



TRANSCRIPT

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**FARM BILL NUTRITION FORUM
Detroit, Michigan - October 18, 2005**

12 PRESENT:

13 OLLICE C. HOLDEN

14 USDA Food and Nutrition Service

15

16 KATE COLER

17 USDA Food Nutrition and Consumer Services

18

19 JESSICA SHAHIN

20 USDA Food and Nutrition Service

21

22 STEVE CHRISTENSEN

23 Deputy Nutrition Programs

24

25 Before Laurel A. Frogner, RMR, CRR, CSR-2495

1 Detroit, Michigan

2 October 18, 2005

3 About 9:00 a.m.

4 MR. HOLDEN: Good morning. It seems

5 that everybody is here that is able to get here early.

6 One of the comments I made to Augie in the back was we

7 have two kinds of weather, we have winter and we have

8 construction, and I understand construction is going on

9 heavily here in Detroit, and that might account for

10 some of the late arrivals, major accident, okay.

11 But what we're going to do is move

12 ahead, and I will start by saying the word welcome, and

13 you know you are. You're welcome to our Farm Bill

14 Nutritional Forum. You will have an opportunity while

15 you're here today to give us some insight into what you

16 might have as a person working on the ground, ideas

17 that will help our programs work more effectively

18 together. We have a very distinguished panel up here

19 of people who are actually the ones who are responsible

20 for those programs that you will be speaking of and

21 will be your representative in assuring that the
22 messages that you bring today to us are shared and
23 considered in the process of reauthorization.

24 To my right is Steve Christensen.

25 He's the deputy administrator for the Special

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1 Nutritions Programs, Steve to my right.

2 Next to Steve is Kate Coler. She is
3 the deputy to the Under Secretary for Food and Consumer
4 Services, and, of course, she has additional expertise
5 in the fact that she was the deputy administrator for
6 Food Stamps Program and was effectively involved in the
7 implementation of the last Farm Bill reauthorization.

8 And to my right, further to the
9 extreme right is Jessica Shahin, who is now the deputy
10 administrator for the Food Stamp Program.

11 So what you have in front of you
12 here are those who are intimately involved with the
13 implementation of the programs and are definitely
14 interested in what you have to say. We all are. And

15 as a consequence, we have you here assembled today.

16 But before we get under way, I'd
17 like to invite Augie Fernandes from Gleaners Food Bank
18 to come up and give you the Detroit welcome.

19 AUGIE FERNANDES: Morning, everyone.
20 Thank you so much for being here and thanking everyone
21 that is to participate here and bring you such great
22 knowledge and such great passion for who we are. I'd
23 like to welcome you to the great state of Michigan, and
24 it is a great state, and to Southeast Michigan, which
25 is a region of much compassion, it's a region of much

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1 giving, but it's also a region of much poverty, as we
2 all know, and welcome to the great City of Detroit, the
3 home of the 2006 Super Bowl. Sadly, we will not be
4 playing in it.

5 But I kind of just wanted to set a
6 stage for all of my colleagues and those who join me as
7 allies in this war against poverty and in this battle
8 of hunger, and I want to set the stage by talking about

9 not programs and not policies and not procedures but
10 about people, and I want to talk about the people we
11 serve, and I want to talk about the importance of your
12 programs and the continued support that the USDA has
13 given to our missions, and our mission is truly
14 nourishing our communities by feeding hungry and needy
15 people.

16 I want to talk about our future and
17 the future of this great nation and this great state,
18 and that future lies with our children. And when I get
19 into our city here and I visit with our children in
20 Detroit and other areas in this region and I look into
21 their eyes, I see greatness. I see what we're all
22 looking for and we all want in this great nation. I
23 see leaders, I see scientists, I see the cure for
24 cancer, I see the next great surgeon, and I see the
25 next great president of the United States, but I also

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1 know when I look in their eyes that it'll be
2 extinguished because of poverty. Katrina did one thing

3 for all of us, and the high winds blew the mask off of
4 the face of poverty, and wasn't it something how
5 everybody was just astounded about what we see every
6 day. Wasn't it amazing that those who had their head
7 in the sand for so long have finally taken it out and
8 said, oh, my gosh, there are impoverished people living
9 in hunger and despair.

10 Your programs make it possible for
11 us to bring so much to our communities. We can nourish
12 our future by nourishing our children in so many of the
13 great programs that you bring to us. When I see that
14 some of the programs that nourish our community is
15 being watched and looked at as a way of saving money, I
16 say this is not the time, now more than ever, we don't
17 talk of cuts, but we talk of increases. We talk about
18 more food, because we're a nation of plenty, we're a
19 nation of great farmers, we're a nation of agriculture,
20 and we need to sustain those programs. We thank you
21 for all those programs.

22 And as I speak of our future, I also
23 speak of our past, because when you serve our community
24 here, you realize that over 50 percent of who you
25 serve, actually 59 percent of who you serve are either

1 the children, our future, or the seniors, our past,
2 those seniors who built this great state, those seniors
3 who toiled in the factory, those seniors who worked the
4 fields, and those seniors who today are on fixed
5 incomes and are facing the expense of living, those
6 same seniors who are right now as we see redevelopment
7 and redesign of many of our industry, who are going to
8 be suffering because there will be changes in their
9 retirements and so forth.

10 So I want to welcome you to a great,
11 great region of the State of Michigan, and I want to
12 say thank you so much for all you do, and I want you to
13 hear the people that know a heck of a lot more than I
14 do of all of this, and they will be here, and I want to
15 thank you very much for everything.

16 And I leave with one thing. In my
17 office and, also, in the Under Secretary's office now
18 there is a platter that says that agriculture and
19 manufacturers are the foundation of our independence.

20 It doesn't say the foundation of our economy, it's the
21 foundation of our independence. Help us stay free,
22 help us stay independent. And thank you.

23 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you. Okay. Here
24 is how we will operate. This is the modus operandi
25 today. Each of you have been given some context in

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1 which to look at the programs. I'm sure that you have
2 comments that could go longer than the time that we're
3 allotting, and as a consequence, this is how we're
4 going to operate. Oral presentations we're going to
5 try to hold to four minutes so that everyone gets an
6 opportunity to get before us. Your full comments can
7 be provided through your written documentation. You
8 can either give it to us at the end of the session or
9 during the session, any of the representatives. In
10 addition, you have until November 1st to send them, if
11 you would like to send them to us, and we'll give you
12 an address later.

13 Another housekeeping item will be if

14 you need to find the rooms, the restrooms, they're out
15 of the door, across the way, and to the right.

16 The next thing that I'll tell you is
17 that at around 10:15 we'll take a 15-minute break so
18 that if you can hold until then, then there will be
19 crowding. If you want to go in at some staggered
20 period, again, that will be opportunity there won't be
21 crowding. I'm just suggesting that in case the 15
22 minutes is not enough time.

23 Okay, are we ready now? Any
24 questions?

25 MS. COLER: I just wanted to thank

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1 all of you for coming here today, and we're pleased to
2 be here in Detroit, it's been a nice visit so far, and
3 thank you for the very warm welcome to our first
4 speaker.

5 We are unbelievably ready or gearing
6 up for the next Farm Bill, the 2007 Farm Bill. It
7 seems like we just went through this process in 2002

8 and implemented a lot of the changes made by Congress
9 in the Farm Bill, and I think we saw a lot of
10 improvements to the nutrition programs that we
11 administer. Certainly there's been simplifications and
12 some expansions to those that we are able to serve
13 through the various nutrition programs.

14 Generally we serve one in five
15 Americans every day, just to echo the comments of our
16 first speaker, and our programs do make an important
17 difference in the lives of many, many people who live
18 in this country. Certainly hunger is the core mission
19 of these programs, but we're also exploring new ways to
20 utilize these programs to fight another real
21 significant problem in this country, and that is the
22 problem of obesity. So we're trying to find new ways
23 to utilize these programs not only to fight hunger but,
24 also, to help move Americans to a healthier lifestyle,
25 and I've heard comments to those effects in other

1 forums, and I suspect we'll hear some today.

2 But generally we really do rely on
3 your input and your comments. Those of you who are at
4 a closer level of administering these programs, we
5 really need your input, we need your suggestions, we
6 need your comments, not only about what works about
7 these programs, but what is providing difficulties or
8 obstacles. We are having forums all around the country
9 for total Farm Bill forums, so there's going to be one
10 in every state. We're having 10 specifically geared
11 towards the nutrition titles or the food program
12 titles, but as I know, a number of folks traveled here
13 from other states, and I just want you to know that
14 you're welcome to also with your colleagues back home
15 to suggest that they attend some of the other forums
16 that might be on the more general topics, that comments
17 on the nutrition title are welcome at all of these, and
18 if there's other people here today who wanted to
19 address titles other than the nutrition title, you're
20 welcome to do so as well.

21 We do have a recorder who is talking
22 down verbatim notes, and then we're also going to be
23 summarizing what we're hearing from people at these
24 different forums and we'll be posting those. So,

25 again, I just want to say thank you in advance for your

10

1 time and your commitment to come here today to share
2 with us your views about the different nutrition
3 programs and how they can be improved in the next Farm
4 Bill.

5 So with that, we are here to listen
6 today and again just appreciate your time and
7 commitment to this effort. Thank you.

8 MR. HOLDEN: Okay. We are ready to
9 start. I believe the first person up will be Bud
10 Beesley from the Indiana Farm Bureau. Bud.

11 MR. BEESLEY: Thank you for the
12 opportunity for Indiana Farm Bureau to be here. I'm
13 Bud Beesley, the chairman of the Indiana Farm Bureau
14 Value-Added Committee. I want to address two subjects
15 today of your five. The Community or Commodity
16 Supplement Food Program and the Senior Farmers' Market
17 Nutrition Program.

18 A. The problem of no meat from USDA

19 getting to rural counties was solved by our community
20 foundation and the county trustees. The other two
21 times I came before this group I talked about things
22 that wasn't quite working just right, we figured
23 solutions now. I'm going to give you solutions today
24 that worked for us.

25 The county trustees and community

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1 foundation split the cost of locally grown meat that
2 was taken to the trustees for low income people. We
3 have local grown meat, process it locally, and then we
4 distribute it now to our low income people in our own
5 county, everything done in one place. We're also doing
6 that in our school systems now. In our county the
7 trustees were refused USDA commodities when they would
8 not give everybody everything they wanted. USDA
9 commodities was then given to the local churches who
10 was asked to match everything. This broke the local
11 churches. That didn't work, either.

12 B. If a document with one sentence

13 was sent to each State Department of Education from
14 someone with the right power to do so telling them that
15 they would not lose their USDA food distribution if
16 they buy from local farmers, the nutrition would triple
17 in the schools because it loses almost two-thirds of
18 its nutrients by the end of the third day. Shipping
19 time from most places cannot be quicker than that.
20 Everyone should visit their local elementary school,
21 and I've got this on film, you can't believe it, and
22 see what's left on the tray that is being thrown away.
23 The low bidder may have all the nutrient requirements,
24 but if the taste is so bad that the kids cannot eat the
25 food, what good is the nutrition requirements?

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1 And I handed that film in the
2 Indiana Department of Education to let them look at --
3 when you can't get a kid to eat a hotdog, there's
4 something wrong, you know.

5 C. All State Departments of
6 Education should be told that the website, and it's you

7 guys website at www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodstamp -- you
8 know all that -- can be used for local grown food
9 nutrient data that must be turned in. This is a very
10 detailed source and will let the growers sell that do
11 not have computer programs. This can also help the
12 local economy.

13 And I wanted to compliment some of
14 you folks' people, Deputy Trof (sic) and Jason Rohler
15 (sic) from USDA Marketing Service, they helped us get
16 this website through USDA Region 5, which Sandra Lanier
17 (sic) was a great help there, and we got this down in
18 the Indiana Department of Education, and we are shoving
19 meat to school that's locally grown now. So thank you
20 folks. Great.

21 Okay, the Senior Citizens Farmers'
22 Market Nutrition Program. In rural counties the
23 redemption rate is in the high 90 percent, so a large
24 number of the seniors will not return to the farmers
25 markets because they must choose between paying for

1 foods, drugs, or housing. For many this is the only
2 time they will get fresh produce.

3 B. The program should be set so
4 that an option of local government can handle the
5 vouchers because some government departments do not
6 cooperate very well.

7 Farmers find old friends and
8 neighbors that cannot afford to return to the market,
9 so most of the farmers take the unsold produce to them
10 after the market closes. Nutrition is still very high
11 in fresh produce when picked that day. Every 24 hours
12 after you pick a tomato or anything else, it loses
13 25 percent of its value, and after that third day the
14 stuff we're getting out of the grocery stores is about
15 like feeding an old cow a corn cob, you know. Thank
16 you very much.

17 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you, Bud, you're
18 right on time.

19 Tony Nertoli. I think I pronounced
20 it correctly, Sault St. Marie Chippewa.

21 MR. NERTOLI: Correct.

22 Thank you. This letter that I have
23 before you I previously submitted to Kathy McCollough,

24 (sic) so what I want to do is speak on the -- pretty
25 much just read the first paragraph or first page and

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1 then do the summation.

2 To understand where I'm at, I
3 thought long and hard on this letter. Tribes in
4 Michigan in the Midwest and even on a national basis, I
5 speak as a program director of 25 years when the
6 program on -- Food Distribution Program on Indian
7 reservations was initiated, and the last six years I've
8 had the honor of serving the national association as
9 its president, so when I looked at the letter and the
10 testimony I'm about to give, it was in consideration
11 not only would I look at it in the tribe and the people
12 that we serve but also look at it from a -- those
13 issues that are facing us on a national basis.

14 I would like to also thank -- give
15 you a thanks for this opportunity to speak, and I want
16 to acknowledge our regional offices, most of the
17 problems and the things that I want to speak on, along

18 with our national office, the regional offices know the
19 tribes as well. I think they have a frustration in
20 some of the things that they're doing.

21 The food distribution on Indian
22 reservations is the core program that most tribes are
23 associated with. The current FDPIR originally started
24 in 1980. In the course of feeding the tribal people,
25 the USDA has assumed a trust responsibility negotiating

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1 a treaty responsibility or in de facto regulation.
2 Food and nutrition service must recognize its role in
3 trust responsibility and develop a policy toward tribes
4 that is currently lacking. This will be pointed out in
5 other aspects of this testimony. But we have real
6 difficulty.

7 One of the issues among tribes is
8 that how they view the Food Program as not as a grant
9 but as an obligation under treaty and trust
10 responsibility that seems to be lacking at a national
11 level.

12 As a sovereign domestic nation there
13 does not exist a strong government-to-government
14 relationship with tribal governments. We are regulated
15 and consulted only after the fact. An example of this
16 attitude is the Prime Vendor Project in the Midwest
17 Region of the USDA. The PVP was withdrawn from the
18 tribes based on cost projection that was not shared
19 with the tribes, this despite the Department of
20 Agriculture recognition of the outstanding quality and
21 services provided to the tribes. Correspondence to the
22 Under Secretary and Secretary of Agriculture drew
23 little response to our concerns, and no recognition of
24 our tribes as government entities in trying to save the
25 program or develop an alternative. Midwest tribes were

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1 required to return to the old method of food
2 distribution. At this time our concern was being
3 treated as second class citizens with poor delivery
4 schedules and food that expired, severely damaged
5 goods, and rusty or leaky products. I was assured this

6 would not occur. As I'm speaking, everything I've told
7 you has occurred.

8 One of the things that -- talking to
9 one of the program directors is that, you know, a
10 program we had a lot of pride in in giving it out to
11 the people, right now we don't. Part of this came from
12 the fact that when the hurricanes happened in the
13 southern parts of the states we weren't prepared in any
14 manner or form to deliver the program.

15 One of the issues I have is that
16 this is not a program that we're taking from the rich
17 and giving to the poor. Our people on these tribes are
18 some of the very poorest people in this country, and
19 all you have to do sometimes, and I've invited both the
20 Under Secretary and Secretary to come over to the
21 tribes, spend a week or spend a couple days with us,
22 and you'll see not only where we live but how good
23 people we are. And when I have people tell me that the
24 great pride they had in this project, they don't want
25 to do it anymore, it's difficult.

1 Other recommendations I have in this
2 is that what we would like to see in a
3 government-to-government relationship is that the USDA
4 allow us to administer WIC programs, food stamps,
5 Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program, and the
6 Commodity Supplemental Program as our own entity, not
7 through states. We're very competent and able to
8 administer these programs ourselves.

9 Again, I have submitted in the
10 testimony in front of you that deals with the issues
11 that we have, and they're real, and we're lacking in
12 that, and we're looking at government-to-government
13 relationship and trust responsibility the USDA has not
14 assumed -- excuse me, national office. Okay, thank
15 you.

16 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you.

17 Frank Kubik, Focus: Hope.

18 FRANK KUBIK: Deputy Under Secretary
19 Coler, distinguished panelists, and invited guests,
20 good morning and welcome to Detroit. My name is Frank
21 Kubik, and I'm the Commodity Supplemental Food Program
22 manager at Focus: Hope in Detroit, and I also work with

23 the National Commodity Supplemental Food Program
24 Association with the Legislative Affairs Committee.
25 I'd like to thank USDA for giving us this opportunity

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1 this morning to speak on behalf of CSFP and the 43,000
2 people that we serve every month as well as the over
3 500,000 nationwide and 32 states, District of Columbia,
4 and two Indian tribal organizations. It's important to
5 note that of the 500,000, over 90 percent are senior
6 citizens.

7 I strongly support reauthorization
8 of this Commodity Supplemental Food Program. I've been
9 involved with CSFP at Focus: Hope since 1981. I've
10 seen firsthand the dilemma many of our people face,
11 particularly elderly, dilemmas they find themselves in
12 today. Low income seniors who are living on fixed
13 incomes are facing the increasingly difficult challenge
14 in making their limited resource take care of all their
15 daily needs, particularly food. They are making
16 choices between whether to eat, take their medicine,

17 pay the utility bills, because their income does not
18 allow them to fully provide for themselves. The
19 average income for a person in our program is under
20 \$600 a month. That's not much when you consider the
21 ever rising price of food, medicine, home heating
22 costs, which promise to make the choice even harder
23 this coming winter. Add to that problem the lack of
24 major supermarkets in this city and other urban areas
25 across the country, and you begin to see how important

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1 it is for CSFP to be reauthorized, and we have speakers
2 that are following me that will tell their story about
3 the program, the benefits of it.
4 CSFP works through 150 nonprofit
5 agencies nationwide and over 1,800 sites across the
6 country. At Focus: Hope we work with many volunteer
7 agencies and individual volunteers to distribute the
8 commodities to those who are unable to visit our sites.
9 Many of the participants who receive their commodities
10 that way are unable to leave their homes, and the food

11 as well as the visit from that volunteer are important
12 in assisting them to maintain their independence and to
13 maintain a healthier lifestyle as well as what they
14 need for assisted living and increased medical care.

15 The relatively low cost of the food
16 packets can go a long way in reducing health costs for
17 seniors and for allowing our children to reach their
18 full potential by providing the needed nutritional
19 assistance.

20 We're asking the department for
21 things to support CSFP with new initiatives that will
22 benefit us and the people it serves. And the number
23 one initiative will be to support a study that would
24 demonstrate the individual and program outcomes through
25 CSFP, the positive results of the program success

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1 stories to show that the program is beneficial to
2 everyone who's a participant.

3 The second initiative would be to
4 restore the financial guidelines for seniors to 185

5 percent of poverty, which they were when the program
6 was piloted in the 80s. It's now 130 percent of
7 poverty, and with rising costs for seniors that we're
8 not allowed to deduct or make exemptions from, the 185,
9 which is the same as the moms and kids, would go a long
10 way to provide the services to seniors that need it.

11 Number three, implement programs in
12 five additional states with improved state plans for
13 CSFP. Arkansas, Delaware, New Jersey, Oklahoma, and
14 Utah all have state plans, and we're asking the
15 department to provide support needed to make CSFP
16 available not only in those five states but in all 50
17 states. States should not have to wait to begin this
18 program.

19 And the last one is to set a program
20 priority, take greatest need within a project area,
21 instead of the current mothers and children priority,
22 so that the resources available are directed towards
23 those that need them the most.

24 In closing I'd like to say the
25 mission of CSFP is to provide quality nutritional

1 assistance economically, efficiently, and responsibly
2 always keeping the needs and dignity of our
3 participants first. We commend the food distribution
4 division for their continued innovations to strengthen
5 the quality of the food package and streamline
6 administration, and look forward to our continued
7 partnership with USDA through this reauthorization.
8 Thank you again Under Secretary Coler, panelists,
9 everyone here. Thank you.

10 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you, Frank.

11 I think the next on here I'm having
12 a problem reading the handwriting, Lisa Hutto, is that
13 correct?

14 LISA HUTTO: Hutto.

15 MR. HOLDEN: Okay. And that would be
16 from Focus: Hope.

17 LISA HUTTO: Good morning. My name
18 is Lisa Hutto, and I am a volunteer at Focus: Hope.
19 I'm also a full-time engineering student at Focus:
20 Hope, I am a full-time mother, and I'm here on behalf
21 of the food program at Focus: Hope. I am one of the

22 43,000 participants in the program, and it has been
23 really beneficial to me. We all know people going
24 through hard times now especially myself, took a
25 10 percent pay cut, and fortunately Focus: Hope has

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1 come up to take the slack of that. It's been really
2 helpful, and not just helpful because of just coming up
3 with the food but it's the type of food that they have
4 there, it's very nutritious, and also not for me, also
5 for the senior citizens as well, so please continue to
6 support the program. Thank you.

7 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you.

8 Liz Cunningham, Focus: Hope.

9 LIZ CUNNINGHAM: Good morning. My
10 name is Liz Cunningham, and I am a participant and also
11 a volunteer at Focus: Hope. I enjoy being around the
12 elderly like myself, and if that program, if it was
13 cut, it would not be beneficial to the elderly,
14 especially them, the mothers to be or the mothers that
15 have children, any support that is given by the USDA is

16 really appreciated, and only thing I can say is just
17 keep up the good work and please support us. Thank you
18 very much.

19 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you.

20 Colleen Moriarty, Hunger Solutions.

21 COLLEEN MORIARTY: Good morning.

22 Colleen Moriarty, Hunger Solutions in St. Paul,
23 Minnesota. I'm here today really to talk about the
24 fact that we have to resist the current moves, and I
25 know all my colleagues in the room have resisted the

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1 current moves to make any cuts to the Food Stamp
2 Program as we move forward in budget deliberations.

3 The other thing I want to caution my
4 colleagues and caution others against is the over-
5 reliance on the faith-based organizations to be able to
6 provide the kind of services. In fact, in the State of
7 Minnesota we estimate that if the government response
8 to hunger were removed, there would be an additional
9 \$100,000 due for every congregation in the State of

10 Minnesota. This would be much greater than just a food
11 drive.

12 We have entered into several
13 partnerships with Children's Defense Funds to be able
14 to determine public eligibility for public programs on
15 a website, and we've been using that tool across the
16 State of Minnesota. That's been an effective way to
17 move forward. However, we still find ourselves in the
18 position of having to have the people not be able to
19 become eligible on the website but to have to visit all
20 the individual offices. Further collaboration needs to
21 be sought so that we can guide people in the right way
22 that makes it the most successful for them so that they
23 can become participants in programs which can truly
24 help them.

25 One of the things that we've become

1 additionally concerned about aside from the rising
2 costs that families are facing is the number of
3 emancipated young people that we have particularly in

4 urban areas. Their lack of a permanent address really
5 has kept them from being able to participate in the
6 Food Stamp Program. We'd like to see some eligibility
7 requirements extended for them so that we can be able
8 to serve them better.

9 And I just wanted to say that this
10 is -- promoting the Food Stamp Program has also been a
11 joy throughout the State of Minnesota as it's given me
12 an opportunity to really talk about contributing to the
13 local economy using those food stamp resources as a way
14 to really bolster the local economy, especially in
15 smaller rural areas of the State of Minnesota that have
16 been hit hard in the past several years. Thank you
17 very much.

18 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you.

19 I think this is Leah Jahnke or
20 something like that, and that would be Bay Mills
21 Community.

22 LEAH JAHNKE: My name is Leah
23 Jahnke, and I'm a commodity food program director at
24 the Bay Mills Indian Community. I would like to thank
25 you for the opportunity to address you today. For

1 approximately three years the midwest region
2 participated in the Prime Vendor Pilot Project. During
3 this time we experienced an overwhelming increase in
4 program participation and client satisfaction. This
5 was due to an improvement in product quality and
6 perception, faster inventory turnaround, and greater
7 shipping reliability. As a program director, I was
8 able to more effectively administer the program because
9 the vendor based system runs on a tightly managed
10 schedule. Suddenly we received an e-mail that alerted
11 us to the fact that the Prime Vendor Pilot Project was
12 being terminated because it was not cost effective. We
13 were told to expect a rapid return to the previous
14 system of procurement. Having participated in the
15 pilot project, I know what level of service and
16 products are available to our programs and clients. I
17 feel the glaring disparities between a vendor based
18 system and the Federal warehousing system would be
19 unacceptable. It is my understanding that first year
20 costs were used to determine the cost of the Prime

21 Vendor Pilot Project. If this is the case, then the
22 pilot project has never been accurately evaluated.

23 There's also the issue of
24 compromised product integrity. I can offer numerous
25 examples of product mishandling that are completely

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1 inconsistent with USDA established guidelines. Client
2 satisfaction has plummeted. I see firsthand the look
3 on the clients' faces when they realize they are no
4 longer receiving excellent products and services but
5 instead are receiving products at a level of quality
6 which has been deemed good enough for them.

7 As directors in tribal entities we
8 have done our best to cooperate with USDA to make our
9 programs a success. I believe it is USDA's
10 responsibility to return this commitment. Is it really
11 acceptable to save money by compromising program
12 integrity and lowering our standards of acceptance? No
13 longer should cost-effectiveness be obtained at a high
14 price to program participants. Possibly the pilot

15 project currently in use in the southwest region is the
16 answer. However, this needs to be decided after
17 consulting with all of the above. Thank you.

18 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you.

19 Roberta Stanley, and that's Michigan
20 Department of Education.

21 ROBERTA STANLEY: Yes, thank you.

22 It's interesting to be on this side of the microphone.

23 I'm used to being up there. I used to work on Capitol

24 Hill in the Ed & Labor Committee and take testimony,

25 and it is an interesting place to be in here.

27

1 Deputy Under Secretary Kate Coler

2 and Mr. Holden, we're pleased to have you back in

3 Michigan. In fact, we're happy to have you all here.

4 We really appreciate the opportunity to talk to you up

5 front before the reauthorization is undertaken by the

6 Congress on some of these issues so they can be

7 discussed in an open and free manner, because quite

8 often these reauthorizations get on a roll and these

9 issues take on some kind of magnitude of their own, and
10 we don't have the input we would like, so we really
11 appreciate this happening up front.

12 I'm the director of the Federal
13 Relations Office, but with me today are people who
14 really do oversee the program, Marla Moss, who's our
15 supervisor of Food Distribution Programs, and Kathy
16 Rhodes, a consultant for the Household Commodity
17 Programs, and they're hiding back there. I told them
18 they should sit in the front row next time. But I have
19 to say when I worked on the House Education & Labor
20 Committee for a Michigan member of Congress, the work
21 that I put in on behalf of child nutrition programs and
22 the agriculture programs that served our state was
23 probably some of the most satisfying work I did. These
24 programs are a critical piece of the social safety net
25 that we have.

28

1 Most recently the emergency that we
2 had in New Orleans, Alabama, and Mississippi put a true

3 face on poverty again, and I think some of us
4 throughout the country with the economic success we've
5 had in recent years, we've forgotten that there are a
6 lot of pockets of poverty in this country, but that
7 face of poverty also resides in Michigan, and while we
8 in Michigan were very helpful in the Katrina emergency,
9 we need to be reminded that in any given month,
10 recently Michigan has the highest unemployment rate in
11 the country and within this very city and throughout
12 the state and rural regions and even some of our older
13 suburbs, poverty continues to reign, and these programs
14 play a very critical role in day-to-day maintenance in
15 how families live.

16 And I'd also like to point out
17 whereas I work for the Michigan Department of Ed,
18 consider the bureaucracy, so to speak, we couldn't
19 oversee these programs without the critical partners we
20 have like Focus: Hope that's been very ably represented
21 today, leaders, and I notice my colleague from the
22 Michigan Catholic Conference back there. We know that
23 the Federal Government, for instance, is really
24 interested in more faith-based initiatives, but we have
25 to look at the broad base of communities throughout the

1 State of Michigan, and sometimes the faith-based
2 servers are the best people to carry out the program,
3 but that isn't always the case, so that we need to keep
4 an open mind and work with all partners.

5 The Commodity Supplemental Food
6 Program in Michigan is in 79 of the 83 counties, and we
7 do that with 17 different agencies. And every month we
8 distribute 83,000 boxes of prescribed USDA commodities,
9 and we've determined that 90 percent of the recipients
10 are senior citizens 60 years of age and older.
11 10 percent then are women, infants, and children who
12 either chose not to participate in WIC or are no longer
13 eligible beneficiaries.

14 We believe that CSFP has a very
15 positive impact throughout our state. It provides the
16 recipients a variety of nutrients that they otherwise
17 would find lacking in their diet. But I'd like to
18 agree with my colleagues who have testified earlier.
19 What we have found, and we have research to prove it,

20 is that quite often our seniors have to chose between
21 medicine and food, and it's really critical that we
22 have this food package offered, because people who have
23 given to build this wonderful country, it is really
24 unnecessary and inappropriate that a country with our
25 wealth would turn its back on its seniors and not

30

1 provide adequate sustenance. They shouldn't have to
2 choose between medicine and food.
3 I hate to stand up here as someone
4 from the bureaucracy and mention this, but quite often
5 we find that Congress is a little stingy on
6 administrative costs. We can't work these programs,
7 work with our partners if we don't have adequate
8 administrative backing. We have provided our remarks
9 to you in writing, and we may supplement them and
10 provide them within the time line. Thanks again for
11 this opportunity to be here today.

12 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you.

13 I'd like to remind you that your

14 full written text can be presented to us if there was
15 something you were unable to cover during your oral
16 presentation, just leave it with one of my staff or
17 give it to me up front.

18 Rebecca Liebes, and that would be
19 with the Area Office of Aging. Thank you.

20 REBECCA LIEBES: Good morning. I am
21 with the Area Office of Aging of Northwestern Ohio, and
22 I'm here to talk about the Senior Farmers Market
23 Nutrition Program. It provides the impetus for
24 successful aging. Programs across the country afford
25 low income senior citizens the means to consume locally

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1 grown fresh fruits and vegetables. In Northwest Ohio
2 over 17,000 senior citizens and 114 farmers, many of
3 whom are senior citizens themselves, benefit from this
4 program, and as a comparison, there's about 10,000
5 senior citizens who participate in our congregate and
6 home delivery meal programs.

7 To give an overview of our program

8 procedures, coupons are distributed at 57 senior
9 activity centers on a first come/first served basis.
10 This year these coupons were worth \$4 each, and four
11 were given at a time each month for August, September,
12 and October, and six were given to be used during June
13 and July. Therefore, our benefit levels ranged from
14 \$16 for a senior who only received the coupons one
15 month up to \$72. Nutrition education is provided with
16 the coupons, and coupons are redeemed at preapproved
17 farmers, farm markets, and farm stands in exchange for
18 locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables. Northwest
19 Ohio was the original program, and while we are one of
20 the best funded programs, there is still substantial
21 unmet need. Each distribution turns away over 500
22 people.

23 In addition to not serving enough
24 people, we're not presenting a true nutrition program.
25 We feel compelled to provide enough coupons to enable

2 recommendations of four and a half cups of fruits and
3 vegetables per day. And according to a study by the
4 Economic Research Service, this would cost a minimum of
5 \$19.20 a month, 64 cents a day.

6 Also, we're currently serving
7 seniors at 185 percent of the Federal poverty level.
8 There are many seniors who do not meet this income
9 criteria, and they're still in need of fruit and
10 vegetable assistance. Additionally, fruit and
11 vegetable assistance is needed more than just five
12 months per year.

13 In July our comments on proposed
14 rules were solicited after the Senior Farmers Market
15 Nutrition Program had been operating as a pilot program
16 without regulations for five years. As pilots without
17 administrative funds, program administrators were
18 innovative in developing and implementing programs.
19 New partnerships formed with farmers and farmer
20 organizations. Relationships between seniors and
21 farmers have proven beneficial for senior participants
22 on a nutritional and psychosocial basis, and farmers
23 enjoy the financial and psychosocial benefits from this
24 program. For example, farmers feel like they are

25 helping seniors, and seniors believe they're helping

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1 farmers, and both are very true. Over the course of
2 five years seniors and farmers were educated both
3 formally and informally regarding the policies and
4 procedures.

5 Our areas of concern include the
6 unreimbursed administrative cost, income eligibility
7 level, and income determination, establishment of a
8 maximum benefit level, verification of benefit use by
9 recipients, and the opportunity to continue the program
10 year-round.

11 Let me skip to my last paragraph
12 here. As a closing comment, we encourage USDA to
13 enable this program to operate year-round. Studies
14 demonstrate the preventive effects of a diet rich in
15 fruits and vegetables. Programs over the past five
16 years demonstrate that senior citizens do increase
17 fruit and vegetable consumption when provided the
18 impetus to do so, and this combination provides a

19 powerful multiplier of fact for reduction in health
20 care costs and is truly a successful nutrition program.

21 Thank you.

22 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you.

23 Jean Barcus, Ohio Department of Job
24 & Family.

25 JEAN BARCUS: Good morning. Thank

34

1 you for this opportunity. My name is Jean Barcus, and
2 I'm an employee of the Ohio Department of Job & Family
3 Services. I'm the state program coordinator for the
4 Emergency Food Assistance Program and the Commodity
5 Supplemental Food Program, and I thank you for the
6 opportunity to tell you what TEFAP means to Ohio.

7 When I began this work 20 years ago
8 I was distributing government cheese, butter, flour,
9 rice, cornmeal, dry milk, and honey off the back of
10 semitrucks in parking lots across the State. It didn't
11 take many of those distributions to realize that we
12 needed to go about this program in a more efficient and

13 effective manner, and we began a partnership with food
14 banks in Ohio that has outlasted some of our marriages.

15 Ohio is blessed with a dedicated
16 network of compassionate emergency food providers, and
17 through this partnership we have succeeded in crafting
18 TEFAP into a cost-effective and administratively
19 efficient nutrition assistance program. This works in
20 large part due to the Federal guidelines that have been
21 crafted by USDA which permits states the flexibility in
22 adopting the program based on state and local
23 resources. Thank you for that flexibility. We have
24 seen the growth of TEFAP and appreciate the TEFAP
25 purchase entitlement in the past few years. The

1 storage and distribution dollars for the entitlement
2 food has remained static for several years, and while
3 the cost of doing business at all levels of the program
4 have steadily risen, the continued support of TEFAP by
5 the administration and legislation is vital to our
6 network and more importantly to the hundreds of

7 thousands of citizens who need our help in providing
8 for their household nutritional needs.

9 As you know, BONUS commodity in
10 TEFAP is offered to states with no administrative funds
11 to cover the cost of storage and distribution to the
12 state and local agencies. Those least able to bear the
13 cost of handling this product are obligated to do so.
14 The farmer, the processor, the transportation company,
15 and even USDA are all paid for handling BONUS
16 commodity. State agencies and local agencies are not.
17 We recognize that USDA has attempted to address this
18 issue by allowing states the option of moving
19 entitlement food dollars into the administrative pool.
20 We should not have to sacrifice entitlement food
21 dollars for this purpose. We request the attention of
22 the administration in providing administrative funding
23 for storage and distribution of the BONUS product that
24 is allocated to TEFAP.

25 We are relatively new to CSFP. An

1 Ohio state plan of operation for CSPF was on file with
2 USDA for ten years prior to being funded in Fiscal year
3 2000. Our initial caseload of 2,000 slots has grown in
4 the past five years to 13,226. And the success of this
5 program has been heart wrenching. The participation in
6 CSFP in Ohio is 99 percent in the elderly category,
7 seniors age 60 and above. The average age is
8 approximately 74. And we conducted a survey of program
9 participants in 2005 and received a 40-percent response
10 rate. Results of the survey are provided to you today
11 with my comments.

12 From that survey we know that the
13 nutrition education materials that we are required to
14 provide to CSPF participants are read and are helpful
15 to our participants. They are eating better, they like
16 the program, the product variety, getting to the
17 distributions aren't a problem, and, if able, they
18 wouldn't change a thing.

19 But their comments were startling.
20 They thank us for our hard work. They want us to know
21 that it keeps them independent. It curbs their living
22 expenses, helps with medication, and keeps them
23 healthy. They depend on this, and they thank us for a

24 helping hand.

25 Our oldest CSFP participant

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1 responded in this way: "I am 100 years old, and this
2 program helped cut my grocery bills in half."
3 Initially I was thrilled at the fact that we had a
4 100-year-old participant on the program. And then it
5 hit me. Knowing the value of the box, the greater
6 realization was how little this person had been
7 spending on groceries before CSFP. Thank you.

8 MR. HOLDEN: There has been a
9 request, and I don't know how we fit this in, that you
10 speak slowly for the stenographer. Now, I am kind of
11 caught in the middle here. So could you moderate a
12 little. I know you were trying to get a lot in, Jean.

13 JEAN BARCUS: Do you want me to do
14 it again?

15 MR. HOLDEN: No.

16 JEAN BARCUS: Just a little slower?

17 MR. HOLDEN: Did you leave notes for

18 us?

19 JEAN BARCUS: Yes, they're at the
20 desk, but I can also give you one now.

21 MR. HOLDEN: Okay, just checking.
22 You don't have to. We have it already. You can give
23 it to her.

24 Okay, at the same time could we have
25 Tina Osso come up, please, Shared Harvest. Tina.

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1 TINA OSSO: Ollice.

2 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you.

3 TINA OSSO: Sure.

4 MR. HOLDEN: See what happens, I get
5 my copy from her.

6 TINA OSSO: My name is Tina Osso,
7 and I'm the founder and executive director of Shared
8 Harvest Food Bank. We are part of America's Second
9 Harvest, the nation's food bank network. We contract
10 with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services to
11 administer the TEFAP program in 30 counties in Ohio,

12 and we serve 1,200 senior citizens in two counties
13 through the CSFP program. We are also one of 16
14 charities across the country that were awarded a food
15 stamp average contract with food and nutrition
16 services, and so we have been piloting many efforts to
17 reduce the barriers for people who are going to our
18 food pantries to apply for food stamps and are being
19 very successful.

20 We're also one of the leading food
21 banks in the state to develop Choice Pantries, which
22 are pantries that are set up like grocery stores, so
23 that people who are in need of food can shop the
24 shelves and pick out the food that's most culturally
25 appropriate or food that they know their family will

1 consume.

2 We developed a collaborative
3 partnership with the Ohio State University County
4 Extension Offices to develop a color coded system in
5 our Choice Pantries that complements the food pyramid,

6 so that we have a nutritionist on hand at the Choice
7 Pantries helping people make healthy choices based on
8 the food pyramid that's color coded with the kinds of
9 food that they should be consuming to live a healthier
10 lifestyle.

11 The food pyramid also directs me on
12 how I purchase my TEFAP entitlement. In the State of
13 Ohio, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services allows
14 each regional agent to purchase the food that we need
15 through TEFAP, and so I've begun looking at how to
16 purchase food to fill out the color coded needs in the
17 Choice Pantries.

18 And one of the things that I
19 discovered as I started looking at over the past four
20 years of what we've been able to purchase through TEFAP
21 is that, for instance, in 2003 we are spending an
22 average of \$11,000 a tractor trailer load for TEFAP,
23 and that provided us with about 109 tractor trailer
24 loads every year. 2006 we're looking at 15,700 average
25 cost, which means that we're getting less food. At the

1 same time because we have such a large region that
2 we're delivering product to, our fuel costs have grown
3 incredibly. In 2003 on average we put \$52 worth of
4 gas, diesel, and in our trucks to deliver a trailer
5 load of food. In 2006 we're looking at \$129 to deliver
6 one tractor trailer load, and I'm sure you're
7 experiencing the same kind of escalating costs,
8 including the increasing cost of utilities,
9 everything -- it's going to affect everything we do,
10 which means that at a time when the entitlement dollars
11 are buying less entitlement food and donations are
12 down, because that's our other source of food, as of
13 September 30th we're 1.2 million pounds below where we
14 were this time last year at a time when more people are
15 going to pantries in need of food. People who never
16 thought they would knock on the door of a food pantry
17 are doing that. Middle income people who used to be
18 our donors are now turning to our network for
19 assistance. It is unconscionable for us to consider
20 these folks like pieces on a game board, like what are
21 we going to trade off to get enough food to feed this
22 child who is going to go to bed hungry, or this senior

23 who has to make a selection between whether they're
24 going to have a roof over their head or food in their
25 refrigerator. I mean what do we want our legacy to be?

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1 One of indifference? I mean we know that children who
2 are fed adequately develop cognitively on par with
3 their better fed peers. We know that adults who take
4 in enough nutrition are more productive. We know that
5 seniors who get enough food live healthier than those
6 who don't. And it's either invest now or later at a
7 much higher cost.

8 We have it within our power to make
9 a difference. This is not a time to be talking about
10 cutting these very necessary and needed programs, food
11 stamps, TEFAP, and CSPF. Please think about how you
12 would feel if your family members were depending on any
13 of these programs to put food on their table. Thank
14 you.

15 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you.

16 Jennie Robertson, Childrens Hunger

17 Alliance.

18 JENNIE ROBERTSON: Good morning. My
19 name's Jennie Robertson. I'm with the Childrens Hunger
20 Alliance in Columbus, Ohio. I'm here today to talk
21 briefly about the Food Stamp Program. The Food Stamp
22 Program is fairly new to us in terms of our outreach
23 and advocacy on behalf of that program to families and
24 children in Ohio. We've been talking a lot with both
25 clients and administrators of the program at the county

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1 level, and one of the biggest problems that they say is
2 access to the program. I know at the state level we
3 are urging the State Department to focus more on the
4 recertification and the face-to-face interview,
5 extending the time period from six months to one year,
6 use more of the hardship waivers for our families, and
7 another aspect that we're working on is the
8 transitional benefits. Currently they can do it for
9 five-month transitional benefits, and Ohio has not been
10 able to implement that, and I know one of their reasons

11 is that most of the other programs including food
12 stamps and the other welfare programs run on the three,
13 six-month recertification time period, so the
14 five-month time span is not as compatible. However,
15 extending it to six months would make it more
16 compatible and hopefully encourage them to implement
17 transitional benefits. In Ohio about 12,000 children
18 on average go off cash assistance every month.
19 Therefore, the impact would be tremendous and help
20 families and their children move from welfare to work
21 and continue to meet their nutritional needs. Thank
22 you very much.

23 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you.

24 Annie Schmidt, TEFAP.

25 ANNIE SCHMIDT: Yeah.

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1 MR. HOLDEN: Sorry.

2 ANNIE SCHMIDT: That's all right,

3 just don't call me late for dinner and I'll be fine.

4 Good morning. My name is Annie Schmidt, and I'm from

5 part of the Northeast Oakland Advisory Committee.
6 We're represented by OLSA in Pontiac, and our site is
7 in Lake Orion, Michigan. I'm a volunteer that helps
8 pass out food to seniors, mothers, and small children,
9 low income and disabled. Our need to have the TEFAP
10 program is an important thing in our community. I've
11 been doing this distribution now for about 13 or so
12 years, and during this time I've had the occasions to
13 see so many people in need of help. I have also been
14 the recipient of this program because of many years of
15 not being able to do things for myself, and because of
16 a dramatic change in my life, I've been able to change
17 things for the better for me. However, since I know so
18 many others that are still in need, I can understand
19 what they're going through since I've walked a mile in
20 their shoes.

21 It's hard to imagine what it is to
22 live on as little as \$350 to \$700 a month to a grand
23 total, and there is -- yes, there's Human Resources to
24 help with food stamps, but it doesn't pay the utilities
25 and the other bills, and still have the money left over

1 for a car that may need a lot of work or the insurance
2 on it because we have to protect ourselves from the
3 others who don't carry insurance. Then there's the
4 insurance on our houses, because in case of fire,
5 flood, or an act of nature can wipe it all away in a
6 split second.

7 There have been those who because of
8 the money is gone and the food stamps are gone, they
9 don't have anything to eat and have to resort to buying
10 cans of anything that is cheap to try to make something
11 last for a few days. Without those cans of food from
12 our TEFAP program to take up the slack that help make
13 it to the next time they pass it out, there are plenty
14 of people who wouldn't have anything to eat.

15 It would be a shame to think that
16 there are people right here that grow the food and
17 instead of someone who really need it, that it would be
18 turned under and not used at all. My mother used to
19 say waste not, want not, and she lived by that rule and
20 taught me to do the same.

21 I have homebound people that I

22 deliver to, and sometimes my car hits the ground
23 practically when I'm traveling because it's so full.
24 And they wait for sometimes an hour or more to, you
25 know, when they come to our site, for the men to pack

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1 the food that they don't normally have. When they get
2 the baking mix and the walnuts and the dried fruit,
3 it's like Christmas, and they're so happy, they talk
4 about what they will be able to do with it and how
5 they've been waiting for this or that, they love the
6 fact they get a small ham or a couple pounds of ground
7 beef. Some people are waiting for these extra things
8 they know they can't buy at that time for themselves.
9 Just know that none of it's ever wasted.

10 The one who picks up doesn't have to
11 worry about a lot of paper work anymore, and the form
12 has shortened so they don't have to keep track of the
13 card, and bringing all of their information makes it
14 more difficult, although at our site we have all of our
15 records of our seniors and mothers with children so we

16 can furnish that if it's needed. Please know that we
17 deeply appreciate what is given to us and those we pass
18 food out to. It breaks our hearts to think that this
19 or any other program would be stopped when we have so
20 many in need. Thank you for hearing me.

21 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you, Jean. That
22 was Annie Schmidt, I'm sorry.

23 Kevin Kelly, Wayne County.

24 KEVIN KELLY: Good morning. Kevin
25 Kelly. I'm the director of Senior Citizens Services

1 and Veterans Affairs for Wayne County. We're also
2 joined by our TEFAP supervisor, Greg Bowman. I'd like
3 to begin by thanking USDA for holding this forum as we
4 discuss the importance of continued funding for TEFAP
5 and CSFP programs. As we near the 25th anniversary of
6 the program, the last few years have been important in
7 the lives of thousands of Wayne County's needy families
8 and senior citizens. Other speakers have touched on
9 the economic conditions of the State of Michigan, the

10 budget cuts, and our high unemployment rates, so I'm
11 not going to dwell on that. But I would like to say
12 that the major accomplishment of the TEFAP program has
13 been as a safety net month after month for over 5,000
14 families of our senior citizens. When the unemployment
15 check runs out, there is TEFAP. When a senior's Social
16 Security check runs out, there is TEFAP. When a food
17 stamp allocation gets exhausted, there is again TEFAP
18 to help supplement the nutritional needs of our
19 residents. We have heard from grateful families and
20 seniors how important the cans of beans, corn, and
21 applesauce have been. We have heard that the canned
22 chicken, beef stew, or frozen ham, ground beef is the
23 only food citizens have to eat for the remainder of the
24 month on occasion. We have heard that the various
25 cereals provided by TEFAP keep children from going

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1 hungry and getting at least some breakfast during their
2 day.
3 Future priorities of TEFAP should be

4 to continue to provide high protein diets to the needy
5 residents to help them sustain their nutritional needs
6 while they seek to find work and become financially
7 stable again or for our seniors to provide supplemental
8 nutrition as they struggle on fixed incomes as their
9 medication costs sky rocket so they don't have to make
10 a basic decision, do I choose food or medicine.

11 You will not find another
12 governmental program as cost efficient as TEFAP in
13 Wayne County. We have approximately 30 sites that
14 distribute the commodity food. The sites are staffed
15 by over 250 volunteers. In fiscal year 2005 we
16 distributed over 850,000 pounds of commodity food to 24
17 communities, about 56,000 households at about an
18 administrative cost of \$1.78 per household. It's an
19 outstanding job by our people, and that's why the hair
20 that Barry has left is turning gray. He does an awful
21 good job for us in running the program.

22 Technology has aided in the
23 efficiency of TEFAP as we now have e-mail reports and
24 data available at the click of a mouse, and the USDA
25 website provides essential information to both agencies

1 and clients alike. It's a great service.

2 So in closing we urge the USDA to
3 continue to fight hard and vigorously for funding for
4 the program and attempt, if possible, to acquire more
5 funding for the program. We appreciate your attempt to
6 provide a social safety net for the citizens of Wayne
7 County and the citizens of the State of Michigan, and
8 we appreciate all you do on a partnership with
9 Education Department of the State of Michigan that
10 provides the program. Thank you for coming here today.

11 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you, Kevin.

12 Lisa Hamler. That would be Lisa
13 Hamler-Fugett.

14 LISA HAMLER-FUGETT: Thank you.
15 Here's my testimony, and I do have it electronically if
16 it would be easier for you. Good morning and thank you
17 for convening this regional hearing. I'm very pleased
18 to be here. And, again, my name is Lisa Hamler-Fugett.
19 I serve as the executive director for the Ohio
20 Association of Second Harvest Food Bank, Ohio's largest

21 charitable response to hunger. We provide food and
22 grocery items through our 12 America's Second Harvest
23 food banks to 30 100-member charities. We provide both
24 federal, state funded, privately purchased, donated
25 food, and grocery items to over 1.3 million low income

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1 Ohioans for the three-month period ending June 30th of
2 2005. These Ohioans were forced to turn to our
3 agencies because they lacked the resources they needed
4 to purchase food through normal channels. The food
5 stamp, TEFAP, CSFP, and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition
6 Program helped by providing critical benefits to some
7 of the people we serve. Unfortunately, for many the
8 benefits are unavailable, insufficient, and
9 nonexistent. USDA alone establishes and estimates that
10 1.2 million Ohioans are hungry or at risk of hunger.
11 For many the Food Stamp Program is a critical lifeline
12 that provides more than a billion dollars annually to
13 help feed hungry Ohioans. This is a good investment
14 for our people and our state's economy. These are

15 uncertain times for far too many Americans, many who
16 play by the rules working every day in low wage/no
17 benefit jobs, seniors who've worked hard all their
18 lives and now struggle to survive on low fixed incomes,
19 and poor children who are the least able to protect
20 themselves.

21 Most certainly the natural disasters
22 in the U.S. have brought into sharp focus the rising
23 poverty that is consuming this nation. USDA's response
24 to those disasters is to be commended. It provides a
25 nation a unique opportunity to examine how important

1 and beneficial our nutritional safety net is. Despite
2 the many strengths and accomplishments of the current
3 program, the Food Stamp Program remains a large,
4 growing, complex, highly regimented program. It still
5 requires more application information, more
6 verification and follow-up, and more frequent updates
7 than any other comparable assistance program. These
8 barriers for many of the families we serve are

9 insurmountable.

10 I would like to touch on just a few
11 of the recommendations I've included in my written
12 testimony for your very serious consideration to
13 improve, preserve, and strengthen the Food Stamp
14 Program.

15 USDA should immediately drop any
16 considerations of policies and initiatives that would
17 undermine or damage the Federal Food Stamp Program such
18 as super waivers and block grants, raise eligibility to
19 150 percent of the federal poverty level, and index
20 food stamp benefits to the moderate food plan insuring
21 that benefits reflect the real cost, purchase, and
22 nutritionally adequate diet and guarantee the maximum
23 benefits are issued to all households with incomes
24 below 100 percent of the federal poverty guidelines,
25 enhance benefits and implement policies to insure that

1 senior citizens and disabled recipients receive at
2 least \$100 per month in food stamp benefits,

3 standardize the medical deduction, and expand it so it
4 will not reduce the value of any other medical or
5 prescription drug benefits.

6 Far too many of our poor citizens
7 spend most of their housing on medicine -- most of
8 their income on housing and medicine. Another
9 recommendation, to achieve significant cost savings,
10 link food stamp issuance to participation in the
11 Medicare Part D Low Income Subsidy Prescription Drug
12 Benefit Program, reduce administrative costs by
13 providing categoric food stamp eligibility to seniors
14 who participate in CSFP and the Senior Farmers Market
15 Nutrition Program, immediately eliminate any
16 regulations that time limit food stamp benefits to
17 unemployed able-bodied adults.

18 I'd also like to make
19 recommendations on TEFAP. Increase through your
20 discretionary authority the mandatory funding for TEFAP
21 up to \$500 million per year for commodity purchases and
22 expand the program to include regionally available food
23 purchases, set aside and earmark current TEFAP funding
24 to help cover the cost of increase in transportation,
25 storage, and distribution, take immediate action to

1 provide supplemental TEFAP appropriations to ensure
2 that adequate levels of emergency food are available,
3 provide \$200 million per year in CSFP and provide
4 additional funding to expand the program nationwide,
5 provide funding to support CSFP and the Senior Farmers
6 Market Program. Many CSFP programs are well suited to
7 promote the local farmers markets by locating them in
8 conjunction with monthly CSFP distributions. By
9 providing monthly Senior Farmers Market Nutrition
10 Program coupons of 15 to \$20 a month, USDA will
11 strengthen the local farmers in agriculture
12 communities.

13 Now, how are we going to pay for
14 this, because that's what you wanted to know, right?
15 Allocate all Section 32 funds and prioritize funding to
16 expand TEFAP, CSFP, and the Senior Farmers Market
17 Nutrition Program, limit farm price support payments
18 and implement systems to evaluate their effectiveness,
19 ensure that support is targeted to sustainable

20 agriculture and food production, allow all the recently
21 passed tax cuts to expire. This is about shared
22 sacrifice. Implement a nationwide nutrition assistance
23 system that would assess a fee on every public and
24 private employer whose employees receive food stamps.
25 And to seriously address the growing issue of obesity,

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1 rising healthcare costs, and hunger, the administration
2 at the urging of USDA should implement a consumer tax,
3 simply put, enact a national fast food surcharge that
4 would most certainly generate sufficient revenue needed
5 to fund these critical programs. This is similar to
6 every other tax policy governing alcohol and tobacco
7 sales.

8 In closing, our association believes
9 our nation's nutrition policies and programs should
10 work to eliminate hunger and poverty or at minimum
11 adequately provide the resources we need to treat the
12 symptoms. Our network supporters, volunteers, and
13 partners are on the front lines every day doing the

14 best to treat the symptom. Our landscape offers only
15 an image of declining food, funding, and resources that
16 we need to meet the demand as we attempt to hold back
17 the growing lines of despair.

18 Increasing unemployment, wage
19 stagnation, lack of health care, rising gasoline,
20 housing costs, coupled now with nearly 70 percent
21 increases projected in heating costs this winter will
22 make it nearly impossible for the Ohioans that we serve
23 to make ends meet. The families that we serve want
24 what all people want, a decent wage for a fair day's
25 work, they want healthcare they can afford, they want

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1 affordable housing, and they want to be able to feed
2 themselves and their families. They simply want the
3 American dream of prosperity and not poverty. Thank
4 you.

5 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you.

6 We're at a point now where we should
7 take our 15-minute break. It is now exactly, according

8 to my watch -- set yours with mine -- 15 minutes after
9 10. You are to be back at 10:30. The wash rooms are
10 out of the door and to your right.

11 (A recess was taken)

12 MR. HOLDEN: Esther Sciammarella
13 from the Chicago Hispanic Health Coalition.

14 ESTHER SCIAMMARELLA: Good morning.

15 Thank you for this opportunity. My name is Esther
16 Sciammarella. I'm the director of the Chicago Hispanic
17 Health Coalition. Previously I was the assistant
18 commissioner for Hispanic Affairs in the City of
19 Chicago. And I want to say thank you for this
20 opportunity. I've been working with the USDA and the
21 Mexican Consulate in Chicago, and we have meeting
22 before, but I want to regulate the policies that I
23 mention at that time that until we change the system
24 how to manage poor from the region to the states to the
25 city, we are not reaching the Hispanic community, so I

1 don't want to talk about all the needs, but it's a

2 policy issue. We need to, in order to live with the
3 Hispanic -- how we reach the Hispanic community, we need
4 to be sure the family going to the organizations, they
5 are serving the Hispanic community, I mean community
6 health centers, centers who, people who speak the
7 language, they can be explained, because sometimes
8 people don't -- in general when they try to explain,
9 seems to people have prejudice about who is resident,
10 is illegal, and we need to know that you can be
11 resident in this country and not be citizen, because
12 the only things that you do different be citizen is
13 vote. The rest, you pay all the taxes, and sometime
14 you see when people come, they have that relationship
15 with them understand and explain, and people don't come
16 for the service because even if they are residents in
17 this country, they don't know how the system work, and
18 we are frustrating not to reach the nutrition program
19 in general for all the population across the border
20 because we are not competent -- and so my comment today
21 is that I wanted to see, and I know that USDA is making
22 all the effort to reach the Hispanic community, and
23 until we discuss at the region level or in the
24 different states how to design a model that is working

25 for the Hispanic community -- thank you very much for

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1 the opportunity. Thank you.

2 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you.

3 John, can I eat this?

4 JOHN JANOWSKI: No, sir. It was

5 transported from Milwaukee, so it's probably not good.

6 My name is John Janowski. Good morning, first of all,

7 and there are a few people in Milwaukee that weren't

8 able to make it today that wanted to speak to you so we

9 brought their comments.

10 Basically these are people that use

11 our emergency feeding network in Milwaukee County

12 and/or volunteer with the network, and the first person

13 you heard is Kris Schell. She's the director of South

14 Milwaukee Human Concerns, which is one of our bigger

15 programs, and her basic point was that USDA commodities

16 are very important to her program, and she was one of

17 the food pantries that we worked with to implement the

18 TEFAP cheese waiver, and she had many, many clients, I

19 think they serve almost 2,000 people a month that
20 utilize the cheese that we receive through this waiver,
21 and, of course, this waiver has just ended this past
22 month. She's very distraught, disappointed about that
23 and wanted to let you know that waivers like that have
24 helped feed a lot of people, and in particular they
25 love the cheese, so that was her point.

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1 The next person that we had on tape,
2 her name is Patricia Cifax. She's a principal at 21st
3 Street Elementary School, and she was talking mostly
4 about the summer feeding programs. She was real
5 involved in our summer food program operations. And
6 really her major point was that poverty is worsening in
7 Milwaukee. I'll allude to that later, but basically
8 that there are about 62,000 children in Milwaukee that
9 are in poverty, and that schools are on the front lines
10 of seeing poverty and in doing something about it
11 through the school meals programs.

12 The next person we had is Perry

13 Huyck. He's the executive director of United Methodist
14 Children Services of Wisconsin, and he also wanted to
15 reiterate, and I should mention, too, that he is also
16 part of our emergency feeding network in Milwaukee
17 County. He also alluded to the fact that Milwaukee is
18 one of the poorest cities in the country, now 7th worst
19 poverty rate in the United States with 26 percent of
20 our citizens living in poverty. He also reiterated the
21 fact that Milwaukee now has the fourth worst child
22 poverty rate in the nation. 41 percent of our kids are
23 at or below the poverty level. And he also wanted to
24 reiterate that their programs serve about 14,500 people
25 in Milwaukee County, that was last year. This year

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1 they're expecting to serve over 20,000, kind of
2 reiterating the need that they are seeing, and all the
3 different issues that people that use their program
4 face in terms of increasing medical costs, increasing
5 energy costs, increasing healthcare costs, and food in
6 particular. So he wanted to reiterate that. The CSFP

7 program and also the TEFAP cheese waiver was extremely
8 beneficial to him in his operation.

9 Alicia Ellis is the next person.

10 She is the director of Central City Churches Food
11 Pantry in Milwaukee. She is also one of our partners
12 in our CSFP and TEFAP cheese waiver pantries. They
13 serve primarily elderly people. She wanted to again
14 reiterate the fact that they are seeing worsening need,
15 and she also wanted to really highlight the benefits of
16 the cheese waiver. People absolutely love the cheese.
17 This is one of the biggest food pantries in Milwaukee,
18 they serve thousands of people every month, and people
19 are extremely disappointed that our cheese waiver is
20 ending.

21 Then we have two clients. The first
22 person is -- his name is Dale Brewster, he's a client
23 and a volunteer for the AIDS Resource Center of
24 Wisconsin Food Pantry, which is located in Milwaukee.
25 His basic point was that he's gotten the cheese for

1 about 18 months, it helps him feed himself and his
2 family, and he could not buy this type of product in
3 the store because it is cost prohibitive. And he also
4 made a point that he could not understand how at one
5 point the government was putting nonfat dry milk or
6 giving nonfat dry milk to cattle and not to people, and
7 he thinks that the cheese waiver and other waiver
8 authorities that the Hunger Task Force is asking for
9 should be granted and restored.

10 And then the final client, his name
11 is David Kierstyn. He is also from the AIDS Resource
12 Center of Wisconsin Food Pantry, and he basically says
13 without the help of this food pantry, especially useful
14 products like the cheese, his life would be extremely
15 difficult and he could never afford a product like
16 that, and he says that the USDA should be thinking of
17 people, not cattle.

18 So that is a summary of some of the
19 people and the volunteers that we have in Milwaukee
20 County that work with us.

21 I work for the Hunger Task Force,
22 which is an advocacy-based organization and independent
23 food bank located in the Milwaukee community since

24 1974, and as a food bank, we distributed 8.8 million
25 pounds of food during our last fiscal year. We served

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1 almost 38,000 people through our 58 member food
2 pantries, and we also served almost 61,000 hot meals
3 through our soup kitchens and homeless shelters last
4 year -- excuse me, in August of 2005, that's where
5 those numbers come from.

6 We also operate the CSFP, TEFAP, and
7 Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program in Milwaukee
8 County, so I think we have a very good perspective on
9 how these programs work.

10 Some of the points that our
11 volunteers made I'd like to reiterate. The fact that
12 especially in terms of child poverty, that Milwaukee
13 now has the fourth worst child poverty rate in the
14 nation, but this is not a trend that is just isolated
15 in Milwaukee. The State of Wisconsin between 2003 and
16 2004 had the worst growing poverty rate of any state in
17 the country. It grew worse during that time period

18 than in any of the other states. So it really
19 reiterates the importance of the federal nutrition
20 programs to these people.

21 Just a few points about some of the
22 programs that will be reauthorized during the Farm
23 Bill. Regarding the TEFAP program, we basically ask
24 for one thing, and that is for waiver authority to
25 allow us to turn excess unwanted products into useful

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1 products that needy people are asking for. I brought
2 some examples up there today. You're all familiar with
3 the nonfat dry milk to cheese waiver that we
4 sufficiently implemented over the last 18 months,
5 extremely popular, I think we did a very good job of
6 implementing that particular pilot project. We also --
7 I also brought some peaches that nobody likes and
8 nobody wants. We want to turn it into peach yogurt
9 that people want and people can use. And one of the
10 other products, raisins to Raisin Bran, although that's
11 kind of a moot point, but the idea is that we are

12 asking Under Secretary Bos and his staff to respond to
13 our letter that we sent in August 2005 to grant us that
14 authority and to move ahead with our pilot projects.

15 Second, regarding the CSFP program,
16 our main point is that inventory requirements are too
17 stringent. In July this year, for example, we hand
18 counted 21,000 individual pudding packets, almost
19 16,000 individual cans of greenbeans, and almost 8,000
20 individual cans of evaporated milk. Simply an
21 extremely time-consuming process and a waste of time,
22 as far as we're concerned. All we're asking is that we
23 be allowed to inventory by the unpacked case as in
24 TEFAP and by the packed distribution package so we can
25 save some of the administrative burden on our staff.

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1 Third, and I have two more points,
2 the Food Stamp Program is being used at record levels
3 in Milwaukee County and in Wisconsin, yet the program
4 still provides too little benefit given hassle of
5 applying and program benefits are not sufficient to

6 support a diet rich in fruits and vegetables. Our main
7 point is that the program should be preserved as a
8 national entitlement and be adjusted so that all needy
9 individuals can readily access a program that truly
10 alleviates hunger.

11 Fourth, regarding the Senior Farmers
12 Market Nutrition Program, the demand for this program
13 in Milwaukee County is unbelievable. We conservatively
14 estimate that about 20,000 people are eligible for this
15 program in Milwaukee County. We were only able to
16 serve about 3,200 people this year. These are people
17 that are really, really struggling with increased food,
18 energy, and healthcare costs. And in this case we
19 asked the USDA to aggressively advocate for additional
20 federal dollars to help this growing and increasingly
21 poor population.

22 In closing, we believe that
23 improving or expanding nutrition programs to meet
24 growing need does not require a debate about what can
25 be done with limited federal resources. The debate

1 should be about policy choices. Do we provide
2 government benefits, subsidies, and tax breaks to
3 people who do not have to worry about hunger and
4 poverty, or do we shift scarce government resources to
5 where the need is greatest to help people in need?
6 It's up to us as advocates and to you, the leaders of
7 the USDA, to insure that our policy makers make the
8 right choices.

9 Thank you very much for having me
10 here today, and we look forward to working with you in
11 the future. Thanks.

12 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Excuse me.
13 Could you explain what the cheese waiver is?

14 JOHN JANOWSKI: Sure.

15 MS. COLER: Briefly.

16 JOHN JANOWSKI: We basically were
17 granted a pilot project waiver authority in 2004 to
18 turn -- basically barter nonfat dry milk and turn it
19 into mozzarella cheese through the TEFAP program.

20 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Do you use
21 admin money to do it?

22 JOHN JANOWSKI: No.

23 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Because
24 they've been doing that in the --

25 MR. HOLDEN: I can help you out on

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1 further explanation on that if you want to work with
2 us.

3 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Well, I'm not
4 necessarily interested. It's just we're in a quandary
5 back here what it is.

6 MR. HOLDEN: I understand, but I can
7 give you additional explanation with the staff. We're
8 trying to move on a schedule, and by the way, John
9 didn't get extra time. Each of those people that he
10 named had four minutes according to the rules, and,
11 therefore, it looked like it went a long time, so I
12 don't want anybody thinking I gave him favoritism.
13 John and I box every once in a while.

14 Okay. The next person on the list,
15 Angie Abbott from Purdue University. Angie.

16 ANGIE ABBOTT: Thank you for the

17 opportunity to address the USDA Farm Bill Nutrition
18 Forum this morning. My name is Angie Abbott, and I am
19 speaking in my position as director of Food Stamp
20 Nutrition Education Program at Purdue University and
21 Cooperative Extension nutrition specialist on behalf of
22 the educational role that Purdue Cooperative Extension
23 plays in the State of Indiana.
24 Purdue Extension is represented in
25 all 92 counties of the state and provides numerous

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1 educational programs that provides citizens with
2 choices they can make related to nutrition and health.
3 Not only is Extension in almost every county in the
4 country, but the electronic technology exemplified by
5 the internet and by distance education permits rapid
6 dissemination of the latest knowledge regarding
7 nutrition and health. USDA through the Cooperative
8 State Research Education and Extension Service has
9 always been in a position to have definite impact on
10 health issues associated with food choices. These

11 issues center around the quality and quantity of food
12 that is available to almost all people in our country.
13 Food assistance programs distributed by USDA such as
14 the Food Stamp Program and WIC are the cornerstone of
15 this country's effort to ensure nutrition for the
16 disadvantaged.

17 Nutrition education is an important
18 component of improving nutrition and health status.
19 One way Extension is addressing the need at providing
20 nutrition information is by contracting with state
21 agencies for federal funds from USDA Food and Nutrition
22 Service Food Stamp Program to conduct nutrition
23 education projects for Food Stamp Program participants
24 and eligible individuals. To increase access to
25 nutrition education and nutritious foods, the Food

1 Stamp Nutrition Education Program focuses on diet
2 quality, food security, shopping behavior, and food
3 resource management as well as food safety. Whatever
4 the issue is related to nutrition, the functions of

5 Cooperative Extension are ideally suited to reach a
6 broad base of people with scientifically sound
7 information that will enable them to make better food
8 choices and lower the incidence of and the risk for
9 chronic disease such as obesity. Cooperative Extension
10 is well positioned to provide nutrition education to
11 low income people across the nation.

12 During the fiscal year of 2005
13 Indiana reached over 70,000 people directly face to
14 face with group and individual instructions in addition
15 to an additional 370,000 indirect contacts through
16 newsletters, public service announcements, displays,
17 and health fairs. I urge USDA to capitalize on the
18 great resource it already has in Cooperative Extension
19 and use this excellent educational system to continue
20 to reach a large percentage of the populace especially
21 the disadvantaged through the Food Stamp Nutrition
22 Education Program. More than any other factor, a well
23 educated populace is the best way to increase the
24 nutrition status and health of the nation. Thank you.

25 MR. HOLDEN: Next on the list we

1 have Kim Harkness, Kim, and that's from Food Bank
2 Council of Michigan.

3 KIM HARKNESS: Yes. Good morning.
4 My name is Kim Harkness, and I am the food programs
5 manager for the Food Bank Counsel of Michigan, and we
6 are the State Association of Regional Food Banks here
7 in Michigan, we provide emergency food to about a
8 million people throughout our network of 2,500
9 emergency food providers. Our customers are generally
10 low income individuals and households. The food we
11 provide is intended to fill a temporary need to help
12 people in an emergency such as fire, job loss, or when
13 there's just not enough money in the household budget
14 to make ends meet.

15 I'd like to share three important
16 points with you in this brief testimony about some of
17 the important USDA programs. First, a well funded food
18 assistance program needs to remain a priority of USDA.
19 In Michigan, food banks and emergency food providers
20 will distribute over 75 million pounds of groceries to
21 about a million people this year. But that volume of

22 food is tiny compared to the impact that the food
23 assistance program has for low income families. We
24 have always said that the Food Stamp Program is the
25 first line of defense against hunger. What is best

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1 about it is the program is designed to provide
2 assistance to all people using consistent eligibility
3 requirements and designed to suit the needs of
4 individuals and families. It is a reliable source of
5 critically needed nutrition. Please know that the
6 emergency food provider network is in no way capable of
7 taking the place of food stamps. In Michigan,
8 according to the 2001 Hunger in America Study of food
9 bank customers, less than 40 percent of emergency food
10 clients are enrolled in the Food Stamp Program, yet
11 emergency food providers are currently at capacity,
12 struggling to serve people that come to their doors.
13 Any change in food stamp funding or eligibility that
14 reduces people's resources will ultimately impact the
15 emergency food system and the way many respond. Food

16 stamps are truly crucial to hundreds of thousands of
17 people in Michigan. Funding should be increased or at
18 least maintained.

19 Secondly, food banks rely heavily on
20 TEFAP as a critical source of staple household food
21 items for emergency assistance. It has become an
22 integral source of food for our regional food banks,
23 and this product gets distributed to all 83 counties of
24 Michigan through our agency network. In 2005 food
25 banks handled about 6 million pounds of TEFAP food, and

1 this, like I said, went to all 83 counties in Michigan.
2 Changes in our nation's food industry have brought
3 about a dramatic change in the supply of the non-
4 perishable staple foods. TEFAP is one of the most
5 important sources of protein, pasta, canned fruit and
6 vegetables that we have.

7 In Michigan our organization works
8 closely with our Department of Education to provide
9 this program. We're very fortunate for that

10 relationship that we have and through recent years
11 we've been able to work with a new ecosystem for
12 ordering the food and selected delivery sites. This is
13 an effective and efficient ordering delivery system,
14 and we feel that people with emergency food needs are
15 better served because of the variety and quality of
16 food we get from TEFAP. So please maintain and when
17 possible increase the funding for this program.
18 Because of it, Michigianians have access to better food
19 and more food.

20 Finally, I would like to underscore
21 the importance of USDA food programs by reminding you
22 that these programs not only benefit low income and
23 vulnerable families in our state, but they also affect
24 grocers, retailers, agricultural programs throughout
25 our state. We are the second largest -- agriculture is

1 the second largest industry in our state, and due to
2 the purchases with the USDA program, that money goes
3 right back into our economic system. This is an

4 important feature of the USDA programs because it
5 recognizes the needs that we have here in our state,
6 creates job security and markets for many sectors of
7 the food industry.

8 In closing, I would like to thank
9 you for this opportunity to be heard at this listening
10 session and appreciate your time.

11 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you.

12 Harley Torres Aldeen, Second
13 Harvest.

14 HARLEY TOVVES ALDEEN: Good morning.
15 I'm Harley Tovves Aldeen. I'm with America's Second
16 Harvest, the nation's food bank network, and before I
17 launch into my very long list of requests, I do want to
18 take a moment to thank the USDA for its prompt and
19 efficient response to the devastation caused by
20 Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Our network of 209 food
21 banks, particularly the 20 or so in the gulf states
22 that were affected, could not be more grateful for the
23 expedient distribution of disaster food stamps as well
24 as the more than 400 truck loads of USDA commodity
25 product including 66 that went directly to our food

1 banks. Thank you so very much.

2 As I mentioned, America's Second
3 Harvest represents 209 food banks, and they in turn
4 support 50,000 charities around the country and more
5 than 94,000 individual programs. As broad-based,
6 far-reaching, and expedient as our network is, and
7 frankly downright wonderful, we do depend a lot on the
8 support of the USDA. Federal commodities through the
9 Emergency Food Assistance Program and the Commodity
10 Supplemental Food Program provide some of the most
11 nutritious products received by hunger relief charities
12 nation wide. This is really underscored by the
13 commodities that were sent directly to the disaster
14 affected areas which we're truly grateful for some very
15 stable items including peanut butter and chili, things
16 that were very easy to use at the household size.

17 Programs like TEFAP serve the public
18 good in two primary and important ways. First, high
19 quality nutritious food gets to hungry Americans in an
20 efficient manner utilizing what we do best, our

21 efficient network.

22 Secondly, the agricultural economy
23 strengthened through surplus commodity removal. This
24 is really what we see as a win/win. America's Second
25 Harvest, the nation's food bank network, strongly urges

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1 Congress to provide sufficient support for these
2 critical anti-hunger programs, including adequate
3 storage and distribution funds.
4 The 2002 Farm Bill included a number
5 of positive reforms to the Food Stamp Program making
6 the program easier for states to administer and
7 enhancing access for applicants and recipients.
8 Program changes that add unwarranted complexity and
9 excessive bureaucratic conditions on food stamp
10 administrators and beneficiaries would truly undermine
11 these advances. More can and needs to be done to make
12 the Food Stamp Program more accessible to certain
13 vulnerable populations, including but not limited to
14 seniors, working families, and immigrants. Despite the

15 dramatic surge in food stamp case load, slightly above
16 half the total persons who are eligible actually
17 participate in the program. A few needed changes
18 include making eligibility for the elderly and disabled
19 automatic with their food stamp eligibility being
20 determined at the Social Security office without an
21 additional application, and increasing the minimum
22 benefit to at least \$25 per month. And, second,
23 allowing states to test a variety of innovative methods
24 that can remove more barriers, further streamline the
25 eligibility and benefit determination process, and

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1 improve the quality of food purchases.

2 For instance, one pilot with which
3 Mr. Holden is intimately familiar that will soon be
4 tested in Illinois will allow food banks or similar
5 organizations to initiate the application process with
6 up to two months of initial eligibility followed by a
7 conventional application review by the State agency.

8 While some of these innovations

9 might result in higher overall program benefit costs,
10 making these investments in the Food Stamp Program
11 would be amply repaid in greater program access, less
12 confusion, and simpler administration. Congress should
13 set aside sufficient funds to cover reasonable
14 additional costs of these innovations. Thank you.

15 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you.

16 I have Michael from Michigan's Farm
17 Bureau. Michael.

18 MICHGAL FUSILIER: Thank you for
19 this opportunity to comment on the next Farm Bill. I
20 am Mike Fusilier from Washtenaw County. My wife and I
21 operate a farm market and greenhouse with our children.
22 I am also a member of the Michigan Farm Bureau Board of
23 Directors. As a farmer, I'm very interested in the
24 outcome of the 2007 Farm Bill debate. Farmers across
25 Michigan support the current Farm Bill as it secures a

1 safe food supply, provides a safety net for farmers,
2 expands exports, and maintains income levels. I'm in

3 favor of free and fair trade, and, therefore, our farm
4 programs need to be in compliance with the current WTO
5 agreement. However, I am concerned about the WTO
6 cotton case and how it will impact my eventual
7 operation and others. Consideration should be given to
8 the fruit and vegetable sectors of the agricultural
9 industry during the Farm Bill discussion.

10 I support a consistent long-term
11 market oriented farm policy that will rely less on
12 government and increasingly more on the markets, allow
13 farmers to take maximum advantage of market
14 opportunities at home and abroad without government
15 interference, encourage production decisions based on
16 market demand, and develop risk management tools to
17 deal with inherent fluctuations in revenue and income
18 associated with farming. This Farm Bill just as in the
19 past will impact my farming operation and the over
20 53,000 other farmers in Michigan. It is agriculture's
21 goal to work with the administration and Congress to
22 pass and implement a farm bill that will strengthen our
23 economy and agricultural industry. Thank you again for
24 this opportunity.

25 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you.

1 Sarah Cook.

2 SARAH COOK: Good morning. My name
3 is Sarah Cook, and I'm here representing Elder Law of
4 Michigan where I work as the project director for
5 Michigan's Coordinated Access to Food For the Elderly
6 or MICAFE Program for short. The MICAFE Program
7 increases the participation of eligible older adults
8 age 60 and over and the members of their households in
9 the Food Stamp Program. For the purposes of this
10 discussion, when I mention seniors, I'm referring to
11 people age 60 and over. And I have three
12 recommendations that I'd like to share with you today.

13 First, Elder Law of Michigan
14 recommends that funding levels be increased for the
15 Food Stamp Program. The Food Stamp Program is a
16 dynamic program that currently changes with the needs
17 of our nation. If poverty or unemployment rates
18 increase as they continue to do, the Food Stamp Program
19 can quickly respond to prevent people from slipping

20 into hunger. Without increased funding levels or, even
21 worse, with cuts to the program, the Food Stamp Program
22 will become static and unable to respond to meet our
23 nation 's changing needs.

24 Second, Elder Law recommends that
25 the minimum benefit level be increased from \$10 to \$30.

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1 Increasing the minimum benefit level would have a
2 twofold impact, providing food stamp recipients with
3 greater purchasing power as the cost of food increases
4 and infusing local economies with critically needed
5 federal dollars.

6 The need for a higher minimum
7 benefit amount is necessary to keep pace with the cost
8 of monthly living expenses to cover the basics of life
9 like food, clothing, shelter, utilities, gas, and
10 medicine. The Food Stamp Program serves as an
11 important safety net, but it must increase with the
12 cost of living to be adequate to ease the stress of
13 meeting monthly expenditures.

14 A higher minimum benefit will also
15 allow seniors to purchase food to meet health related
16 needs. Having the resources to purchase not just any
17 food but nutritionally appropriate food makes a
18 tremendous difference to the health and well-being of
19 older people. Good nutrition can aid in stress
20 management, help prevent depression, and aid in the
21 healing process.

22 A higher minimum benefit level will
23 also help food stamp recipients as well as boost local
24 economy. A USDA study found that every \$5 of food
25 stamps generates almost \$10 in total economic activity.

1 Thirdly, based on the qualitative
2 information provided by many of the seniors who use
3 MICAFE, Elder Law recommends that the requirement of
4 the in-person interview for food stamp applications be
5 flexible allowing local service organizations to assist
6 with the process. Elder Law in partnership with the
7 Michigan Department of Human Services was able to

8 secure a waiver of the in-person interview for the
9 MICAFE process, and we found that the waiver of this
10 in-person interview was a major determining factor when
11 seniors were deciding whether or not to apply for
12 benefits. Seniors expressed preference in using the
13 MICAFE process, which involves meeting with a trusted
14 volunteer in their local community.

15 Our country has made much progress
16 to improve the economic well-being in lives of older
17 people. Now is not the time to take a step backward
18 and consign our parents and grandparents to lives of
19 quiet desperation. I urge you to increase funding for
20 the Food Stamp Program, increase the minimum benefit
21 level, and modify the in-person interview requirement
22 to ensure that food stamps works for all of our
23 nation's most vulnerable population. Thank you. And
24 I've submitted written comments as well.

25 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you.

2 Northern Illinois Food Bank.

3 ELIZABETH DONOVAN: My name is
4 Elizabeth Donovan. I'm the director of the Agencies
5 and Programs with Northern Illinois Food Bank in St.
6 Charles, Illinois. With a mission to provide
7 nutritious food to all those in need, last year
8 Northern Illinois Food Bank distributed more than 21
9 million pounds of food through our network of 480 food
10 pantries, shelters, soup kitchens, and other nonprofit
11 food assistance sites to help more than 227,000 people
12 living in poverty in 13 Northern Illinois counties.

13 A recent study at our food bank
14 indicated that nearly half of the households served
15 have at least one employed adult, almost half of the
16 people being served are children under the age of 18,
17 and 7.6 percent of our clients are elderly.

18 My comments this morning are based
19 on our experience serving a large and varied geographic
20 area as well as a very diverse population. Our clients
21 are farm families living in rural communities, elderly
22 residents living in small towns, laid off workers
23 struggling in suburban villages, and nonEnglish
24 speaking immigrants trying to make it in urban

25 neighborhoods. Among their commonalities are the

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1 economic struggles and their need for food assistance.

2 There are three major components to
3 the Farm Nutrition Bill that are crucial to meeting the
4 nutritional needs of low income people, the Food Stamp
5 Program, the Emergency Food Assistance Program, and the
6 Commodity Supplemental Food Program.

7 The Food Stamp Program has a
8 potential and promise of ensuring that no child in
9 America experiences hunger and that all residents have
10 the means to purchase basic food items. Yet it is
11 estimated that only 54 percent of all persons eligible
12 to receive these benefits participate in the program.
13 While it is imperative that the Food Stamp Program
14 continue, it is also important that the provisions of
15 the Farm Nutrition Bill 2007 address issues of
16 accessibility, eligibility, and benefit levels. Some
17 specific recommendations include support outreach
18 efforts aimed at increasing program participation

19 levels, including allowance of the on-line applications
20 at local food pantries and for the use of the
21 application or other means tested programs as the basis
22 for enrollment in the Food Stamp Program. Eliminate
23 the interview requirement for recertification of
24 household continued eligibility. Eliminate or minimize
25 current work requirements to align more closely with

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1 other federal benefit programs. Provide a standard
2 medical deduction for use in calculating food stamp
3 benefits or allow a deduction for actual medical costs.
4 Remove the asset limit for households below 130 percent
5 of federal poverty level. Provide food stamps for all
6 eligible legal immigrants, and increase the minimum
7 benefit level from \$10 and calculate the benefit level
8 using USDA's moderate or low cost food plan.

9 The Emergency Food Assistance
10 Program and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program
11 greatly contribute to the amount of food available to
12 low income people, particularly those not participating

13 in the Food Stamp Program. As a food bank, these
14 programs directly impact the quality and the types of
15 food that we have available for distribution. Specific
16 recommendations include increase the availability of
17 the commodities and increase the nutritional value of
18 the products, increase funding for the storage,
19 handling, and transportation of the commodities
20 recognizing the rising cost to food banks, and
21 expanding service areas.

22 I applaud USDA for soliciting public
23 comment and providing the opportunity for input. Thank
24 you.

25 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you.

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1 Terri Stangl, the Center for Civil
2 Justice.

3 TERRI STANGL: Yes. Good morning.
4 My name is Terri Stangl. I'm the executive director at
5 the Center for Civil Justice. We have offices in Flint
6 and Saginaw here in Michigan. For quite a number of

7 years we've been very involved in trying to improve
8 access to food stamps by Michigan residents, and in
9 2001 we received one of the early access grants which
10 has led to a continuing partnership with Michigan State
11 University Extension and the Michigan Department of
12 Human Services. We do both a state-wide eligibility
13 help line, a phone help line, and a calculator. We did
14 one of the very early on-line benefits calculators here
15 in Michigan. We also appreciate very much that USDA
16 has provided funding to do outreach work, and that's
17 been very helpful for other states including Michigan.

18 Food stamps in Michigan has been
19 absolutely critical for the last six or seven years
20 because of our economic situation. We have been -- we
21 and Mississippi have been at the bottom of this
22 economic recovery. Currently about one out of 10
23 people in Michigan receive food stamps, and that
24 represents an increase of over 50 percent in recent
25 years. So on one hand the outreach efforts have

1 worked. On the other hand, we've really began
2 plummeting the depth of need here in the state.

3 I would like to make some specific
4 recommendations based on our experience working with
5 agencies and families in Michigan.

6 First of all, it is vital, as others
7 have mentioned, that we maintain adequate funding for
8 the program. We can see when a state like Michigan has
9 economic downturns which continue beyond what they
10 should, and when we have natural disasters, it is
11 necessary to have the funding that can maintain need
12 and respond to critical new needs. This is not the
13 time to beg and borrow between groups to meet that
14 combined need.

15 Second of all, it is also very
16 important to maintain the key federal structure, and I
17 say that for several reasons. One, we've seen with
18 Katrina that the federal structure allowed food stamps
19 to be one of the most responsive and quick programs to
20 respond to need, and advocates throughout the country
21 are extremely appreciative of that, and it really made
22 a difference when we needed it on the ground.

23 I also find that by having a federal

24 structure you've can have clarifications,
25 interpretations, and guidance that get into the field

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1 very quickly, and that's important for both states and
2 advocates. Having some waivers has been helpful.
3 Michigan has used some waivers in some creative ways
4 that have benefited our citizens, but there has been
5 oversight and guidance by USDA about who is affected,
6 what is the cost, are they really beneficial, and I
7 would urge you to maintain that level of waivers and
8 not go to a block grant or super waiver model which
9 puts states at risk to disasters and also takes away
10 that kind of oversight, which really protects the
11 intended beneficiaries of the program.

12 Third, in the eye of looking at
13 program coordination, we would recommend that you
14 consider raising the gross income level to 185 percent
15 of the poverty. What we see in Michigan is that many
16 working families cannot get food stamps even though
17 they have ever growing shelter, utility, and child care

18 costs. A family of two where the mother's working 40
19 hours a week at \$8.50 an hour cannot get food stamps
20 regardless of the cost of her rent, utilities, or child
21 care. That's very low income and we should be bringing
22 it up to the same level that we use for WIC, the summer
23 food service program, and others.

24 Next, I would recommend that we do
25 also restore benefits to those who have been under-

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1 served in recent years, namely legal immigrants. That
2 will help get those children on food assistance if the
3 parents are also eligible who are here legally and
4 working and for the childless adults. Michigan did not
5 have a waiver until the last two years, and it has
6 really helped childless adults during times of
7 unemployment.

8 And, finally, I would also recommend
9 that we look at increasing the minimum benefit level.
10 As we talk to seniors on the help line, that \$10
11 minimum is sometimes a barrier as they fear the amount

12 of administrative work. Thank you for the chance to
13 share these concerns.

14 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you.

15 G. Paul Cloutier. I think I did it
16 correctly.

17 G. PAUL CLOUTIER: Yes.

18 MR. HOLDEN: And that's the Michigan
19 Department of Human Services.

20 G. PAUL CLOUTIER: Good morning. My
21 name is Paul Cloutier, and I'm the Native American
22 Affairs Director for the Michigan Department of Human
23 Services. First of all, I want to thank the USDA as
24 well as the midwest regional office for bringing the
25 Farm Bill forum to Michigan. Usually when I get an

1 opportunity to speak on behalf of Native American
2 Affairs issues, I am either in the State of Wisconsin
3 or in Minnesota, so it's nice to be local for a change.

4 My comments this morning will
5 primarily focus on the Food Distribution Program on or
6 near Indian reservations. However, I would be remiss

7 if I did not take the opportunity to comment on the
8 Food Stamp Program. Nearly 10 percent of Michigan
9 residents currently receive food stamps, which equates
10 to a monthly average of about 1 million recipients.
11 Furthermore, this does not take into account the nearly
12 3,000 plus victims of Hurricane Katrina who are
13 temporarily located within the state receiving services
14 from state government. The average monthly allotment
15 made to a family of three for food service or food
16 stamp benefits is roughly about \$237, a few pennies
17 above that. The Food Stamp Program and other food
18 distribution programs help insure nutrition and combat
19 poverty in the United States. The Food Stamp Program
20 also makes large contributions to the economy of the
21 state and the nation. During the 2004 fiscal year the
22 Food Stamp Program contributed a little over
23 \$896 million to Michigan's economy. The Michigan
24 Department of Human Services believes the Food Stamp
25 Program should be held harmless in all budget

1 discussions if not strengthened.

2 The Michigan Department of Human
3 Services also supports the Food Distribution Program on
4 or near Indian reservations. However, we do believe
5 that with a few policy changes at the Federal level,
6 the program could be much more effective in the State
7 of Michigan. Roughly, according to the 2000 census,
8 approximately 75 percent of the Indian population in
9 the state resides in urban areas, areas such as
10 Detroit, Flint, and Lansing. These are also areas that
11 are not near an Indian reservation where the Food
12 Distribution Program is made available. We believe
13 that it would be appropriate to expand the program to
14 include urban Indian programs to enable them to
15 establish the program to serve these populations.

16 We also feel that there is some
17 additional oversight needed in regards to the Food
18 Distribution Program and its interaction with the Food
19 Stamp Program. As you are aware, individuals must
20 chose one program versus the other in order to receive
21 assistance, and there is not a tremendous amount of
22 guidance made available to ensure a timely free flow of
23 information between tribes and states to avoid

24 misissuance of either program.

25 Once again, I want to thank

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1 everybody for providing the opportunity to come here
2 and speak, and I do have written comments that I will
3 be submitting at a later date due to the fact that I
4 have substantially more information that I'd like to
5 add and share. Thank you.

6 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you.

7 Megan Wheaton, Michigan Farm Bureau,
8 correct?

9 MEGAN WHEATON: Correct. Thank you
10 very much for the opportunity to provide some general
11 comments on the Farm Bill and the next Farm Bill.
12 Obviously here representing the over 47,000 farm family
13 members of the Michigan Farm Bureau when they have some
14 interest in commodity titles and other titles, nonfood
15 stamp related. So I appreciate the opportunity to
16 provide that.

17 These farm families are very

18 interested in the outcome of the next Farm Bill debate
19 and what impact it will have on agriculture in the
20 State of Michigan and our economy. As we prepare for
21 the next Farm Bill debate, and it is important to note
22 that Michigan farmers support the current Farm Bill and
23 urge fully funding all of the current programs entitled
24 in that Farm Bill including conservation and commodity
25 titles. Additionally, we oppose changing or re-opening

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1 the current Farm Bill. It is critical that the 2007
2 Farm Bill focus on improving net farm income, enhancing
3 the economic opportunity for farmers, preserving
4 property rights, and conserving the environment. Our
5 nation's economy, environment, and national security
6 are dependent on the viability of our farmers and
7 ranchers. Agriculture must be treated as a strategic
8 resource by our nation and reflected as such in local,
9 state, and national government policies. Understanding
10 the international scope of the United States Domestic
11 Farm Policy and the role of the WTO negotiation,

12 Michigan Farm Bureau supports the development of a WTO
13 compliant Farm Bill. Today we've seen the vast reaches
14 of what the Farm Bill can do. As debate continues over
15 the next year and a half, we encourage all stake
16 holders to work together for the improvement of our
17 communities across this country and think innovatively
18 to provide resources for all in need. Thank you.

19 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you.

20 Michael Sarafa. And I think that is
21 the Association of Food Dealers.

22 MICHAEL SARAFA: Right. Michael
23 Sarafa. I'm president of the Associated Food Dealers
24 in Michigan. I thank you for this opportunity to
25 address you this morning. I'd like to say, first of

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1 all, that the Associated Food Dealers represents 2000
2 independent retailers throughout the State of Michigan.
3 We're privileged to work with many of the
4 organizations, the Michigan organizations that have
5 addressed you this morning, and I applaud them for

6 their efforts in helping to feed the poor and the needy
7 and the hungry in the State of Michigan. I also would
8 like to say that we enjoy a very strong working
9 relationship with the USDA Detroit or Michigan
10 representative, Miss Shirley Miles, and she does a good
11 job keeping our retailers in check.

12 Today I'd like to raise an issue
13 that is something we've been working on for the last
14 several years that has to do with money management,
15 hunger, store operations, and grocery service to the
16 underprivileged neighborhoods.

17 The first issue is relative to the
18 cuts in the Food Stamp Program or potential cuts, and
19 one of the things I would ask you to keep in mind as
20 you advocate against those cuts is that the Food Stamp
21 Program is very key to the ability of our members to
22 locate in neighborhoods where there are high food stamp
23 usage.

24 In Michigan right now we're down to
25 one chain supermarket, Kroger, Farmer Jack is in the

1 process of closing or selling 70 stores, and it is our
2 members that are left to locate in those neighborhoods
3 that will have a harder time in terms of food delivery.
4 Without the Food Stamp Program, even those stores would
5 suffer.

6 The second issue has to do with
7 money management. Years ago salaried employees or
8 hourly employees were paid once a week. It was changed
9 to twice a week as a -- primarily because it was a
10 mechanism to save payroll costs or costs associated
11 with payroll. All of us get paid or most of us get
12 paid now every other week. The Food Stamp Program, of
13 course, is a once-a-month benefit, and what we're
14 learning from our members that serve in high food stamp
15 programs is that their customers that are largely
16 dependent on food stamps and their children grow up
17 with the culture of knowing they're going to eat better
18 at the beginning of the month than they do at the end
19 of the month. And apparently there are even recipes
20 that have grown up over time around leftovers and gravy
21 drippings and things like that at the end of the month.

22 From the business standpoint, some

23 of our stores do 80 percent of their business in the
24 first 10 days of the month. It creates enormous
25 problems for staffing, for inventory control, et

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1 cetera, especially with respect to perishable items,
2 and it's not fair to the employees who might have to
3 work 50 or 60 hours a week for the first two weeks and
4 then can't get hours in the second half of the month.

5 And, again, the third issue, I
6 think, is that it's really unfortunate, and I believe
7 that there's enough evidence out there that this can be
8 proven, that kids go hungrier and eat not as well at
9 the end of the month as they do at the beginning of the
10 month.

11 So what we're asking you to do is to
12 take a look, and we've been working with the Department
13 of Human Services in Michigan to ask them to evaluate
14 the option of twice monthly payments, and primarily
15 what we get back is that it's possibly not allowed by
16 federal regulation. I'd ask you to take a look at

17 whether or not you can authorize states or allow them
18 the flexibility of the discretion to do other payment
19 methods, whether it's random or alphabetical or just
20 twice a month, once at the beginning of the month and
21 once in the middle of the month. Thank you for your
22 time.

23 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you.

24 Princess Pine, Inter Tribal Council
25 of Michigan. Princess.

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1 PRINCESS PINE: Thank you. Hello.
2 My name is Princess Pine. I come from Sault Ste.
3 Marie, Michigan. First of all, I'd like to thank --
4 I'm happy to see the interpreters. I think they did a
5 good job. My boy has two grandbabies of mine. My one
6 grandbaby is five years old. He came home last year
7 and he knew the American Sign Language, and I was so
8 impressed. I think he knows what to do but he doesn't
9 know the concept, and I thought that was pretty cool.
10 And another thing I was going to bring up is at five

11 years old he knows the Pledge of Allegiance, and I
12 thought that was the coolest thing. I said make sure
13 you get that on tape, said that would be cool.

14 But, anyway, I come today for the
15 children of our next generation and for all the
16 children. I have worked with the Inter Tribal Council
17 of Michigan for 26 years. Michigan Inter Tribal
18 Council is a consortium of 12 federally recognized
19 tribes. We are 501C3. I have worked in programs such
20 as the Food Distribution Program for 15 years, the
21 energy program, the elderly programs. I currently work
22 with the elderly program and the Michigan Indian
23 Tuition Program and the Work Force Investment Program.
24 I've also been very happy to be able to serve my people
25 in whatever capacity I could help them with. I was a

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1 volunteer income tax assistant person in the 1980s when
2 VITA was not even here, and I thought that was pretty
3 good.

4 Today I'm coming to talk about the

5 Farm Bill, specifically to the Food Distribution
6 Program on Indian reservations. That was developed
7 because the tribes were rural and remote, and
8 transportation issues and poverty was great on the
9 tribes, and so the USDA worked with the tribes, and
10 they got the Food Distribution Program on the Indian
11 reservations. Thank you. My suggestion is that the
12 tribes are very competent, they have followed all the
13 USDA regulations, and they currently administer great
14 programs such as Indian Health and BIA programs, they
15 have Tribal Health Centers, Tribal Courts, and Tribal
16 enterprises, and they provide healthy communities for
17 its members to live. The gaming opportunity has just
18 been fabulous, but the gaming opportunities for all but
19 one of the communities is for infrastructure
20 development, housing, and meeting the needs, health
21 care needs of the children and the elders and the poor
22 populations on the reservation.

23 The suggestion I would have is that
24 the tribes be able to administer their own Food Stamp
25 Program, their own WIC program, their own Commodity

1 Supplemental Program, the TEFAP program, and the Senior
2 Farmers Market Program. We have competency and we have
3 infrastructure involved, and we've been working with
4 USDA since the inception of the Commodity Food Program
5 in the 1980s, and we have a good track record.

6 Another issue is the quality of the
7 food for the tribes. USDA's receptive to listening to
8 the FDPIR changes, but very slowly implement changes.
9 I think an increase in administration is required,
10 because whether you serve 150 people or 1,000 a month,
11 the administration level is the same. The FDA
12 products, they arrive late at times. The food quality
13 is inferior due to shelf life or damaged items. There
14 needs to be a more uniform and timely distribution
15 system. There was a project, a pilot project, private
16 vendor project. It provided higher quality food, and
17 the products were bought from local vendors. That
18 private vendor project was well received by the
19 participants, and the foods were higher quality. The
20 private vendor project needs to continue. The USDA
21 administration workers need to come to our sites, and

22 they need to eat the food that they are providing so
23 that they get a good gist of what is going on.

24 When I did the Commodity Food
25 Program, I ran a food program, I had four warehouses I

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1 was responsible for and the workers, and we did a great
2 job. So I was actually a front line worker, I'm still
3 a front line worker, and I'm coming here as the voice
4 for the people.

5 The Senior Farmers Market Program
6 was very, very well received at the tribal level. The
7 seniors loved it, but when I tried to apply last year,
8 they said you had to have, number one, a letter of
9 intent, which wasn't in the first RFP, and then, number
10 two, I was too late for that, so we couldn't open up,
11 and that was like two years ago, and as of this date
12 when I stand here seniors are still asking, "Princess,
13 when are we going to get that Project Fresh again --
14 Senior Farmers Market Program?" We gave coupons to the
15 individuals, we modeled it after the State of Michigan

16 program, and we helped poor farmers.

17 In my program I had to be the
18 administrator, I had to be a farmer, and I had to be a
19 market master all at once, and I did it, but I went
20 through that system just for educational enrichment,
21 and now that I know how to do it, I know I could come
22 in at a lesser administration cost. It was 35,000 to
23 implement that for the 12 reservations, and we served
24 about 3 or 400 people.

25 The next thing is the TEFAP program,

1 Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program. I think
2 that program should be continued and that the community
3 action agencies or whatever agencies that run that
4 program, they have to know that commodity food
5 participants are automatically eligible for TEFAP, and
6 I don't know how we would do that, probably just in a
7 newsletter or some kind of notice, but we are
8 discouraged from getting TEFAP because they figure we
9 get commodity foods, anyway. And that's not a correct
10 attitude to take.

11 I want to congratulate USDA in the
12 responsibility they have undertaken in the very

13 technical areas to make our nation safe in the food
14 arena. We speak to provide information and input on
15 how to serve and better serve your participants,
16 especially for me today it's for the tribal members who
17 reside in the rural and remote areas. There's only one
18 tribe in Michigan that provides a per capita, monthly
19 per capita. The rest of us tribes are poor. We're
20 using our money -- some of them do give a once-a-year
21 per capita payment of maybe a thousand or 3,500.
22 Basically, though, the funds used for gaming are for
23 infrastructure development, health, and social welfare
24 needs. Thank you and so be it.

25 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you.

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1 Kami Pothukuchi. Did I do it right?
2 KAMI POTHUKUCHI: Close enough. I'm
3 Kami Pothukuchi from Wayne State University. Thank you
4 for this opportunity to speak in front of you, and I
5 have written comments that I'll submit at a later date
6 because I've added some things listening to my

7 colleagues here as well.

8 We're confronted with two big
9 realities today. One is that energy prices are going
10 up, getting gas from external sources has implications
11 for a whole host of issues in this country, including
12 social and economic justice, homeland security, and
13 economic vitality. We need policies that reduce energy
14 consumption policies related to the Farm Bill and make
15 our food and agricultural systems more sustainable.

16 The second reality is that obesity
17 and diet related illnesses are going up, especially in
18 communities of color. Detroit was named fattest city
19 not too long ago. Given this, we need to do two things
20 immediately as it relates to the Farm Bill. One is we
21 need to realign our current support in terms of where
22 our money is going to address the realities I named
23 before and the priorities that are facing the nation.
24 The reality is that currently 85 percent of the support
25 is going to 15 percent of the largest producers,

1 putting both smaller producers and poor communities at
2 risk. And our priority is that we need to increase the
3 health of individuals and link the health of
4 individuals to communities, regions, and to the health
5 of our nation.

6 The second thing we need to do is to
7 support more local and regional food systems so that
8 healthy food is produced, processed, and distributed
9 closest to where the eaters are, including, by the way,
10 community gardens, which are a very important source of
11 food and tend not to be considered important, so that
12 these local and regional sources are given greater
13 support than more distant sources.

14 We need policies that produce
15 basically healthy individuals, healthy neighborhoods,
16 communities, and regions that also link to a healthy
17 nation in terms of prosperity and security.

18 So I have three major categories of
19 points. One is that for healthy individuals, we need
20 access to healthy fresh fruits and vegetables within
21 places within communities and neighborhoods. First and
22 most importantly, and others perhaps have covered this
23 more eloquently than I will, we need to protect and

24 enhance basic nutrition safety nets such as food stamps
25 and child nutrition programs. Those should not be

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1 hurt, those should be actually enhanced. We need to
2 increase our WIC and Farmers Market Nutrition Program.
3 We know research has shown that these are actually very
4 successful. And we need to be very mindful of the
5 barriers to accessing especially Farmers Market
6 Nutrition Program and WIC programs, Farmers Market WIC
7 programs among low income households. For example, in
8 Detroit the redemption rates of Project Fresh coupons
9 is only 30 percent, where as Brother Rick Samon, (sic)
10 who supplies fresh fruits and vegetables from his
11 one-acre urban garden in the soup kitchen, it runs out
12 of produce when he actually takes his produce to the
13 WIC clinics and the FIA where the mothers and pregnant
14 women, basically where they get the coupons, they're
15 able to spend it, and, of course, redemption rates are
16 very high there, so we really need to be mindful of the
17 barriers to the use of Farmers Market, but we need to

18 increase money for that.
19 We need to increase support for
20 community food projects, competitive grants program.
21 Detroit has benefitted twice from these programs, and
22 the benefits are way out of proportion to the money
23 that's been invested here. We need more money to
24 projects like this, especially that give low income
25 communities of color access to fresh fruits and

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1 vegetables.
2 We also need increased technical
3 assistance to organize community food projects within
4 communities of color, and we need to support food banks
5 that are sourced from local and small farmers
6 regionally.
7 My second point is that healthy
8 individuals are linked to healthy neighborhoods,
9 communities, and regions. We need more support for
10 farmers markets that link local consumers and local
11 producers. We need to fund the Farm to Cafeteria

12 Project that has been enacted, and we also need a
13 community food project type funding stream specifically
14 for the development of year-round food retail outlets
15 that also deliver other values to communities such as
16 minority entrepreneurship or provide more positive
17 relationships with local communities.

18 I'm mindful of my time, so I want to
19 go to my last point, which is healthy and local
20 regional food systems are also linked to our national
21 health in terms of social and economic justice, food
22 safety, and economic vitality and homeland security.
23 We need to reverse the policy incentives that drive
24 unsustainable production of surpluses by large
25 corporations that in turn keep small and medium scale

1 producers off the market place. We need to support
2 local food systems that produce the food, and therefore
3 are more energy efficient, and I've mentioned those
4 already, but we also most importantly need to support
5 the development of local and regional infrastructure

6 such as public wholesale terminals, local distribution
7 systems, and local food reserves that will be available
8 for us in times of crises and disasters. And, you
9 know, we have enterprise zones, for example, in urban
10 areas. It would be really nice to see a food related
11 enterprise zone that builds a local food system from
12 production to processing, distribution, and then be
13 available as a retail outlet for local and urban
14 consumers. Thank you very much.

15 MR. HOLDEN: Thank you.

16 MS. COLER: That is the last speaker
17 who has signed up. We do have a few more slots if
18 there is anyone who did not have the opportunity to
19 sign up that would like to come up and speak for a few
20 moments, it is your opportunity. Going once.

21 PRINCESS PINE: I'm Princess Pine.
22 Princess Pine honors our native medicine that's called
23 Princess Pine, and it's a fern, and it helps reduce
24 swelling. But, anyway, I just wanted to comment on the
25 community garden program with the seniors. The tribes

1 are really interested in the community garden concept,
2 and I am interested in being a farmer, but I don't know
3 how. I have 22 acres, 20 acres, and I sold 10 to get
4 to buy my home because I was homeless for the past two
5 years and go from home to home. And I would like to
6 try to do a garden, and we need more people like the
7 USDA rural development in Michigan who work with the
8 tribes on a government-to-government basis who try to
9 really help the tribes in accessing programs and
10 getting the best benefit from what they have to
11 receive. And USDA with the Food Distribution Program
12 has been pretty receptive, and I'm proud that USDA
13 allowed the tribes to have a national association of
14 Food Distribution Program directors. It gives us an
15 opportunity to share cultures, to share business
16 management, business administration problems and
17 successes, and we need that, too, for Michigan for the
18 tribes and for farming and for all of our economic
19 agriculture needs, we need to all be together, and we
20 need to know what one person is doing with the others.
21 With the Commodity Food Program I had one in 15 years
22 who had food stamps and commodities the first month. I

23 think that's a pretty good record. Thank you.

24 MS. COLER: Thank you all for coming

25 and sharing with us your thoughts. We've certainly

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1 heard some new ideas that we will follow up and look

2 into but, also, some ideas that we're hearing in other

3 spots of the country, too, so it's good to hear some

4 similarity in concerns and suggestions.

5 Certainly those folks that spoke to

6 the nonnutrition title of the Farm Bill, we do meet

7 with our colleagues back in Washington, and I'll be

8 sure to share that information and make sure it's

9 getting to the proper mission area.

10 And, again, I just want to say thank

11 you all, because it's the partnerships that we all have

12 between the federal, state, local, community, and

13 faith-based groups that really make these programs

14 successful. It's the input of everybody that's needed

15 to make them even better, because, as I mentioned at

16 the beginning, these programs do touch the lives of

17 many Americans, and it's an important part of ensuring
18 that those less fortunate are getting adequate
19 nutrition. And, again, thank you very much for all of
20 your input.

21 (The proceeding was concluded at 11:45 a.m.)