



TRANSCRIPT

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**FARM BILL NUTRITION FORUM Nutrition Forum
Boston, Massachusetts - October 28, 2005**

1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 MS. FERRIS: Welcome, everyone, coming to
3 the Boston Farm Bill forum. We appreciate having
4 such a large group joining us as we get ready for
5 the reauthorization of the 2007 Farm Bill. This
6 session provides us a great opportunity for those
7 who really play the vital roles in our programs in
8 helping the nation's health as we look forward to
9 your recommendations and the improvements that can
10 be made to the nutrition programs.

11 A couple of housekeeping things that I
12 want to share. Hopefully, everyone has turned off
13 their cell phones. If they haven't, would you
14 please do so. Hopefully, you have registered and
15 filled out the cards, and your name is on the list
16 at the registration table. We ask that you do
17 that.

18 Thank you -- whoever's turning off their
19 cell phone.

20 And we ask that if you have coffee or food
21 or water, that you have it outside the auditorium.
22 We're not allowed to have it here in the
23 auditorium -- except for those who can't get up and
24 have it during the session.
25 It is now my pleasure to introduce Deputy

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1 Undersecretary Kate Coler. She was first appointed
2 as deputy undersecretary for food and consumer
3 services, December of 2003. Time goes by very
4 quickly, and she first joined USDA food and
5 nutrition services in June 2002 as the deputy
6 administrator for the Food Stamp program. And
7 while serving in that capacity, Ms. Coler was
8 instrumental in the implementation of the 2002 Farm
9 Bill.

10 Kate.

11 MS. COLER: Good morning, everyone, and
12 thank you very much for attending this session.
13 Your input as we prepare for the 2007 Farm Bill --
14 which it's hard to believe that we're already
15 getting to that phase -- but your input is very
16 important to us, because the key to our program's

17 success is the partnerships that we developed with
18 state partners, as well as local and community and
19 faith-based organizations. I think all of us
20 working together and knowing the obstacles we may
21 face in administering these programs and
22 everybody's ideas on how we can improve the
23 programs will benefit us all and most certainly
24 benefit the people that we're trying to serve
25 through the nutrition programs that are

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1 administered by the food nutrition and consumer
2 services.

3 Secretary Joe Hanz is committed to getting
4 everyone's input, because he knows that the Farm
5 Bill has a wide reach on a lot of programs, not
6 just the nutrition programs which are the purpose
7 of this session, but all the various programs. And
8 so, I just want anyone who is here who may wish to
9 speak about programs outside of the nutrition
10 title, your comments are certainly welcome, and we
11 will share those with the appropriate mission
12 areas.

13 We do have official note-keepers and --
14 verbatim note-keepers, and all the transcripts will

15 be shared and the information will be summarized
16 and posted on the internet.
17 This is the beginning of a long process.
18 Congress actually makes the ultimate decisions in
19 how the Farm Bill is written. And I'm sure that
20 many members on the committee will be having forums
21 as well. But USDA wanted to really get your input
22 as soon as we could to start developing our
23 policies in figuring out how we can improve the
24 programs that we administer most effectively.
25 We're committed to a strong safety net in

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1 the nutrition programs. We know how vital they are
2 to the people that they serve. The programs that
3 we administer touch the lives of one in five
4 Americans and the specific programs that are going
5 to be reauthorized in the Farm Bill under the
6 nutrition title do have a far reach.
7 We've been putting a lot of emphasis on
8 how these programs can fight hunger, but we're also
9 looking at ways to utilize these programs to fight
10 a growing problem in this country of obesity. So,
11 comments on how we can do a more effective job in

12 that area are always very helpful and appreciated.

13 The 2002 Farm Bill made a lot of
14 improvements. We saw the program rules
15 streamlined. We saw access improved for people,
16 and we want to build upon that success. And again,
17 your comments and the lessons you've learned over
18 the years under the new rules of the 2002 Farm Bill
19 will help us make better policies in the next
20 go-round.

21 Just one example I'd like to throw out is
22 the Food Stamp program. We saw how Congress
23 provided states more flexibility in that program,
24 which I think has enabled it to serve people
25 better. It's now a 100-percent electronic program

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1 for redeeming your benefits with the EBT cards.

2 One thing I'm personally interested in is
3 having congress change the name of the program to
4 maybe remove some of the stigma that's been
5 associated with it; that I think it's been a
6 barrier for eligible people to participate. But
7 there's a lot of other elements of that program and
8 the other programs to review and to get your input.

9 The specific programs up for

10 reauthorization are the Food Stamp program, the
11 Food Distribution on Indian Reservations, the
12 Commodity Supplemental Food program, and the
13 Emergency Food Assistance program, the Senior
14 Farmers' Market program, and also the Nutrition
15 Assistance program that's a specific block grant in
16 Puerto Rico. But all of these programs work
17 together. They serve common populations, and
18 again, your input -- your comments -- will help us
19 make them most effective. Because as I said at the
20 beginning, it's the partnerships and the strong
21 partnerships that's the key to the success of these
22 programs.

23 And I just, again, wanted to say thank you
24 for coming to this forum, for providing your input.
25 If there's other people you know who were not able

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1 to attend, there are sessions in all 50 states, but
2 even if people aren't able to attend a session,
3 there is a forum or an opportunity to provide
4 comments on the USDA Web site. When you go right
5 to www.USDA.gov, there's a link to the Farm Bill
6 forums. Comments can be submitted there probably

7 for the next two weeks, I think -- or the last
8 forum will be mid November. So, that's the formal
9 time for making comments. But as I said, this is
10 the beginning of a long process.

11 So, again, thank you for your commitments
12 and attorney to come today, and we're here to
13 listen. With me on my left is Jessica Shahin. She
14 is the associate deputy administrator of the Food
15 Stamp program in Washington, DC. Mary Ann Ferris
16 has already introduced herself as the regional Food
17 Stamp director, but we also have representatives
18 here from the region who are intergrally involved
19 in other programs as well.

20 So, we're sort of sharing the workload and
21 we're having many of these forums across the
22 country. But there is going to be a lot of
23 discussion among the staff in the different
24 programs and the different missionaries about your
25 input. So, again, thank you. With that, I'll turn

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1 it over to --

2 MS. FERRIS: Thank you, and I was going to
3 make sure I don't want to forget Jessica. She
4 plays a very important role for all of us. One of

5 the -- I guess I want to share just a few more
6 things about logistics of how this is going to
7 work. First of all, if it's easier for anybody to
8 speak from the back of the room, we do have
9 microphones up there. So, please just let the
10 registration know, and we'll make arrangements for
11 that.

12 What we're going to do is call down four
13 names at a time and have them come to two on each
14 side of the room so that they're ready. And after
15 three more speakers, we will call down four more
16 names.

17 We ask that when you do speak, that you
18 repeat your name and also the organization you're
19 from. That will make it much easier for all the
20 reporters. We have reporters on both sides of the
21 room and also to help -- I'd like to call the first
22 four names down now. Doctor Cook, Rick Harris,
23 Sally Mancini, and Tracy Helin.

24 Yes. And reminder -- we have five-minute
25 timing for each. We'll be timing, and hopefully

2 want to share with us five minutes and John
3 Magnarelli over here, our nutrition director, is
4 keeping track. So, the ref.

5 Do we have our four speakers? Okay.

6 Great. All right. Doctor Cook.

7 DOCTOR COOK: Good morning. My name is
8 John Cook. I am associate professor in the
9 department of pediatrics at Boston University
10 School of Medicine. I was the principal
11 investigator for the food security measurement
12 study sponsored by USDA Food & Nutrition Service
13 and Department of Health and Human Services
14 National Center For Health Statistics in the mid
15 1990s.

16 That national research activity developed
17 measures of food security, food insecurity, and
18 hunger for the US population. Those measures were
19 implemented annually in the current population
20 survey and reported by USDA economic research
21 service. The report on food security in the US for
22 2004 is, in fact, being released today.

23 I am here today representing a group of
24 pediatricians and medical researchers who have been
25 researching the impacts of food insecurity on the

1 health -- of low-income children under three years
2 of age at urban medical centers in seven states
3 since 1998.

4 I came here today to deliver a very simple
5 but very important message: And that is, food
6 insecurity is a serious health problem for millions
7 of young children in the United States, and Food
8 Stamps are an excellent medicine to prevent and
9 alleviate that health problem.

10 In 2003, more than 36 million Americans
11 lived in food insecure households. Over 13 million
12 of these food insecure people were children. Even
13 mild-to-moderate undernutrition in young children
14 is linked to problems of physical and cognitive
15 growth and development that can last a lifetime.

16 The Food Stamp program helps protect
17 low-income children and their families from food
18 insecurity and the more severe condition of hunger
19 by helping them purchase an adequate diet.

20 Pediatricians around the country are deeply
21 concerned about the implications for young
22 children's nutrition and health, of potential cuts
23 in the funding for the Food Stamp program in this
24 Farm Bill.

25 Healthy eating is a top priority,

1 articulated both by the president, the Attorney
2 General, and others. It is a top priority public
3 health issue for our entire nation today. Healthy
4 eating is a solution to many serious health problems
5 associated with both undernutrition and overweight.

6 Food insecurity is the primary proximate
7 cause of undernutrition among young children in
8 America, and it is emerging as a serious factor in
9 the pandemic of overweight and obesity.

10 Food insecure households lack sufficient
11 -- lack consistent access to adequate nutritious
12 food for a healthy life. When faced with food
13 insecurity, households rely more heavily on low
14 cost, energy-dense nutrient-sparse foods that can
15 harm children's ability to self regulate food and
16 energy intake and make it more difficult to prevent
17 or reduce overweight as they grow.

18 Food Stamp benefits are crucial to
19 preventing food insecurity and making sure young,
20 low-income children have access to healthful foods.

21 Healthy eating requires consistent
22 availability of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole
23 grain cereal products, lean meats, fish, and low

24 fat dairy products and other protein sources in the
25 diet. These important foods are, unfortunately,

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1 among the more expensive foods that are often
2 eliminated from the diets of food insecure
3 households. Food Stamps help low-income families
4 achieve access to these critical foods, and reach
5 the national public health goal of healthy eating.

6 Data from the Children's Sentinel
7 Nutrition Assessment program collected over the
8 period 1998 to 2005 in Massachusetts, Maryland,
9 Minnesota, California, Washington, DC,
10 Pennsylvania, and Arkansas indicate that cuts in
11 family's Food Stamp benefits are linked to greater
12 likelihood that those families will be food
13 insecure, and that young children in those families
14 will suffer from poor health. In our data from
15 more than 15,000 interviews, infants and toddlers
16 in families whose Food Stamp program benefits were
17 reduced or terminated are more than twice as likely
18 to experience child food insecurity, compared to
19 similar children in families whose Food Stamp
20 benefits did not change.

21 Both household and child food insecurity
22 are linked to young children's poor health, even
23 without measurable hunger. Our research shows that
24 young children in food insecure households are
25 significantly more likely to suffer poor health,

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1 including illnesses severe enough to require
2 hospitalization, than are children in food secure
3 households. However, CSNAP data also show that
4 Food Stamps reduce the harmful effects of food
5 insecurity on child health. In food insecure
6 households, the risks to children's health are
7 about 20 percent less if the family receives Food
8 Stamps. Thus, Food Stamps are good medicine.

9 The average total cost of a single
10 pediatric hospitalization in 2003 was \$11,300.
11 This amount could purchase almost five years of
12 Food Stamps for a family receiving the 2003 average
13 monthly household benefit of \$194.90.

14 Pediatricians want to urgently warn that
15 reductions or losses of family Food Stamp benefits
16 as a result of federal funding cuts will exacerbate
17 food insecurity in families with infants and
18 toddlers and harm these young children's health.

19 Medical data, including the findings from other
20 research programs, strongly indicate that food
21 insecurity weakens the health of the nation's
22 youngest and most vulnerable children. However,
23 those research findings also indicate that Food
24 Stamp benefits reduce the harmful effects of food
25 insecurity on child health.

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1 Available empirical evidence persuades us
2 that it would be imprudent at best -- and possibly
3 catastrophic -- to the health of many infants and
4 toddlers living in food insecure households to use
5 the Food Stamp program as a vehicle for reducing
6 the cost of the Farm Bill. While doing so might
7 reduce the apparent cost of this legislation
8 somewhat, it would inevitably lead to far greater
9 health care costs to the nation and rob us of
10 critical human capital.

11 If No Child Left Behind means anything at
12 all, it surely means not trading the health,
13 growth, and physical and cognitive development of
14 our most vulnerable infants and toddlers for
15 short-term, short-sighted increases in farm

16 profits. As you consider this important
17 legislation, we ask you to please remember: Food
18 insecurity is a serious health problem for millions
19 of young children in the US, and Food Stamps are an
20 excellent medicine to prevent and alleviate that
21 problem. Thank you very much for the opportunity
22 to speak.

23 MS. FERRIS: Thank you. And if you do
24 have -- if you are speaking and you have copies of
25 your written comments that you can leave and share

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1 with us at the registration table, we'll use that
2 to ensure that we've recorded it accurately.

3 Rick.

4 MR. HARRIS: Good morning, honored guests.

5 My name is Rick Harris, and I am the general
6 manager for Sunkist Growers value added division.
7 On behalf of Sunkist Growers and the United Fresh
8 Fruit & Vegetable Association, it is my honor to
9 speak to you about the importance of fresh fruit
10 and vegetables to the future of our kids.

11 As you may know, Sunkist Growers is a
12 112-year-old marketing cooperative serving 6,000
13 grower owners. My division, which is located here

14 in Boston, is tasked with creating new fresh-cut
15 fruit and vegetable products with our initial lines
16 directed toward school food service. In the next
17 few minutes, I'd like to address three points:
18 One, provide a prospective of what we, in the
19 produce industry, are competing against and actions
20 that we're taking; second, confirm our continued
21 support for two very promising USDA programs, the
22 DOD Fresh and the Fruit & Vegetable Snack program.
23 And third, encourage the creation of policies
24 reflecting the 2005 dietary guidelines, which will
25 encourage more fruit and vegetable consumption by

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1 kids.

2 So, first, it is important that we are
3 cognizant of what we're up against. Since this
4 session has a lot to do with dollars, let's put
5 funding dollars in perspective. The typical salty
6 snack company will spend between \$10 and \$50
7 million launching one new product directed toward
8 children. That's \$50 million -- one product.

9 Adding to the sum annual advertising and
10 marketing budgets in the millions -- a lot of

11 Saturday morning TV -- it is no surprise to see
12 dietary trends that we're seeing among children
13 today. Like others in the produce industry, we at
14 Sunkist are very seriously considering the alarm
15 bells raised by the USDA and HHS, as well as other
16 Capitol Hill policymakers, concerning the
17 increasing threat to America's health posed by
18 obesity and poor diet.

19 Our growers are particularly concerned
20 that if we do not get kids eating and enjoying
21 fruits and vegetables while they're young, we may
22 lose them forever to salty snacks.

23 But this also means making our produce
24 more accessible and convenient, especially for our
25 on-the-go families and children. Our strategy is

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1 to create a snack experience without the salt and
2 the sugar, and we've done so in fruits and
3 vegetables with something called "Fun Fruit."
4 These prepackaged fresh produce items have several
5 benefits for schools and kids, including reduced
6 labor, improved safety, attractive packaging, at
7 the same time meeting those half-cup equivalents
8 for fruit. No added sugar, no salt, no trans fats.

9 These product offerings, as well as others
10 presented by our industry, complement the
11 nutritional criteria of federal feeding programs.

12 Second, we've had very favorable
13 experiences with both the DOD Fresh program and the
14 Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Snack programs. We have
15 seen firsthand in Boston, in New York City, where
16 our Pineapple Pals, our Sunkist Smiles, our Grape
17 Giggles, our Apple Grins in North Carolina and
18 Mississippi, kids are starting to like eating fruit
19 again, sometimes without even knowing it's good for
20 them.

21 We were very encouraged by the
22 announcement yesterday regarding the snack program.
23 We hope that continued successes over the next
24 months will bring this to all 50 states. We
25 greatly support the increased funding of the DOD

1 Fresh program to 100 million and beyond. Logistics
2 and coordination are a real key in bringing large
3 amounts of products to schools. Given product
4 perishability -- and that's one of the things that
5 makes fresh fruits & vegetables more expensive than

6 highly-processed products -- these factors are very
7 key to successful implementation.

8 We also believe that there's a real
9 opportunity to set aside certain commodity
10 processing dollars specifically for fresh-cut
11 fruits & vegetables.

12 Finally, we encourage policy changes in
13 the creation of school menus that will truly
14 reflect the 2005 dietary guidelines.

15 If you look at the pyramid outside, nearly
16 one-half of the child's plate really should be
17 fresh fruits and vegetables. So, produce becomes
18 the true center of the fruit -- or
19 center-of-the-plate item.

20 Under these guidelines, school food
21 service buyers will naturally allocate more funds
22 to fresh fruits and vegetables and take even more
23 advantage of the aforementioned programs.

24 Thank you very much, honored guests, for
25 the opportunity to support more healthy diets for

1 our kids in the future.

2 MS. FERRIS: Thank you. Sally.

3 MS. MANCINI: Hi. My name is Sally

4 Mancini. And I'm program director for End Hunger
5 Connecticut, a statewide antihunger and food
6 security organization. Our mission is to promote
7 access to healthy affordable foods.

8 I'm here today representing over 500
9 emergency feeding programs in our state, many of
10 them faith-based, that feed hungry people on a
11 daily basis. Since we work in the trenches day in
12 and day out observing the administration of
13 nutrition programs, and conducting outreach to
14 expand our nation's nutrition safety net, there are
15 few times more exciting than the opportunity to
16 recommend changes and enhancements to federal
17 nutrition programs.

18 I will speak on the Food Stamp program,
19 the Emergency Food Assistance program, and the
20 Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition program.

21 The Food Stamp program is the premier
22 Nutrition Assistance program in this country. In
23 Connecticut alone, it feeds over 200,000 people
24 every month. The fact that it is a federal program
25 with near uniform standards across all states is

1 something that must be preserved.

2 In prioritizing specific policies for the
3 Food Stamp program improvements, End Hunger was
4 mindful of making recommendations that not only
5 assist individuals in accessing the benefit, but
6 also help states in administering the program.
7 Connecticut has seen a decline in state social
8 service workers since the Farm Bill of 2002.
9 Today, Connecticut caseworkers average between 800
10 to a thousand cases apiece. EHC workers are
11 constantly faced with the challenge of bringing new
12 Food Stamp recipients to already-crowded Department
13 of Social Services doors.

14 End Hunger's three main Food Stamp program
15 goals and in the Farm Bill reauthorization 2007 are
16 program simplification, benefit enhancement, and
17 increased use of technology.

18 I've included many recommendations in my
19 written testimony and will only touch on a few now.
20 In order to simplify the program, End Hunger
21 recommends fully restoring legal immigrant
22 eligibility. This will eliminate confusing
23 restrictions for certain legal immigrants applying
24 for Food Stamps. We also recommend fully restoring
25 eligibility for able-bodied adults without

1 dependents.

2 The combination of ABOD restrictions on
3 top of the already existing work requirement is
4 burdensome both for recipients and caseworkers.
5 Streamlining the ABOD population back into the
6 general Food Stamp case will undoubtedly simplify
7 the program.

8 We also encourage USDA to extend
9 opportunities for automatic enrollment in the Food
10 Stamp program by allowing all states to pursue the
11 SSI combined application project or pilot and allow
12 the use of other applications for means tested
13 programs as a basis for enrollment in Food Stamps.

14 Lastly, under program simplification, we
15 encourage USDA to require states and localities
16 administering the Food Stamp program to eliminate
17 face-to-face application and recertification visits
18 for individuals unable to come to the office. In
19 Connecticut, we have only 12 offices around the
20 state, leaving people miles from the nearest
21 office. I talked to someone this week that lives
22 an hour from the nearest Food Stamp office. And
23 although there is a policy in place, many offices
24 do not adequately advertise the waiver of the

1 Food Stamp recipients and for caseworkers.

2 In order -- in order to enhance the
3 benefit, we recommend raising the minimum benefit
4 to at least \$25. The majority of households that
5 receive the \$10 minimum benefit are elderly, living
6 on fixed incomes. Increasing the minimum benefit
7 will help with outreach to this vulnerable
8 population, who historically, have had very low
9 participation rates.

10 We also recommend using USDA's Moderate
11 Cost Meal Plan rather than the Thrifty Food Plan to
12 determine the Food Stamp benefit. This will also
13 further align USDA's nutrition education efforts
14 with Food Stamp recipients' ability to actually
15 purchase fresh fruits and vegetables.

16 And lastly, I'll address the increased use
17 of technology. Over the last two years, I had the
18 honor of serving on the first-ever USDA Technology
19 and eGovernment council. Through this council, I
20 saw firsthand how USDA is implementing new
21 technology throughout all agencies from the Farm
22 Service Agency and their ELDP program to online

23 learning for USDA employees. But I have some
24 specific recommendations for the Food & Nutrition
25 Service.

23

1 Firstly, pursue the goal, USDA available
2 any time, anywhere. This can be achieved by
3 mainstreaming the Food Stamp program and giving
4 states and local governments the needed resources,
5 along with the flexibility, to design web-based
6 systems to collect applications and grant Food
7 Stamps. While many states are already doing this,
8 the USDA should develop a best practices guide for
9 states that can use -- can use this guide to also
10 implement it themselves.

11 We also encourage states to use remote
12 pinning for the EBT card. Credit card customers do
13 not need to leave their homes to activate their
14 credit cards, and neither should EBT customers. It
15 should be routine for the Food Stamp administering
16 agency to send EBT cards to eligible Food Stamp
17 recipients, and the pin-setting can be done over
18 the phone.

19 We also encourage USDA to continue and

20 expand EBT funding or EBT services at farmers'
21 markets and this is a wonderful way to get fresh
22 fruits and vegetables to Food Stamp recipients. It
23 is also relatively inexpensive and keeps money in
24 the local economy.

25 Now I'll speak on the Senior Farmers'

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1 Market Nutrition program. Okay. I don't have much
2 time, so --

3 MS. FERRIS: Signs work.

4 MS. MANCINI: Yeah. Senior Farmers'
5 Market program is a great program. It's getting
6 needed produce to seniors, but it's underfunded in
7 Connecticut, and there's much more need. The
8 Emergency Food & Nutrition Food Assistance program,
9 as reported to me by the state's two food banks, it
10 gets good, quality food into the hands of people
11 that need it, but the administrative reimbursement
12 should be increased.

13 Before I conclude, I'd like to just let
14 you know -- you were mentioning the online
15 submission of comments for the Farm Bill. When I
16 went on to submit comments, there were six
17 questions that asked me -- and none of those

18 questions pertained to nutrition. So, I would
19 encourage you to talk to -- talk to the USDA and
20 try to get some nutrition questions on that comment
21 form.

22 So, even as we sit here this morning,
23 House Agriculture Committee is considering around
24 800 million cuts in the Food Stamp program. So, to
25 make any of these recommendations that I just

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1 talked about a reality, we must work together for a
2 strong nutrition title in the Farm Bill, and we're
3 committed to working on it, and we thank you very
4 much for having this forum. Thank you.

5 MS. FERRIS: Thanks. Before our next
6 speaker, I'd like four more people to come forward
7 and be ready: Carol Tienken, Connie Rizoli, and
8 Deb Wachenheim, and Molly Anderson.

9 Tracy. Thank you.

10 MR. HELIN: Good morning. Thank you for
11 this opportunity today and for being with us. My
12 name is Tracy Helin. I'm the outreach director
13 with the Connecticut Association For Human
14 Services. Some of my comments reflect similar ones

15 to Sally's. We work together to complement each
16 other, and some of mine are a little bit more
17 specific in some areas. So, I hope that you
18 recognize a couple of common themes, and I hope
19 that you hear some of them more today.

20 And from here on out, I'll refer to my
21 organization as CAHS, because it's a mouthful. So,
22 CAHS had advocated for Connecticut's lower-income
23 residents since 1910 and has made efforts to reduce
24 the causes and effects of poverty, while working to
25 improve the human services delivery system at the

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1 state regional and national levels.

2 In recent years, CAHS has concentrated on
3 improving overall family economic security and
4 moving families and communities toward
5 self-sufficiency. The Food Stamp program plays a
6 critical role in ensuring that the nutrition needs
7 of working households are met as they move towards
8 self-sufficiency and economic security.

9 CAHS also recognizes that certain
10 households may not reach self-sufficiency due to a
11 variety of factors. For these households, Food
12 Stamps may play an even more important role in

13 meeting their basic needs. So, we're also very

14 sensitive to those issues.

15 My comments focus on improving access for
16 working families; simplifying program procedures,
17 which I hope that you hear several more times today
18 -- other speakers; allowing Food Stamps to be more
19 widely available to certain groups by eliminating
20 policies that may be misinterpreted within the
21 community; and to improving benefit levels.

22 These comments are based on CAHS's
23 experiences through our many outreach programs that
24 we've operated across the state for the last ten
25 years. My first main area is to concentrate on

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1 improving Food Stamp access for working poor
2 families. An August 2005 report by Mathematical
3 Policy Research, which was prepared for the USDA,
4 entitled "State Food Stamp Participation Rates For
5 the Working Poor in 2002," noted that nationwide
6 only 46 percent of eligible working poor households
7 participate in the Food Stamp program. This is
8 compared to an overall participation rate of 54
9 percent nationwide.

10 This report also indicates that in
11 Connecticut, the difference is far greater, with
12 only 43 percent of eligible working poor families
13 participating, which represents a 5 percent decline
14 in working poor family participation over the three
15 years in which the study was conducted. And in a
16 state like Connecticut, that's especially
17 important, because this shows that working poor
18 families are actually sliding further down the
19 self-sufficiency scale, because we have higher
20 costs of living and higher housing costs. So, this
21 is an alarming trend for us.

22 With this, I would like to make the
23 following recommendations: No. 1, and most
24 importantly: Mandatory elimination of face-to-face
25 interviews. While lower rates of participation

1 among households with earnings may be caused by a
2 variety of factors, such as lack of information or
3 perceived low benefits, many working households may
4 find it nearly impossible to complete the
5 application process. As Sally alluded to earlier,
6 in several parts of Connecticut, applicants who
7 have to travel up to 30 miles each way to the

8 nearest Department of Social Services office. So,
9 with this in mind, we recommend that USDA make the
10 face-to-face interview waivers mandatory for
11 states. This will improve efficiency for DSS
12 workers and ensure better access for potential
13 applicants. Excuse me.

14 Secondly, we would like to encourage
15 states to increase office hours to meet the needs
16 of working poor family. I know that there is a lot
17 of flexibility in other states, but in Connecticut,
18 these options tend not to be enacted. We feel a
19 large part of that is due to cost restrictions that
20 are put on our state. Working families may find it
21 difficult to reach DSS staff members due to limited
22 office hours, which in Connecticut are generally 8
23 to 4:30 p.m.

24 So, we recommend that USDA look to improve
25 the administrative cost-sharing formula with states

1 to make it more an attractive and more possible for
2 states to accommodate working families and expand
3 their office hours. Along the same lines, we would
4 like to suggest a pilot program in some states

5 where Food Stamp agencies work to out-station Food
6 Stamp employees, which will also alleviate some of
7 the travel burden for potential applicants, and it
8 would potentially put a more friendly face on the
9 program by having community-based DSS workers.

10 Also, in working towards promoting
11 self-sufficiency, we would like to recommend that
12 the asset limit that Food Stamp households may have
13 be increased. CAHS recommends that the asset limit
14 be raised to at least \$10,000. And the reason for
15 that is -- well, the reasons for this are many.
16 Most prominently is that if a Food Stamp household
17 is eligible for the earned income tax credit, which
18 can give them a windfall of up to about \$4300
19 during tax season, these families are encouraged to
20 expend that money rather quickly. So, we feel that
21 if we're encouraging people to build assets and
22 become self-sufficient, they shouldn't be penalized
23 for having an effective savings program. And I
24 just got my 30 seconds mark, so I'm going to move
25 rather quickly.

1 Just to also echo the words of Sally, we
2 are -- our second main point is to simplify the

3 Food Stamp program. Our outreach program is
4 extremely -- we have an extremely difficult time in
5 communicating effective messages to people, because
6 there are so many different groups that we have to
7 communicate with.

8 Specifically, ABOD policies are incredibly
9 difficult for us to communicate across the state.
10 Connecticut currently has a few waivers around the
11 state for labor surplus areas, but it's difficult
12 for us to communicate from one part of the state to
13 the other, and we don't know if ABODs in one part
14 of the state qualify in other parts of the state.
15 So, it can be extremely confusing for us to
16 communicate that message.

17 And once again, I want to conclude with
18 one main point: We recommend that the benefit
19 levels be enhanced. A lot of people will probably
20 throw around a figure today. I would say something
21 in the neighborhood of \$40 per month be a minimum
22 benefit, and it should also be looked at to somehow
23 attach the minimum benefit to inflation as \$10 is
24 worth much less than it was when the -- when the
25 program was implemented.

1 And I think I'm basically out of time, so
2 I would like to just conclude by thanking you for
3 this opportunity. My written comments that I've
4 submitted are much more complete, so I hope that
5 you'll take the time to read them, and I appreciate
6 this opportunity. Thank you.

7 MS. FERRIS: Thank you. Carol.

8 MS. TIENKEN: Good morning. My name is
9 Carl Tienken. I'm the chief operating officer of
10 the Greater Boston Food Bank. I appreciate this
11 opportunity to present testimony to the Farm Bill
12 and Nutrition Forum regarding hunger relief for
13 more than 517,000 people at risk of hunger in
14 eastern Massachusetts.

15 The Greater Boston Food Bank deeply
16 appreciates the continued effort of the United
17 States Department of Agriculture, Food & Nutrition
18 Service team to address hunger throughout the
19 nation. We also would like to acknowledge the
20 Massachusetts Department of Education for all of
21 their hard work ensuring that the administration of
22 TFB food runs smoothly in our Commonwealth.

23 The Greater Boston Food Bank is a member
24 of America's Second Harvest, the nation's food bank
25 network and the largest hunger relief organization

1 in New England. We acquire, warehouse, and
2 distribute over 24 million pounds of food to more
3 than 600-member hunger relief agencies throughout
4 eastern Massachusetts. The food bank also provides
5 direct food distribution to 4,500 elderly each
6 month via our Brown Bag programs and to 600
7 children a day via our Kids' Cafe. We also provide
8 nutrition education and food safety workshops to
9 our member agencies.

10 Today I wish to provide an overview of the
11 hunger problem in eastern Massachusetts, along with
12 a few recommendations. As you are aware, greater
13 Boston is a particularly difficult place to be poor
14 or even middle class. The Boston Foundation
15 released a housing report card last month that
16 found Boston is the most expensive metropolitan
17 area in the United States. The report found that
18 it now costs a family of four over \$64,000 for
19 basic necessities in greater Boston; \$6,000 more
20 than New York City; \$7,000 more than San Francisco.
21 The median price of a home in greater Boston has
22 increased more than 37 percent between 2001 and
23 2004. Our region's economics are a major

24 contributor to an estimated 517,000 people in
25 eastern Massachusetts relying on food provided by

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1 the Greater Boston Food Bank on our member
2 agencies. An estimated 173,000 of these people are
3 children. In fact, one in every three households
4 utilizing emergency feeding services has a child
5 under the age of 18.

6 In distributing more than 24 million
7 pounds of food to our network last year, we've
8 increased our distribution by more than 60 percent
9 in five years. Regrettably, during the same time
10 period, government-funded resources for emergency
11 food have been flat funded or cut. These cuts,
12 combined with low Food Stamp utilization rates,
13 have put tremendous strain on the emergency food
14 distribution system. An increase in TFB funding at
15 this time makes sense, as it would allow the hunger
16 relief community in eastern Massachusetts and
17 throughout the country to cost effectively meet
18 increasing demands for emergency food.

19 The Greater Boston Food Bank also would
20 like to see a uniform threshold for eligibility in
21 federal programs. For example, while the

22 eligibility thresholds for Food Stamps is 130
23 percent of the federal poverty level, it is 185
24 percent for WIC. Issuing a standard 185 percent of
25 federal poverty eligibility guideline for all

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1 nutrition programs would greatly improve access for
2 individuals and families at risk of hunger.

3 Finally, the application process quagmire
4 is particularly acute for elderly individuals who
5 utilize a range of government assistance programs,
6 including Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security.
7 It would make sense to connect the Food Stamp
8 application process to any or all of these. Elders
9 would then be more likely to utilize the wide range
10 of available programs.

11 In summary, TFB is the backbone in the
12 effort to end hunger in eastern Massachusetts and
13 around the country. We can be proud of our
14 collective achievements in ensuring that these
15 programs reach millions of individuals and families
16 living at or close to property. At the same time,
17 we can do better by strengthening TFB so that even
18 more people at the risk of hunger receive the food

19 they need.

20 The 2007 Farm Bill presents an ideal
21 opportunity to achieve this by including the
22 following measures: Increase the TFB funding so
23 that more Americans can receive high-quality
24 nutritious food in an efficient manner. Issue a
25 standard 185 percent of federal poverty eligibility

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1 guideline for all nutrition programs, and where
2 possible, consolidate application processes and
3 forms for federal nutrition and entitlement
4 programs.

5 I thank you again for the opportunity to
6 present this testimony today. The Greater Boston
7 Food Bank is encouraged by your support of the
8 mission to end hunger for our people in our
9 community and throughout the United States and
10 looks forward to collaborative efforts to reaching
11 this goal with you.

12 On a personal note, I was recently in
13 Alexandria, Louisiana, running a warehouse
14 operation for America's Second Harvest. I was very
15 gratified to see familiar USDA product in our
16 inventory that was distributed to hunger victims

17 who greatly needed help and support. We thank you.

18 MS. FERRIS: Thank you. Connie.

19 MS. RIZOLI: It's unfortunate that these

20 forum -- this forum today is happening in the

21 context of what's probably going to be happening in

22 Washington today in terms of the potential over

23 \$800 million proposed cut to Food Stamps. I would

24 just like to acknowledge that.

25 For the record, my name is Connie Rizoli,

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1 and I'm the director of public policy for Project

2 Bread The Walk for Hunger. Project Bread is a

3 nonprofit organization dedicated to alleviating,

4 preventing, and ultimately ending hunger in

5 Massachusetts. Project Bread sponsors the annual

6 Walk for Hunger, runs the only statewide hotline

7 for hungry people which last year took in 35,000

8 calls -- a record; funds 400 emergency food

9 programs each year; has developed the state's first

10 online Food Stamp application with a grant from

11 USDA; and develops hunger prevention programs --

12 get this a little closer -- I'm sorry -- and

13 develops hunger prevention programs that feed

14 hungry children where they live, learn, and play.

15 I would like to thank USDA for hosting
16 this and other forums around the country, thereby
17 making it easier for those of us in the grass roots
18 to give you feedback. It's greatly appreciated.

19 My thanks to the previous speaker who
20 talked about poverty, so I don't have to go into it
21 in great detail, and I can say other things
22 instead. But the poverty rate in Massachusetts has
23 increased dramatically since 2001. Today in the
24 Commonwealth there are 630,000 people or 9.8
25 percent of the population that live below the

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1 poverty line. More people than ever are relying on
2 emergency food pantries, soup kitchens, and federal
3 nutrition programs such as Food Stamps. Calls to
4 Project Bread food source hotline have increased by
5 68 percent in the last three years.

6 I would like to take this opportunity to
7 make some specific comments relative to the Food
8 Stamp program. Project Bread has several proposals
9 which we would like both the USDA and the congress
10 to consider. First, in this year of hurricanes and
11 rising energy costs, the relationship between

12 hunger and poverty is crystal clear. As fuel costs
13 spiral, we know that many individuals will be
14 applying for fuel assistance, and there is a
15 synergy between fuel assistance and Food Stamps.
16 Both programs rely on income and expense criteria,
17 but each program has a different set of
18 verifications.

19 While it may be too cumbersome to examine
20 the verifications need for each program in order to
21 design a uniform process, it should be relatively
22 easy to develop a system of reciprocity, where
23 verification for fuel assistance would
24 automatically make one eligible for Food Stamps and
25 vice versa.

1 Project Bread, through a federal grant,
2 and with the assistance of the New England regional
3 office of USDA's Food & Nutrition Service, has
4 played a leadership role in developing a system of
5 interdepartmental coordination by using technology
6 to increase multiple enrollments amongst federal
7 nutrition programs. The Child Nutrition Access
8 Process, known as CNAP, has, for example, created a

9 system that allows Food Stamp recipients to be
10 directly certified for free school lunch.

11 In addition to the Bay Stay CAB program,
12 Massachusetts was able to automatically enroll
13 thousands of senior adults into the Food Stamp
14 program.

15 I believe this type of creative thinking
16 could be used to develop a shared application or
17 linkage system for those applying for Food Stamps
18 and/or fuel assistance. And I'm going to submit in
19 the back when I'm done a copy of the CNAP report
20 for your report.

21 Second, the USDA Thrifty Food Plan should
22 be updated to take into account new nutrition
23 standards of the USDA. Healthy food is more
24 expensive than foods that are high in fat and
25 calories, and Food Stamp benefits should be

1 increased so that recipients can purchase food for
2 a healthy diet. In addition, while there has been
3 much discussion about the possibility of limiting
4 the choices one has with Food Stamps, we would
5 suggest a better approach would be the development
6 of some sort of incentives to encourage Food Stamp

7 recipients to purchase healthy food.

8 Three, we recommend increasing the current
9 housing cap of \$388, and I think the reasons are
10 rather obvious. No. 4, we would propose increasing
11 the monthly benefit from \$10 to \$25. We believe
12 that the \$10 minimum is so low that it sometimes
13 acts as a disincentive to even apply for Food
14 Stamps.

15 Fifth, since Food Stamps is a nutrition
16 program, work requirements should be eliminated or
17 minimized. Other federal nutrition programs do not
18 include a work requirement.

19 Six, we urge the federal government to
20 fully restore eligibility for Food Stamps to legal
21 immigrants. Seven, the asset cap should be
22 adjusted upward at least to \$10,000, for reasons
23 stated earlier; and finally, categorical
24 eligibility has proven to be a successful mechanism
25 to reach individuals in need of Food Stamps and

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1 should be continued in the future. Again, I thank
2 you for coming to Boston and hearing from us.

3 MS. FERRIS: Thank you. Deb.

4 MS. WACHENHEIM: Hi. My name is Deb
5 Wachenheim. I worked at Jewish Vocational Service
6 here in Boston. We got a grant about a year ago to
7 do one of the USDA grants to do outreach,
8 specifically to working individuals in the greater
9 Boston area, and I'm overseeing that project.

10 So, I'm just going to quickly comment on
11 one -- sorry -- one population that I have met
12 often through the work that I have done. I --
13 again, I specifically do outreach to working
14 individuals, and I've done a lot of work in some of
15 the larger industries in Boston, such as the
16 hospitals, nursing homes, and hotels, where there
17 would be many low-wage workers, and the majority of
18 those who I have met have been legal immigrants.

19 So, again, as others have said, the main
20 recommendation that we have, based on the work that
21 I've done, is that full eligibility be restored for
22 legal immigrants. I have found that many of these
23 people do have children who are also legal
24 immigrants or citizens and could apply for their
25 children and people really don't know about that.

2 hear that legal immigrants are not eligible, and
3 then that's it. So, we do believe that if it was
4 just made -- if it was more simplified and more
5 legal immigrants were eligible as adults, then not
6 only more adults would have access to Food Stamps,
7 but their children would have access as well. So
8 thank you.

9 MS. FERRIS: Thank you. I'd like to have
10 -- call the next four names before the other
11 speaker comes forward. Barbara Packett, Robin
12 William McBrearty, Joy Richfield, I believe, and
13 Karen Murphy.

14 Molly?

15 MS. ANDERSON: Hello. I'm Dr. Molly
16 Anderson, and I'm speaking today in two capacities:
17 One as a board member of the National Community
18 Food Security Coalition, which is a coalition of
19 about 75 organizations around the country with
20 thousands of constituents. My second role is as
21 research coordinator of the National Food and Farm
22 Policy Project, which is a coalition of several
23 hundred antihunger, sustainable agriculture,
24 environmental, world development, and community
25 food security organizations around the country that

1 have come together to focus on the 2007 Farm Bill.

2 The Food and Farm Policy Project is
3 working through four groups: The Healthy Food &
4 Communities Group, the New Agricultural Markets
5 Group, the Family Farm Revitalization Group, and
6 Farm & Ranch Stewardship. The nutrition programs
7 mainly come up in this coalition through the
8 Healthy Food & Communities Work Group.

9 And the measures that we are interested in
10 promoting in the Farm Bill are those that address
11 health problems that are caused by our current food
12 system, such as food insecurity, obesity, farm
13 worker health that's compromised by exposure to
14 pesticides, and the health of food processing
15 workers.

16 I say that these are caused by our current
17 food system because policies are in place now that
18 allow all of these to continue to be perpetuated
19 and to actually increase.

20 Many of these health problems are
21 exacerbated by rural poverty, so we're also
22 interested in ways to support the incomes of small
23 and mid-scale farmers, very few of whom can support
24 their families on farm income, although they list
25 farm operator as their principal source of support.

1 Our main hope for the nutrition title of
2 the Farm Bill is that the Food Stamp program would
3 be enhanced. The specific measures that we're
4 interested in are increasing the maximum amount per
5 household so that food costs of low-income families
6 can be covered so that they can actually eat a
7 healthy diet, according to USDA's current dietary
8 guidelines. We also hope that eligibility will be
9 extended to all families with food needs. This
10 would include both permanent residents and guest
11 workers and other legal immigrants; that funds be
12 invested in increasing participation in the Food
13 Stamp program; and that deductions be increased for
14 housing and vehicular expenses.

15 These points have been raised by several
16 other speakers this morning. Other specific
17 programs that should be kept and funded at higher
18 levels than they're funded currently include the
19 Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition program, and EBT
20 use for Food Stamps to purchase local foods in
21 farmers' markets and elsewhere.

22 Funds for linking local producers with

23 agencies that serve low income consumers should be
24 increased substantially. Two examples of such
25 programs in the food bill -- in the Farm Bill are

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1 the community food projects competitive grants
2 program, which has a stellar track record but now
3 receives only a tiny fraction of USDA's total
4 allocation of funds; and farm-to-cafeteria programs
5 to benefit both children's health and farming
6 communities.

7 Other recommendations include: Ending all
8 government support for foods of low nutritional
9 value in schools, daycare centers, hospitals, and
10 other institutions and maintaining existing
11 programs to introduce fresh fruits and vegetables,
12 particularly in the diets of children, such as DOD
13 Fresh.

14 Second, increasing support for advertising
15 foods of high nutritional value that are available
16 directly from farms in all regions of the United
17 States; and third, investing in new food
18 distribution processing and retail infrastructure
19 that's absolutely critical to allow small and
20 medium-scale producers of fresh fruits and

21 vegetables to market their goods.
22 I'm going to include a few comments that I
23 have in my written comments addressing the question
24 on the USDA Web site of how farm policy should be
25 assigned to effectively and fairly distribute

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1 assistance to producers. Because this also has
2 relevance to the nutrition title, many of our
3 farmers are receiving Food Stamps. They cannot
4 afford to feed their families healthy diets on farm
5 income.

6 Current farm policy promotes farm
7 consolidation, which has been demonstrated
8 conclusively to hurt rural families. Commodity
9 programs should not be linked to acreage and total
10 production but to evidence of positive results from
11 environmentally-responsible methods.

12 Other measures should be put in place to
13 ensure a floor price for crops that covers basic
14 costs of production so that farmers are no longer
15 dependent on subsidies to make their farming
16 operations break even. The Grassley-Dorgan Bill is
17 a reasonable approach to payment limitations that

18 should become part of the 2007 Farm Bill.

19 Other recommendations here are to ensure
20 fair wages, prices, and access to government
21 resources for limited-resource and minority
22 farmers, for farm workers, and for all other
23 vulnerable food workers.

24 One way to do this is to increase funds in
25 the outreach and technical assistance program in

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1 the Farm Bill for limited resource and minority
2 producers.

3 In addition, the Farm Bill should be
4 supporting beginning farmers, new immigrant
5 farmers, and value-added producer grants and
6 supporting research for innovation in the food
7 system that links food insecure consumers and
8 vulnerable producers. Thank you very much.

9 MS. FERRIS: Thank you. Barb.

10 MS. PACKETT: My name is Barb Packett.
11 And I am the Nebraska Commodities Supplemental Food
12 program director. I also serve as a board member
13 on the nation at CSFP association. I would like to
14 thank you and USDA for giving me this opportunity
15 to speak on behalf of CSFP and its 14,000 monthly

16 participants in Nebraska, as well as the over 510
17 monthly participants in the other 31 states, the
18 District of Columbia, and two Indian tribal
19 organizations.

20 CSFP began in 1969 to supplement protein,
21 calcium, iron, and Vitamins A and C for low-income
22 mothers and children. USDA purchases nutrient-rich
23 foods at wholesale prices to provide a
24 nutritionally-balanced monthly food package. Pilot
25 programs in 1983 added seniors as eligible

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1 participants.

2 Today, 90 percent of all CSFP participants
3 are seniors. The mission of CSFP is to provide
4 quality nutrition assistance in a cost effective,
5 efficient, and responsible manner, always keeping
6 the needs and dignity of our participant first. We
7 commend the food distribution division for their
8 continued innovations to strengthen the quality of
9 the food package and streamline administration and
10 look forward to our continuing partnership.

11 I strongly support reauthorization of the
12 CSFP program. Many of our seniors have to make the

13 choice between whether to eat, take their medicine,
14 or pay their utility bills, because their income
15 does not allow them to fully provide for
16 themselves.

17 Last week one Nebraska community action
18 agency reported being told by seniors that they are
19 planning on only eating every other day so that
20 they can save to pay for their heating bills this
21 winter. This followed a national press release
22 that heating bills could rise as much as 40 percent
23 from last winter.

24 The average income for a senior in our
25 program is under \$750 a month. That's not too much

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1 when you consider the ever-rising prices of food,
2 medicine, and home heating costs, which promise to
3 make the choices even harder. In a recent CSFP
4 senior survey performed by the association, 55
5 percent of the seniors reported that they run out
6 of food each month. 67 reported -- 67 percent
7 reported they use their food money to pay their
8 medical bills, and 75 percent say they do not use
9 Food Stamps.

10 13 states do not have CSFP. The limited

11 number of projects in states operating CSFP has
12 made it difficult to provide nutrition support to
13 many seniors with an inadequate diet and income.
14 A national program available to all states
15 would address the growing need and would help
16 garner support for farm commodity and price support
17 programs that are an integral part of the USDA
18 agriculture policy. CSFP works through 150
19 nonprofit agencies in 1,800 sites across the
20 country. Many of our participants are unable to
21 leave their homes, and the food, as well as visits
22 from the many volunteers, are important in
23 assisting them to maintain their independence and
24 maintain a healthier life-style, thus lowering
25 their need for assistant living and increased

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1 medical care.
2 CSFP's use of volunteers accounts for up
3 to 45 percent of savings to CSFP, along with the
4 relatively low cost of the food package. This goes
5 a long way in reducing health costs for seniors and
6 allowing all children to reach their full potential
7 by providing the needed nutrition assistance.

8 We ask USDA to support new initiatives to
9 benefit CSFP and the people we serve. One, support
10 a study that demonstrates individual and program
11 outcomes for CSFP. Change program priority to have
12 low-income seniors the greatest priority, while at
13 the same time retaining eligibility for women and
14 children who are not eligible for services through
15 the WIC program; restore financial guidelines for
16 seniors to the original level of 185 percent of
17 poverty, as they were when the program was piloted,
18 bringing them in line with levels for mothers and
19 children. Implement programs in five additional
20 states with approved state plans to operate CSFP;
21 and they are Arkansas, Delaware, New Jersey,
22 Oklahoma, and Utah. And then provide support
23 needed to make CSFP available in all 50 states.

24 A state should not have to wait to be --
25 to begin this vital and important program. The

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1 senior population of this country is growing, and
2 CSFP should be a crucial part of any senior
3 nutrition plan.

4 Since this information indicates that
5 nationwide over 5 million senior citizens are

6 living under the current income guidelines for
7 CSFP, according to USDA, 35 million people in this
8 country are considered food insecure in 2003. The
9 case for CSFP in all 50 states has never been
10 stronger. I would like, again, to express my
11 appreciation for this opportunity to provide this
12 testimony. Thank you.

13 MS. FERRIS: Thank you. Robin.

14 MS. McBREARTY: Good morning. I would
15 like to also thank the department for this
16 opportunity. This is not the first time I've taken
17 advantage of this type of opportunity to present my
18 opinions, and anybody who knows me knows that those
19 are pretty strong.

20 So, my name is Robin Williamson McBrearty,
21 and I am the chief of the nutrition and health
22 promotion section of the New Hampshire Division of
23 Public Health Services.

24 In that capacity, I have the privilege of
25 managing four FNS supplemental nutrition programs:

1 WIC, CSFP, the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition
2 program and the Senior Farmers' Market nutrition

3 program. We also have a state-funded farmers'
4 market program for our CSFP mothers and children
5 who are not eligible for the other two programs.

6 In addition, my unit implements
7 school-based and adult-based physical activity
8 programs, the Five-a-Day Program, a CDC-funded
9 folic acid education program, and Healthy New
10 Hampshire 2010. And in my spare time, I'm the
11 secretary for the National CSFP Association. So it
12 keeps me out of trouble.

13 New Hampshire is the only state in the
14 nation to offer WIC, CSFP, and the WIC and Senior
15 Farmers' Market Nutrition services statewide. We
16 are also the only state to totally integrate these
17 services at both the state and the community level.
18 This structure enables us to provide services more
19 efficiently, reduce access barriers, and to adopt
20 broad nutrition education messages across all of
21 our supplemental nutrition programs. There is -- I
22 have provided written testimony, and I have
23 attached an information sheet that shows the
24 results of some of these efforts.

25 Our health promotion program efforts also

1 target our nutritionally-vulnerable mothers,
2 children, and seniors, in addition to the community
3 at large. CDC preventative health block grant
4 objectives have been developed to specifically
5 address both the WIC and the CSFP populations.

6 It's been very exciting to watch that grow.

7 The New Hampshire CSFP serves
8 approximately 1,800 mothers and children and 6,000
9 low-income seniors each month. A recent profile on
10 our senior CSFP participants gave the following
11 information: The average age of a New Hampshire
12 CSFP-enrolled senior was 74-and-a-half years old.
13 The average income for the same seniors was \$717 a
14 month for a family of one, which is way below the
15 income guideline of \$1,009 a month. These seniors
16 are financially desperate, given their low incomes,
17 the cost of prescription drugs, and the new worry
18 of heating cost increases of up to 60 percent in
19 New Hampshire. These people are not nameless
20 entities. Living in such a small state, they are
21 my neighbors, and they are the people I encounter
22 every day. The remainder of my comments speak
23 generally to the CSFP, but there are a couple of
24 related contributions for the Senior Farmers'
25 Market Nutrition program.

1 The proposed changes to CSFP race and
2 ethnic reporting and income verification and
3 farmers' market -- same -- we assume those same
4 requirements will be coming down -- these will be
5 extremely burdensome for agencies that are not
6 computerized, which is the bulk of our agencies,
7 because there's just no money for it. Significant
8 concern has been expressed regarding the costs of
9 these requirements. Both CSFP and Senior Farmers'
10 Market Nutrition program state managers have
11 predicted that they may end up having to shut down
12 these programs in these states as a result of the
13 burden that's imposed. For the Senior Farmers'
14 Market Nutrition program, it could cost more to
15 document eligibility verification than the actual
16 cost of the entire seasonal benefit. So, that does
17 not seem like a real cost effective -- it's cheaper
18 to give them the food than to find out if they're
19 eligible. New Hampshire is also very concerned
20 about the retroactive application of more
21 constrictive performance criteria for CSFP caseload
22 allocations.

23 These regulations were not issued in final
24 format until late September, but they are being

25 applied to the entire 2005 caseload year to set the

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1 base for our 2006 funding. In New Hampshire, I
2 would never, ever be allowed to implement a role
3 retroactively. I mean, my head would be served to
4 me, and I'm just incredulous that this is the
5 position that's been taken by the department.

6 In New Hampshire, we're also very
7 concerned that the funding approach to CSFP is
8 becoming a slippery slope which is particularly
9 endangering small rural states that do not enjoy
10 the benefits of economies of scale. Each
11 reduction, whether through reduced grant amounts or
12 increasingly-stringent performance standards, makes
13 us less able to maintain service levels. We are
14 currently developing contingency plans to reduce
15 services by county if our funding levels decrease
16 any further. By necessity, these reductions would
17 need to occur in our smaller, more rural areas
18 where availability of our services is also
19 significantly lower.

20 In 2006, between appropriation reductions
21 and the new performance standards, New Hampshire

22 anticipates a 10 percent CSFP caseload reduction,
23 which translates to nearly 800 low-income seniors.
24 This number may seem small, but I grew up in a
25 small town in New Hampshire with a population of

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1 400 people, and I understand just how much of an
2 impact this has on the individuals.

3 In the past, the department has defended
4 limitations to CSFP funds because there is access
5 to other USDA nutrition assistance programs. A
6 study recently published by the University of New
7 Hampshire reports that Food Stamp program
8 participation is significantly lower in rural areas
9 than in urban areas. In small towns, where
10 everybody knows everybody else's business, seniors
11 are very reluctant to participate in the Food Stamp
12 program, due to the need to reveal personal
13 financial data for a potentially small benefit
14 amount and then to being stigmatized while
15 shopping. That's a major issue, because they're
16 revealing it -- revealing information to people
17 they probably know, and that is certainly -- I
18 wouldn't want to have to be doing that.

19 In conclusion, New Hampshire would like to

20 make the following recommendations regarding the
21 CSFP: We would recommend restoration of the senior
22 CSFP income eligibility guidelines to 185 percent
23 of poverty, which is consistent with most other
24 federal nutrition assistance programs. We would
25 recommend making seniors the first priority for

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1 CSFP services, while reserving the option to serve
2 women and children should additional slots be
3 available. And we would recommend implementation
4 of an evaluation program for the CSFP to provide a
5 participant profile and program outcome data. This
6 would provide more specific information for
7 congressional decision-making, and it will also
8 assist in documenting senior nutritional needs for
9 inclusion in collaborative efforts at both the
10 federal and state levels. The interest in senior
11 nutrition is definitely growing, as well as the
12 impact of nutrition on their health status, and the
13 CSFP needs to be an integral part of that. We
14 can't do that if we're being reduced and put out of
15 business.

16 Again, I appreciate the opportunity to

17 provide comments on these senior nutrition safety
18 net programs. I would urge you to contact me with
19 any follow-up questions that you may have. Thank
20 you very much.

21 MS. FERRIS: Thank you. Joy.

22 MS. REHFELD: Good morning. Thank you for
23 this opportunity to speak today. My name is Joy
24 Rehfeld and this is Kwasi Sarpona. And we are here
25 today from Worcester Community Action Council. We,

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1 too, are a recipient the USDA Food Stamp outreach
2 grant, we'd like to thank you for that funding.

3 Our grant also targets specific
4 populations: The immigrants and the working
5 families. However, we have been targeting -- we
6 have been outreaching to every population, because
7 the need is so great. And I just want to comment
8 on some of the outcomes that we have had and some
9 recommendations.

10 So far, from April until up until
11 yesterday, we have submitted over 450 Food Stamp
12 applications to the Worcester DTA. And during the
13 process of working on the grant, we have partnered
14 with eight of our agencies within the city who are

15 also working on Food Stamp application assistance,
16 and together we partnered with DTA -- the Worcester
17 DTA -- to work on developing new systems to ensure
18 that more clients are improved -- are approved for
19 the benefits, because there's a lot of ways people
20 fall between the cracks getting into the
21 verifications.

22 One issue that constantly arises with the
23 outreach happens to do with the immigrant
24 population, and the five-year rule. And Kwasi is
25 here today to speak a little bit about that.

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1 MR. SARPONA: Thank you very much. My
2 name is Kwasi Sarpona. We have a big immigrant
3 group in the Worcester area. And they just
4 migrated like a year or two -- a lot of kids, and
5 they don't qualify. The school system, they have
6 been complaining of cognitive deficit. They said
7 the kids are not doing good, and now we very much
8 can say and most immigrants think that getting Food
9 Stamps, they will become public charge. So, this
10 is a big fear of deportation.

11 We recommend that if the USDA can partner

12 with the WIC program, because you refer them to
13 WIC, they go and get it. So, if they can get this
14 program at the WIC centers, that will be very easy,
15 because there are a lot of kids and we have infant
16 mortality issue. A lot of pregnant women. They
17 are hungry. We visited their home. Nothing to
18 eat. But they fear deportation. And they come in
19 from what are difficult areas where there's no
20 food, and they come to America, and they hope to
21 get food. And there are too many regulations and
22 they cannot get food. But we thank you for your
23 generosity of including the immigrant community.
24 Thank you. Joy.

25 MS. REHFELD: Thank you, Kwasi. One thing

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1 I would like to say is we need -- the Food Stamp
2 program really needs to be increased in funding,
3 not decreased, and more outreach needs to be done.
4 So, if we could get more funding to go towards
5 outreach, because there's many people out there who
6 lack education or any kind of information on the
7 Food Stamp program. Thank you so much for this
8 opportunity to speak today.

9 MS. FERRIS: Thank you. Before Karen

10 comes forward, I'd like to call down the next four
11 speakers so that they're ready. Commissioner
12 Nicholas, Ed Sanders Be, Renee Richardson, and Jeff
13 Toscano.

14 MS. MURPHY: Good morning, ladies and
15 gentlemen. My name is Karen Murphy. I am the
16 marketing and communication specialist for
17 Mantrose-Haeuser Co., Inc., located in Westport,
18 Connecticut. Mantrose jointly developed and
19 patented with the USDA the first Nature Seal
20 formulation to extend the shelflife of fresh-cut
21 apples. Nature Seal is vitamin/mineral blend that
22 maintains the taste, texture, and color of sliced
23 produce for up to 28 days. You may be familiar
24 with the Apple Dipper and the fruit and walnut
25 salad products that are now offered at McDonalds.

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1 That is our technology that's made this possible,
2 and we've since developed a wide variety of
3 fresh-cut technologies for fruits and vegetables,
4 including organics.

5 I'm here today on behalf of the United
6 Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Association and all of our

7 school children nationwide to urge you to expand
8 the Fruit & Vegetable Snack program to all 50
9 states and to double the funding for the DOD Fresh
10 program for schools on the 2000 Farm Bill.

11 Since the development of Nature Seal, I've
12 been involved with schools across the country in
13 trying to help provide more nutritious meals
14 containing less fat and sugar to students, while at
15 the same time, offering them products they'll
16 actually want to consume. Mantrose has provided
17 Nature Seal for two major independent studies
18 concerning the consumption rate of sliced verses
19 whole apples amongst the school children.

20 One was conducted by C.A. Walker &
21 Associates in the Sarasota, Florida school system,
22 and the other one was conducted by the University
23 of Las Vegas in the Clark County, Nevada school
24 system. The results of both of these studies
25 indicated that children will overwhelmingly consume

1 -- I'm sorry -- choose, but more importantly
2 consume, a slice of pieced fruits when given the
3 option. The consumption rate increased between 62
4 and 80 percent when sliced apples were offered.

5 Through my work with the school food
6 service personnel over the past six years, I've
7 also learned how incredibly tight the budgets for
8 meals are. Time and time again, I've heard from
9 school food service directors that they know
10 students will consume more fruits and vegetables
11 when they're offered sliced. However, they menu
12 sliced produce less frequently than they would like
13 or not at all simply because they can't afford it.

14 The fact that I found most shocking was
15 that many school systems across the nation, aside
16 from having federal nutritional guidelines to
17 follow, actually carry the additional burden of
18 having to turn a profit.

19 This is -- in essence, we are profiting at
20 the expense of our own children's health. This is
21 a tragedy. However, we have the power to change
22 it. With the expansion of the Fruit & Vegetable
23 Snack program and increased funding to the DOD
24 Fresh program, we can make positive strides towards
25 reversing a national health epidemic, and in turn,

1 creating a healthier life for our children. We

2 already know that the Fruit & Vegetable Snack
3 program is a success. Not only are the students
4 eating the produce offered through this program,
5 they are actually spending less money in vending
6 machines that offer soda and junk food.

7 It is vitally important that we make fresh
8 fruits and vegetables available to as many school
9 children as possible. Childhood obesity has
10 reached epidemic proportions. According to former
11 secretary of Health & Human Services Tommy
12 Thompson, "Obesity is the fastest-growing disease
13 in America."

14 Dr. William Klisch, the head of pediatrics
15 at Baylor College of Medicine in Texas, has stated
16 that children today will have a shorter life than
17 their parents for the first time in 100 years, due
18 to the epidemic of obesity.

19 These are extremely alarming statements.
20 We're talking about our children's future. And we
21 need to do whatever it is in our power to reverse
22 this trend.

23 From 1979 to 1999, annual hospital costs
24 for treating obesity-related diseases in children
25 rose from 35 million to \$127 million. Overweight

1 or obese children and adults add as much as \$93
2 billion a year to US medical bills.

3 We need to take a good, hard look at the
4 issues at hand today and the far-reaching effects
5 they have on the future. We must provide our
6 children with the right foods at an early age to
7 ensure that they develop healthy eating habits.

8 I implore you to consider expanding the
9 Fruit & Vegetable Snack program to all 50 states,
10 and to double the funding for the DOD Fresh program
11 in schools as part of the 2007 Farm Bill.

12 And just as a side note, I did find out
13 yesterday that an additional six schools have been
14 added -- officially added -- to the Fruit &
15 Vegetable Snack program, one of which is
16 Connecticut. Thank you very, very much, and we
17 will continue to work together to see that they all
18 get this access. Thank you.

19 MS. FERRIS: Thank you. Commissioner
20 Nicholas.

21 COMMISSIONER NICHOLAS: Kate, Mary Ann,
22 and Jessica, it's great to be here. Great to see
23 you again. Before I start, my name is Jack
24 Nicholas, Commissioner, Department of Health and
25 Human Services. I did want to recognize -- put her

1 on the spot -- Barbara van Bergel, my acting
2 director of the Office of Integrated Access and
3 Support. Mary Ann knows Barb very well, who is
4 just a tremendous supporter of the Food Stamp
5 program and other programs that we administer that
6 help the most neediest in the State of Maine.

7 So, I do want to thank you for the
8 opportunity to speak today. I think it's very
9 important and very critical, obviously, for a rural
10 state -- some of the changes that are being
11 proposed.

12 During the implementation of the 2002 Farm
13 Bill which provided states the opportunity to
14 employ multiple positive options, Maine was in the
15 middle of designing and implementing an integrated
16 client eligibility system, which included Food
17 Stamps. It was quite a challenge. And it still
18 remains to be a bit of a challenge.

19 We were unable to take full advantage of
20 the changes until deep into federal fiscal year
21 2004. This inability to take advantage of these
22 choices resulted in Maine having nearly the highest
23 error rate in the nation -- though today I'm

24 pleased to announce and to report that we have
25 reduced that error rate by 41 percent through a

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1 very energetic, concerted effort and through the
2 leadership of Barb. Maine has also received
3 several awards that we're very proud of for
4 customer service, most improved, program access. I
5 think probably, and, again, a tribute to Barb. 94
6 percent of potential Food Stamps eligibles receive
7 Food Stamp benefits in Maine.

8 We are proud of the work that our staff
9 does in community agencies. Partnership and
10 collaboration is very important for our agency, and
11 that is how we collectively assist the citizens
12 that are the most needy in Maine.

13 Access to Food Stamps in a rural
14 northeastern state such as Maine is essential for
15 families to meet their nutrition needs, healthy
16 eating habits, and general well-being. Maine
17 supports the goals of the Farm Bill of improving
18 program access, targeting those in need, ensuring
19 adequate benefits, supporting where promoting
20 healthy eating and improving federal/state

21 partnerships.

22 However, Maine would like to suggest the
23 following recommendations that we feel really
24 supports that collaborative effort in fulfilling
25 those goals: Continue bonus awards when states

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1 increase access and accuracy, which really provides
2 an incentive to provide the best service for our
3 citizens; raise the resource limit from 2,000 to
4 5,000 so individuals and families have assets to
5 fall back out in emergency situations; raise the
6 minimum Food Stamp allotment for the elderly and
7 disabled from \$10 to \$50. We've heard, I think,
8 25, suggestion, 40. But certainly \$10 is totally
9 inadequate.

10 Allow the purchase of vitamins and food
11 supplements for Food Stamps -- with Food Stamps.
12 We think that that's -- that's really important in
13 providing full opportunities; increase the monthly
14 stipend in the child care allowance for employment
15 and training support for Food Stamp recipients.
16 Continue simplifying complex rules, and aligning
17 policies with other means-tested programs, and
18 continue current categorical eligibility options.

19 I've provided you with my testimony, and
20 with that -- which would take much longer, but is a
21 real detailed explanation of all these proposals.
22 Again, I want to really sincerely thank you for the
23 opportunity to speak today on behalf of our state
24 and really trying to continue what we think is a --
25 is a great federal/state partnership. Thank you.

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1 MS. FERRIS: Thank you. The state
2 commissioner Ed Sanders Be.

3 COMMISSIONER SANDERS BE: Thank you.
4 Thank you, Mary Ann, and I see a lot of members of
5 the regional staff. I'd like to thank them for all
6 of the help that they provide us over the years.
7 I'd like to acknowledge three of my staff people:
8 Fu Kal, the director of the Food Stamp program,
9 Mary Ann Marshall, and Lauren Arms, without their
10 expertise we would not be as successful as we've
11 been in recent years.

12 Deputy Undersecretary, Deputy
13 Administrator, welcome to the Commonwealth of
14 Massachusetts.

15 MS. SHAHIN: Thank you.

16 COMMISSIONER SANDERS BE: We saw you
17 yesterday, of course. We're very happy to see you
18 because you came to town with money for us, and we
19 like that very much. How appropriate to host one
20 of the national public hearings on reauthorization
21 of the food bill -- the Farm Bill, rather, here in
22 Boston, and especially in this historically
23 significant public facility, the Boston Public
24 Library, being the first publicly-supported
25 municipal libraries in the United States. This

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1 facility has fed the minds of the public, including
2 many national leaders, for over 155 years. This,
3 of course, is an annex. The actual library is next
4 door, and I would urge you to take a look at it.
5 It's just a wonderful place if you have time later
6 today.

7 On behalf of my commissioner, John Wagner,
8 I want to thank you for inviting us here today to
9 give testimony. John could not be here. He is
10 nursing a very nasty head cold, and it's my honor
11 to stand in for him and to read the testimony that
12 he intended to present to you today.

13 Massachusetts is committed to ensuring the

14 nutritional health of all residents. Currently,
15 Massachusetts has the largest emergency food
16 purchasing program in the nation, with a budget of
17 \$6.4 million in this current fiscal year. We have
18 also consistently led the nation in food security
19 for several years. The Food Stamp program is a
20 critical tool in ensuring good nutrition. For over
21 the past two years we have focused on increasing
22 access to and participation in the program as our
23 primary goal. Three years ago at this time our
24 caseload stood at approximately 115,000 households.
25 Today, our latest figures show a caseload of almost

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1 200,000. This is an increase of approximately 70
2 percent.

3 We are also dedicated to high standards of
4 professionalism in the administration of the Food
5 Stamp program. We have maintained an outstandingly
6 lower error rate that is well below the national
7 average. I am especially proud of our timely case
8 processing rate for which we were recently awarded
9 a bonus. That occurred yesterday -- for the second
10 year in a row. So, the experience of Massachusetts

11 is that the state has been able to dramatically
12 increase access to the program, while maintaining
13 high standards in administration, even decreasing
14 our error rate. This is something many states see
15 as a trade-off to increasing participation. We did
16 not see it as a trade-off, and we've been able to
17 prove that.

18 Many of the provisions of the Farm Bill
19 2002 helped to enable us to attain these noteworthy
20 statistics. For example, the ability to implement
21 the standard deduction for income determination and
22 the changes in eligibility and benefit
23 determination, such as the mandated standard
24 utility deduction, the homeless shelter utility
25 expense deduction, and child support payment as

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1 income exclusion -- exclusion option.

2 These provisions have all had the effect
3 of increasing participation and benefit levels. In
4 addition, semiannual reporting has reduced
5 administrative burdens. But more importantly, has
6 facilitated the reporting process for our working
7 poor.

8 Transitional Food Stamp benefits for

9 households exiting welfare whereby benefits are
10 maintained at the same level for months post
11 receipt of cash assistance has been instrumental in
12 supporting households who otherwise may have
13 thought they were ineligible -- excuse me --
14 ineligible for such benefits, and this provision
15 has helped to encourage employment, the cornerstone
16 of welfare reform.

17 The restoration of federal benefits for
18 disabled legal immigrants and legal immigrant
19 children certainly ensures that those most
20 vulnerable among us are not hungry, do not go
21 hungry from day to day. We have also benefitted
22 from enhanced funding that has enabled us to
23 partner with other agencies to increase
24 participation, as well as make Food Stamp
25 applications available online. We strongly

1 recommend that these provisions of the 2002 Farm
2 Bill be preserved as we move forward with Farm Bill
3 2007.

4 Today we continue to look for innovative
5 ways to increase participation, while streamlining

6 administrative costs and maintaining our high
7 standards of service and delivery, timely, accurate
8 benefits to all families in need. We believe that
9 the standardization of medical deductions is a step
10 in that direction. Our experience with standard --
11 standardizing deductions clearly indicates that
12 there is a substantial administrative benefit to
13 this uniformity of policy and procedure. But a
14 much more compelling reason exists for this
15 standardization: To relieve the complicated
16 verification process for our households with
17 elderly and disabled recipients.

18 Analysis of our caseload indicates that
19 only a fraction of households with elderly or
20 disabled members actually take advantage of this
21 deduction. Additionally, anecdotal evidence from
22 our caseworkers show that, in many instances, the
23 households that would benefit the most from this
24 deduction -- that is, with the highest
25 out-of-pocket medical expenses -- are also the ones

1 most unable to gather and submit verifications.

2 We believe that a standard deduction -- a
3 standard medical deduction should be applied to the

4 benefit calculations for all elderly or disabled
5 households so that all may benefit from this
6 provision.

7 On another note, our recent experience
8 with the pilot program leads us to believe there is
9 a relationship between benefit levels and
10 participation. Working with the Social Security
11 Administration -- our colleagues at the regional
12 office, also, of course -- we have launched our
13 highly successful combined application project
14 referred to as CAP. In the first phase of CAP, we
15 reached out to approximately 29,000 individuals.
16 80 percent of these had been known to the Food
17 Stamp program before, but chose not to participate,
18 perhaps due to a lower benefit level.

19 When they were offered the higher benefit
20 under CAP, most chose to participate. As a result,
21 over 22,000 are now enrolled in the Food Stamp
22 program through the CAP. Our experience would
23 suggest that a study be conducted to determine if
24 it is feasible to increase the minimum benefit
25 amount as a means of providing increased incentive

1 for households at this level to participate.

2 Finally, evidence suggests that the
3 prescriptive rules for administering the work
4 requirement of three-month time limit for the ABOD
5 application may be a deterrent to their actual
6 participation. Massachusetts Department of
7 Transitional Assistance is dedicated to encouraging
8 and enabling self-efficiency for all --
9 self-sufficiency for all. However, we believe that
10 there may be other, more efficient means to achieve
11 this goal.

12 We recommend that there be a review of the
13 existing ABOD work requirements and time limits,
14 and that states such as Massachusetts, which has a
15 progressive employment and training program with
16 many initiatives that encourage work, be allowed to
17 flexibly -- be allowed to flexibly implement a
18 state-designed work program that is consistent with
19 our TANF program. Some of our recommendations, for
20 example, would be to allow ABODs a 60-day work or
21 job search at the point of initial application, and
22 allow the activity of job search to meet the work
23 requirement.

24 As you know, the Food Stamp program is an
25 important benefit in conjunction with the cash

1 benefits we receive under the TANF block grants.
2 States should be given the maximum amount of
3 flexibility to ensure these programs are working
4 together.

5 Let me end by acknowledging some recent
6 reports coming out of Washington calling for the
7 potential elimination of the categorical
8 eligibility provision under PRWORA. As you are
9 aware, under this provision, states have been
10 allowed to simplify the eligibility process by
11 relaxing certain Food Stamp financial rules for
12 families receiving a TANF-funded benefit.
13 Elimination of such a provision could have a
14 devastating impact on potentially thousands of
15 Massachusetts families.

16 We recommend that this option be included
17 under the reauthorization of the Farm Bill so it
18 can be preserved as a means to provide more working
19 families access to food and nourishment. The
20 Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of
21 Transitional Assistance looks forward to continuing
22 our successful relationship with our federal
23 partners in the northeast regional office and our
24 leadership role in Food Stamp outreach error

25 prevention and timeliness. We're confident that

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1 the provisions of the Farm Bill -- Farm Bill
2 2007 -- will provide the states both the means and
3 the support to complete the mission we all have:
4 To end hunger in this country. Thank you very
5 much.

6 MS. FERRIS: Thank you, Ed. Renee.

7 MS. RICHARDSON: Hello. My name is Renee
8 Richardson. I'm the food and nutrition program
9 chief for the State of Vermont. And like some
10 other folks, I've had an opportunity in a couple of
11 other venues to be able to provide comments and
12 feedback on what we think the Farm Bill options
13 should be in the upcoming 2007.

14 I think that one of the things I can say,
15 without any qualms at all, is "ditto" to everything
16 that the people have gone before me have said,
17 because I haven't heard anything yet that I
18 wouldn't support. And so, what I'm going to do is
19 essentially go through kind of a laundry list of
20 policy items -- very quickly -- without a lot of
21 elaboration, just to say these are some of the
22 points that I would like to emphasize coming from

23 Vermont.

24 The first thing is simplification.

25 Simplify. Simplify. Simplify. The more we can

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1 simplify the program and create more standardized
2 rules, the more cost savings we'll have so we will
3 be able to afford to perhaps increase benefits or
4 whatever.

5 I'm just going to go through my list. One
6 thing that I would like to see is to allow a full
7 alignment of the program with the state's TANF
8 Medicaid programs. Full alignment. In particular,
9 to be able to treat earned income in some earned
10 income categories the same way. For example, in
11 Vermont, we're having a lot of difficulty right now
12 without being able to -- to exclude the adoption
13 subsidy payments for families who are adopting
14 special needs children. I know that there are some
15 states in the midwest who have demonstration
16 waivers to exclude that subsidy, but we have folks
17 who are adopting children who have a lot of need
18 who really need to have that money, and they're
19 having to go off Food Stamps or whatever and not be

20 able to -- to support their family.

21 We would like to see the ABOD specific
22 work requirements eliminated. We'd like to see
23 ABODs mainstreamed in the Food Stamp program.
24 Often these folks are the least employable that we
25 see coming through our doors. They have a lot of

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1 employment barriers, but they may not be
2 documentable employment barriers. We have a lot of
3 young, single males who may not have a high school
4 diploma, who may have some history in the
5 correctional system. And so, some of these folks
6 are really just at need, and they need to be
7 allowed to get Food Stamps.

8 At least I would like to say ABODs be
9 allowed to continue on Food Stamps beyond three
10 months and be required to participate in some type
11 of work activity while they're receiving Food
12 Stamps, but not to be cut off at three months.

13 I'd also like to see the labor surplus
14 area waiver rule changed. I'm struggling right now
15 with trying to look at labor surplus areas in
16 Vermont, and the posting for the Department of
17 Labor is not up to date. Our -- our waiver expired

18 September 30th, and the posting online is not up to
19 date, and it's well beyond September 30th.
20 So, what I'd like to see, if -- if we need
21 to continue with ABODs, I would like to see us be
22 able to opt into taking the labor surplus area
23 waiver by letting FNS know that we are going to
24 waive those areas that have been posted by the
25 Department of Labor without having to go through

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1 the waiver approval process. So, let it become an
2 option rather than a waiver to the rule.

3 I'd like to see uniform standards for the
4 standard utility allowance based on regional cost
5 of fuel. You know the regional costs in the
6 northeast would be a lot different than the
7 regional cost in the southwest for fuel. I think
8 it would be easier to simplify the calculation for
9 states. Each state has a very convoluted
10 methodology for determining standard utility
11 allowances, and I think it would -- you know, that
12 simplification would save a lot of money.

13 I would also like to see the elimination
14 of the shelter cap -- especially in this time of

15 high fuel prices -- for nonelderly and disabled
16 households. Granted, that might not make them
17 eligible for more Food Stamp dollars if they're at
18 the maximum level for their household, but it may
19 make other people -- they may be able to get more
20 benefits. And whatever they're not spending on
21 food, they might be able to put into their gas
22 tanks or into their oil tanks.

23 At a minimum, I would like to have states
24 be allowed to forecast their standard utility
25 allowances rather than looking at a retrospective

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1 budget for fuel oil and gas and propane and
2 whatnot.

3 I'd like to echo what I've heard from
4 other people. I'd like to see the categorical
5 eligibility expansion maintained. In Vermont, we
6 actually allow state recipients of the earned
7 income tax credit to be categorically eligible for
8 Food Stamps. I would like to see this expanded to
9 include folks who receive the state and federal
10 DITCs nationally, WIC benefits, Medicaid, etcetera.
11 Any means-tested program I would like to see as an
12 expansion to categorical eligibility for Food

13 Stamps. That would get more needy people more
14 opportunity to have food money.

15 I'd also like to echo using a standard
16 medical expense deduction. I gave 30 seconds, so
17 I'll race it through here with no elaboration.
18 This is both a quality control situation and a
19 program access situation. So, a standardized
20 medical expense deduction.

21 At a minimum, I'd like to see 18-year-old
22 children be eligible for Food Stamps if they're
23 legal immigrants, and I'm talking about those who
24 are under 18; they're eligible, then they hit 18,
25 and they hit that wall, and they have to be in the

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1 country for another few years before they're
2 eligible again. I'd like to see the food allotment
3 space for moderate or low-cost food plan; increase
4 the minimum benefit to at least \$25; do away with
5 inactivating benefits on an EBT card that are older
6 than three months; allow outreach partners to
7 conduct face-to-face interviews and attest to their
8 -- the validity and accuracy of the information,
9 continue the bonus system, but require the 80

10 percent of the state's bonus be returned to the
11 Food Stamp program, rather than to be absorbed into
12 the general fund.

13 And last but not least, rename this
14 program. Base it on the EBT acronym, Eat Better
15 Today. Thank you.

16 MS. FERRIS: We've had a very growing list
17 of people who are interested in speaking. So, to
18 ensure that everyone has an opportunity to make
19 their comments, I'd like the rest of the speakers
20 to limit their comments to four minutes. Got that,
21 John?

22 MR. MAGNORELLI: Yes.

23 MS. FERRIS: Before Jeff comes forward,
24 I'd like to read four more names so they're ready.
25 Robert Haigh, Helen Mont-Ferguson, Andrew

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1 Morehouse, and Ben Marxer.

2 Jeff.

3 MR. TOSCANO: Good morning. Thank you.

4 My name is Jeff Toscano. I represent the
5 Massachusetts Association of Stable Owners
6 Operators & Instructors. This is going to go off
7 in a little different direction than the previous

8 speakers. I'd like to talk about unattended
9 consequences in recycling.
10 Specifically, I want to talk about house
11 Bill 503 that prohibits the slaughter of horses for
12 human consumption. We do not advocate human
13 consumption for horses. However, that does take
14 some 50 million tons of food out of the food chain
15 that goes overseas -- really not a concern of ours,
16 but what is our concern is there's 100,000 horses
17 that go to these slaughter houses every year. The
18 bill does not provide any information or resources
19 of where those horses are going to go.

20 Now, the Bureau of Land Management sends
21 maybe 10 to 15,000 horses and burros a year into
22 that stream. However, a significant portion of
23 those animals are our concern, our worry. We don't
24 know what's going to happen to those. Are they
25 going to be neglected? Are they going to be

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1 abandoned, and in most cases, buried illegally?
2 For those of us within the 495 belt where
3 there's small parcels of land and people have
4 septic systems and wells, there's not an awful lot

5 of land to bury those animals. So, we're very
6 concerned, and we'd like to see -- somebody, some
7 national organization take some direction here and
8 provide a resource to these backyard owners of
9 horses -- what they -- how can they dispose of
10 those animals humanely? That's a real concern of
11 ours.

12 That's the unintended -- unintended
13 consequence of that particular bill. As we
14 understand it, that bill has passed both chambers,
15 the house and senate and is sitting on the
16 president's desk waiting for signatures.

17 The vast majority of those horses have
18 debilitating injuries, and we're really worried
19 about the quality of life of those horses if they
20 haven't got the facilities to humanely euthanase
21 those animals. So, we're very concerned about
22 that.

23 Also, we'd like to talk about recycling if
24 we could. We'd like to encourage the USDA to
25 further policies that advance the recycling of

1 organic residuals as soil amendments, fertilizers
2 and -- for energy production. Recycling local and

3 regional wild solids and organic residuals is a
4 win/win situation. It helps society safely manage
5 these materials, while improving farm and other
6 soils with recycled organic matter and nutrients,
7 all the while saving energy and resources.

8 Here again, because of the urban sprawl,
9 we have a real concern about proper manure
10 management. With the wetlands issues and drinking
11 wells, it's becoming a greater and greater concern
12 for the State of Massachusetts and for most of New
13 England, as we understand it. That's all. I just
14 want to apologize for my casual attire. This is
15 our first time at one of these venues, but we
16 thought since we had the opportunity to voice these
17 concerns, we wanted to. And we have a ton of
18 information, if that's needed. So thank you very
19 much.

20 MS. FERRIS: Thank you. And since some of
21 the people speaking may -- speaking now may have
22 come in after we began, I just want to mention
23 again if you do have written comments, if you could
24 provide them or leave them at the registration
25 desk, it would just help us ensure that we get all

1 your comments accurately. Robert.

2 MR. HAIGH: I'm Robert Haigh, president of
3 Mass. Association of Stable Owners Operators &
4 Instructors. Again, the only thing I want to add
5 to Jeff's comments is we hear about starving people
6 here in the United States. There's also neighbors
7 throughout the world which are the biggest users of
8 horse meat and we want to stop production of meat
9 for those people, also? Where's the common sense
10 here? There's people starving here. There's
11 people starving there. Do we want to stop the food
12 chain to those cultures that like to eat horse
13 meat? Meat seems to be a bad word here this
14 morning. It's all fruit and vegetables. But we
15 all eat meat, also. So, let's not stop the
16 mainstream of horse meat to foreign countries. I
17 think it's very, very important. Thank you for
18 allowing me to speak.

19 MS. FERRIS: Thank you. Helen.

20 MS. MONT-FERGUSON: Hi. Good morning.
21 Thanks for this opportunity. My name's Helen
22 Mont-Ferguson. I'm director of food and nutrition
23 services for the City of Boston Public Schools.
24 We're a 75 percent needy school district, and maybe
25 I'm speaking on behalf of some of the larger school

1 districts in the country. I have pretty much three
2 points that I'd like to address:
3 No. 1, it's now passe, but I am really
4 happy with the new dietary guidelines that came out
5 earlier in the spring. The education that's now
6 going on surrounding the dietary guidelines and the
7 mypyramid.gov and the new kid site are really
8 important, and certainly the children and the
9 adults -- the parents are now tying into, Okay. We
10 need to change to whole grains; we need to eat more
11 fresh fruits and vegetables, and that's great.

12 School districts I believe around the
13 country have always tied into following dietary
14 guidelines, and we're no different. We've always
15 offered as many fresh fruits and vegetables as we
16 can. But one of the things sometimes I think USDA
17 fails to realize is that not all schools are the
18 same.

19 In our particular district, we have a
20 central kitchen, and we have full-service schools
21 that can make meals right there on site. However,
22 in our central kitchen, we service about 80
23 schools, and 24 of those schools have classroom

24 feeding situations. Rick Harris spoke earlier
25 about Boston piloting their Fun Fruits. And in

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1 fact, 2 1/2 years ago we worked very closely with
2 Sunkist to try to develop cut orange sections,
3 because it was very discouraging as I would go
4 around to schools, especially these satellite
5 programs, and see children take whole fruit and
6 throw them away.

7 So, I had contacted them, asked them to
8 come in and say, What can we do to get children to
9 eat, you know, these oranges? We knew in our
10 full-service schools when the managers cut the
11 fruit up, the kids consumed them. However, we were
12 seeing a lot thrown in the barrel.

13 So, they did come. We piloted it. The
14 kids loved it. It was a real success. What we're
15 finding now is the difficulty in the cost of
16 getting these Fun Fruits or other packaged fruits.
17 One of the things I know that's helpful is, again,
18 the McDonalds and other fast food chains now
19 bringing in fresh fruits, whether it's the bagged
20 apples that were referred to earlier, or even in
21 the case of Wendy's, the mandarin oranges. Kids

22 are attracted to packaging. And I challenge USDA
23 as I've gone to the summer conferences, not only
24 should you try to make or work out relationships
25 with the fresh fruit manufacturers, but we notice

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1 that even some of the dried fruits that you offer,
2 when they're packaged, kids will take them, because
3 that's the day and age that we're living in. Kids
4 are really, I think, impressed by kid-friendly
5 attractive packaging, and I think adults are, too.

6 Let's see what else I have here. I
7 mentioned the cost. When we were working with
8 Sunkist, we did try originally when we were
9 piloting the program or testing the program, and
10 this year our department of education has made
11 available some of our entitlement dollars. We're
12 going to use about \$52,000 to pilot the Fun Fruit.
13 But for us what that means is ten times on the
14 menu. It's not very much. So, what I would again
15 like USDA to look at when we're talking about 40
16 cents, approximately, for half cup of a fresh
17 packaged fruit, and that comes to -- if not equal
18 to -- maybe a little bit more than our protein

19 center-of-the-plate item. I know that you're
20 working with departments of education and you're
21 looking at the surveys that the school districts
22 across the country submit, but see again how we can
23 adjust the budget or, working through the DOD, make
24 more funds available to school districts to, again,
25 meet those dietary guidelines. Thank you.

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1 MS. FERRIS: Thank you, Andrew.

2 MR. MOREHOUSE: Good morning. And thank
3 you very much for hosting this event. Before I
4 start, I just want to preface it by saying that I'm
5 relatively new to the food security and antihunger
6 movement. I spent the last decade in the community
7 development corporation movement promoting key
8 economic development, but I wanted to say that
9 because I've learned a tremendous amount just by
10 being here today and hearing all of the other
11 speakers.

12 In any event, my name is Andrew Morehouse,
13 and I'm the executive director of the Food Bank of
14 Western Massachusetts. I'm glad to represent
15 western Mass. And we distribute over 6 million
16 pounds of food to approximately 400 partner

17 programs, including soup kitchens, pantries, meal
18 sites, shelters, and youth and elder programs.
19 Throughout our well-established network, we serve
20 approximately 100,000 people who are either food
21 insecure or who go hungry on any given day.

22 The poverty rate in western Massachusetts
23 is 12.4 percent, about the same as the national
24 poverty rate. This means that 102,000 people live
25 below the poverty threshold. 292,000 are food

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1 insecure, and 29,000 are food insecure with hunger,
2 based on the respective USDA national rates that
3 are very helpful.

4 In some cities, such as Holyoke, the child
5 poverty rate is as high as 42 percent -- where I
6 spent the last decade working. The need is great,
7 and it is growing. Poverty is on the rise in
8 western Massachusetts and across our country.
9 People are hurting. As you know, the national
10 poverty rate has increased every year for the
11 fourth straight year from 2001 to 2004. The
12 poverty rate in Massachusetts shadows the national
13 rate, although there was a modest dip in the 2003

14 to 2004 period. With the hurricane disasters down
15 in the south, rising energy, food, housing,
16 insurance, and other costs, it is fair to say that
17 poverty, too, will continue to rise in 2005 once
18 that's documented, and into the foreseeable future.

19 We rely heavily on TFB as a source of food
20 commodities to distribute to our partner programs.
21 We and the three other food banks in Massachusetts,
22 as was acknowledged earlier by our gorilla, Greater
23 Boston Food Bank, we use these USDA commodities
24 with modest operating funds from USDA on an
25 allocation method using the poverty and

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1 unemployment rates in our respective -- respective
2 service areas. In my humble opinion, one of the
3 greatest policy challenges that these programs face
4 and all federal programs that serve the poor for
5 that matter, is the use of the federal poverty
6 threshold and the definition of the unemployment
7 rate as the basis for allocating federal money to
8 states and regions within them -- the 60/40 rule.

9 We all know that the federal poverty
10 threshold does not account for the cost of living
11 in specific states and regions. Massachusetts is a

12 high state cost -- a high cost state. The federal
13 poverty rate in Massachusetts does not capture tens
14 of thousands of working poor who could not qualify
15 for these and other federal programs, but who
16 cannot make ends meet on a minimum wage job in the
17 Commonwealth, even at the state minimum wage rate,
18 much less the national. Why can't USDA use income
19 thresholds that reflect regional and state costs of
20 living such as the HUD MSA income guidelines?
21 Similarly, the unemployment rate is an
22 unreliable barometer of real joblessness for two
23 main reasons: One, it does not include individuals
24 who are involuntarily unemployed but who have given
25 up actively looking for unemployment -- or

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1 employment through official channels because they
2 cannot obtain a job that will meet their family's
3 needs.
4 Two, individuals who have worked as little
5 as one hour in the last month are considered
6 employed. In both cases, there's a staggering
7 number of people who are jobless and who cannot
8 meet basic family needs such as food, shelter,

9 transportation, health insurance, and child care.

10 They are cutting corners in an attempt to
11 survive. They're not eating healthy. They're
12 being forced to give up their apartments and homes.
13 They are going into debt. They are stressed out.
14 They are taking it out on their children, spouses,
15 neighbors. They are engaging in recidivism out of
16 despair. They have lost hope.

17 Communities across western Massachusetts,
18 the Commonwealth, and this nation are in crisis.
19 TFB is essential to our mission of reducing hunger.
20 Funding for this platform must be increased to keep
21 up with rising demand. We are witnessing 100 plus
22 participation in our programs.

23 In addition to USDA commodities that we
24 distribute for free, we also sell donated food that
25 we receive from the private sector. Many of our

1 partner programs are finding it difficult to
2 purchase this food, especially in this season,
3 which we sell at 18 cents a pound, consistent with
4 the standards of the national food bank network,
5 America's Second Harvest.

6 With regard to the Food Stamp program,

7 which I am much less familiar with, significant
8 efforts have been made in the Commonwealth to
9 streamline this program and increase enrollment,
10 even though my understanding is Massachusetts lags
11 behind other states in Food Stamp enrollment. I
12 would humbly recommend that the Food Stamp
13 application process be available statewide,
14 nationwide online, and that it be integrated into
15 other entitlement electronic application processes
16 like the Massachusetts Real Benefits.

17 Moreover, additional funds must be
18 invested to train local and regional state and
19 nonprofit agencies to use these technologies to
20 boost enrollment. I am aware that what I am
21 proposing would require an increase in funding for
22 these programs simply to keep up with the pace of
23 rising demands for assistance. You ask us how
24 might we offset the cost of a proposed increase,
25 given the realities of budget constraints? My

1 answer is that we must think out of the box, as
2 everyone always says. What is constraining the TFB
3 Food Stamp and program budgets are federal

4 expenditures in other areas that do not invest in
5 the health education and the well-being of our
6 society. Studies from the Minnesota Federal
7 Reserve Bank clearly demonstrate that investment in
8 programs that benefit children at early ages -- and
9 what programs are more central to children than
10 those that guarantee children a nutritious diet --
11 yield high public and private returns in terms of a
12 more educated work force, reduce health costs and
13 reduce crime. Thank you very much.

14 MS. FERRIS: Thank you. Before the next
15 speaker, I'd like four more people to come forward.
16 Paul Klutes, Georgia Mattison, Hannah Freedberg,
17 and Paul Fleming. Is Ben ready?

18 MR. MARXER: Good morning. My name is Ben
19 Marxer. I'm here, and I'm just observing. I'm not
20 in any expertise or any mode of expertise like a
21 lot of you people. The reason I'm making my
22 comments is basically I think that what we are
23 looking at with the USDA and the national
24 government is a problem in addressing hunger in
25 this country.

2 viewpoint of a major consolidation in this country,
3 that consolidation is in food, as well as in the
4 economy. My observation seems to focus more in
5 regards to how that can be met on a regional basis
6 rather than on a national level.

7 We seem to be adopting a lot of criteria
8 from the standpoint of how paperwork is originated
9 and ended. If we are to end this viewpoint and
10 make it fundamentally efficient, what needs to be
11 done is to make these criteria of statistics and
12 standards that are to be met at the regional level,
13 rather than the local level. Now, what does this
14 mean as far as the federal government goes? Well,
15 if it means that the federal government is to
16 become involved in a more efficient manner, they
17 would rely on the sources of a regional directorate
18 rather than a national directorate.

19 It means also that the ability to come and
20 meet a farm productivity program that would
21 supplement and nourish a program, it would be more
22 useful to do that at a regional concept in
23 recognition with the communities being involved.

24 I don't know if I'm being very clear about
25 it, but these are comments that I'm working at from

1 just off the top of my head. So, that's the only
2 thing I have to say in regards to what I'm saying.
3 Thank you.

4 MS. FERRIS: Thank you. Paul.

5 MR. KLUTES: Good afternoon, and thanks
6 for having me. Thanks for creating this forum. My
7 name is Paul Klutes. I'm with Welch Foods,
8 Incorporated, senior product manager and within my
9 field of activities at Welch's includes our
10 burgeoning new business in fresh produce.

11 Many may not know it, Welch's is also --
12 Welch's is a cooperative. We are a wholly-owned
13 subsidiary of National Grape Cooperative, and a 130
14 years old, representing 1,400 growers across the
15 country.

16 So, when you're owned by farmers, your
17 interest in ag issues is quite pronounced. We are
18 also members of the Produce For Better Health
19 Foundation. I personally serve on the executive
20 committee. And we are members of United Fresh
21 Fruit & Vegetable Association as well. So, on
22 behalf -- kind of speaking on behalf of all of the
23 above in my efforts here, too.

24 We have a strong interest in delivering
25 better quality food and particularly produce in

1 our, you know, sales efforts. In fact, we at
2 Welch's -- it's been interesting to hear what some
3 of the other industry partners have been doing
4 here, too, in terms of delivering new technologies
5 and new methods of delivering food to new
6 consumption occasions and new venues.

7 We at Welch's over the past three years
8 have been involved in a similar effort to deliver
9 new technology for Welch's single-serve fresh
10 grapes so people can consume fresh produce and more
11 consumption venues and consumption occasions.

12 So, we think, based on what we've heard
13 today, that the industry is doing quite a bit to
14 move the needle in driving environmental change.
15 We also think there's a very unique role for
16 government to play a part, particularly in driving
17 environmental change and particularly in relation
18 to driving more fruit and vegetable consumption
19 occasions for children.

20 With that in mind, we would like to
21 strongly encourage expansion of the USDA school
22 fruit and vegetable programs. I want to commend

23 the recent decision to expand that funding to six
24 new states, but believe strongly that it ought to
25 be expanded to all 50. We know that kids today get

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1 about 50 percent of the fruit and vegetable
2 consumption occasions on a daily basis that they
3 ought to get. That's woefully inadequate. This
4 program's been proven to boost consumption. And we
5 know that increased consumption of fruits and
6 vegetables is a remedy to problems like childhood
7 obesity, and a preventative measure against chronic
8 diseases like adult onset Type 2 diabetes. So, we
9 think that's a very strong positive move that we'd
10 like to see adopted.

11 We'd also like to throw our support behind
12 the DOD Fresh program for schools, 'cause both are
13 -- we think are targeted in precisely the right
14 direction. Finally, kind of more holistically on
15 behalf of the produce industry, I'd like to just
16 note that in the scope of the total Farm Bill, the
17 amount of funding that's devoted to fruits and
18 vegetables is a virtual rounding error. It's pixie
19 dust. And we're not seeking subsidies like some of
20 our other ag brothers might be, but we are looking

21 for common sense changes that would include looking
22 at mandating changes and procurement on all
23 federally-funded feeding programs to reflect the
24 new '05 dietary guidelines, which we think are very
25 -- are an excellent start in the right direction.

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1 So, that is -- that pretty much sums up my
2 comments for the day. And again, thank you for
3 creating this forum.

4 MS. FERRIS: Thank you. Georgia.

5 MS. MATTISON: My testimony will be very
6 short. My name is Georgia Mattison, and I am the
7 project coordinator at the Poor People's United
8 Fund, and we raise money for shelters and pantries
9 and advocacy groups, and we work with -- among
10 other groups, we work with an advocacy group called
11 Survivors, Inc., which has advocates in the Boston
12 and Brockton welfare Food Stamp offices to assist
13 people with applications.

14 So, we -- we hear an awful lot of access
15 issues around Food Stamps that are going on, and I
16 have written testimony with -- with a lot of
17 recommendations on access in Massachusetts for Food

18 Stamps. And I actually was not going to testify
19 today. I was going to save you from me, except,
20 unfortunately, yesterday I read in the newspaper
21 that the -- Massachusetts had gotten over a million
22 dollars for reducing the error rate, and I would
23 like to recommend that -- in all of my years of
24 working with food programs since the early '70s,
25 that I feel that FNS, the USDA has focused more on

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1 reducing the error rate in applications rather than
2 the access rate, that I know that FNS is doing an
3 access review in Massachusetts, and I really
4 applaud that. I think that that needs to be
5 something that you need to emphasize more, given
6 the -- the number of people that need Food Stamps.

7 Our advocates working, say, even in the
8 Grove Hall office in Roxbury, are working with the
9 fact that the people's cars get towed that are
10 coming to apply for Food Stamps. So, there's a lot
11 of access issues that -- that need to be looked at.
12 And I would just like to appreciate the opportunity
13 to testify. Thank you.

14 MS. FERRIS: Thank you. Hannah.

15 MS. FREEDBERG: Hello. Thanks for this

16 opportunity. My name is Hannah Freedberg. I'm the
17 outreach director for the Federation of
18 Massachusetts Farmers' Markets, and we're an
19 organization that's dedicated to using farmers'
20 markets as a tool to revitalize local agriculture,
21 improve consumer nutrition, and strengthen the
22 connection between consumers and producers here in
23 Massachusetts.

24 My comments today are concerned with our
25 second goal, which is improved consumer nutrition,

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1 and we're specifically interested in ways to
2 reinvigorate the use of Food Stamps at farmers'
3 markets.

4 As probably most of the folks here know,
5 prior to Food Stamps transition to the EBT system,
6 it was fairly simple and convenient for Food Stamp
7 recipients to use their paper stamps at market.
8 They effectively worked at cash. Now the majority
9 of farmers' markets do not have the infrastructure
10 to run wired EBT terminals, nor do most of them
11 have the funds to purchase the wireless terminals
12 which hovered around a thousand dollars apiece to

13 accept Food Stamp cards without electricity and
14 phone lines on hand.

15 Why is this goal important to me when the
16 same fruits and vegetables are often available to
17 Food Stamp recipients at grocery stores? For two
18 reasons: First, allowing Food Stamp recipients to
19 access their benefits at farmers' markets increases
20 their choices about what and how to eat. My
21 organization is dedicated to ensuring that people
22 from all income levels have access to the health
23 and taste benefits of farmers' market products. If
24 Food Stamps can't be used at farmers' markets, Food
25 Stamp recipients are effectively denied access to

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1 an excellent source of fresh, locally-grown
2 produce.

3 Secondly, reinvigorating the use of Food
4 Stamps at farmers' markets will have two positive
5 effects: Not only will it increase Food Stamp
6 expenditures on fruits and vegetables specifically
7 and improve consumer nutrition, but it will
8 simultaneously provide needed income for another of
9 our countries more challenged groups, small family
10 farmers.

11 So, what changes would I hope that the FNS
12 can catalyze in order to reinvigorate Food Stamp
13 use at market? To the extent that it's possible, I
14 would hope that funds could be made available for
15 the purchase of wireless EBT readers at farmers'
16 markets, especially at markets in neighborhoods
17 where demographic indicate large numbers of
18 families or individuals using Food Stamps.

19 Funds could also be made available to
20 support greater national and state promotion of and
21 importantly outreach for the Food Stamp program so
22 that recipients can be aware that they can get
23 these Food Stamps, and then choose to use them at
24 farmers' markets once that program is in place.

25 There are currently privately-funded

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1 initiatives in place working on both of these
2 things. An example of them that's pretty exciting
3 is happening two cities over in Somerville, Mass.
4 There is a project funded by the Robert Wood
5 Johnson Foundation called "The Healthy Eating By
6 Design Program" and in Somerville that's taking the
7 shape of lower barriers to farmers' market access

8 and the purchase of and promotion and use of a
9 wireless EBT terminal to redeem Food Stamps is a
10 really central piece of that program.

11 However, those are very small initiatives,
12 you know, trying to span 50 states. So, in my
13 view, a really much broader scope of change is
14 necessary if we're going to be able to take
15 advantage of the full potential of the Food Stamp
16 program to encourage healthy eating for all
17 Americans and to make farmers' markets a part of
18 that. Thank you.

19 MS. FERRIS: Thank you. I'd like four
20 more people to come down to be ready before the
21 next speaker. Philip Wachsler, Andy Finton, Inger
22 Hustrulid -- I'm not sure if I got that right, but
23 -- Diane Lambert. Michael.

24 Michael Fleming?

25 MR. FLEMING: I'm sorry. I thought I

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1 heard you say Paul Fleming before.

2 MS. FERRIS: I might have.

3 MR. FLEMING: My name is Michael Fleming.

4 I'm here today representing the Department of

5 Conservation and Recreation, Bureau of Forest Fire

6 Control and Forestry. And unlike others, not
7 speaking about food and nutrition, but speaking
8 about the forestry title in the Farm Bill.

9 Just a few statistics: Massachusetts has
10 3 million acres of forest land. Of the 3 million
11 acres, 60 percent of the total land in
12 Massachusetts is owned by private forest land
13 owners that represents 285,000 of these private
14 forest land owners. 69 percent of that total
15 forest area is owned by these land owners. In
16 comparison the nation as a whole -- the private
17 forest land owners represent 42 percent.

18 The Farm Bill is critical to the forest
19 and forestry in Massachusetts. There should be a
20 separate forestry title in the Farm Bill that
21 addresses forest issues, forestry, and forestry
22 programs.

23 There is a continued need for the federal
24 government to recognize the contributions that the
25 forest provides to the nation. These contributions

1 include: Clean air, carbon sequestration, clean
2 water -- clean water is provided by forest land

3 owners for two-thirds of the public drinking water
4 supply in our nation; wildlife and endangered
5 species, a multitude of forest products, including
6 timber, which represents -- which is the second
7 largest -- excuse me -- agriculture crop, second
8 only by corn in the country in our quality of life.

9 The bureau strongly endorses the following
10 three areas: Continued long-term protection and
11 conservation of forest land held in private
12 ownership; provide assistance to private forest
13 land owners for a multitude of forest benefits and
14 ensure that forest health, water quality, wildlife,
15 and endangered species and forest cover are
16 maintained on private forest lands.

17 In order to accomplish our national
18 environmental and natural resource goals,
19 sufficient financial resources must be allocated to
20 serve the present and future generations. Thank
21 you for this opportunity to speak on the Farm Bill.

22 MS. FERRIS: Thank you. Philip.

23 MR. WACHSLER: Hi. My name is Philip
24 Wachslar. I am an officer in the Service Employees
25 International union Local 509, the Department of

1 Transitional in Massachusetts, State Social Workers
2 Union and representing Food Stamp workers at the
3 Department of Transitional Assistance.

4 The Farm Bill has helped both my workers
5 and their clients. However, one situation I've
6 heard from my members that greatly disturbs me is
7 of elderly clients who are try to -- who come in
8 and apply for Food Stamps, living off RSDI, Social
9 Security, and assets -- their investments through
10 dividends or interest -- and because of the asset
11 limit, are forced to either spend down the assets,
12 or to cut their -- their nutritional intake.

13 Conversely, in Massachusetts, the families
14 with incomes of less than 200 percent poverty
15 limit, their assets are not considered due to the
16 waiver -- the categorical eligibility. Please
17 remove the asset limit for the elderly so that they
18 can -- so that they can increase the participation
19 by this -- by this population. Thank you.

20 MS. FERRIS: Thank you. Andy.

21 MR. FINTON: Thank you for this
22 opportunity to provide input to the Farm Bill. My
23 name is Andy Finton. I represent the Nature
24 Conservancy. I'm the director of science for the
25 Massachusetts chapter of the conservancy. Our

1 organization has over a million members nationwide
2 and chapters in every state, and our mission is to
3 preserve the plants, animals, and natural
4 communities that represent the diversity of life on
5 earth and the lands and waters they need to
6 survive.

7 This morning -- or now this afternoon -- I
8 want to mention just a couple of things: One, the
9 importance of forests in Massachusetts, the
10 benefits they provide to Massachusetts citizens,
11 and how the Farm Bill can help in maintaining these
12 values. As a previous speaker, Mike Fleming,
13 mentioned, the bulk of Massachusetts forests are
14 held by private forest land owners. And at the
15 same time as our population is increasing, we are
16 losing over 40 acres per day of forest agriculture
17 lands and other open space.

18 So, how can the Farm Bill help to
19 ameliorate these issues? First of all, maintaining
20 habitat friendly agricultural and forestry and
21 increasing funding available for programs to assist
22 private forest land owners and establish long-term
23 easements will go a long way. As part of this, as
24 Mike earlier mentioned, as in 2002, there should be

25 a forestry title within the Farm Bill.

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1 The net goals of this will be to decrease
2 habitat conversion and increase habitat
3 conservation. Revisions to the 2007 Farm Bill
4 should eliminate the sentence, "encourage
5 conversion or intensify production on
6 ecologically-sensitive lands," and also, revisions
7 should strengthen conservation programs to
8 encourage conversion back to native habitat and
9 discourage conversion to more intensified uses such
10 as development.

11 The Farm Bill should address invasive
12 species threats associated with agricultural and
13 forest lands by amending the Plant Protection Act
14 to bolster federal capabilities of preventing the
15 introduction of plants and pests that cause harm to
16 both our natural environment and to agricultural
17 and forestry-based economies.

18 Promoting improved water quality would be
19 another benefit in relation to the flow regimes
20 impacted by agriculture and forest management.
21 Increasing incentive for adaptive management of

22 native species would include cost shares for
23 management of land under USDA agreements and
24 easements related to mimicking natural disturbances
25 and controlling invasive species. And finally, a

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1 monitoring program for evaluation are key to
2 demonstrating the improvement in public benefits
3 that these programs provide, requiring
4 ecologically-based measures tied to the purpose of
5 conservation programs would show the benefit of
6 these programs.

7 Again, thank you for your time and
8 allowing these comments.

9 MS. FERRIS: Thank you. Inger.

10 MS. HUSTRULID: Hello. My name is Inger
11 Hastrulid, and I am a registered dietician and the
12 founder of Foundations Family Nutrition. And I am
13 representing the common -- on behalf of the
14 American Dietetic Association today. The public
15 needs an uncompromising commitment from their
16 government to advance nutrition knowledge and to
17 help people apply that knowledge to maintain and
18 improve their health. Millions of Americans
19 benefit from USDA food assistance programs, but we

20 still see hunger in the US. Coexisting with hunger
21 is a national epidemic of overweight and obesity.
22 In fact, overweight and obesity is the
23 largest manifestation of malnutrition in the United
24 States today. The next Farm Bill needs to address
25 four key areas: One, USDA's food assistance

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1 program must be available to those in need and
2 adequately funded. Two, improving the nutritional
3 status of Americans needs to rise in priority and
4 food assistance programs, other food programs, and
5 truly for all Americans. Three, increased
6 investment in nutrition education and nutrition
7 research is necessary, and it must be sustained.

8 Four, having up-to-date knowledge of the
9 nutrition composition of the food supply is
10 essential for all work in food, nutrition, and
11 health to bear fruit.

12 If we expect consumers to take personal
13 responsibility for making healthy choices, then we
14 have a responsibility to make sure that they are
15 adopted -- adequately prepared. The government
16 must invest in nutrition research and nutrition

17 education necessary to give Americans the knowledge
18 and ability to make their own nutrition decisions.
19 These nutrition recommendations and
20 programs for the public must be based on sound
21 science. Only the federal government has the
22 public mandate and resources to carry out research
23 and human nutrition needs and to develop dietary
24 guidance that forms the basis for all federal
25 nutrition programs. We believe federal research

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1 exploring the relationship between diet --
2 particularly dietary patterns -- and health is
3 particularly important. Thank you.

4 MS. FERRIS: Thank you. Before Diane
5 comes up, I'd ask the last three speakers to be
6 ready. Kathleen Gorman, Deb Lundgren, and Sofia
7 Perez. And I thank everyone for the patience.
8 It's been tough getting everybody in without a
9 break.

10 MS. LAMBERT: Thank you for allowing me to
11 testify at this hearing. My name is Diane Lambert,
12 and I'm here as an individual to testify in regards
13 to suggested changes to the Food Stamp program. I
14 live and work in the northeast corner of

15 Connecticut. Very recently there was a joint
16 report released by the Connecticut Food Policy
17 Council, the University of Connecticut, and the
18 Hartford Food System assessing food security in
19 Connecticut towns.

20 I attached a map in regards to that which
21 shows the State of Connecticut -- I don't know if
22 you could see from where you're at -- the red
23 indicates the lowest food security area. This is
24 the northeast corner. Almost all of it is in red,
25 though I don't need a map. I see it every day in

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1 my work as a social worker, distributing food.

2 The good news is that when Food Stamps are
3 given out at adequate levels, they primarily work
4 well. People in need are able to purchase the
5 types of food they want to eat, and are able to
6 purchase special needs foods and
7 culturally-designated foods to a limited extent.

8 The card system also allows them to
9 purchase foods with dignity, as other Americans are
10 able to do. However, there are some large gaps
11 that need to be filled. It is beyond me, as well

12 as the many, many single clients I see who are
13 often on disability for a variety of reasons and
14 having an income of \$500, \$600, \$700 a month, but
15 only getting \$10 a month in Food Stamps.

16 I suppose they could buy a gallon of milk
17 and a loaf of bread and a large jar of peanut
18 butter to eat with this, but how long would that
19 last, and how difficult would that be if it was the
20 only thing they had to eat for a month? So, of
21 course, they have to come to the food pantries to
22 survive. And even if someone is able to go to all
23 four food pantries which are in our area, the most
24 they're going to get is 12 days of food.

25 So, if you add that to the \$10 that they

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1 get in Food Stamps, it's still completely
2 inadequate to meet their food needs.

3 So, many clients mark their calendars and
4 come at the first day they're eligible again,
5 because they're so desperate to get food again.
6 And I wish I was exaggerating this, but I'm really
7 not. And often we have these people, as well as
8 others who have no transportation, and they're
9 walking to the food pantries and walking all over

10 towns -- and we're in a large rural area. There
11 are a lot of people who can't even get to the food
12 pantries, so they really are relying on Food
13 Stamps.

14 And many of these people are sick or
15 elderly or mentally ill, and they are walking
16 across town to get a food bag to then walk across
17 town again in all kinds of weather, and adequate
18 levels of Food Stamps could, of course, help
19 eliminate that.

20 I wish I could also get a nickel for every
21 person who whispered in my ear, red-faced, could I
22 please also give them a roll of toilet paper, and
23 they're anxiously awaiting my answer. I would be a
24 very rich woman accumulating all these nickels.
25 These clients need to request this, because of

1 course, with Food Stamps, they can't purchase the
2 toilet paper, the soap, the shampoo, the diapers,
3 the sanitary pads, other basic essentials that they
4 need. I know I would have a difficult time asking
5 someone to give me a roll of toilet paper. I'm
6 sure other people would too, and that's what we've

7 reduced poor people to in this country. And I
8 think we can do better.
9 At the beginning of the year is always
10 interesting. I have the elderly and the disabled
11 tell me the very small cost of living increase they
12 get with their Social Security, and I dutifully
13 record it. And then they tell me, because of this
14 very modest additional fund, their public housing
15 rent has increased and their Food Stamps have gone
16 down, which virtually wipes out their very small
17 cost of living increase.

18 So, I just want to add then there are also
19 the working people getting minimum wage or a little
20 above it, getting inadequate or even no Food
21 Stamps. They are struggling to pay these basic
22 bills as well, and have no money left for food.
23 And it's sadly ironic to see all the working people
24 who come in -- many of them working in supermarkets
25 or other places selling food -- who cannot purchase

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1 the food there. They have to come to the food
2 pantries, because they're getting inadequate
3 amounts of Food Stamps or none at all.

4 So, my recommendations are: Increase the

5 minimum amount that is given out to single people.
6 They need to get substantially more than \$10; allow
7 for nonfood essentials to be purchased, such as
8 toilet paper, soap, laundry soap, diapers and other
9 personal need items -- restrictions could be placed
10 to limit the allowable items; allowing Social
11 Security cost of living increases without it
12 affecting the level of Food Stamps given --
13 restrictions not to penalize for Food Stamps for
14 small increases in a working person's income.
15 I have many people who -- they work, if
16 they work a little bit more, then their Food Stamps
17 are reduced. It's unfair. We're penalizing people
18 for working. Increasing the amounts of overall
19 Food Stamps given and broaden the income and asset
20 limits to qualify. We who work -- and I would also
21 add, if you could greatly increase TFB, it's
22 wonderful, but we need more food to give out.
23 We're all running around like squirrels trying to
24 get enough food to give out to all the clients that
25 come to us. So, it's a great help, but we do need

1 a lot -- a great deal more. And in a country as

2 rich as ours, I think we can do better. There's no
3 excuse for not being able to give out adequate food
4 to people in this country. It really should be a
5 right. So, thank you.

6 MS. FERRIS: Thank you. Kathleen.

7 MS. GORMAN: Good afternoon. My name is
8 Kathleen Gorman. And I'm the director of the
9 Feinstein Center for a Hunger-Free America at the
10 University of Rhode Island.

11 The center is an academic center, and we
12 focus on addressing the causes and consequences of
13 hunger and food insecurity through education,
14 research and policy-related outreach. As a
15 researcher and a faculty member, I have spent the
16 last 20 years studying the effects of malnutrition
17 and undernutrition on children's health, cognitive,
18 and social development.

19 As part of our work, we continue to
20 investigate the negative effects of food insecurity
21 on children's well-being, and we really appreciate
22 this opportunity to provide input on one of the
23 most important and successful assistance programs,
24 the Food Stamp program. I might also add that I
25 manage the Rhode Island state Food Stamp outreach

1 project for the state. So, I am very familiar with
2 both the strengths and the weaknesses of the
3 existing program.

4 Currently, the Food Stamp program is the
5 most critical line of defense for families
6 experiencing hunger and food insecurity. As such,
7 we feel it is extremely important that the program
8 needs to be -- excuse me -- reinforced, rather than
9 dismantled.

10 Being an entitlement program assures that
11 all people who are eligible can receive assistance,
12 and we think that's a real positive. Further, by
13 providing resources specifically for food, we are
14 really directly addressing issues of hunger and
15 food insecurity. Research has shown that families
16 on Food Stamps spend more money on food and are
17 able to purchase better quality food. These are
18 important results that are directly linked to the
19 Food Stamp program.

20 I'm just going to make a few
21 recommendations. I'd like to say that I concur
22 with most of what everyone else has said, so I'll
23 try not to be representative. I would like to
24 emphasize that I think the benefit level should be
25 raised. A lot of people have talked about the \$10

1 benefit. But really there are many families and
2 the elderly who really need more than that. And
3 so, I think that the bottom line is that could
4 benefit from an increase.

5 In terms of eligibility, I think one of
6 the issues is federal programs all have different
7 eligibility levels and a more uniform eligibility
8 that coincides across the board with school lunch,
9 school breakfast, and WIC programs, for example,
10 would be very helpful. And while I know that
11 raising the federal poverty level standard would
12 definitely increase the numbers of eligible, it
13 would also decrease the administrative costs of
14 managing so many different programs for the states,
15 and I think that a more streamline process would
16 result in a more efficient system and better
17 outcomes for the participants.

18 In terms of administrative costs, I think
19 that -- I know that the portion that the state pays
20 has been decreasing. We'd like to see that
21 stabilized. But more importantly, in Rhode Island,
22 our data management system is outdated, and we
23 really would like to see the federal government

24 provide some assistance for technological upgrades.

25 I think that an investment by the federal

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1 government as recommended by APHSA to support
2 states to improve their administrative systems
3 would be a very important investment, and it would
4 really contribute to quality control concerns that
5 we see in many states.

6 In terms of deductions, in Rhode Island,
7 access to a car is essential in moving towards
8 gainful employment. USDA has reaffirmed its
9 understanding of the need for reliable
10 transportation when the certain cars were removed
11 from the resource test. Car insurance is both a
12 necessity and a heavy financial burden for
13 low-income workers who need transportation to get
14 to work. We'd like to say a portion of the cost of
15 car insurance as a deduction in the Food Stamp
16 benefit calculation. That would benefit many
17 households.

18 Resources, as others have noted, that the
19 \$2,000 resource limit does not really reflect true
20 expenses many families face when having to provide

21 shelter, transportation, child care, and health
22 care. Even basic monthly costs in many parts of
23 the country exceed \$2,000. Furthermore, the gross
24 monthly income guidelines exceed \$2,000 for some
25 households, making the resource test even more

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1 effective. So, we'd like to see that raised.

2 We definitely would like to see continued
3 support for Food Stamp outreach efforts through the
4 distribution of outreach materials, coordination of
5 media campaigns, and state matching grants. That's
6 going to be really essential to improve the
7 participation rates, and I know that we've been
8 asked finally to comment on where these funds are
9 supposed to come from -- all these recommendations.

10 And while I understand the need to ask that
11 question, I think the real important question is,
12 what is the cost of not doing this? We never
13 calculate the cost of not feeding children and of
14 looking at the long-term cost of children who have
15 been undernourished for long periods of time.

16 So, if we start asking that question, I
17 think the costs involved in these investments, as I
18 see them, is minimal relative to the cost of not

19 doing so. Thank you very much for your attention

20 and allowing us to participate.

21 MS. FERRIS: Thank you. Deb.

22 MS. LUNDGREN: Good morning. My name is

23 Deb Lundgren. I'm here today not only as a food

24 consumer, I'm also proud to say that I'm a food

25 producer. My husband, four children, and I operate

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1 a grain farm in North Dakota. I would like to

2 quickly share three thoughts from a prospective of

3 the producer.

4 First, before food gets to the table, it

5 must get to the store, and before it gets to the

6 store, it must leave the farm. Today I represent

7 this essential first and important link in the

8 American food chain -- a food chain that is, in

9 fact, not linear, but circular. Consumers depend

10 on us, and we depend on consumers. To benefit us

11 both, we must actively participate in the

12 discussions of each other's concerns.

13 We must recognize, celebrate, and build

14 upon our interdependence. Second, programs that we

15 are discussing today must insist upon the use of

16 US-grown food products. American family farm
17 agriculture is consistently held to the highest
18 standards in the world. These standards have
19 resulted in domestic production that is extremely
20 efficient, providing abundant, nutritious, and most
21 importantly, safe foods that all consumers demand
22 and that are essential to the growth, health, and
23 well-being of all citizens.

24 Finally, incredible as it seems, producers
25 are increasingly becoming a population in need of

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1 some of the services we've discussed. To say it as
2 simply as I can, family farmers are receiving Food
3 Stamps to help them buy what they produce. Let me
4 repeat that: Family farmers are receiving Food
5 Stamps to help them buy what they produce.

6 This should be unacceptable to all food
7 stakeholders, which includes everyone here, since
8 we all eat. To visualize the importance of
9 farmers, invert a pyramid -- a shape that we're all
10 fairly familiar with. That single point at the
11 bottom would represent the less than 2 percent of
12 Americans that participate in production
13 agriculture -- those upon whom everyone else

14 depends. We must assure family farm viability and
15 sustainability.

16 In conclusion, I believe that the most
17 important role of the USDA is to create and
18 maintain safety nets for both producers and
19 consumers. We are all in this together. We are
20 both nothing without each other. And we must join
21 forces -- both consumers and producers -- to grow
22 and distribute our resources to the benefit of us
23 all. Thank you.

24 MS. FERRIS: Thank you. Sofia, thank you
25 for patiently waiting. You're the last speaker.

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1 MS. PEREZ: I'm Sofia Figuara Perez. I
2 work at the Hispanic Council. The council --
3 Hispanic Council is nonprofit organization. It
4 started in Hartford, Connecticut. We are located
5 in inner city Hartford, and we've been there -- the
6 council has been there for 25 -- the last 25 years
7 serving the community -- the surrounding community
8 -- and as you know, Hartford is the second city of
9 its size that has a high percentage of child
10 poverty. 40 percent of the population is Latino,

11 and another 40 percent is black. So, we have a lot
12 -- East Hartford has a lot of poverty.
13 As a council, we are recipients of the one
14 year grant -- food grant, which thank you very much
15 -- our city has been very helpful to meet the needs
16 of a lot of low-income -- of a lot of our clients.

17 What I want to say is that through these
18 grant experience that I have had is I have seen a
19 lot of needs among the people that go there --
20 mainly among the immigrants that come here to the
21 United States. I think we are being able to serve
22 them for those that have children born here, I
23 think one of our biggest issues has been being able
24 to serve them to help them to apply for Food
25 Stamps, being able to find them. So, that's one of

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1 the strengths I think that the program has. But I
2 have seen a lot of need that is -- like, for
3 example, we have a lot of our clients are homeless.
4 And I have seen a lot of homeless young men -- 20,
5 21-year homeless men that are not in drugs. They
6 just don't have a job. They -- as you know, many
7 of the population that's -- 60 percent I think
8 doesn't go -- doesn't have -- doesn't complete high

9 school -- of the Latino population.

10 So, I have seen the struggle to find a job
11 and a struggle to get Food Stamps. So, sometimes
12 even if it should be -- and everything -- sometimes
13 they have -- there are some situation in which they
14 find difficult to -- to find all the papers that
15 they need in order to get it.

16 I think it should be -- it should be given
17 more support of helping those young people to also
18 find a job or find an easier way to get that help.

19 Another population that I have seen at the
20 immigrants that are legal immigrants. We do a lot
21 of presentations where we go and we say, You are
22 illegal, and you can come up to the five years, but
23 once when they come, is -- they feel a lot of --
24 they still feel a lot of fears about how that these
25 will be -- affect them in the future, and that

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1 something -- they actually in a lot of need. I
2 mean, they need the Food Stamps to be able to eat
3 well to get working, to get thriving, and these are
4 some of the cases that we have.

5 But in general, I think for the -- for all

6 people, I have seen that -- I see people that is
7 very -- working poor people that are not eligible
8 because the income is a little bit over it. And in
9 my opinion I think it should be -- I don't know --
10 all their expenses that they have should be taken
11 in account. Like heating is a big problem. They
12 spend a lot of money in other things. So, even --
13 it seems a little bit higher or over, for me, I
14 think it should be increase only some, which other
15 expenses should be accounted, so, to be more
16 supportive, because it's very important to provide
17 the Food Stamps to have a nutritious meal, and many
18 of our clients will tell you, Well, I would buy
19 more fruits and vegetable if I have enough money.

20 So, we have also a program there we
21 provide the kitchen to the client to -- I supervise
22 the staff for both programs, and they -- the
23 activities, and I think it's very nice to see how
24 both things can work together in terms of we are
25 giving the nutrition in the kitchen, and we can

1 also tell them to apply for Food Stamps --
2 different staffs, but we can refer them and
3 everything. But still I think it needs to be

4 probably give a little bit more of the eligibility
5 to increase to be able to get more working poor
6 and more low income. Thank you very much for the
7 grant. Again -- just thank you.

8 MS. FERRIS: Thank you.

9 MS. COLER: We just barely made it. I
10 want to thank everybody who stayed for the duration
11 and listened to all of the comments. I really do
12 appreciate it. Heard a lot of interesting and new
13 suggestions, but also heard some common themes that
14 we've heard at forums in other places around the
15 country. And so, that reinforcement is very good.

16 I want to thank those who traveled any
17 amount of distance -- but I also know that North
18 Dakota and Nebraska was represented here. I want
19 to make a special thanks for those folks who
20 traveled a great distance.

21 One thing I did hear a number of times is
22 about the need or sometimes the predicament that a
23 person may be in choosing medicine versus food, and
24 I just want to make you all aware, if you don't
25 know already, the new Medicare prescription drug

1 benefit will be available to seniors starting
2 January, and sign up for that program is actually
3 going to start November 15th. You may have seen a
4 number of TV commercials. Medicaid and Medicare
5 are jointly doing a number of outreach promotions
6 and TV ads, but then all of those sponsors that
7 have been approved as private plans also have some
8 commercials going. You may have seen Carol
9 Burnette.

10 But one of the barriers we're seeing in
11 trying to enroll seniors in this program -- and
12 they're just not sure if that's for real, because
13 it is a new benefit, and I think for a lot of
14 people -- especially the low-income seniors -- it's
15 going to provide a lot of assistance in their
16 prescription drugs.

17 So, especially for those of you that are
18 out in the communities what you can do to help
19 share that message and even those of you that may
20 have a family member, it's not just for low income.
21 It's for all Medicare or Medicaid -- I'm sorry --
22 Medicare participants. It's something for families
23 to look into, and there's actually going to be a
24 national day of family discussion the day after
25 Thanksgiving to try to raise awareness about this

1 and get families involved.

2 So, just wanted to make that comment,
3 because it is -- it has been an issue for a lot of
4 seniors that they do face tough choices, and we
5 really are trying to -- to remove that from them
6 and make sure that there's access to food and
7 medicine.

8 Again, just want to say thank you so much
9 for all of the comments. It reinforces to me that
10 we do have just fantastic and dedicated partners in
11 administering these programs to make them work, and
12 appreciate your time. Also just want to say I am
13 going to follow-up on the question about Web site
14 and make sure that there is a link. FNS does have
15 our own link, but I'll check on the USDA main page,
16 make sure that there's not any barrier for
17 questions outside of those six questions that have
18 been the focus of the commodity title. And there's
19 been an effort in those forums to try to steer some
20 of the dialog to specific questions, but I'll
21 definitely double-check and make sure that there
22 aren't any glitches on our Web site. All right.
23 Thank you very much. Appreciate it.

24 MS. FERRIS: I just wanted to point out

25 that within about three weeks there should be a

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1 summary of this session on our Web site, too.

2 Thank you.

3 (Whereupon the hearing adjourned at

4 12:49 p.m.)

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