



NEWS RELEASE

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Transcript of Farm Bill Nutrition Forum
with Kate Coler, Deputy Under Secretary for
Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services
Columbia, South Carolina
November 17, 2005

2 MS. HOLLAND: Good morning, or afternoon, as it
3 just has changed to afternoon. I'm Denise Holland, the
4 Executive Director of Harvest Hope Food Bank here. I want
5 to welcome you all to the Food Bank. We are very happy to
6 have all of the USDA representatives here.

7 Before the introduction of Ms. Coler, let me tell
8 you a little bit about Harvest Hope Food Bank and also about
9 the other food banks that serve South Carolina. In total,
10 there are six food banks that serve South Carolina, the
11 entire state, and we are strategically located in
12 Greenville, Charleston, here in Columbia, we have a branch
13 in Aiken, I have a branch in Florence, and then Metrolina
14 Food Bank in Charlotte serves two counties in South Carolina
15 as well.

16 For Harvest Hope Food Bank, we serve 18 counties
17 around the central part of South Carolina; and in the 2001
18 America Second Harvest Hunger Study, of which we are all
19 members, we provide for 56,000 people per week who are
20 suffering from hunger. We do that through 350 member
21 agencies that are food pantries, soup kitchens, emergency
22 shelters, group homes, who are very dependent on the donated
23 supplies of food in addition to the USDA supplies of food.

24 They come here regularly. This is the area that
25 they come to receive the product we have staged through the

1 warehouse, and normally we have pallets out in this area for
2 them to pick from as well.

3 Serving those hungry people every day is a
4 personal crisis to them, and it happens very frequently.
5 There's food insecurity, which means maybe they have gone
6 for a day or missed -- they know that they will miss a
7 couple of meals over the next month. When they suffer from
8 hunger it means that they probably have gone for a day or
9 several full days without food.

10 For Harvest Hope Food Bank, and I'm sure the other
11 food bank representatives here from North Carolina and South
12 Carolina, we work very hard to secure donated food product
13 in our areas to supplement the USDA supplies.

14 You know, for my food bank, we don't turn anything
15 down, whether it's fresh produce or it's frozen meat or
16 canned goods, even cakes, pies and breads in the area, we
17 really take that. And we want to make it as nutritious as
18 possible. Certainly the USDA supplies help us to focus on
19 nutrition, but you're going to see cakes, pies, baked bread,
20 all that sort of thing as well. Hopefully, after this is
21 over you can go on a tour with us.

22 All of that is important. When someone is
23 suffering from hunger, not only do we need to provide the
24 very best we can, nutrition, for them, but we need to make
25 them feel better right then and there.

1 I'm reminded frequently of a little girl who came
2 with her mommy here to the food bank, and the mom, in
3 talking to our counselors -- because as a food bank we're a
4 little different, we have our own emergency food pantry on
5 site. And that little girl, in walking out of the food bank
6 with her mom, she looked at her, and she was talking about
7 the things that she could see in the bag, and there were
8 some apples and oranges and frozen meat and peanut butter
9 and jelly and that sort of thing, but the thing that she was
10 most excited about was there was a birthday cake sitting on
11 top. And she said, Look, Mommy, I've never had a birthday
12 cake before.

13 So you never really know what of that donated food
14 supply or that USDA food supply is going to not only
15 physically make them feel better but emotionally meet some
16 needs as well. When you're hungry, it's the full spectrum
17 that needs to be met, so we do thank you for your
18 participation in today's public forum.

19 It is important to have this policy discussion
20 amongst those who deal with it on grand scales and amongst
21 those of us who deal with it sometimes on also a much
22 smaller scale.

23 It affects many, many hungry people, particularly
24 those in South Carolina. We are extremely grateful for the
25 work of the USDA and, certainly, our local Department of

1 Social Services, to supplement our donated food product with
2 wonderful nutritious food from TFAP, which is called the
3 Emergency Food Assistance Program, and CSFP, which is the
4 commodity supplemental program. Without these supplies,
5 many families and children and our elderly in South Carolina
6 would simply not have what they need to eat.

7 Two weeks ago the USDA released the 2004 Household
8 Food Insecurity Report, finding that food insecurity and
9 hunger had gotten worse around the nation and especially
10 here in South Carolina. The prevalence of food insecurity
11 in South Carolina went from 11.3 percent of South Carolina
12 households to 14.8 percent of households.

13 If that were not bad enough, the rates of food
14 insecurity with hunger went from 3.6 percent to 5.5 percent
15 of households. Put very simply another way, South Carolina
16 went from being fifth, the fifth most hungry state in the
17 nation, to the second most hungry state. That means for us
18 in South Carolina, as food banks, food pantries, soup
19 kitchens, emergency shelters, we have thousands more people
20 who are suffering much more than one simple family crisis.
21 They are suffering a multitude of family crises. They are
22 not having food today and they have much greater anxiety
23 about are they going to have food tomorrow.

24 I'm deeply troubled about the findings in this
25 report. I'm troubled because, regularly, with our other

1 food banks here in South Carolina and North Carolina and
2 other states, we meet regularly to talk about that. We know
3 we are putting every resource we possibly can, and we're
4 doing that very efficiently to make hunger go away, yet it's
5 gotten worse.

6 So it begs to ask the question: How can we serve
7 South Carolina better in our population to assure that no
8 one goes to bed hungry tonight, and how can we prevent them
9 from suffering this calamity tomorrow, next week, next
10 month, next year.

11 I am proud to say that the Deputy Undersecretary
12 Kate Coler has proven to be a leader, recognizing that the
13 challenges to reducing hunger here in South Carolina and
14 around the nation are numerous. The scenarios are
15 completely varied and much needs to be done.

16 Ms. Coler has been a great visionary for the cause
17 of food insecurity and hunger. Since 2003, she has
18 successfully implemented provisions in the 2002 Farm Bill
19 that expanded eligibility for the Food Stamp Program,
20 developing initiatives, outreach initiatives that included
21 the conversion of paper coupons to the electronic benefit
22 transfer cards and the expansion of those eligibility
23 benefits.

24 Reporting to Eric Boss, the Undersecretary, and
25 through their combined teamwork, 5.8 million more eligible

1 people are receiving food stamps, 1.6 million more children
2 receive a free or reduced-priced school lunch. Over 1.5
3 million more children receive school breakfast, and over
4 400,000 more women, infants and children receive assistance
5 through the Women, Children and Infants Program.

6 The USDA staff are great supporters of the food
7 banks across the nation and the many-member agencies that we
8 support to put a stop to hunger. Through this leadership of
9 the entire staff -- and I really must call, also, your
10 attention to the people who make this happen right here in
11 South Carolina. They are completely engaged at all levels.
12 We meet with them nationally, we meet with them locally as a
13 state, and they are very involved with us. They work very
14 diligently to understand that it takes all of us. It takes
15 the non-profits, government, business and community leaders
16 to make a difference. We would not be here without all of
17 the people supporting us to do that work.

18 We sincerely appreciate Ms. Coler and the work
19 that she does and the work that the entire staff does, and
20 we are pleased to have all of them here.

21 After the public forum we would like you, if you
22 are interested, to gather over here beside the roll-up door.
23 It will come up, and I'll be glad to take you on a short
24 tour of the food bank so you can actually see the work that
25 we do every day.

1 Thank you very much.

2 MR. DONALD ARNETTE: Thank you, Ms. Holland.

3 I really appreciate the warm welcome and
4 explanation about our programs. But more importantly today,
5 I'm so thankful that we have this facility to meet all of
6 you here in Columbia, South Carolina, so it's good to be
7 here.

8 We have many staff, and we'll introduce them a bit
9 later, but the most important person, Ms. Kate Coler, Deputy
10 Undersecretary, and we will be visiting with her very, very
11 shortly.

12 But before we do that, I have some housekeeping
13 rules and issues to share with you, and I'd like to do that.
14 And then after I've shared the housekeeping, I'll turn the
15 mike over to Jessica Shahin, who is our deputy for the Food
16 Stamp Program out of Washington, D.C. She'll speak just a
17 bit about the forum and what will be discussed here today.

18 So with that, I have several rules, issues, that
19 I'd like to share. Attendees that have written comments may
20 leave them in the box that's designated for written
21 comments. We have one here, we have a table here, and
22 certainly there was another as you signed in earlier today.

23 Second: For attendees making oral statements, you
24 were provided a blue card with a number and a location,
25 either left or right. If your card has "right," then you

1 will speak from the microphone on your right, and those with
2 "left," you will speak from the microphone on your left.

3 Next, at the front of the room, staff will hold up
4 a card with a number on it. That will be your cue to move
5 to the microphone so that you can make your oral comments.

6 Next, before you begin to make your statement,
7 please state your name, your affiliation, and provide your
8 city and state. I'll say that again: Your name, your
9 affiliation, and provide your city and state.

10 Five: We will have ample time, obviously, to
11 accommodate everyone if your comments exceed five minutes,
12 so we're going to be -- in other forums we've cut it to
13 five, but today, if you have to, we can allow you to exceed
14 the five minutes, but we will at some point say we have to
15 move on. We will not be taking a break, so if you need to
16 leave the forum while it's in session, please feel free to
17 do so.

18 Seven: We have a sign language interpreter, as
19 you can see, that will be available for the length of the
20 forum. However, the interpreter will sign for the
21 introduction only unless there is a need for her to
22 continue. So is there anyone in the forum who has a need
23 for the sign language interpreter to continue beyond the
24 introduction? I'd like to see you raise your hands so we
25 can know. We want to use her time very effectively, but if

1 there is no need for her services we would like to
2 acknowledge that now. So if you need sign language
3 interpreting services, let us know. I don't see any hands.
4 Okay. Very good.

5 Thank you. I appreciate that. Thanks a lot.

6 (Sign language interpreter leaves the forum.)

7 What we're doing is making sure that everyone has
8 an opportunity to be heard. Based on those who signed up,
9 we didn't have an indication from all of you who are here.
10 We wanted to ask that question. Thank you, and we will
11 continue with the forum this morning.

12 At this point I'll turn it over to Ms. Shahin and
13 she'll talk about the forum and the next step and where we
14 go from here. Thank you.

15 MS. JESSICA SHAHIN: Can you guys hear me? I have
16 a pretty big voice. All right, wonderful.

17 I couldn't help but be struck when Don said that
18 we have some rules. Well, of course. We're the Feds, of
19 course we have rules. I also want to just say, didn't
20 Denise do a wonderful job of contextualizing what we're here
21 for? I think she's left. I'm sorry. She did a fabulous
22 job. She's absolutely right. These food forums
23 specifically are set up -- oh, hey, Kate is here, you don't
24 need me anymore.

25 MS. KATE COLER: Hello everyone. Are we just

1 kicking off?

2 MS. JESSICA SHAHIN: We are just kicking off, and
3 I'll let you take over. I was just telling them that our
4 host did a fabulous job of putting context around how we
5 have to work together and that's what the forums are about,
6 is letting us hear from you, who have that kind of direct
7 impact on the people that we mutually serve, so we're very
8 happy to have you here and thank you very much for coming.

9 MS. KATE COLER: Thank you.

10 And on behalf of Secretary Shahin, thank you very
11 much for coming to this. This is the last of the 50 Farm
12 Bill forums that we've had around the country. And thank
13 you to our host here. We're going to have time for a tour
14 of this facility afterwards, so we're thankful for that.

15 These forums are to address all titles of the Farm
16 Bill, so if people have subjects outside of the original
17 Title 3, I'm happy to receive those as well, but today's
18 forum is focused on the Nutrition title primarily. There
19 are seven nutrition programs that are up for reauthorization
20 in the next Farm Bill. I think we saw a lot of success in
21 the 2002 Farm Bill and many improvements to the programs,
22 and we want to hear from you how those have been
23 implemented, what you think needs to continue, where there
24 can be changes to make the programs better. We want all of
25 your ideas because we do recognize the value of

1 partnerships. I think we've seen successes in our programs
2 and it can't just be because of the actions of USDA. It
3 takes all partners. It takes the state and local levels of
4 government, it takes community and faith-based
5 organizations, it takes the programs working together. And
6 I think we want to build upon the success of the 2002 Farm
7 Bill and see how we can take these programs into the next
8 time the Farm Bill's going to be reauthorized, in 2007.

9 We primarily, with our nutrition programs, have
10 been focusing on hunger, but we've identified a new problem
11 over the last few years and that is the issue of obesity.
12 And we do know that these two problems coexist. And we look
13 to our programs to not only fight hunger but how can we also
14 use them as tools to fight obesity and help move people to a
15 healthier lifestyle. I'm interested in your comments on
16 that as well.

17 So again, we are here to listen today. I
18 apologize for the delay. There were bad winds in New York
19 and we were on the runway for an hour, but happy to be here,
20 looking forward to your comments. They will be recorded
21 verbatim and we're also doing summaries. We're going to use
22 this information at USDA as we develop policy to put forward
23 before Congress, because Congress actually makes the
24 ultimate decisions, but your input to us and all of our
25 voices together in this debate will, hopefully, make these

1 programs as strong as they can be. So with that we will
2 listen. Thank you.

3 MR. LARRY YOUNG: Good afternoon. My name is
4 Larry Young. I'm employed by the South Carolina Department
5 of Social Services here in Columbia, South Carolina. I am
6 the Program Director for the Emergency Food Assistance
7 Program, TFAP, the Commodity Supplemental Food Program,
8 CSFP, as well as the Seniors Farmers Market Program.

9 I would like to thank you, Undersecretary Coler,
10 for being here today, along with all the other USDA
11 officials. We are very happy for the opportunity to be able
12 to speak to you about these very important programs.

13 TFAP, CSFP and the Farmers Market Program are very
14 crucial to our efforts here in South Carolina to address
15 hunger and food insecurity. Because of these programs, a
16 very conservative estimate would indicate that USDA
17 contributes to at least 2.5 million meals annually here in
18 South Carolina to our local low-income individuals. And,
19 unfortunately, that is still not enough.

20 I would like to make some comments this afternoon
21 regarding the Seniors Farmers Market Program, and I've also
22 been asked to make a brief statement concerning the FSE&T
23 program. My agency has administered the Farmers Market
24 Program since it began in 2001. We look forward to its
25 continuation with the new regulations and the addition of

1 some administrative funds, obviously.

2 During the past five years approximately 110,000
3 seniors have received benefits through our program. That
4 number could be much higher if additional funding were made
5 available. The Senior Farmers Market Program is currently
6 available in 32 of our state's 46 counties.

7 I recommend that as the Seniors Farmers Market
8 Program is being considered in the next Farm Bill, that you
9 keep in mind the operational realities of the program. The
10 success of our program depends upon the collaboration of
11 many organizations. We work very closely with our state WIC
12 agency, our state department of agriculture, and our aging
13 offices here in the state.

14 Most importantly, however, our program would not
15 survive without the support of smaller non-state agencies
16 such as local councils on aging, churches, community action
17 agencies, et cetera. These organizations are on the front
18 line promoting the program, distributing the benefits,
19 determining the eligibility, and doing many other things
20 , which are required for a successful program.

21 As you are aware, a diverse group of organizations
22 needed to make the program more accessible to program
23 participants in all areas being served. It is because of
24 this diversity we urge that simplification of the rules and
25 paperwork requirements be a key consideration as the program

1 goes forward.

2 All organizations are not created equally. There
3 are varying levels of staff and/or volunteers available at
4 these agencies to operate the program, as well as expertise
5 in operating federal programs.

6 Let me conclude by stating, the Seniors Farmers
7 Market Program depends primarily on the structure of
8 community-based charitable services that existed long before
9 the program. Seniors Farmers Market distribution sites are
10 typically neighborhood organizations that distribute small
11 amounts of benefits. Often, they are staffed mainly or
12 entirely by volunteers. The unit value of the benefit
13 provided to the participate is small. Therefore, the
14 program should be made accountable to the taxpayer in a way
15 that does not impose excessive paperwork burden on the
16 sites.

17 My concluding statement was actually an excerpt
18 from the Food Distribution Memo, National Policy Memorandum
19 FD036, that addresses local level record keeping in the TFAP
20 Program. I modified it by substituting "Seniors Farmers
21 Market Program" where it said "TFAP."

22 I believe the premise of the memo would remain
23 just as valid if it had been written for the Seniors Farmers
24 Market Program.

25 Regarding the FSE&T Program, we have one comment

1 that we would like to offer, and it's concerning making
2 employment an accountable component within the FSE&T
3 Program. Currently, there is no financial incentive for
4 state agencies to place FSE&T clients in jobs. As
5 employment is the ultimate goal of the program, as even the
6 name "Food Stamp Employment & Training" would indicate, we
7 feel that one part of the equation should be employment.

8 Thank you for the opportunity to speak and welcome
9 to South Carolina. Thank you.

10 MS. SUSAN FROST: Good afternoon. My name is
11 Susan Frost. I'm a registered dietician and I live in
12 Chapin, South Carolina. I've been in practice in South
13 Carolina for 27 years, working with senior nutrition
14 programs, pregnant women, infants, Head Start, and
15 school-age children, home health, wellness programs, and am
16 a regional WIC director. I've served on a board of
17 directors of the food bank in Greenwood, South Carolina.

18 I'm presenting comments today on behalf of the
19 South Carolina and the American Dietetic Association.

20 The public needs an uncompromising commitment from
21 the government to advance nutrition knowledge and help
22 people apply that knowledge in order to maintain and improve
23 their health. Millions of Americans benefit from USDA
24 assistance programs, yet we still see hunger in the United
25 States and in South Carolina.

1 Coexisting with hunger is a national epidemic of
2 overweight and obesity. In fact, overweight and obesity is
3 the largest manifestation of malnutrition in the United
4 States today.

5 The next Farm Bill needs to address four key
6 areas: USDA's food assistance programs must be available to
7 those in need and adequately funded. Improving the
8 nutrition status of Americans needs to rise in priority in
9 food assistance programs, other food programs, and for all
10 Americans.

11 Increased investment in nutrition education and
12 nutrition research is necessary and it must be sustained.
13 Having up-to-date knowledge on the nutrition composition of
14 our food supply is essential for all the work in food
15 nutrition and health to bear fruit. If we expect consumers
16 to take personal responsibility for making healthy choices,
17 then we have a responsibility to make sure that consumers
18 are adequately prepared.

19 The government must invest in nutrition research
20 and nutrition education necessary to give Americans the
21 knowledge and ability to make their own nutrition choices.
22 These nutrition recommendations and programs for the public
23 must be based on sound science. Only the federal government
24 has the public mandate and resources to carry out research
25 on human nutrition needs and to develop dietary guidance

1 that forms the basis for all federal nutrition programs.

2 We believe federal research, exploring the
3 relationships between diet, particularly dietary patterns,
4 and health is especially important.

5 Thank you for the opportunity to speak today, and
6 again welcome.

7 MS. SUE BERKOWITZ: Thank you for providing me
8 with the opportunity to speak. I'm Sue Berkowitz and I'm
9 with the South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center,
10 which is located here in Columbia, South Carolina

11 South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center is a
12 nonprofit dedicated to adequacy for low-income people in
13 South Carolina to effect systemic change by acting in and
14 through the courts, the legislature, administrative
15 agencies, community and the media, and helping others to do
16 the same through education, training and co-counseling.

17 I'm here to talk about the Food Stamp Program.
18 The Food Stamp Program was created to provide low-income
19 families and individuals with resources they need to
20 purchase an adequate diet. The program, which is the single
21 most anti-hunger program in America, does an excellent job
22 of providing poor households with basic nutritional support.
23 Without food stamps, many families, particularly working
24 poor families, people with disabilities and seniors simply
25 could not afford to put food on their table every day

1 I want to tell you how impressed I am with the
2 South Carolina Department of Social Services, who has done
3 so much to reach out to eligible South Carolinians,
4 increasing the number who participate in the Food Stamp
5 Program over the past few years, and its proud willingness
6 to partner with organizations and local communities for the
7 good of our citizens. And our host, Harvest Hope Food Bank,
8 who, I know you can see, has so much to be proud of, has
9 been working to assist families in need with their
10 application through a new partnership that they developed
11 with DSS to increase food stamp participation, and I can't
12 tell you how proud I am to participate with both of these
13 agencies.

14 But even with all of these positive steps, the
15 Food Stamp Program could be made better. Reauthorization is
16 an opportunity to review the program strengths and its
17 weaknesses and to find ways to improve the program for the
18 individuals in need.

19 I would like to take a moment to first discuss the
20 program's most significant strengths, these aspects of the
21 program should be preserved and if at all possible need to
22 be increased.

23 First, the program is an entitlement. It is an
24 open-ended entitlement program. Food stamps support
25 communities during times of economic downturn by

1 automatically responding to the increased need. This is
2 both true on a national level and on a local level. I think
3 we've seen that, unfortunately, due to the national
4 tragedies we've seen over the last few months. It provides
5 needed food to hungry people while supporting our local
6 business.

7 Second: The program has a national benefit
8 structure. Although states are provided flexibility in how
9 they administer the program, the food stamp benefit is
10 essentially uniform across all states. This ensures that
11 poor families, wherever they live, have adequate nutritional
12 resources.

13 And third: Benefits are targeted to those most in
14 need. The Food Stamp Program targets benefits to those who
15 need and are least able to afford an adequate diet. While
16 targeting the benefits have added some complexity to the
17 program -- I'm sure we all grouse about at times -- it
18 provides additional help to the families who struggle the
19 most.

20 But there are a number of challenges facing the
21 Food Stamp Program that can impact our citizens' ability to
22 access needed resources, and this is especially true among
23 working families.

24 Eligibility restrictions: There are some groups
25 of low-income people who need assistance purchasing an

1 adequate diet but who are ineligible for the program. I
2 don't need to remind you who two of those significant groups
3 are. First, legal immigrants and children and childless
4 unemployed workers. While progress is made in restoring
5 benefits to these groups, all eligibility limits on these
6 groups needs to be lifted.

7 We also need to reexamine the level in which we
8 cut individual families and households from receipt of food
9 stamps. The current level of 130 percent of poverty leave
10 many needy working poor and elderly households, who
11 desperately need food, from accessing needed assistance. We
12 need to increase our minimum gross income threshold from its
13 current 130 percent of the federal poverty level, and it
14 needs to be done in reauthorization.

15 Increasing the gross income level rewards working
16 families struggling to make ends meet while supporting the
17 family's nutritional needs, and that's what the Food Stamp
18 Program should be about.

19 In addition, there are certain asset limits that
20 ought to be reevaluated in the coming Farm Bill. For
21 example, the \$2,000-financial asset limit results in making
22 genuinely needy people ineligible. The asset limit has not
23 been increased for most households in two decades and
24 undermines savings goals, such as retirement and education,
25 which the Administration is trying to promote everywhere

1 else. While it may have appeared to be a generous amount
2 when it was set, it has no relationship to the asset limits,
3 what it means in 2005 dollars, and needs to be increased.

4 And the adequacy of benefits: The food stamp
5 benefit, as you know, is based on the Thrifty Food Plan and
6 the costs are very bare bones monthly food budget. Many
7 would argue it's too low. Across-the-board cuts enacted in
8 1996 have sharply eroded the purchasing power of the
9 allotment, and the 1996 benefit reductions and the overall
10 adequacy of the food stamp benefit structure need to be
11 reexamined

12 I have two teenage boys and a very large husband.
13 When I look at the amount of the Thrifty Food Plan, and I
14 think of how I could try to make ends meet, especially when
15 we're also talking about adequate nutrition, I know I
16 couldn't do it, and I'm amazed at the individuals we work
17 with and the dignity that they use to try to make ends meet
18 with the Thrifty Food Plan, but it needs to be reevaluated.

19 Improving access to the Food Stamp Program: In
20 recent years we've had much progress to reach more people in
21 South Carolina. Our own state is a shining example of how
22 outreach has reached so many, especially the working poor.
23 Still too many people do not participate. Some of the
24 eligible find barriers to participation, make it difficult
25 or too costly. We need to continue to explore ways to

1 facilitate enrollment and make it easier to participate.

2 But, most importantly, let's not take any steps
3 backwards. Categorical eligibility has been one of the most
4 important steps our state has taken to increase
5 participation, especially among the elderly and the working
6 poor in our state. I can't describe in words how outrageous
7 it is to me that that would even be a recommendation, in
8 2005, to take away categorical eligibility and hamper the
9 State's ability to access and to outreach to those who are
10 in need, and would strongly, strongly urge the
11 Administration to step away from any efforts to remove
12 categorical eligibility. And I want to applaud the Senate
13 and the reconciliation bill for not putting it in as they
14 are going forward.

15 The last step I think we need to take, and
16 especially looking at the increase in utility bills that we
17 see in our state and all over the country. We need to
18 increase the SUA. South Carolina has recently learned and
19 requested permission to increase its SUA from \$188 a month
20 to \$244 a month. You need to do that this week. This is
21 based on the dramatic rate hikes our utilities have been
22 already approved in South Carolina. Our largest utility has
23 been approved for a 50 percent rate hike for gas in South
24 Carolina.

25 I know that both Kansas and Maine have asked for

1 an increase of the SUA based on prospective increased
2 utility costs. I understand that's not the way you've done
3 it in the past. It needs to be considered and we need to
4 act on this fast. No one, absolutely no one should decide
5 between heat in their home and food on their table.

6 We must build on the strength of the Food Stamp
7 Program and we must not block-grant this program. We've
8 seen how effective it is during times of emergency and how,
9 the way that, the fact that it is an entitlement allows the
10 flexibility and the growth that's needed during times of
11 need.

12 And I know I've taken a lot more time. Thank
13 goodness it's a small crowd, but the last thing I would like
14 to comment on is, you were asking us to provide you with how
15 we offset any of these increases. And I agree with
16 responsible budgeting. I believe in fiscal discipline and I
17 wholeheartedly believe we shouldn't have a growing deficit.
18 But I also believe it's unfair of us to ask those of us who
19 come forward to you on behalf of the hungry to offer you
20 offsets that are neither fair or reasonable given the
21 Administration's position in recent years to allow \$200
22 billion in tax cuts to go without any offsets whatsoever.
23 It's disturbing that fiscal discipline must only be
24 addressed when it comes to programs that help those in need,
25 but not when it comes in connection to tax cuts for the

1 well-to-do.

2 Quite simply, we must provide the Administration
3 with options to pay for improvements in the program that
4 serve our neediest, while -- it's wrong of the
5 Administration to do that while it continues to advocate for
6 tax cuts for the wealthiest while not offering one offset.

7 I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide
8 this testimony. I'm pleased that you've taken the time to
9 discuss these critical issues outside of the Beltway and
10 have had 50 of these forums, and that you've taken it to
11 places like little Columbia, South California. I hope
12 you'll take these comments to heart and strengthen our Food
13 Stamp Program in 2007. Thank you.

14 MS. SANDY ALLEN: My name is Sandy Allen. I'm a
15 program director for food stamp policy with the South
16 Carolina Department of Social Services. I'm here today in
17 Columbia, I'm from Columbia, speaking on behalf
18 of (inaudible.)

19 We do want to thank USDA for the opportunity to
20 have these forums for the public to voice concerns regarding
21 the reauthorization of the Farm Bill legislation in 2007.

22 The South Carolina Department of Social Services
23 feels that it is essential that the current Food Stamp
24 Program evolve to simplify the administration of program
25 rules for state agencies while making program access

1 considerably easier for the food stamp eligible public. We
2 ask that the federal government recognize, and plan
3 accordingly, that the changes necessary to modernize our
4 current program will impose a fiscal impact, and the offset
5 of which should not be carried by the neediest segments of
6 our national population.

7 We also ask that we formally rename the Food Stamp
8 Program, with the dissolution of "food stamp," to better
9 reflect the nutrition support aspect of the program.

10 That said, we are asking that the following be
11 considered: For improving program access, we would like to
12 eliminate the face-to-face interview requirement for
13 recertifying households. This would be essentially
14 beneficial to the elderly and disabled and to working poor
15 families.

16 For targeting those in need we ask that more of a
17 targeted marketing focus be concentrated on the elderly;
18 that we increase the income eligibility requirements; that
19 we remove the asset test for households below 130 percent of
20 the federal poverty level by extending categorical
21 eligibility to this population, or significantly increase
22 the asset cap level. We ask that we remove the shelter cap
23 and that we eliminate permit disqualification for a felony
24 drug conviction. It is difficult to explain to the public
25 why we qualify individuals who (inaudible) for a felony drug

1 action but we do not disqualify individuals convicted of
2 rape or armed robbery or other serious offenses.

3 Allow the purchase of hot prepared meals at retail
4 stores.

5 To ensure adequate benefits, we ask that we
6 increase the minimum allotment from \$10 to at least \$25.

7 To simplify complex program rules, we would like
8 to have a graduated medical deduction provided for all food
9 stamp households based on household size. This would
10 eliminate the burden on both state agencies and recipients
11 of verifying medical expenses that are incurred by all
12 households, not just our (inaudible.)

13 We ask that we simplify non-citizen eligibility
14 rules. Reinstate eligibility to legal immigrants.

15 And that (inaudible) consider savings in
16 administrative costs in calculating cost neutrality for
17 demonstration projects to encourage states to design and
18 develop progressive Food Stamp Program strategies. Also
19 allocate funding to states approved for demonstration
20 projects designed to improve Food Stamp Program service
21 delivery.

22 To promote healthy eating, we would like to see
23 methods developed to increase the consumption of more fruits
24 and vegetables by Food Stamp Program participants. We would
25 like for the Food Stamp Program to develop campaigns to

1 encourage healthy eating and incentive programs for healthy
2 food purchases.

3 And with a prominent emphasis on nutrition
4 education in the Food Stamp Program, adequate funds need to
5 be available so states do not have to rely on in-kind march.

6 In improving our federal and state partnerships,
7 we would like to see an increase in the funding match for
8 administration of the Food Stamp Program for states based on
9 the state's increase of participating households. This will
10 allow states to concurrently fund agency resources necessary
11 to support the increasing caseloads.

12 We would like to see an increase in the percentage
13 of federal match to states for technology support to
14 encourage the development of more up-to-date and
15 sophisticated technologies.

16 And one last thing the Food Stamp Program would
17 like to see, is we would like a national database, a
18 participation database so that states can prevent
19 duplication from one state to another consistent with the
20 (inaudible.)

21 In closing, the South Carolina Department of
22 Social Services (inaudible) would like to acknowledge FNS at
23 the regional and the national levels for their consistent
24 responsiveness to our Food Stamp Program needs and their
25 supportive attitude and our partnership. We greatly

1 appreciate their competent guidance. Thank you.

2 MR. CHARLES WINGARD: Good afternoon. My name is
3 Charles Wingard. I'm a vegetable farmer from Lexington
4 County. I work with my family. We raise and ship and
5 process about 5,000 acres of fresh vegetables a year over in
6 Pelion, South Carolina.

7 And to the lady from Harvest Hope -- where is she
8 at? I'm proud to say that I see a Harvest Hope truck come
9 to our facility about once a week, I believe, and hope it
10 continues to come.

11 I want to thank you all for coming to Columbia.
12 This is awfully important, and I want to talk to you this
13 afternoon just a little bit about the School Fruit and
14 Vegetable Snack Program. That is, of course, a part of the
15 2002 Farm Bill. It created a pilot program in four states,
16 with 25 schools each, and seven schools and one Indian
17 reservation. It's a very successful pilot program. Those
18 107 schools began to offer free fruits and vegetables to
19 children throughout the school day in high schools, middle
20 schools and elementary schools, and they were able to give
21 those kids fresh fruits and vegetables through very create
22 concepts using kiosks, vending machines.

23 In 2004 that program was expanded to include four
24 more states and two more Indian reservations, and it was
25 established as a permanent part of the Child Nutrition WIC

1 Reauthorization Act.

2 Today, I think something just happened in the last
3 couple of weeks. The president signed a bill today; it's in
4 14 states with 25 schools each, and I think still just three
5 Indian tribes. I'm not sure about that, but there's about
6 370 U.S. public schools participating in this today out of a
7 possible 100,000, and it has current annual expenditure of
8 about 13 million right now, about a million dollars per
9 state.

10 The schools that participate in this program are
11 reporting that as their students ate fresh fruits and
12 vegetables, they ate more of them, and they ate less
13 high-calorie, high-fat vending options, otherwise known as
14 junk food. They ate more healthy foods during the school
15 lunch program; they had better attention spans and were less
16 hungry throughout the day. They felt better and visited the
17 nurse less often, and the schools had fewer discipline
18 problems.

19 Let me read just a few comments from a few people
20 involved in that program. A student from North Elementary
21 in Michigan says, I eat more fruits and vegetables at home
22 now, too. And a parent, also from a middle school in
23 Michigan, says it makes her smile when she sees her kids
24 eating celery sticks. Prior to this her daughter would
25 never have touched them, thank you for providing those

1 healthy foods for our children. Parents really do
2 appreciate it.

3 And a health education director, also from a
4 middle school somewhere up in Michigan, says that school
5 officials have heard students in the hallway talking, and
6 some students get excited now about kiwis. So it is a very
7 successful program. It's showing positive results. It's
8 definitely increasing our kids' consumption of fruits and
9 vegetables.

10 On average, children today eat less than
11 50 percent of the daily amount of fresh fruits and
12 vegetables recommended by the U.S. Dietary Guidelines. I
13 believe that's those pyramids right behind you.

14 It's decreased the consumption of junk food. A
15 study of the Norway Pilot Program and of the U.S. Pilot
16 Program, in 2002 and 2003, shows that students spent less
17 money on sodas, chips and candies when fresh fruits and
18 vegetables were available in their schools. And the
19 participating schools have observed immediate positive
20 changes in behavior.

21 This program helps offset -- and, Ms. Coler, I was
22 glad to hear you mention in your comments -- this program
23 helps offset many diet-related health problems. The four
24 big diet-related health problems are diabetes, stroke, heart
25 disease and cancer. We're only talking about a pound, a

1 pound and a half of fruits and vegetables a day for the
2 kids, and maybe two pounds for us. Really, we're talking
3 about an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure here.

4 I encourage you and urge you and ask you to expand
5 this program from 14 states to 50 states, hopefully. I know
6 it's a big step. I know we're talking about money. I know
7 you have budgetary constraints. I urge you to do it
8 incrementally, if you will. That's what's been done in the
9 past and it seems to work very well. And I would encourage
10 you to explore state or local cost-sharing programs.

11 I also want to touch base with you just a little
12 bit about the Department of Defense Fresh Program for
13 schools. This has been a very cost-effective mechanism to
14 get fresh fruits and vegetables into school meals. We're
15 not talking about the snacks now, we're talking about the
16 meals at lunch and breakfast.

17 The schools, quite simply, are using the Defense
18 Department's purchasing power and network to get the
19 quantities of fruits and vegetables they need. It includes
20 a diverse network of produce suppliers with over 300 produce
21 items currently available. And not only are they currently
22 available, but they are available when the schools need them
23 and where they need them, and then the large quantities that
24 they would need.

25 And special emphasis in this program is given to

1 locally grown produce and to small suppliers. It's a good
2 program, it's working very well, and if there's any way you
3 can increase the funding there, I would encourage you to do
4 so.

5 I've heard from other USD programs, or heard about
6 other USD programs here -- and, by the way, the gentleman
7 about the Seniors Farmers Market, it's a big hit in
8 Lexington County. I've heard more about that just through
9 town, over in Lexington County, than any other program from
10 the general public, than any other program from the USDA.
11 You wouldn't believe those people over there asking about
12 that. I didn't know they were that old.

13 I know these other programs are necessary and
14 vital, but this Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program and
15 Department of Defense Program for schools is a very good
16 program. It is a very proactive program.

17 Literally, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound
18 of cure. This is a place where we can nip it in the bud.
19 This country spends an astronomical amount of money on
20 diet-related health care problems. Like I said, diabetes,
21 stroke, heart disease, cancer, they are caused by obesity,
22 high blood pressure and high cholesterol, which is caused by
23 poor nutrition.

24 This country -- or let me back up. In my research
25 I could find data no later than 1999. This country spent in

1 1999 well over \$82 billion on those four diseases, and I'm
2 sure, I see what my paycheck looks like on the little line
3 that says "insurance." I'm sure that 82 billion has gone up
4 significantly in the last six years.

5 South Carolina leads or is near the top in the
6 United States in many of these health care costs or these
7 health care problems for both adults and adolescents. It
8 will take a long-term commitment to reverse these trends and
9 to teach our young people how to eat.

10 The statistics will not turn around quickly, but
11 they will turn around with good nutritional habits. And
12 considering that South Carolina is at or near the top in
13 many of these health care problems, and considering that
14 South Carolina, or considering that in the past decade, in
15 the United States, the number of obese and overweight
16 children has doubled, the time is right for a healthy food
17 environment that promotes the increased consumption of
18 fruits and vegetables.

19 The one thought I want to leave with you -- and I
20 do appreciate you being here. I regret that Undersecretary
21 Boss couldn't be here. I met him a while back, and a very,
22 very sharp individual. But the one thought I want to leave
23 with you is that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of
24 cure, and we have an opportunity here and we need to seize
25 on it more to really nip it in the bud. Thank you.

1 MR. RUSTY MARSH: My name is Rusty Marsh. I'm the
2 South Carolina Administrator of the Golden Harvest Food Bank
3 in Aiken, South Carolina. I want to thank you for being
4 here, particularly that you've come here to a food bank, and
5 how important your program is and the good work you do.
6 You're to be commended.

7 I came to the food bank in May of '94, so I've got
8 ten-plus years, so I guess you would call me an old-timer.
9 But when I first came to the food bank, it was interesting.
10 I heard stories about food banking and about how Mike Furman
11 started the food bank in 1982. It was known as the Cookie
12 Food Bank because we were close to residential banking,
13 which became Keebler, and then it was bought out by Murray
14 Biscuit.

15 But we've come a long way in food banking. We're
16 not known as the cookie food bank anymore. In fact, a
17 little shopping list in Aiken, South Carolina has anywhere
18 from eight to ten pages of shopping items on the shopping
19 list.

20 You know, we're truly blessed in this nation.
21 Most of us get up and we roll out of bed and we go into our
22 kitchen, we prepare ourselves a meal, then we get on fine
23 clothes and we get into our cars and go to work.

24 Now, I said that's most. For a lot of them that's
25 not the picture, and that is the people that are standing in

1 the gap at the food bank.

2 I also work with the Aiken Barnwell Homeless
3 Coalition, and we're concerned about those people, as I know
4 you are.

5 That being said, I came to the food bank in
6 September of 2002, at the Aiken branch. We service six
7 counties on South Carolina's site. The last three years of
8 distribution has just been amazing. We've gone from 1.6
9 million pounds to 1.7 million pounds. Last year it was 1.8
10 million pounds. The need is so great out there. USDA is
11 vital. We need it even to be stronger.

12 We get donations locally, nationally, but
13 donations are down. Our national association, America's
14 Second Harvest, that you probably heard about during
15 Katrina, during Katrina, in the first two weeks of that
16 disaster -- and that was truly a national disaster,
17 something like we've never seen before -- they shipped 7
18 million pounds of food in the first two weeks -- (inaudible)
19 that was 238 tractor-trailer loads of food.

20 Now, as a food banker I'm a little concerned
21 because that was food that would normally come to food
22 banks, such as Denise Holland's Harvest Hope, mine down in
23 Aiken. We have Mauldin, we have Charleston, up in
24 Asheville. We're scattered all around, and we're doing a
25 good job, but we need help. We're asking ourselves right

1 now, with the disasters that are going on, with the need
2 going up, with there being so many people that are out of
3 jobs, we're asking ourselves what are we going to do. Well,
4 we don't throw up our hands. We look creatively at what
5 we're doing and how we can do it better, and I'm sure that's
6 the same thing that you do.

7 We don't want to depend on government food at the
8 Aiken Golden Harvest Food Bank, but, quite frankly, we get
9 donations for 50 percent of what we distribute is USDA food.
10 Now, I tell people we're not a government program, but we
11 can't do without you. The people who we serve can't do
12 without you.

13 I have some statistics here, and I'm not going to
14 bore you with them because they go from families served in
15 fiscal year 2002-2003, from 32,035 families to, 2003-2004,
16 41,831 families. You can look at the statistics. I'll put
17 it in your box, but the need is growing.

18 Now, we have looked creatively at this and we've
19 decided that the food bank is to start a Purchase Food
20 Program. You know, agencies that come to us, and they rely
21 on our shared maintenance, just a minimum amount of money,
22 because we have the freezers, we have the coolers, we have
23 the forklifts, we have the warehouse. They rely on us to
24 run their food programs. If it wasn't for us, they would be
25 going to the grocery stores, they would be going to Fred's

1 Discount or Sam's or somewhere to be getting their food. We
2 started a Purchase Food Program because we have to have the
3 food.

4 I look at my shelves in my warehouse and I say, I
5 cannot let those go down. Now, when they go down I start
6 praying, but, you know, we need supplemental sources of food
7 coming in, so we went out and we started looking at it
8 creatively and we started a Purchase Food Program.

9 And overall our goals have changed. We're not a
10 program just to ship out pounds to distribute; that's not
11 where we're at. We are looking at, our goal would be to
12 improve the nutrition, the nutritional value of what people
13 are getting from this. This actually improves their health.
14 This actually -- improved health actually improves the
15 society all over.

16 But not only that, we're improving stability for
17 people who are unstable. Most of us, when we go home in the
18 afternoon, we know where our next meal is coming from. Our
19 children, when they come home from school, they know where
20 their next meal is coming from. They've got it in the
21 cupboard or it's available to them, or, hey, we can always
22 go to McDonald's. My wife works, I work, so it's McDonald's
23 in the afternoon.

24 But, you know, we are here, not only as a food
25 bank to give a hand-out. It's not a program where you just

1 hand out stuff. We're actually in a program where you take
2 the hand and you lift them up. You give them a hand up. We
3 want them to feel good when they come to one of our
4 emergency food pantries and receive food. We want to give
5 them a good product.

6 Now, we deal with donated product, and that's
7 good, because if we didn't get donated product, it would
8 probably end up in a dumpster somewhere. We get food that
9 has a date on it. We know exactly how far it will go.
10 We're trained in food-handling, and we actually salvage that
11 food. We're doing everything that we can do to serve those
12 that are in need, but we need your help, and that's why I'm
13 here today.

14 I'm just saying we need your help. We can't let
15 these people who depend on us, who live in an unstable
16 environment, to be without the necessities of life. We are
17 not talking about a newer improved car. Jobs are out of the
18 question. If you have a job, you better keep it because
19 jobs are hard to find. These people are not going to be
20 able to bring themselves up unless somebody takes them by
21 the hand and shows them a better way, gives them the food
22 that they need until they can get on their feet, get a job,
23 and then they can do it for themselves.

24 That is what we are going to do. That's what the
25 food bank is going to do, and we'll do it with your help.

1 Thank you for your time.

2 MS. LYNDA CHRISTISON: I'm Lynda Christison. I'm
3 the Director of the Council on Aging for Lexington County.
4 On behalf of all of us, thank you for coming. Welcome to
5 South Carolina. This is our first, really, fall day so it's
6 really nice.

7 I'm here to talk about the food programs and USDA
8 on behalf of local, very local community-based service
9 providers. We're part of Larry's network and we're part of
10 the Lexington County network that makes sure people get fed.
11 We issue the farmers market vouchers. We hand out the
12 commodities that Denise and her people pack up every month.

13 These programs are crucial and they cannot be cut.
14 It is just -- I mean, to me it is absolutely criminal that
15 anybody would consider cutting food and cutting taxes. That
16 is insane. It costs more in the long run to not feed
17 people, so what everybody said here I say ditto and then
18 some.

19 We have been distributing the Seniors Farmers
20 Market vouchers. We helped recruit the farmers to
21 participate in the program. We give out information to the
22 seniors on where they can go to shop with their vouchers.
23 We transport them to get this food. We help them get it
24 back home again. We provide them with educational
25 information on how to use it. And it makes a difference.

1 We also provide home-delivered meals at seven
2 senior centers. And there's been some recent preliminary
3 research in South Carolina that connects the value of the
4 meals to hospital and nursing home stays and emergency room
5 usage. What it is showing is that seniors who get three or
6 more home-delivered meals a day have a tremendously reduced
7 rate of usage of medical programs.

8 Now, it costs a whole lot more to pay the Medicaid
9 bill at the hospital than it costs to provide the vouchers,
10 the commodities and home-delivered meals. I pay \$2.05 in
11 food costs for every senior that I serve. That's a lot less
12 money, if you're paying out 10, 12 dollars a week, to feed
13 somebody than it is to put them in a nursing home. I think
14 that's something that people really need to start to take a
15 look at because I think we're paying at the wrong end of the
16 spectrum.

17 I mean, we issue 900 to 1,000 farmers market
18 vouchers a year. In 2004 we ran out of vouchers in our
19 county. It is truly, probably, the most well-known program
20 in the county. And we had waiting lists with a couple
21 hundred people on them.

22 In 2005, we made a hard decision and we said we
23 could only issue one set of vouchers per household. Well,
24 that's not really fair because that program is designed on a
25 per-person basis. And that's important. I mean, whether

1 you're married, whether you're living and you have your
2 sister living with and your husband as well, it's not fair
3 for three people to get the same amount of fruits and
4 vegetables as one person. Nutritionally it doesn't make
5 sense, but it was the only way we could spread that program
6 as far as we could spread it. So on behalf of all the
7 seniors in South Carolina, please increase that program, do
8 not cut it.

9 The same is true for the Commodities Program.
10 That 25-pound box -- and Lord knows we've lugged a lot of
11 them. Those boxes for some people make a difference in
12 whether or not they are able to make their dollars stretch
13 every month.

14 We get an allotment of how many we can issue in
15 Lexington County to our seniors, and we get, you know,
16 between 95 and 100 folks on that program. Well, in the
17 two-month period, in August and September, we increased the
18 number of people getting daily meals from us by 44 people.
19 For a small local program, that is a lot of folks. That's
20 \$22,000 in meal costs that I have to come up with to feed
21 those people for a year.

22 A lot of those people also want to be on the
23 Commodities Program. A lot of those people will also want
24 to be part of the Farmers Market Voucher Program this
25 spring. I have no way to do that, because we have a limit

1 in terms of how many vouchers we can get in Lexington
2 County.

3 And Lexington County is perceived as being one of
4 the wealthiest counties in South Carolina. That's because
5 we have great services, we have a lot of folks that choose
6 to retire there, the people that come into the county that
7 retire are quite wealthy. Many of them, not all of them,
8 but many of them.

9 On the other hand, the people that are aging in
10 place, the people that are native to South Carolina, native
11 to Lexington County, or who moved here years and years ago,
12 are not wealthy. Many of them are well below the poverty
13 level, many of them are maybe just a little bit above the
14 poverty level. Those people have, this year, will be
15 choosing, without a doubt, between eating, medication and
16 heating their homes.

17 We are already getting numerous requests from
18 people who want help getting a small space heater so they
19 can heat one room in their house and close off the rest of
20 it. That's a crime.

21 A lot of the houses are not great. A lot of them
22 are not well insulated. There's so much more that these
23 programs can do on a preventive level that is so, so
24 terribly important.

25 I would also like to bring up one other point on

1 behalf of all the local providers. We get no administrative
2 dollars, none. These programs, we do them because they
3 matter to our people. But do you know what, we can't do
4 everything. We are inundated, we are totally and completely
5 inundated.

6 Volunteers are wonderful. We couldn't exist
7 without volunteers, but they can only do so much. And the
8 more complicated the forms become, the more complicated the
9 technology, the greater the requirements, the harder it is
10 for us to implement these programs.

11 There are councils on aging in this state that
12 will not do the Farmers Market Voucher Program because they
13 cannot afford the staff time. It basically kills a couple
14 of weeks of staff time for us, plus all of the getting
15 people to market and everything else. That means that we
16 fall way behind on our other responsibilities.

17 We are funded by the Older Americans Act, which
18 means we have to meet all the paperwork requirements, we
19 have to comply with HIPAA. We have to do all those things.
20 If you don't put administrative dollars into some of these
21 programs and keep asking us to do them, at some point none
22 of us are going to be able to do them, not the churches, not
23 anybody, because it's just really a burden.

24 I would say that we are the experts at doing less
25 with, doing more with less, and we've about bottomed out.

1 A case in point is Medicare Part B. Anything you
2 look at says go to your local aging office, go to your
3 council on aging, go to your local senior center. Guess who
4 doesn't have the money to pay their staff to deal the
5 Medicare Part D? We don't, but we are fielding tons and
6 tons and tons of calls.

7 We have people coming to us and saying, Mr. and
8 Ms. Smith have Alzheimer's and they need somebody to help
9 them pick out what plan they want. We have insurance agents
10 at our doors wanting us to put them in touch with seniors,
11 which we don't, so if any of you are insurance agents,
12 forget it.

13 But the point is, none of these things, not the
14 Commodities Program, not the Food Stamp Program, which we
15 also help people access, not the Farmers Market Voucher
16 Program, nothing that comes down the pike comes with
17 administrative dollars for the local agencies, that are the
18 gateway for getting people into these programs.

19 Now, we believe in these programs. We work hard
20 to try and get our folks into these programs. We bend over
21 backwards to accomplish it. We get a lot of help from the
22 community, but there is only so much. So please, as you do
23 this, please get the increase that people need to have the
24 nutrition, to keep their health up, for all these programs,
25 whether they are for kids or for seniors or for anybody. It

1 is the best prevention we've got. But also please remember
2 that administrative costs are there. They don't stop when
3 that program leaves Washington, D.C. They certainly don't
4 stop when it leaves the state offices in Columbia, which
5 also need administrative dollars because they don't have
6 anywhere near enough either. We need help to be able to do
7 these programs and do them well.

8 Please keep them simple. In South Carolina, as
9 well as in a lot of other places, how we provide our
10 programs varies from community to community.

11 I've got seven senior centers. None of them run
12 the same. They all do the same paperwork, but none of them
13 run the same because the population is different in each
14 community. And in an urban area like downtown Lexington or
15 West Columbia, you get a lot of people who are highly
16 literate, but you go out to some of the small more rural
17 communities, a lot of people are functionally illiterate. I
18 can't give them a piece of paper that says where they can go
19 to get fruits and vegetables from Mr. Wingard. I have to
20 have somebody tell them or show them, because they can't
21 read. These are people who went to World War II. They
22 dropped out of school. They deserve better, so please do
23 your best. Thank you.

24 MR. FRED BROUGHTON: Good afternoon, my name is
25 Fred Broughton, South Carolina Department of Agriculture.

1 I did not particularly plan to speak, but then I
2 got here I just couldn't pass up the stage time. I wanted
3 to thank you for coming also, and particularly
4 Undersecretary Coler, good to see you again.

5 I had an occasion to chat briefly with Deputy
6 Undersecretary Coler last month at the National Association
7 of Farmers Market, and Secretary Coler and I had a few words
8 that I wanted to point out to her, that I think sort of a
9 point, sort of a tell the story about some of the issues
10 that came up here today, because we, you know, we have a lot
11 of people who can benefit from these programs, but I think I
12 reflect on something that was said at that conference during
13 Secretary Coler, that we're going to have to figure out some
14 way to be creative because it appears that the funding is
15 not in keeping with the needs of the people.

16 Now, several people talked about there are needs
17 for additional funds, and they've also talked about how we
18 should be spending money for nutritional purposes versus the
19 treatment of ills that people acquire. I believe I read
20 recently that the government spent over \$100 billion a year
21 for medical expenses, and some years ago it was nearly 40
22 percent of the USDA budget went into food and nutrition, but
23 how can we get those resources to where it could best serve
24 those individuals who are nutritionally at risk?

25 Now, I would suspect that there needs to be some,

1 maybe some additional flexibility in the programs so that
2 the local people can make some adjustments where needed. As
3 the lady from Lexington talked about, even within a given
4 county there are different needs, so the one-size-fit-all
5 for the nation does not necessarily work even in this
6 program.

7 In South Carolina there is a great need for the
8 WIC and the Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Program. The
9 gentleman from Lexington talked about how he didn't realize
10 there were that many old people in Lexington. Mr. Wingard,
11 we aren't any more older than we think we are, but those
12 individuals still have needs.

13 I've had the opportunity of also serving on the
14 board of directors for the Orangeburg County Council on
15 Aging, so I'm kind of familiar with some of the challenges
16 that many of these people face in Lexington. You've got two
17 dollars and change to feed, to provide a meal for people in
18 Orangeburg. We had one dollar and some change, so there are
19 all kind of needs. We've got to figure out how we could
20 better utilize the resources here, as I said earlier.

21 Now, I have been involved with the Seniors Market,
22 Seniors Nutrition Market and the WIC. Those programs are
23 serving a critical need in many communities in South
24 Carolina. However, I would like to recommend that
25 education, nutrition education be made part of these

1 programs in the future.

2 I know you talk about the Seniors Program going
3 from discretionary funds to statutory funds. When that
4 happened, I think we also need, it would also be advisable
5 for the USDA to write in the Farm Bill or get Congress to
6 write in the Farm Bill that nutrition education is critical
7 for both WIC and the Senior Program, even if we've got to
8 put the resources in it to make sure that we get the
9 nutrition education.

10 There are people who, some school of thought have
11 it that could not maximize the use of these checks because
12 they may not necessarily know how to prepare the vegetables.
13 So in that case we're ending up paying that medical bill
14 when we could have invested, make a small investment on the
15 front end to help those individuals.

16 So with that I would like to suggest that the Farm
17 Bill include resources for nutrition education and, wherever
18 practical, let's see that funds go to provide fresh fruits
19 and vegetables for those individuals with nutrition at risk.

20 Thank you very much for your time.

21 MS. DENISE HOLLAND: I'm Denise Holland. I'm with
22 the Harvest Hope Food Bank here. We're very sorry that you
23 were delayed getting here.

24 One closing remark, and I know it's getting late.
25 As you can see, your report recently released says that

1 South Carolina went from fifth in the nation suffering from
2 food insecurity with hunger to number two in the nation of
3 suffering with food insecurity and hunger. All of us, there
4 are -- we are all community partners here. Every one who
5 spoke, the food bank has a relationship with.

6 Out on the other end of this building, I just
7 walked outside, our emergency food pantry, the line is out
8 the door and in the parking lot.

9 We take it seriously. We are very passionate.
10 Our work is just not work; it's really a mission. It all
11 becomes a very personal mission on our part, and we see it
12 every day, that hunger.

13 We hope that if anything from South Carolina you
14 take away from this is that everything that you do for USDA
15 is terribly important to us. We hate to be standing here
16 begging for more, but it's the reality.

17 I thank you for what you've done for us and for
18 being here and coming to Columbia, South Carolina, to hear
19 us out. Thanks very much.

20 MS. COLER: We do have plenty of
21 time. If there is anyone who didn't have
22 the opportunity to sign up and would like
23 to make some comments, please feel free to
24 do so.

25 Please introduce yourself.

1 REVEREND J.J. DIAZ: I'm Reverend Diaz, J.J. Diaz.
2 I'm Mexican but I'm a U.S. citizen.

3 I've been working here in South Carolina since
4 '89, 1989 with immigrants. I have under my care 20
5 families. I'd like to say that out of those 20 families, no
6 one needs anything. I'm proud of them, and I challenge
7 everybody to teach others how to survive by themselves and
8 help others. That's the best thing.

9 At the same time, I congratulate you, you guys by
10 doing this, helping others.

11 I would like to know from anyone in this place how
12 deep is the need to have immigrants. We have been talking
13 about USA citizens, but how deep is the need for immigrants,
14 and in which fashion or way have been accomplished.

15 I got tired of going to Social Services, taking
16 Hispanics. It's hard, the process is hard. They are not
17 used to it. I was not used to it. I'm not familiar with
18 the system, so we just ended going to Social Services. It's
19 not that they are not prepared, but we were not. They were
20 not ready for internationals. The paperwork was not
21 available. And I'm sure that today it's different. It was
22 many years ago.

23 And I would like to know, in your experience, how
24 much progress have been done in your agency in terms of
25 helping the internationals.

1 With the Hispanics, as soon as they come into the
2 community, it's not easy, it's just not easy. All of them
3 are so different. Cubans, the paperwork is different in the
4 immigration. Mexicans, different. From Central America,
5 different; from South America, different. From India or
6 China, totally different. So for you guys working with
7 internationals, it's a mess, and I guess you pray, Please
8 don't send me an international.

9 As soon as they come to the community, if they are
10 in my hands I take care of them, because they can take care
11 of themselves. They are not asking for anything. They just
12 need someone to take them by the hand, to teach them how to
13 work, where to live.

14 But first they need, as soon as they come, of
15 course is food. Of course they need to eat something. And
16 it would be good to help, I mean, take them to some place
17 like this. They are just coming; they don't have papers or
18 they have papers, but not the papers you want. They have a
19 passport and the visa and something else, but they don't
20 have social security number. And a lot of places, if you
21 don't have a social security number, you are not, you are
22 nobody.

23 Then after the number -- by the way, you need to
24 wait, you need to apply and wait sometimes a day, sometimes
25 two months. Once you have your social security number, you

1 need your ID. So how can you live in the United States if
2 you cannot have all those things? You cannot rent an
3 apartment, but you need to send your kids to school the same
4 day they come. If not, you're against the law. So if you
5 send your kids to school, you need an address, so usually
6 they ask for, friends ask for an address.

7 All those things are not very well coordinated
8 among the authorities, and it's a mess, I know. It's a
9 headache for everybody.

10 I have five (inaudible). I have wrestled with
11 some of them. Finally we get the things we want. It's not
12 that they are better, or I'm better than -- but finally the
13 human heart is there and either I break or they break.

14 So if you, as USDA and some other, the house and
15 education, Social Services, and if the people can come
16 together and say let's make simple, things simple for
17 internationals.

18 When Cubans are coming to the United States, if
19 they're coming to Florida, or Miami, that's heaven. That's
20 a paradise for them. If they come to South Carolina, we are
21 kind of ready, but not really. Coming to Florida, they have
22 food stamps immediately, immediately, but not here. Maybe
23 now, I don't know. It's hard. You need all those things,
24 even for transportation.

25 One thing that I am fighting -- I'm nobody in

1 South Carolina. Who is a reverend? Nobody. But I'm
2 fighting, I'm pushing. I'm recommending that this state
3 needs a national ID, a national ID. Immigrants, they don't
4 need to have the same ID you have if they are not citizens
5 or they are not residents. You can get all the services
6 that USDA have because they don't have a driver's license.
7 A driver's license is the only document human beings in the
8 USA have to identify themselves?

9 If you want to transport one foot or two feet from
10 where you are, you need a bicycle or you do it by yourself,
11 by train, whatever. You don't need a driver's license to
12 transport yourself, but you need it because then with a
13 driver's license you can do anything. You just can do
14 anything.

15 I hope that in the future things will be easier,
16 like some of you have been asking, but just make it simple.

17 With the Latinos I apply the rule of the Bible.
18 Some people get offended with that nowadays, but if they
19 don't work, don't eat. I'm so cruel. And if they are
20 hungry we teach them where to find a place to work. We are
21 not giving away money. But if they're in my hands, I say
22 give me a Hispanic, any Hispanic, hard-working Hispanic, in
23 two months they are totally independent, in two months, with
24 his own car -- of course making payments -- his own
25 apartment, his work, his papers is straight. In two months,

1 hard-working Hispanics.

2 They're in the streets begging for nothing, so I
3 would go an extra mile in telling them where to go, with
4 which agencies.

5 But you guys in USDA, go ahead and do what you're
6 doing, you're great. We are still, we are still angry
7 sometimes and there is a lot of people that go home with no
8 food.

9 I feel so sorry for so many people in the streets
10 with no place to go. They stay sometimes in the parking lot
11 in our church, and some of the members of my church are
12 scaring them. I say, Just let them stay, they are not doing
13 any harm. I don't want to make this problem bigger, but
14 just let them stay.

15 I ask them, Please don't trash, please don't --
16 some of them say, well, as long as I'm here nobody will be
17 here except me, so that's fine. If one person eats there,
18 no one will come to their territory, and they preserve our
19 place.

20 But we just pray that the United States open the
21 doors or teach them how to work, how to -- instead of just
22 begging for one piece of rice, teach them, as the Chinese
23 say, how to sow instead of begging for rice.

24 Thank you very much. Did I say who I am? Yes.

25 MS. KATE COLER: You can repeat it.

1 REVERENCE J.J. DIAZ: I'm Jose Juan Dias. I work
2 with the Social Reform Presbyterian Church. I'm a member of
3 several agencies in the state. Thank you.

4 MS. KATE COLER: Is there anyone else?

5 MS. KITTY SHALLER: Good afternoon. My name is
6 Kitty Shaller. I'm the Executive Director of Second Harvest
7 Food Bank in Asheville, North Carolina, and I want to make
8 sure that all the South Carolinians have had their say.

9 I wasn't prepared to speak. Some of you may know
10 that the part of North Carolina that we come from is closer
11 to five other capitals besides our own.

12 I've been in food banking for 23 years. It is my
13 pleasure, it is my passion, and I think for all of us who
14 are involved in feeding people, you all too, it is our
15 pleasure and our passion to be able to help people who are
16 in need, and I celebrate your being here this afternoon to
17 hear our comments.

18 When I think about food banking, it does make me
19 proud. Over these 23 years, America's Second Harvest Food
20 Bank has grown and grown, and we do an amazing amount of
21 work among needy people across the United States.

22 I know lots of people -- some of them are my own
23 board of directors -- who think this is the way to help
24 people in need; the charitable efforts will solve all the
25 problems. It's not so. It's a good thing we do. It's a

1 particularly good thing that we do, that we engage the
2 public in a way that some, for some is the only way they
3 will engage.

4 But we would be crazy not to credit the food
5 programs that you bring to these United States with a huge
6 amount of import for what you accomplish, and we need to get
7 that message out. I want to encourage that that be a
8 greater part of what you do, to blow your own horns.

9 We in food banking get what is available, not
10 necessarily what we need, and we need from you what people
11 really need. And we will augment that with industry
12 donations, food donations that come from the community so we
13 can spread them among the hundreds and hundreds of agencies
14 that we work with.

15 In North Carolina, in the western part of North
16 Carolina in the mountains, we have particular issues of
17 rural poverty that are very difficult to get to, very
18 difficult to minister to. It's a bit difficult to attract
19 people, even to a good program like food stamps. Mountain
20 pride gets in the way. Help us sell this program to the
21 very people who need it most.

22 And one reason they are not drawn to it is the
23 stigma that remains. Help us across the United States to
24 begin to break down that stigma. It's so important.

25 I want to say a word about fraud, and I say this

1 particularly because I had need to call a legislator, in
2 these last couple weeks, about the budget in the nation
3 coming out of the House. And when I heard that cuts were
4 being proposed from the House Agriculture Committee,
5 necessary to deal with the rampant fraud from the Food Stamp
6 Program, I know there's not rampant fraud from the Food
7 Stamp Program. It gives me particular pain to hear that
8 from a legislator, but I know that that is the sense that
9 people have in our communities too. Help us to dispel that.
10 It just isn't so.

11 I am reminded, when we did our hunger study with
12 client, doing client interviews, of a woman I spoke with in
13 Reepsville, North Carolina, a sweet elderly 78-year-old
14 woman. And as we finished our survey, one of the questions
15 said, have you ever applied for food stamps? She said yes.
16 I said, do you receive food stamps? Yes. How much do you
17 receive? Ten dollars a month. I finished the survey,
18 closed the book and I said, Ms. Miller, is it really worth
19 your while to apply for food stamps when you receive ten
20 dollars a month? And she said, Oh no, of course it's not.
21 And I said, then why do you continue to do it? And she
22 said, my, dear, if I don't continue to do this, they are
23 going to forget about all of us out here.

24 To think that a woman of that age, with the
25 disability that she had, the transportation concerns that

1 she had, would continue to apply because she felt she needed
2 to be a voice for her people, it was pretty profound to me.

3 I want to say just a word or two about some of the
4 things that we are doing at our food bank and how much we
5 welcome your partnership, and I agree that we need much more
6 to be done with nutrition education. We're working to put
7 EBT cards in our farmers markets for everyone, for your use,
8 and partnering with another agency to do that, and also to
9 get good farm product, particularly locally grown farm
10 product, into our schools, because it's true that so much,
11 our children are just robbed of fresh fruits and vegetables,
12 and sometimes the worst offenders are our own school lunch
13 programs.

14 We do a Kids Cafe Program that feeds kids in
15 after-school programs. I know you've heard about that
16 across the country. Another thing that we're doing in
17 Asheville is to put in the hands of kids, on Friday
18 afternoon when they go home for the weekend to their
19 families, a bag of groceries. We call it the Back-Pack
20 Program. Those groceries are fruits and vegetables.

21 Food banking is not equal across the country.
22 Lots of times it has to do with food already in our areas.
23 We don't have that much flat land where we are, so we don't
24 build very many big food manufacturing plants, so we have
25 small farms, in fact pretty tiny farms, but they produce

1 good produce. We're glad to get that in the hands of kids.

2 We're also doing community distributions and kind
3 of a Free Tailgate Market Program in 25 sites in nine
4 counties, that brings people right to that site to receive
5 fruits and vegetables.

6 Help us teach people how important zucchini is,
7 and if you have any good eggplant recipes, we surely would
8 like some.

9 Mention has already been made of what has happened
10 with the natural disasters. The disasters will continue.
11 We've had a pretty awful year this year, but these things
12 will happen and the entire public consciousness is focused
13 on them, and those big disasters take people away. We have
14 a little disaster at the dinner table all the time, and
15 we're grateful that you're helping us to do something about
16 it. Thank you.

17 MS. BETSY PITCOCK: I had not planned to speak
18 either, but since my North Carolina friend has spoken, my
19 name is Betsy Pitcock. I'm with the University of Tennessee
20 Extension, and for the last ten years I have been a part of
21 the Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program, and we feel very
22 fortunate to have that program in Tennessee. We're in 92
23 counties, and in those 92 counties we've seen all kinds of
24 wonderful things happen, from young children, in one
25 particular school, that had never -- six kindergarten

1 children who had never tasted a banana. And we think that
2 would be terrible, but they had never tasted a banana.

3 And we had teachers who came to us and said,
4 Please keep this program going. Even though we were
5 teaching about eating fruits and vegetables in that
6 classroom, we didn't know what else we had taught there.
7 And the stories go on and on.

8 I'm an area specialist, so I travel the state of
9 Tennessee doing people development and also working with
10 agents on the front line. And we support, Tennessee
11 Extension supports the funding, and we hope that that
12 funding in no way is ever going to be problematic for you,
13 because we see on those front lines how much good this is
14 doing for the people in Tennessee, so we hope that works
15 well. Thank you.

16 MS. YOLANDA KENNEDY: Good afternoon. My name is
17 Yolanda Kennedy and I am the Assistant Director for the WIC
18 Program here in South Carolina and the Coordinator for the
19 WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program

20 I, like the later two speakers, did not come to
21 speak today. I only came to listen. But after hearing the
22 comments, and very important and relevant ones, I should
23 say, I just wanted to add my two cents, and I am speaking on
24 behalf of the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program.

25 With the WIC Program making improvements in the

1 current food package to include the addition of fruits and
2 vegetables, how will this affect the WIC Farmers Market
3 Nutrition Program? I have asked this question to our
4 regional staff in Atlanta as well as the national staff in
5 Washington, and the answer that I have received from both
6 is, we really don't know, and I really don't feel confident
7 about that answer.

8 Although it is proposed that WIC adds fruits and
9 vegetables to the food package, which is wonderful and well
10 overdue, it is only at a maximum dollar value of about ten
11 dollars per month per participant. This, of course, is not
12 adequate. And I hope you noticed earlier that when I spoke
13 about the food package, I only said the addition of fruit
14 and vegetables and I did not use the word "fresh" to
15 describe them. The word "fresh" is what the Farmers Market
16 Nutrition Program is all about, providing locally grown
17 fresh fruit and vegetables to the people we serve through
18 our local farmers markets.

19 I would encourage you not to use the addition of
20 fruits and vegetables to the WIC programs food package as a
21 reason to eliminate the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition
22 Program.

23 Currently, the WIC Farmers Market Program, from
24 June through September this year, served approximately
25 19,000 participants. Our participants each year tell us how

1 much they love the program because it exposes their children
2 to farmers markets and fresh fruits and vegetables, which is
3 an experience that many of them would not otherwise get if
4 not participating in this program.

5 Please use the revitalizing of the WIC Food
6 Package as an opportunity to improve the Farmers Market
7 Program and not as an excuse to eliminate such a beneficial
8 and much needed program in this state.

9 MS. COLER: Anyone else?

Well, with that, I would just like to say
11 thank you again for coming and
12 participating on behalf of Don Arnette, our
13 Regional Administrator; Jessica Shahin, who
14 is our Associate Deputy Administrator for
15 the Food Stamp Program. We just really do
16 thank you.

17 And while I was listening to your
18 comments it struck me that we really do
19 rely on what happens on the ground, in the
20 local and state areas, to come up with some
21 good ideas. And one of the best, I think,
22 that we've done on a national level started
23 here in South Carolina and that is
24 eligibility, the dual enrollment between
25 the Food Stamp Program and those who are

1 participating in, or who are receiving
2 social security insurance, disability
3 insurance. And that's been just a great
4 program that started in South Carolina and
5 we're trying to roll that out across the
6 nation because it really does help reach a
7 population that is difficult to reach, and
8 that is the low-income seniors who are
9 eligible for food stamps who are not
10 actively engaging in the program.

11 So forums like this help just remind
12 us of wonderful partnerships and
13 innovations and spur new ideas we can take
14 forward as we not only go into the Farm
15 Bill debate but just through regular course
16 of action as well.

17 There is a lot of comments that were
18 really helpful. Just so you know, some of
19 them have been stated in other forums,
20 which I think shows that there are some
21 good ideas out there, that there is some
22 consistency across the country.

23 There are also some new things I
24 heard, which we really do appreciate.

25 One comment I'll touch on is the call

1 for a name change in the Food Stamp
2 Program. That's something that's been in
3 the President's budget. It does require an
4 act of Congress. We have gone through some
5 public comment periods and we're doing
6 focus groups, because we really do think
7 that's an important step, and a fairly easy
8 step to help remove some of the stigma from
9 the program to help reach more people.

10 The State of Minnesota changed the
11 name of their program. They call it the
12 Food Support Program, and we know that
13 their enrollment has gone up because people
14 have not been hesitant to participate in
15 that as they may have been to participate
16 in the Food Stamp Program.

17 Two other quick points I'd just like
18 to make. I think I've heard some comments
19 about the disasters with Hurricane Katrina,
20 Rita and Wilma, and certainly the food bank
21 network across the country jumped right in.
22 The latest number I heard was over 1700
23 truckloads of food from existing
24 inventories across the country were shipped
25 to the region to provide immediate relief.

1 Our partnerships together, we were
2 able to reach many, many people and enroll
3 them in the Food Stamp Program. Over
4 960,000 households were signed up on food
5 stamps as a direct result, and it wasn't
6 just in that area. As people fled across
7 the country, states like South Carolina,
8 North Carolina, Tennessee, really did step
9 up and were very welcoming and expedited a
10 lot of those cases.

11 Comment about fraud: I couldn't
12 agree more. We do spend a lot of time not
13 only speaking about how the Food Stamp
14 Program really is in a new era, with the
15 highest payment accuracy rate. We have no
16 more stamps. We are at 100 percent EBT,
17 and the rate of fraud and abuse in this
18 program are well within they've ever been.

19 And I think the work of the states
20 has really paid off. As you know, Congress
21 is looking at a lot of budget cuts, and the
22 Food Stamp Program, I think, has fared very
23 well so far in this debate because of the
24 ability to demonstrate how it's an
25 effectively run program, so we're pleased

1 with that.

2 And I'll just make one more plug on a
3 program that's not run out of the USDA,
4 and, Lynn, with the Department on Aging, I
5 know you probably are receiving a lot of
6 seniors coming. I think everybody who
7 works with seniors is probably aware of the
8 new Medicare drug discount card.
9 Enrollment for all seniors, it started on
10 the 15th of this month. There was an
11 effort prior to this time to try to enroll
12 low-income seniors. We've got a lot of
13 cooperation with the Social Security
14 Administration to try to reach people.
15 They will be automatically assigned to a
16 plan if they don't take that extra step.

17 But it is complicated as is all
18 insurance type of programs, but I think
19 people who focus an hour on some of the
20 materials that have been sent, or have a
21 family discussion or work with neighbors,
22 can really help people enroll in this
23 program. It's going to save people a lot
24 of money. It's going to be able to ensure
25 that they get the medications they need.

1 It's something that is new, and with
2 everything new there are challenges. But
3 there are going to be TV shows and web
4 programs and lots of material out to help
5 those help seniors not only in community
6 centers but within families and
7 neighborhoods.

8 Because this is an important benefit,
9 I think the fact that there are so many
10 plans available to people is bringing the
11 cost down, which will only enhance the
12 benefit for seniors, so I just wanted to
13 make you all aware of that, that there are
14 materials if you look on the web site.

15 CMS, the Center for Medicaid and
16 Medicare has 7,000 operators standing by to
17 receive phone calls through their 1-800
18 number to help people.

19 It is a challenge, but I think if we
20 all put some effort into helping seniors
21 sign up for that, the benefits in the long
22 run will really, really pay off.

23 So again, thank you for all of your
24 comments on these programs. Some that
25 aren't specifically related to the Farm

1 Bill, the comments are very helpful because
2 these programs all do interact, and
3 together your efforts on the local and
4 state level make a difference in people's
5 lives, and these programs can help support
6 that, so thank you again very much.

7 (The hearing was concluded at 1:50 p.m.)