 MS. TAMI WILLADSEN: I'm thrilled to be
2 here and want to thank you for the opportunity
3 to provide input into the development of the
4 administration's 2007 Farm Bill proposal. I'm
5 Tami Willadsen with the Georgia chapter of The
6 Nature Conservancy right here in Atlanta,
7 Georgia.

8 The Nature Conservancy is an international
9 non-profit conservation organization with
10 chapters in every state and over 1 million
11 members nationwide. Our mission is to preserve
12 the plants, animals, and natural communities
13 that represent the diversity of life on Earth by
14 protecting the lands and waters they need to
15 survive.

16 All programs within the scope of the Farm
17 Bill have a direct or indirect impact on our
18 environment. Knowing that clean air and water,
19 along with nutrition, are vital building blocks
20 for healthy communities and a prosperous farming
21 economy, I would like to submit nine specific
22 comments addressing questions from the USDA Farm
23 Bill Forum website, "How can farm policy best
24 achieve conservation and environmental goals?"

25 First, the Farm Bill should maintain

1 habitat-friendly agriculture and forest while
2 increasing funding available for long-term
3 easements. Generally, revisions to the 2007
4 Farm Bill should eliminate the provision that
5 encourages conversion or intensified production
6 on ecologically sensitive lands. Also,
7 revisions should strengthen existing
8 conservation programs and create new programs to
9 encourage conservation back to native habitats
10 and discourage conversion to more intensive
11 uses, especially development.

12 Secondly, the bill should eliminate
13 barriers to participation by non-industrial
14 private forests in all USDA conservation
15 programs. One such example would be the
16 elimination of the requirement that eligible
17 forest land must be incidental to a registered
18 farm operation.

19 Third, include the development of a
20 broad-ranging forestry program intended to aid
21 in the management and protection of small,
22 non-industrial private forest lands.

23 Fourth, the bill needs to address invasive
24 species threats associated with agriculture and
25 forests. This would include an amendment to The

1 Plant Protection Act to bolster federal
2 capabilities of preventing the introduction of
3 plants and pests that cause harm to both our
4 natural environment and agricultural economy.

5 Five: We suggest targeting Farm Bill
6 conservation programs by granting the National
7 Resource Conservation Service Chief and the Farm
8 Service Agency Administrator the ability to
9 select sites or species to target a portion of
10 program funds where USDA programs have the
11 largest broad-scale impact per dollar spent.

12 Six: The Farm Bill provisions need to
13 promote improved water quality and flow regimes
14 that are impacted by agriculture and forest
15 management. Specifically targeting water
16 quality programs on a watershed-by-watershed
17 basis will address water quality and quantity
18 concerns.

19 Seven: We would like to see an increase
20 in incentives for adaptive management of native
21 species, including funding for management of
22 land under USDA rental agreements and easements
23 in order for two purposes: one, to mimic
24 natural disturbances such as prescribed burning,
25 and, two, to control invasive species.

1 Eight: The bill should specify
2 requirements for ecologically based measures
3 tied to the purpose of conservation programs and
4 use performance measures to inform and modify
5 program rules and implementation.

6 And lastly, The Nature Conservancy
7 recommends an increase in resources to monitor
8 compliance of existing conservation requirements
9 within the Farm Bill.

10 I want to thank you all so much for your
11 effort and time today for allowing us to come
12 and speak today. Thank you.

13 MR. TIM LOWRIMORE: Mr. Secretary, good
14 morning. Welcome to Georgia. We appreciate you
15 being here. My name is Tim Lowrimore. I'm the
16 Staff Forester with the Georgia Forestry
17 Association in Forsyth, Georgia.

18 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: I know where that
19 is.

20 MR. TIM LOWRIMORE: Okay. Good. I didn't
21 want you to come to Georgia without hearing from
22 forestry and to let you know that forestry is
23 important to our state. And the provisions in
24 the Farm Bill that relate to forestry with the
25 non-industrial private land owners, as you just

1 heard, are important to those guys.

2 The Georgia Forestry Association is the
3 advocate organization for more than 2400 private
4 land owners, businesses, and corporations that
5 depend on health in Georgia forests.

6 I think it was Mark Twain that once said,
7 "A rumor travels around the world before the
8 truth can put its shoes on." And I think it's
9 important to hear some facts and consider these
10 facts together about how important forestry is
11 to Georgia.

12 Two-thirds of our state is covered by
13 forests; 24 million acres. A significant
14 portion of that is owned by private land owners,
15 just like us in this room, hopefully;
16 72 percent, as a matter of fact. Only 8 percent
17 of Georgia is publicly owned. More than 170,000
18 jobs are generated by Georgia's forests. Many
19 of these jobs are manufacturing jobs in rural
20 Georgia. I think it's important to point out
21 that for every one of those manufacturing jobs,
22 it can be said that three
23 service-industry-related jobs are supported.

24 Forestry consistently ranks as one of the
25 largest sectors in Georgia's economy,

1 contributing approximately \$22 billion annually.
2 Family forests are recognized as one of
3 Georgia's largest suppliers of timber supporting
4 the thousands of jobs in the multi-billion
5 dollar manufacturing presence in our state that
6 was just mentioned. However, urban sprawl, land
7 fragmentation, forest health issues, and
8 increasing environmental concerns continue to
9 alter, if not threaten, much of Georgia's
10 family-owned forests.

11 The Georgia Forestry Association is here
12 today to express our support on behalf of
13 Georgia's forest owners for the Conservation
14 Title within the Farm Bill. We believe the
15 Conservation Title encourages more productive
16 forestry by private land owners, which, in turn,
17 results in greater ecological services for the
18 public at large such as clean water, clean air,
19 wildlife habitats, recreational benefits, carbon
20 sequestration, and many, many more.

21 All of these ecological benefits are
22 provided to the general public from these family
23 forests. We believe it is essential to continue
24 funding the Conservation Title within the Farm
25 Bill. Today I will conclude my remarks with

1 expressing our support for three specific areas
2 that are of particular importance to Georgia's
3 private forest owners.

4 First, the Georgia Forestry Association
5 supports the Georgia Forest Stewardship Program.
6 We recognize the value of management plans that
7 consider multiple uses of the land. We support
8 the strengthening of the Forest Stewardship
9 Program through authorization of cost-share
10 incentives for the implementation of practices
11 often defined in the management plans that are
12 provided through the stewardship program.

13 Secondly, The Forestry Association
14 supports the funding of programs with respect to
15 the control of invasive species on private
16 lands. Many times, Georgia land owners are
17 faced with controlling invasive species and
18 exotic species that are often a result of prior
19 generation's land management practices. These
20 species are persistent pests and are often very
21 expensive to eradicate and, in fact, can have an
22 adverse impact on the health and productivity of
23 our farms. Financial assistance provided to aid
24 with high eradication costs would be beneficial
25 and may allow land owners to restore

1 unproductive lands, which, in turn, creates more
2 benefits to the public at large.

3 Finally, the Georgia Forestry Association
4 supports funding of programs that support
5 private forest land owners practicing forestry
6 within watersheds. It's said by The American
7 Forest Association and The Society of American
8 Forestry that two-thirds of the nation's
9 drinking water comes from privately owned
10 forests. Georgia's forests mirrors the nation's
11 forest. And here in Georgia, we like to say
12 that our drinking water is actually a forest
13 product.

14 It makes sense for the Farm Bill to place
15 a priority on strengthening the programs that
16 monitor the water quality and that provide
17 assistance to land owners who are practicing
18 forestry in our state's watersheds. We stand
19 ready to help you guys in any way we can in
20 deciding on how conservation appropriations go,
21 and I do appreciate you being here.

22 Thank you for the opportunity.

23 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: I would say to you
24 that when Mr. Carver and I were in Oregon last
25 week or two weeks ago, we heard from several of

1 the people representing the forest industry, and
2 they wanted us to leave Oregon realizing and
3 understanding that the Oregon forest was the
4 best in the entire world.

5 MR. CARTER: That's right.

6 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: And I have since
7 gotten several e-mails from them inviting me to
8 come out and see for myself. And so I wanted to
9 share that with you.

10 MR. TIM LOWRIMORE: I'm extending the same
11 offer. We can discuss that. Thank you.

12 MS. DENISE GRIEWISCH: Good morning.
13 Thank you, Under Secretary Bost and USDA staff,
14 for allowing the State to work with many of the
15 programs under the Farm Bill and being able to
16 present comments today. My name is Denise
17 Griewisch. I'm the Executive Director of Second
18 Harvest Food Bank in Tallahassee, Florida. We
19 serve a 14-county region of the Big Bend
20 containing six of the poorest counties in
21 Florida, according to population priority
22 statistics.

23 My first day on my job was September 10th,
24 2004. Within two weeks, I was inundated with
25 calls of complaints from our member agencies who

1 are increasingly unhappy with the changes in the
2 TEFAP contract.

3 We experienced, in 2002 and 2003, a
4 decrease in the pounds and the reimbursement
5 transportation costs for our area. We
6 previously had expanded our TEFAP Program
7 because of the increase in food that we had
8 received in 2000. We were also encouraged to
9 expand our service area to include those areas
10 of counties that were underserved, which we did.

11 In 2002, we had a decline in our TEFAP
12 food poundage of almost 60 percent. It was a
13 great hardship for our agencies to adjust.
14 We've actually lost over a hundred agencies, in
15 part, because of this decline. We're now down
16 to 204 agencies, about half of which receive
17 TEFAP food.

18 One of the explanations, apparently, that
19 we received for the decline in our food was that
20 the State had mistakenly over-allocated our
21 14-county region. We never received anything in
22 writing to determine what their method of
23 accounting for that was. We do know there was a
24 redistribution statewide, and other regions of
25 Florida that had previously not had as much

1 TEFAP food are now receiving more.

2 The problem is many-fold. We serve a
3 large region. It's almost a 2,000-square-mile
4 region from end to end of our Big Bend region.
5 Our transportation costs, not even considering
6 the huge increase in fuel costs in the past six
7 months, is extraordinary. Each year since 2002,
8 we have funded -- where Florida used to fund --
9 all the transportation costs for their
10 commodities programs.

11 We now fund, in excess of \$30,000 a year,
12 the cost of transporting this government food
13 program. We're not in a position financially to
14 do that, and it is causing a tremendous strain
15 on our very small food bank budget. We're under
16 a million dollar budget.

17 And we've been listening to our agencies.
18 The way that the State has restructured -- and I
19 know that many states have a completely
20 different way that they manage their TEFAP
21 contract. But some of our agencies indicate
22 that in prior years, there was a mix of products
23 that they could then implement a 7-to-14-item
24 package for their recipients.

25 Our contract has changed so that we get

1 bulk truck loads of one item at a time, and we
2 don't have the storage or the ability to serve
3 as a mixing center where the State used to
4 perform this function, as well as absorb a lot
5 of the transportation costs. We now have to do
6 that. The constraints for us are that we can't
7 hold on to food more than 60 days in our
8 warehouse, according to our contract.

9 Therefore, our agencies receive bulk items
10 of frozen product that they have no storage
11 facilities for. They're not getting the variety
12 in a timely fashion. Over the course of a year,
13 the quality of food is very good, and it's one
14 of the best food exchanges that we have in our
15 food bank. It accounts for approximately 30 to
16 40 percent of the entire food stream in our food
17 bank.

18 But I think the issues that our agencies
19 have is that the shift for them is difficult in
20 the contract. There is no longer a way for them
21 to count on knowing that, each month, they will
22 get any kind of a variety of USDA food. It may
23 be all peaches or all chicken one month or all
24 green beans. And we're having to try to
25 encourage them to supplement their food stream

1 with the other types of food that we have at the
2 food bank.

3 I know that one of the questions you had
4 for citizens regarding this was having to do
5 with technology. We recently experienced a
6 difficult audit situation where our auditor was
7 unable to get a complete accounting from the
8 USDA and the Florida Department of Agriculture
9 of all the food they had distributed to us over
10 the past fiscal year.

11 We, however, had all of our accounting,
12 our paperwork, our bills of lading, and
13 invoicing, but there was a discrepancy of over
14 \$200,000 and nearly 300,000 pounds of food that
15 they had no record of that they contributed to
16 our food bank. It was costly for us to pay our
17 auditor an extra day to go and help their staff
18 figure out a way to report this food allocation
19 to us in a factual documentation. We literally
20 had our MIS person help train their staff how to
21 cut and paste information from sources online so
22 that they could present this to our auditor.

23 I would suggest that if the USDA is
24 considering having national uniform rules that
25 they look at each state and explore these sites

1 with pitfalls in the new contracts that each
2 state implements to see if there's a state model
3 that they could implement to help some of the
4 states that are having a difficult time with
5 this new contract configuration to provide
6 support to the people in need on the ground at
7 the agency level that are unable to manage the
8 constraints of this new contract and look again
9 at transportation money for those of us in rural
10 areas who really cannot afford, as non-profits,
11 to absorb a cost that used to be a public
12 program.

13 Thank you very much.

14 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: Interestingly
15 enough, many of your comments are different. I
16 have not heard some of the comments that you
17 have made, and usually they're very, very
18 similar across the entire country.

19 Mr. Arnette will follow up with you in
20 terms of specifics.

21 MS. DENISE GRIEWISCH: I think we're in a
22 different region in Florida.

23 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: So Mr. Arnette will
24 follow up with you in terms of what you've
25 shared with us, because they do tend to be --

1 they're falling outside of the realm of some of
2 the comments that we have heard.

3 MS. DENISE GRIEWISCH: Thank you.

4 MS. MARY CARR: Good morning. My name is
5 Mary Carr. I'm a research associate for the
6 Southern Alliance For Clean Energy.

7 We are a non-profit, non-partisan
8 membership organization promoting responsible
9 energy choices that ensure clean, safe, and
10 healthy communities throughout the Southeast.
11 We have offices in Georgia, Tennessee, North
12 Carolina, and represent our members from eight
13 Southeastern states.

14 As an organization whose main focus is on
15 developing workable energy solutions to our
16 nation's current energy problems, we believe the
17 agricultural community can provide an important
18 source of energy that allow rural communities to
19 support farmers, provide an important source of
20 energy, decrease our dependence on foreign oil,
21 and lower our energy costs while solving many of
22 the nation's energy and environmental problems.

23 I am here today to express our
24 organization's support for the provisions in the
25 2007 Farm Bill Energy Title, primarily

1 Section 9006, that focus on energy efficiency;
2 clean, renewable energy supplies; and bioenergy
3 products.

4 Rather than cutting funding for renewable
5 energy products in the Farm Bill as has been
6 recently proposed by Congress, we would like to
7 see continued and increased effort in the 2007
8 Farm Bill for clean energy products such as
9 wind, biofuel such as ethanol and biodiesel,
10 bioenergy, and solar energy efficiency with the
11 goal of 25 percent of our energy by 2025 coming
12 from farms. We also want to see more research
13 in sources of ethanol so that a greater variety
14 of crops will be able to help us reach energy
15 independence.

16 Here in Georgia, two projects have
17 received increased grant money under the
18 Section 9006 program. In 2004, Wright Witty
19 Davis Farm received money to build an anaerobic
20 crop duster, and in 2005, Beezley Forest
21 Products received funding to install a
22 wood-burning boiler.

23 We look forward to seeing more projects
24 like these being supported by the USDA in the
25 coming year and in the years following

1 development of the 2007 Farm Bill.

2 Thank you.

3 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: Thank you.

4 MS. DOROTHY INMAN-JOHNSON: Good morning.

5 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: Good morning.

6 MS. DOROTHY INMAN-JOHNSON: I'm Dorothy
7 Inman-Johnson. I'm Executive Director of
8 Capital Area Community Action Agency in
9 Tallahassee, Florida. Denise just finished
10 speaking to you from the food bank perspective
11 on the difficulty we are having in the Big Bend
12 area of Florida. I'm here to speak as a
13 sub-distributor on those same difficulties.

14 Capital Area Community Action Agency has
15 been involved in the distribution of USDA
16 commodities for over 20 years in a four-county
17 area, including the capital of Florida. We
18 recently added a fifth county when the local
19 government of Jefferson County decided to divest
20 itself from the program in order to ensure that
21 the low-income families we were serving did not
22 fall through the cracks.

23 Since the restructuring of Florida's TEFAP
24 Program with Second Harvest taking over
25 coordination in the Big Bend region of Florida,

1 my agency has experienced many problems as a
2 sub-distributor receiving food in an adequate
3 and timely manner for our monthly distributions
4 to needy families. My comments are centered on
5 four basic concerns.

6 No. 1: We have not been able to count on
7 a specific number of cases of food to serve the
8 over 1,300 households to which we distribute
9 commodities on a monthly basis. For example,
10 the year before the State restructured and
11 Second Harvest took over, in September 2003, we
12 received 131 cases of basic commodities in
13 Franklin County, one of the coastal counties we
14 serve, compared to September 2005 under Second
15 Harvest, only 20 cases of basic foods were
16 received for Franklin County.

17 The supply for September 2005 was a
18 111-case deduction when compared to the food
19 received in 2003. Since the poverty and
20 unemployment rate in that county have not
21 improved, but, instead, have grown worse in
22 Franklin County along the Gulf coast due to
23 hurricanes, we have no way of explaining this
24 discrepancy.

25 No. 2: The lack of variety in food

1 received is our second concern. For example, in
2 one small, rural county, we received one case
3 each, just 24 cans per case, of pears, potatoes,
4 tomatoes, green beans, macaroni, and one case of
5 12 jars of peanut butter where we were expected
6 to distribute to 134 households.

7 In that same food delivery, we received
8 31 cases of cranberry juice, which basically
9 left us with canned vegetables, canned fruit,
10 macaroni, and no meat to serve only 24 of the
11 134 households, but all the cranberry juice they
12 could drink. I recommend, therefore, that the
13 USDA consider providing greater quantity of food
14 staples like flour, sugar, meal, rice, grits,
15 dried beans, and the such if there is no ability
16 for the money to provide the adequacy and
17 variety needed.

18 No. 3: The federal law guide in the USDA
19 Food and Nutrition Program states that there
20 should be no charge for the food for basic
21 commodities distribution. However, we have been
22 forced indirectly to purchase food from the food
23 bank to meet our monthly, basic commodities
24 obligations. And even though we have a \$4,000
25 credit at the food bank for the problems Denise

1 mentioned, we can't even purchase a wide variety
2 of food.

3 This is supposed to be a federal food
4 program and nutrition program supplement. It is
5 not. When Second Harvest sends in our supply of
6 63 cases of powdered orange energy drink or
7 48 cases of vanilla shakes and 31 cases of
8 cranberry juice, compared to only one or two
9 cases of vegetables or fruit and no meat, this
10 cannot be considered nutritious or a correct
11 supplemental supply of food for the poor.

12 I feel it's an embarrassment for a state
13 as wealthy as Florida that we cannot even
14 provide six or seven items of food in a monthly
15 food supplement for the poorest of our citizens,
16 but we can send billions of dollars in relief to
17 other countries. I was brought up to think that
18 we take care of home first. We are not doing
19 that here.

20 I took the time away from my job and my
21 family to travel to Atlanta because I am so
22 frustrated in trying to meet the very basic
23 needs of the people that my agency serves as the
24 anti-poverty agency in this Big Bend region. I
25 ask you to adopt some basic policies that at

1 least guarantee a basic level of food services
2 for this supplement for poor people.

3 Thank you.

4 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: Thank you.

5 MS. DEBRA SUSIE: Hi. I'm Debra Susie.
6 I'm the Executive Director of Florida Impact.
7 I'm also here representing eight Southeastern
8 states for the Southeastern Anti-Hunger
9 Consortium, of which there are 15 organizations
10 like our own statewide organization working in
11 anti-hunger. The Florida Impact is a 26-year
12 old organization that started as a faith-based
13 group and broadened beyond that, as well. We're
14 headquartered in Tallahassee, Florida, and our
15 reach is statewide.

16 I really want to focus on the Food Stamp
17 Program, but I also want to brag on the food.
18 We had a success in the State of Florida: We
19 passed a statewide law that required summer food
20 programs to be within five or ten miles, but
21 it's more complicated than that. We received a
22 community food nutrition grant and began to
23 implement that immediately.

24 Florida Impact has a contract with the
25 Florida Department of Children and Families to

1 run a statewide health line. And Florida, after
2 two years of hurricanes and apparently more to
3 come, we've learned some interesting lessons,
4 three specifically, a couple of which might
5 provide some information to this forum.

6 First of all, we became quite enamored
7 with our Southeastern regional USDA staff. The
8 response of the Food Stamp Program, this is a
9 tremendous public relations possibility for your
10 division because, especially in contrast to
11 FEMA, the food stamps were on the ground almost
12 immediately as long as the State cooperated with
13 that, and we were able to send people in the
14 right direction for that.

15 USDA regional staff has been wonderful in
16 other ways, too, so we want to propose an
17 immediate policy to put a ban on retirements for
18 the next ten years.

19 Barring that, we also have learned that --
20 something interesting occurred to me yesterday:
21 One of the downfalls that's occurring with
22 Wilma, currently, I would say, is that probably
23 on our State end, the reduction in
24 administration because of our modernization has
25 brought a crash-course train wreck with the

1 hurricanes that are happening and the need to
2 have people on the ground to do those disaster
3 food stamps in those many communities.
4 Unfortunately for Miami, they're going to be the
5 last to get the food stamps on the ground, a
6 week from yesterday, and things were getting
7 very desperate down there, and as we know, we
8 hear that hourly on our phones.

9 What occurred to me is how wonderful the
10 Electronic Benefit Transfer Program is and some
11 of the other policies we've instituted with the
12 food stamps to modernize it at this level.
13 Because, in fact, if you're already on the Food
14 Stamp Program, you're going to get more
15 immediate assistance than if you were not on it.
16 And as you know, Florida has maybe 50 percent,
17 give or take, people who are not on it who are
18 likely to be eligible.

19 So outreach becomes very important in a
20 brand-new way in that it is expected that more
21 hurricanes are to come if we could be effective
22 at continuing the outreach and offering the
23 State matches and so on to get this going.

24 We can maybe make sure that when these
25 hurricanes do hit, we have the capacity to reach

1 more people in the electronically true
2 replacement of food programs, which drop in a
3 day, or speeding up the month's worth of food
4 stamps for November that are staggered, dropping
5 them all at the beginning of November so that
6 everybody has what they need when they need it
7 once the lights come on, of course. And that
8 has been the second lesson that we've learned.

9 Thirdly, I just wanted to say that I --
10 I'm not going to repeat. Being No. 15, of
11 course, leaves you with nothing. But all of the
12 food stamp improvements, everything from
13 abandoning the thrifty food to the low-cost
14 food, raising the seniors from 10 to 25 to \$50,
15 that's our hardest sell to seniors. When they
16 hear it's just \$10, it's hard to convince them
17 to go through with it. And the other things
18 that we've mentioned, of course, we're right
19 behind that and would like to see that occur, as
20 well.

21 One last thing is that -- and I don't
22 know. I feel like, based on where we are, our
23 number sometimes keeps coming up with the FEMA
24 people. So we get all these calls, and we get
25 the information, but since we are in for a long

1 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: No --

2 MS. DEBRA SUSIE: And that may not be your
3 responsibility, but --

4 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: It's not our
5 responsibility; no.

6 MS. DEBRA SUSIE: Okay. Well, maybe it
7 might be possible from your end to push our
8 state. We would do it, too.

9 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: Well, but the issue
10 is that the State would have to give us that
11 information. We have no problems putting it on,
12 but the State would have to give it to us. And
13 usually, the State -- it takes some time for
14 them to get up and running, you know, because --
15 the thing that I would like to share with you in
16 terms of when the first hurricane hit, Katrina,
17 one, we had food positioned three days before
18 the hurricane even hit. And the second point
19 is, I had already made policy decisions that
20 were up the next day.

21 MS. DEBRA SUSIE: That's why --

22 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: So we were able to
23 respond very quickly, but the states were not
24 able to. But to answer your question, if they
25 will provide us with that information, there's

1 not a problem with us putting it up.

2 MS. DEBRA SUSIE: We would like you to do
3 that. And you don't offer an 800 number?

4 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: Yes, we do. We do
5 have an 800 number, also.

6 MS. DEBRA SUSIE: Okay. And then I'm just
7 going to put -- for my dry, statistical piece,
8 I'll put our hunger report in your box, and this
9 has all the programs in each county in Florida
10 and how they're being utilized and how much
11 money we are receiving from Washington as well
12 as the listing of all the people in the
13 Southeastern region.

14 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: Thank you.

15 MS. EARLINE MIDDLETON: Mr. Under
16 Secretary Bost, Mr. Regional Administrator
17 Arnette, my name is Earline Middleton. I
18 service as the Director of Agency Services and
19 Programs for the Food Bank of Central and
20 Eastern North Carolina, and we're located in
21 Raleigh, North Carolina. And I'm also a member
22 of the Southeast Anti-Hunger Consortium.

23 The food bank has branch locations in
24 Durham, Aberdeen, Greenville, Raleigh, and
25 Wilmington, North Carolina. Our network of

1 nearly 900 partner agencies serve 34 counties in
2 central and eastern North Carolina. There are
3 an estimated 400,000 people at risk of hunger in
4 our area.

5 The food bank is one of eight Second
6 Harvest members, and together we serve our 100
7 counties. Thank you for the opportunity to
8 speak on behalf of that network and those people
9 that we serve. Thank you for administering a
10 program which so many Americans and North
11 Carolinians rely on.

12 We understand the role that nutrition
13 plays in building and maintaining an
14 intelligent, strong, and capable nation. In
15 this country, when there is a food need, each
16 citizen can benefit from our faith net or
17 federal nutrition program.

18 I wish to offer comments on two programs
19 of the Farm Bill: the Food Stamp Program and
20 Emergency Food Assistance Program. More than
21 750,000 North Carolinians utilize the Food Stamp
22 Program, and nearly 100,000 of these
23 participants are wage earners. More than
24 350,000 are children, and more than 65,000 are
25 seniors, and nearly a hundred thousand of them

1 are seniors over 65 -- nearly 50,000 of those
2 seniors are over 65.

3 The Food Stamp Program supports North
4 Carolina's economy by putting almost \$73 million
5 back into the State's economy. Now North
6 Carolina has the highest rate of -- the ninth
7 highest rate of food insecurity in the nation
8 with 13.8 percent of North Carolinians
9 experiencing food insecurity in 2002, 2004, and
10 it's up 4 percent.

11 North Carolina has suffered extreme job
12 losses in manufacturing, technology, as well as
13 agriculture. The aforementioned numbers are
14 just numbers, but they represent individuals and
15 families that every day must make decisions
16 whether to pay for shelter, medicine, fuel, or
17 purchase food.

18 The Food Stamp Program makes it possible
19 for low wage earners to stretch their dollars.
20 The Food Stamp Program is effectively targeting
21 to reach people who have the most difficulty
22 affording an adequate diet. Over 95 percent of
23 benefits go to households with incomes below the
24 poverty level and nearly all of the remaining
25 beneficiary, elderly, or disabled.

1 You know the story, so I won't go on, but
2 I will urge that the 2007 Farm Bill be
3 strengthened to include increased minimum
4 benefits for seniors to at least \$50, states
5 being encouraged to explore implementing Food
6 Stamp Programs in innovative ways that will
7 streamline processes used to determine
8 eligibility and remove areas while maintaining
9 integrity.

10 Provide food stamps to all eligible
11 immigrants, allow medical expenses to be
12 included as a deduction for calculation of food
13 stamp benefits, increase food stamp
14 administration funds to accommodate improved
15 services and more effective and efficient
16 processes, increase funds to administration of
17 storage of TEFAP commodities, and expand the
18 commodities supplemental food program to all 50
19 states.

20 I'm hopeful that the safety net of
21 nutrition programs funded for the Farm Bill will
22 be strengthened and expanded so that access is
23 available to all who are currently underserved,
24 as well.

25 Thank you for your time and consideration.

1 MS. JOYCE O'HEAL: Good morning. I would
2 like to thank you for this opportunity to speak
3 on behalf of the Food Stamp Program from the
4 perspective of the State of Alabama. I would
5 like to thank my cohorts in Georgia, Florida,
6 and North Carolina for already giving my
7 comments. I am going to speak anyway because I
8 took the time to come over to do so, and I do
9 want you to hear it from the Alabama
10 perspective. We are very concerned about
11 several things. We have very brief comments on
12 four issues.

13 We know that the Food Stamp Program has
14 succeeded in addressing and supplementing the
15 food needs of those low-income citizens who are
16 willing and able to access the program and the
17 benefits. Including nutrition education is a
18 viable program to us that has aided tremendously
19 in educating recipients and potential recipients
20 on how to make healthy food choices. Recipients
21 also learn how to wisely spend their food
22 dollar.

23 Providing benefits electronically has
24 helped erase the stigma associated with food
25 coupons, thereby encouraging others to apply for

1 and receive benefits. The 2002 Farm Bill
2 brought about significant positive changes that
3 improved and simplified the Food Stamp Program.
4 States also have more choices in selecting
5 options that conform across program lines.
6 However, there are areas that need further
7 strengthening. Changes are needed to better
8 address the food needs and food-buying power of
9 some of our most vulnerable citizens.

10 Our first issue is a minimum benefit for
11 the elderly and disabled households. We have
12 the same dream as some of the other states
13 represented here today. We recommend a minimum
14 benefit level of \$50 per month. According to
15 the inflation calculator, the inflation rate
16 increased from 26.88 percent from January 1995
17 to January 2005.

18 There are statistics on the current FNS
19 website, and I will not cite these right now for
20 the sake of time. But they are there giving us
21 the percentage of elderly and disabled adults
22 with access to the Food Stamp Program. There is
23 additional information contained on this website
24 that validates for us that the participation
25 rate is lowest among of the elderly and

1 disabled. Less than one-third of eligible
2 elderly adults receive benefits. We ask, "Why?"

3 State and county offices in Alabama
4 receive numerous calls and complaints about the
5 low benefit levels of our most vulnerable
6 adults. We make this population choose which of
7 life's necessities they can afford. Will they
8 eat, or will they pay a utility bill? Will they
9 eat, or will they feed their pets? Will they
10 eat, or will they pay the rent or the mortgage?

11 Will they struggle to walk to the grocery
12 store, or can they afford to take a taxi or
13 drive their own vehicle? Will they wrap up in
14 blankets during the winter, or will they pay the
15 heat and fuel bill? Can we not afford to feed
16 the least of these?

17 Issue 2: disaster benefits. We recommend
18 that all administrative expenses related to
19 disasters should be reimbursed at 100 percent
20 either through USDA or FEMA. This statement is
21 not original to me. It's from our Deputy
22 Finance Director, Andy Hornsby.

23 When faced with emergency situations,
24 states are ill-equipped to foot the bill for
25 even half of the administrative costs of running

1 a disaster program. Given the already limited
2 financial resources that must be spread over a
3 number of disaster responses, states are
4 hard-pressed to sufficiently respond.

5 Our next issue is technology support.
6 States need a capped administrative match at
7 75 percent. I'm told that over ten years ago,
8 the match was reduced from 75 to 50 percent.
9 States labor under antiquated and cumbersome --
10 or maybe I should say that Alabama labors under
11 antiquated and cumbersome computer systems.

12 Determination of eligibility and delivery
13 of benefits suffer as a result. More initiative
14 is needed at the federal level to aid states and
15 to encourage states to develop more
16 sophisticated technological approaches for
17 delivery of benefits.

18 Our final issue, able-bodied adults
19 without dependants. Does it make sense to
20 target A-BODs for job opportunities and training
21 when those individuals with children have every
22 incentive? For example, the children. To need
23 and want jobs or skilled training for the
24 opportunity to support those children, should we
25 not give all of our clients the same opportunity

1 for securing jobs, training, or education while
2 continuing to exempt the vulnerable, such as the
3 disabled, those with young children, etcetera?

4 Workers spend an enormous amount of time
5 waiting through complex A-BOD policies when the
6 focus should be on those individuals, A-BODs or
7 not, who want the opportunity to become
8 self-supporting. Many of the targeted
9 population are not able and/or willing to comply
10 with the complex requirements.

11 In addition, in a poor state like Alabama,
12 reimbursement for transportation is limited to
13 \$25. Some states are able to do more such as
14 assist with books, clothing, tools, etcetera.
15 These states have the funds to support these
16 activities. We ask for a thorough look at this
17 policy to determine its cost effectiveness and
18 the relevancy of the services delivery.

19 It appears that we currently spend an
20 enormous amount of money on a population that
21 yields poor results. We believe that an
22 overhaul to the food stamp work requirement
23 could yield cost savings to help fund some of
24 these aforementioned changes.

25 Thank you for your time and the

1 opportunity to present these ideas about which
2 we feel so strongly.

3 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: I do want to
4 comment to one of the recommendations that you
5 made. In terms of Katrina, in terms of the
6 Disaster Food Stamp Program, I had already made
7 the decision to reimburse your administrative
8 costs by 100 percent.

9 MS. JOYCE O'HEAL: I'm not aware of that.

10 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: Well, that's
11 because y'all don't pay attention.

12 MS. JOYCE O'HEAL: We pay attention, but
13 we had not received --

14 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: Well, I have
15 already made that decision, so that's already
16 done for Katrina -- for Katrina.

17 MR. CARTER: Correct.

18 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: For Katrina, that
19 decision has been already been made by me in
20 terms of the Disaster Food Stamp Program. I
21 will cover 100 percent of your administrative
22 costs. Clarence, is that not right?

23 MR. CARTER: That's correct.

24 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: Okay. Next person.

25 MS. JOYCE O'HEAL: We appreciate it.

1 Thank you.

2 MS. LARK HAYES: Good morning. My name is
3 Lark Hayes. I'm a senior attorney at the
4 Southern Environmental Law Center. We're a
5 regional conservation organization that works in
6 six Southeastern states from Virginia through
7 the two Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama, and
8 Tennessee.

9 And one of our priority issues is the
10 conservation of privately owned forest land, so
11 you're going to hear from me some of the same
12 things that you heard from my friends at the
13 Georgia Forestry Association, the State Wildlife
14 Agency here, The Nature Conservancy, and
15 hopefully some others before we get done.

16 Our concerns and our themes and our
17 remarks, I think, are quite similar and probably
18 saved me a little bit of time, and that is the
19 importance of the Farm Bill for the conservation
20 of private forest lands and promoting its sound
21 stewardship. And what we all come back to,
22 those of us who care about this issue, are the
23 public benefits that are secured by the private
24 forest land management in our region.

25 We've got some new fancy names, like the

1 ecological services, that these private lands
2 provide to the public, but the more common names
3 are simply The Wildlife Habitat, The Water
4 Quality and Watershed Management, Recreation
5 Open Space. Carbon sequestration, that's
6 something that helps with the climate change.
7 Of course, we all know it's such a prime
8 economic driver in our rural communities.

9 So I'm here to give a couple of
10 suggestions on how we might increase these
11 public benefits and how we might maintain them
12 across the South and across the nation. And the
13 key here, of course, is supporting the private
14 land owner, the so-called family forest land
15 owner.

16 Here in the South, they own two-thirds of
17 the private forest lands. So if we can't
18 support them through the USDA programs, there's
19 really no other strategy that can help achieve
20 our objectives. And there are a number of the
21 USDA programs that are important both in the
22 Conservation Title and the so-called Forestry
23 Title.

24 We need technical assistance. We need
25 stewardship planning. We need cost share, and

1 we certainly need those reserve-type programs
2 that make payments for certain conservation
3 management and the easement programs. All of
4 these are critically important. Let me give
5 three specific recommendations to you as you
6 prepare the agency for the reauthorization of
7 the Farm Bill.

8 First, and most fundamental, is the need
9 to significantly increase the attention paid to
10 forest land and family forest land owners in the
11 reauthorization. Quite simply, we would like to
12 see it comparable to the attention and the
13 funding paid to other agricultural land owners,
14 farm and ranch owners, and that's simply not the
15 case right now.

16 There are about 10 million forest land
17 owners nationwide; 5 million of those folks live
18 here in the Southeast. And there are about
19 2 million farmers. So you can see the forest
20 land owners greatly outnumber the others in
21 rural America, but there's only one tiny
22 program, The Forest Land Enhancement Program, in
23 the Farm Bill that exclusively focuses on forest
24 land.

25 It's funded or authorized, rather -- it

1 hasn't been fully funded -- at about \$20 million
2 a year, whereas the Conservation Title was
3 authorized at about \$3 billion a year. And most
4 of those programs in the Conservation Title give
5 only a fraction of their services and benefits
6 to the forest land owners. So first
7 recommendation: Let's get greater attention and
8 funding for forest land.

9 Secondly, after we have that increased
10 funding and attention, let's place a greater
11 priority on some of the key forested landscapes
12 around the Southeast and around the country.
13 Right now, the FLEP Program that I mentioned is
14 largely administered on a first-come,
15 first-serve basis for land owners and is one of
16 the few programs in USDA that is not competitive
17 relative to land owners. It's done a great job
18 in some of the other programs with The
19 Environmental Benefit Index and other ways of
20 getting those scarce dollars where they need to
21 be.

22 The scatter-shod type approach of FLEP
23 results in sort of an inch-deep, mile-wide type
24 program. And by contrast, in the next Farm
25 Bill, we would like to encourage you to focus

1 again on some of the priority forested areas
2 here in the South and around the country. An
3 example from the South would be the long-leaf
4 pine ecosystem that once covered most of the
5 coastal plain of Georgia and most of the other
6 southern states. That's down to only about
7 4 percent of its original range.

8 But there's great work being done by the
9 Georgia Forestry Commission and lots of
10 non-profits, the Long-Leaf Alliance, to help
11 land owners who want to restore this forested
12 ecosystem. But we need more focus at the
13 landscape level, and that will achieve more
14 ecological results and will enable us to go back
15 to Congress and really better show what we've
16 been able to achieve with the funding.

17 My final point -- and this is, I think,
18 frequently important in this tight budget time
19 we have where we really do need to do more with
20 the dollars that we have, be more efficient and
21 effective. There's a real need as we prepare
22 for the Farm Bill for better program
23 coordination with respect to forest land within
24 USDA, because right now, the responsibilities
25 are so scattered within NRCS, FSA, The Forest

1 Service, and then the State foresters, it's less
2 than ideal for land owners, and it's certainly
3 confusing to Congress who thinks that a lot of
4 the programs are redundant and overlapping.

5 We would like to work with you on any and
6 all of these ideas, and we very much appreciate
7 the time to make these remarks.

8 UNDER SECRETARY BOST: Did everyone who
9 wanted to speak have an opportunity to do so?
10 This is the last person that we have signed up.
11 Is there someone else that wanted to speak that
12 has not spoken yet? Good.

13 All right. Then first of all, thank all
14 of you for taking the time to be here with us
15 and for sharing your comments with us today.
16 This is the beginning of the process. As I said
17 when I opened up this forum, all the comments
18 will be rolled up and put on our website, and at
19 the end of the year, the first of next year,
20 you'll be able to see what everyone else has
21 said around the country.

22 The next step will be for us to have an
23 opportunity for me to sit down and share my
24 thoughts with the staff about what we want to do
25 as we move forward in terms of putting together

1 a package for the administration. And I have
2 some thoughts, too.

3 I would also state for you, in response to
4 some of the comments that you made, that this is
5 the beginning of the process. And as a
6 reminder, one of the comments that several of
7 you made was increasing the minimum benefit
8 level. Well, with the '02 Farm Bill, I, the
9 administration, we recommended that. We
10 recommended that it go to a minimum of \$25.
11 Congress did not approve that. I didn't see
12 many of you up talking to Congress about
13 supporting the administration's package.

14 My parents also say that it's not only
15 what you say, it's what you do. And as a
16 reminder, you talk about it in terms of there
17 being enough resources to meet the needs of the
18 people in this country. Well, I think that
19 we've demonstrated our commitment to ensure that
20 that occurs.

21 And the one example that I will give you
22 is this: When I became Under Secretary, the
23 budget for our programs was approximately
24 \$37 million. The budget for all of my nutrition
25 programs right now is at \$52 million and will

1 probably go to \$58 million by the end of the
2 year whenever Congress finishes. So I think
3 that that speaks to our commitment of how
4 important these programs are.

5 It is, I believe, the only agency in all
6 the federal government that has seen an increase
7 in our budget every year. I think that that
8 demonstrates our commitment to how important
9 these programs are.

10 And the last issue is the flexibility that
11 we have attempted to provide all of you in terms
12 of managing these programs. We have been out
13 there in terms of working with you, in terms of
14 providing flexibility, and providing you with
15 several opportunities to address the issue of,
16 "Well, we've always done it this way." Well,
17 I'm always open to, "Well, can we can do it
18 differently?" And we provided you with a great
19 deal of flexibility.

20 And when you all do something wrong and
21 get in trouble, I'm the one that has to go to
22 the hill to take the spanking. And I ask where
23 you were, and you all are too busy to come up
24 there, and you all say, "Well, Mr. Bost, let us
25 do it." I'll remind you of that, too.

1 The issue is that this is the beginning of
2 that process, and we're talking about the old
3 7 Farm Bill. I would encourage all of you to
4 continue to work with Congress in sharing with
5 them the ideas you also shared with us. That's
6 very important, because we will take the
7 administration's package to Congress, and they,
8 in turn, debate the thing and have their own
9 ideas about what has to happen as we get into
10 the '07 Farm Bill.

11 Again, thank you for being here. We
12 appreciate you taking your time to come out and
13 visit with us. And you still have opportunities
14 to share your comments. You can send them to
15 Mr. Arnette, send them to Mr. Carter's office.
16 If you send them to me, I'm going to, in turn,
17 send them to them. So don't waste your time
18 sending -- you can send it to me, but I'm going
19 to send them on.

20 And interestingly enough, I do see every
21 single comment that is sent to us. Inevitably,
22 Jessica or Clarence or someone comes and tells
23 me about them, but we do get to see all the
24 comments. So I want you to know that you aren't
25 wasting your time.

1 So we would like to also thank our friends
2 at the Atlanta Community Food Bank for allowing
3 us to use their facilities. This is wonderful,
4 and we greatly appreciate it. Thank you.

5 Have a wonderful, wonderful day, and be
6 safe. And as we go into Thanksgiving and
7 Christmas, my best wishes to all of you and all
8 of your families. Thank you.

9 (Proceedings concluded at 10:51 a.m.)

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1 C E R T I F I C A T E

2

3 STATE OF GEORGIA:

4 COUNTY OF FULTON:

5

6 I hereby certify that the foregoing
7 proceedings were taken down, as stated in the
8 caption, and reduced to typewriting under my
9 direction, and that the foregoing Pages 1
10 through 94 represent a true, complete, and
11 correct transcript of said proceedings.

12 This, the 14th of November, 2005.

13

14

15

16 Christopher M. Artman, CCR B-2325
17 My commission expires on the
18 31st day of March, 2006.