

1 UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

2 FARM BILL NUTRITION FORUM

3 October 14, 2005

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7 The above-mentioned meeting was held on Friday,
8 October 14, 2005, commencing at 10:35 a.m., at the
9 Enoch Pratt Central Library, 400 Cathedral Street,
Auditorium, Baltimore, Maryland 21201.

BEFORE:

10 KATE COLER, Deputy Undersecretary for
11 Food, Nutrition and Consumer
Services

12 JESSICA SHAHIN, Deputy Administrator,
13 USDA Food & Nutrition Service

14 YVETTE JACKSON, Mid-Atlantic Regional
15 Administrator, USDA Food and
16 Nutrition Service

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21 REPORTED BY: Robert A. Shocket

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

2 MS. COLER: Good morning, everyone, and
3 thank you very much for coming to Baltimore today for a
4 Farm Bill listening session, and, specifically geared
5 towards the Nutrition Title, as we prepare for the 2007
6 Farm Bill, which will be reauthorized by Congress. And
7 it's hard to believe that we're already at this stage
8 where we're starting to evaluate some of the changes to
9 the Nutrition Title that occurred in the 2002 Farm Bill
10 but we are, and we are having listening sessions in
11 every state in the country, which is an important
12 priority for Secretary Johanns our new secretary at
13 USDA, because he recognizes that the Farm Bill touches
14 many, many Americans, and specifically the Nutrition
15 Title touches a lot of Americans in many important
16 ways.

17 And, so, we are having these listening
18 sessions because we recognize that these programs are
19 successful because of the partnerships that we have
20 with the federal government, with state and local
21 governments and community groups and faith-based

1 community organizations across the country. And we
2 really need your input on how to build upon the
3 successes of these programs, build upon the success
4 from the 2002 Farm Bill and make these programs as
5 effective as possible for these people who utilize them
6 every day.

7 The Food and Nutrition Service, Nutrition
8 Program, touches the lives of one in five Americans
9 every year and it has an enormous reach. And again the
10 success of these programs depends on input from all
11 levels of government and the community. So, I
12 appreciate your time in coming to Baltimore. I looked
13 at the list and a lot of people have traveled from
14 other states which I appreciate.

15 As I mentioned, we are having Farm Bill
16 forums in every state. You do not have to limit
17 yourself if you have partners in other states to just
18 nutrition forums. You're welcome at any of them and if
19 there's people in the audience that have other titles,
20 they're welcome as well. But we did want to dedicate
21 at least ten of these sessions to the Nutrition Title.

1 Specifically because there's a number of
2 programs that are going to be reauthorized, the largest
3 of course the Food Stamp Program. We saw many
4 improvements to the program in the 2002 Farm Bill,
5 primarily streamlining the program and cutting the red
6 tape, making it easier to reach out to eligible
7 citizens so they can utilize this program, Food Stamp
8 Program because we see it not only as a way to fight
9 hunger but also as a program that's important as we try
10 to move all Americans to a healthier life-style. But
11 the Food Stamp Program is not the only program we
12 authorize. It's also the Commodity Supplemental Food
13 Program, the Food Distribution Program on Indian
14 Reservations, the Emergency Food Assistance Program,
15 the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, and also
16 the Nutrition Assistance Program in Puerto Rico which
17 has unique characteristics. So, those are the specific
18 programs but we're also open to comments about how
19 those programs fit in with other efforts to move people
20 to a healthier life-style and to combat hunger in this
21 country.

1 In the invitation letter we outlined a
2 number of questions to provoke some of your thoughts
3 but your comments certainly are not limited to those.
4 What we're really interested in hearing from you is
5 what aspects of the programs are working and lead to
6 their success but, as well, what aspects of the
7 programs need to be altered so we can serve people most
8 effectively, reach those citizens that are in need but
9 also protect taxpayer dollars.

10 So, this is a listening session. We are
11 here to listen. And I am joined today by Yvette
12 Jackson, who is the regional administrator for the
13 Mid-Atlantic region, and she will be speaking here in a
14 moment with some housekeeping tips, and I don't want to
15 say rules but guidelines. I'm also joined by Jessica
16 Shahin, who is the Associate Deputy Administrator for
17 the Food Stamp Program, with the Food and Nutrition
18 Service. And, she's a key person in Food Stamp policy.
19 And, to her left is Mr. Steve Christensen, who is the
20 Deputy Administrator for Special Nutrition Programs.
21 That's the other side of the food nutrition house.

1 That's basically everything except Food Stamps. And,
2 we're here again to listen, to get your input and,
3 again, I just very much appreciate the time that you
4 all have taken to come to Baltimore and share your
5 thoughts with us today.

6 MS. JACKSON: Good morning. I just want to
7 go over the some of the housekeeping rules so everyone
8 will understand how we're going to proceed this
9 morning. We have two microphones in the front of the
10 room, and, to accommodate our speakers this morning.
11 We will be calling out four speakers at a time and we
12 reserved the front row so that as they call out the
13 speakers you can sit near the microphones so you will
14 be ready and we can keep rolling and keep on schedule.
15 There is a timer, to my right, who will be holding
16 cards that will let the speakers know how much time
17 they have. The green card will be shown as of three
18 minutes. The yellow card will be indicating that you
19 have two minutes left. And then when you see the red
20 card, that means you have to wrap up your remarks.
21 Your time is up. And, please, please, because we do

1 want to make sure that all of the people who have
2 signed up to speak have an opportunity, we really are
3 asking for everyone's cooperation to stick with the
4 timeline. Before the fourth person speaks, I will be
5 calling up the next four speakers again so that we can
6 keep things rolling.

7 In addition to the five-minute remarks,
8 each person will have the opportunity to submit written
9 testimony, including individuals who chose not to speak
10 this morning. We will be accepting written testimony
11 and that testimony can be either given to us today or
12 submitted to us via e-mail. All the remarks that are
13 made today are being captured. We do have a
14 transcriber who is taking information as you speak but
15 for those who have copies, written copies of their oral
16 statements, it would be very helpful if you would leave
17 those with us so the transcriber has those just to
18 check for the accuracy of your statements. We will be
19 collecting all of the oral testimony and that will be
20 summarized and will eventually be available for
21 everyone to review at the FNS's Website. So, when all

1 of the hearing sessions are completed, we will be
2 posting summary information about these listings as
3 they are on our Website.

4 We will be taking a brief break about
5 midway through so after about an hour and a half, I
6 will, we will be taking a ten-minute break. Here's the
7 important information. Pay attention. Restrooms, the
8 ladies restroom is on this floor. When you go out, you
9 turn to the right. When you go through the double
10 doors, into the next section, to your immediate right,
11 is the ladies room. For the gentlemen, you have to go
12 downstairs to the second floor. There is a handicap
13 room that has been made available for your use so you
14 can go to the second floor to the handicap restroom.
15 And that is available for the gentlemen this morning.

16 And, I would like to, also for those of you
17 who are speaking, when you come to the microphone,
18 please give your name and your organization so that the
19 transcriber can capture that before you begin your
20 remarks. Right now I would like to call to the front
21 of the room Donna Seward, Colleen Pawling, Lee

1 Mannering, and Phyllis Kilby. And I apologize in
2 advance for anyone who I mispronounce your name.
3 Please forgive me. Good morning.

4 MS. SEWARD: Good morning. I'm Donna
5 Seward. I'm the director of WIC and community
6 nutrition services for the Virginia Department of
7 Health.

8 MS. JACKSON: Can everyone hear that for
9 the transcriber?

10 MS. SEWARD: That's not something I have
11 been told of, so, is that better? Okay. We believe
12 that WIC is a successful Supplemental Nutrition Program
13 just because it can be supplemental and it has the Food
14 Stamp Program and others like it to help our
15 participants. In Virginia we have the Virginia
16 nutrition assistance network, that is the result of a
17 USDA grant to our Food Stamp Office that has resulted
18 in an online application for Food Stamps, Food Bank and
19 WIC.

20 And we've never even had a WIC application
21 but it is online now and we've done that together.

1 That's a really very successful group and we are
2 working on our state nutrition action plan together
3 through that group as well and we would really
4 recommend that something like it be used to cross other
5 states. We do believe that USDA could do more to
6 facilitate sharing of participant data between
7 nutrition programs, certainly WIC and Food Stamps but
8 school lunch and breakfast as well because that would
9 further simplify the eligibility process and it also
10 will let us do some real evaluation of the programs in
11 relation to one another and to other things. The
12 technology enhancements that you can make will be
13 limited by our ability to share data so if you look at
14 and rely on technology we want you to please let us
15 know about that.

16 WIC participation is at 141,000, an
17 all-time high but that's only a small group of people
18 that qualify for Food Stamps. And so we hope that you
19 will make sure that Food Stamps is kept at the level it
20 needs to be because none of our data take into effect
21 Katrina or Rita or any of the other things that really

1 increase the number of people that need help. A recent
2 study found that the price of fruits and vegetables has
3 the greatest impact on whether people eat healthy or
4 not.

5 If you take away some of their safety net
6 of Food Stamps, then they won't be able to do that. We
7 also have the Champion Program, which is the
8 Commonwealth Healthy Approach mobilization plan for
9 inactivity, obesity and nutrition. And we are very
10 concerned about the obesity issues. That's why we
11 would like programs like Food Stamps because low-income
12 people tend to have a higher rate of obesity. We do
13 know that just giving them more money, though, won't
14 fix it so we also would ask that you strengthen the
15 nutrition education component of Food Stamps. We like
16 to see it so seamlessly included in the eligibility and
17 the distribution process that it's virtually
18 transparent to the participant because that's the way
19 you actually reach everyone with it.

20 The other thing that we would like to see
21 you do is perhaps look at the foods that can be

1 purchased by Food Stamps and make healthier choices
2 eligible and perhaps some of the unhealthy choices not
3 so eligible. Research has shown that given a choice
4 between buying milk and Cokes, kids and adults for that
5 matter will often buy Cokes. But we believe that it's
6 the responsibility of parents and schools and even
7 government to help make those choices for our children
8 to try to impact on the obesity problem in the future.

9 Certainly, please reconsider any cuts to
10 the programs and we would ask that you look at all the
11 policies and all the things that come about from these
12 hearings as they relate to obesity and not just to
13 hunger because the two are tied together very closely
14 and the government needs to speak with one voice as we
15 combat obesity through our government programs as well
16 as the education that we offer the public. Thank you.

17 MS. JACKSON: Would Colleen Pawling come
18 forward.

19 MS. PAWLING: Good morning. My name is
20 Colleen Pawling. I'm with the Center on Budget and
21 Policy Priorities in Washington. And first I would

1 like to thank you and Deputy Undersecretary for the
2 great work you have done in the last five years in
3 making Food Stamp Programs more accessible to the
4 people who need it, the outreach in restoring legal
5 immigrants and simplification in 2002. Back over the
6 past five years the program is much stronger, I think
7 because of that and also all the work to improve the
8 accuracy has really strengthened the reputation of the
9 program and we really appreciate that and your inviting
10 us to come here and listening to what we have to say so
11 thank you.

12 The Food Stamp Program does a tremendous
13 job in getting benefits to people who need food
14 assistance and I would like to mention just three of
15 the strengths of the program which I hope can be
16 reinforced during reorganization.

17 First, entitlement of program response to
18 people both locally and nationally. We've seen that
19 recently with Hurricane Katrina and in the past five
20 years with the increased participation; second, the
21 national benefit structure which makes sure that

1 regardless of where people live they get a comparable
2 benefit. The people in North Carolina need to eat just
3 as much as the people in California.

4 And third, the benefits are targeted those
5 must need by, both by taking into account income and
6 also expenses. And I think those are really important
7 aspects of the program that we would not want to see
8 weakened in any way. As far as challenges, there are
9 three general areas we're concerned about. One is
10 eligibility restrictions, specifically about the
11 immigrants, the 2002 restoration went part of the way.
12 We would like to see that continued as these
13 restrictions need to eventually be lifted completely.

14 And, also, the 2,000 dollar asset limit
15 keeps a lot of genuinely needy people from being
16 eligible for the program. It hasn't been raised in 20
17 years and it's time to take another look at that. It
18 keeps people from saving for education and retirement
19 which are goals that this administration supports in
20 other areas and this seems to be in conflict.

21 Adequacy of benefits, the 1996 cuts have

1 never been restored and I know that you are aware that
2 the thrifty food plan is very bare-bones and many
3 people consider it not to be adequate. We would like
4 to see that reexamined. And improving access, a lot
5 has been done in the last five years and I know you've
6 got a laundry list of ideas and people are giving you
7 more ideas and we look forward to exploring those ideas
8 with you but at the same time we want you to do that
9 with an eye towards the targeting that this program has
10 historically done so well.

11 We would not like to see changes made for
12 purposes of taking simplification that would cause a
13 major redistribution from the neediest to the less
14 needy. So, we need to balance that carefully and make
15 sure that simplification is done in a way that doesn't
16 harm the neediest of people.

17 And on the entitlement structure, I think
18 that the increasing participation and response to
19 Hurricane Katrina make it eminently clear why it's
20 important this remain an open-ended entitlement program
21 and we would like to see the administration come out in

1 front and be very vocal and proactive in protecting the
2 current structure of the program from any changes that
3 would make it less of an entitlement.

4 And, one final note, I would like to
5 respond to the suggestion that we should buy offsets to
6 pay for suggested program improvements. My
7 organization, Center on Budget, we're very committed to
8 responsible fiscal policy and budgeting but it's
9 disturbing to see how when we're talking about programs
10 for the poor, all of a sudden fiscal responsibility is
11 a big deal and then when we're talking about tax cuts
12 for rich people it just fades into the mist.

13 And I think that as long as this
14 administration is giving away two hundred billion
15 dollars a year in tax cuts to the richest people, it's
16 sort of ridiculous for us to try to find ways to pay
17 for programs for poor people. And no one in this room
18 should be obligated to find ways to make up for these
19 huge tax cuts that we are giving to the wealthiest in
20 our country. We will of course submit very detailed
21 comments later and we look forward to working with you

1 in the year 2007 Farm Bill. And thank you.

2 MR. JACKSON: Will Lee Mannering come
3 forward.

4 MR. MANNERING: Lee Mannering, Produce
5 Marketing Association. Thank you very much. Thank you
6 Undersecretary Coler for this opportunity to come
7 forward and offer input on critical issues affecting
8 the fresh produce industry. And again I'm Lee
9 mannering, government relations manager for produce
10 marketing association. We represent companies
11 throughout the produce distribution chains that roughly
12 supply about 90 percent of the fresh produce sold here
13 in the U.S.

14 Our purpose is to advance the marketing of
15 fresh produce and ultimately to get consumers to eat
16 more foods and vegetables and that's why we're here
17 today to talk about a few of these programs that you
18 have. We believe that U.S. federal policy, including
19 that established in the Farm Bill, is crucial in
20 increasing the consumption of the healthy products.
21 They're instrumental in the fight against cardiac

1 disease and obesity.

2 We believe U.S. policy should be consistent
3 and we encourage all USDA feeding programs to review
4 the new federal dietary guidelines for Americans and we
5 also recommend that they consume five to thirteen
6 servings of fruits and vegetables a day to help. We
7 believe that a strong production industry is the
8 foundation for abundant affordable availability for
9 fresh produce. Of course, today we're focused on
10 nutrition policy.

11 First, we recommend that new emphasis be
12 made on domestic communication and marketing efforts to
13 inform consumers about the many benefits of fresh
14 fruits and vegetables. And this will also help enhance
15 our industry competitiveness. Currently produce makes
16 up about 20 percent of total agricultural receipts,
17 given current federal expenditures for produce, only
18 about one percent of agriculture spending. Produce
19 type of domestic marketing communication program will
20 help level that gap while establishing a cooperative
21 program that leverages both industry and government

1 funds.

2 As previously mentioned, we would also like
3 to see more effective efforts and encourage increased
4 consumption of fruits and vegetables among Food Stamp
5 participants and those eligible for Food Stamps through
6 the Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program and direct
7 Food Stamp benefits. These programs should reflect and
8 must reflect the dietary guidelines that Americans
9 counting on federal assistance can increase their
10 consumption of these healthful products.

11 Third, we recommend increased funding for
12 effective and efficient fruit and vegetable commodity
13 purchases including the popular Department of Defense
14 Fresh Program. This will help the school children and
15 will access a wider variety and quantity of fresh
16 produce. We also urge expansion of the school proven
17 vegetable snack program familiar to one hundred schools
18 in every state. The pilot program that was held over
19 the last several years was a success and it was made
20 permanent. We need to expand this, however, to reach
21 more children throughout the country. And this is

1 particularly important in light of the recent Rand
2 study that came out last week that said children are
3 not eating produce because of the cost expenditure.
4 It's too closely.

5 Pilot program being free in schools, you
6 can reach them there in that environment and hopefully
7 get them to change eating habits and so forth. Both
8 the DOD program and the snack program recommendations
9 will get more produce to kids which is critical because
10 on any given day 45 percent of school children eat no
11 fruit and 20 percent eat less than one vegetable, far
12 short of their daily recommendations as outlined in the
13 dietary guidelines on the food pyramid. We also ask
14 USDA to formally establish a senior Farmers' Market
15 Nutrition Program as a permanent initiative.

16 While much consideration has been paid to
17 children's health in recent years, it's also very
18 important that due consideration be given to all
19 population groups, particularly senior citizens, so
20 that they can have increased access to fresh produce
21 through the Farmers' market Program.

1 Finally, we would ask and encourage
2 research to examine why consumers do not eat more fresh
3 fruits and vegetables and to explore the health
4 benefits of fresh produce, so that will also give them
5 the information that they need to make healthful
6 choices. Again, thank you. We appreciate there
7 opportunity to come forward in front of USDA officials
8 and share a few points on nutrition policy and if we
9 can be of further assistance in the future, please feel
10 free to contact us. Thank you.

11 MS. JACKSON: Before the next speakers
12 begins, I would like to call to the front of the room,
13 Mark Silbergeld, Steve O'Grady, Berry Friesen and
14 Sheila Christopher. Ms. Kilby, if you would begin.

15 MS. KILBY: Welcome, Madam Secretary, to
16 Maryland. My name is Phyllis Kilby. I'm a dairy
17 farmer from Cecil County, where I also serve as an
18 elected County Commissioner in Cecil County. I am also
19 at this point the Chairman of the Rural Maryland
20 Council, have been actively involved in that
21 organization for several years. I currently chair the

1 Board of Directors and am a past chairman of the
2 Council's Agricultural Resources Committee. The Farm
3 Bill question that I would like to speak to today is
4 number five, how can federal rural and farm programs
5 provide effective assistance in rural areas?

6 People often think of Maryland as being an
7 urban state because so many people live in the
8 Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area, but over 60
9 percent of our state's land area is still rural. And,
10 our rural people face problems similar to other rural
11 people in other parts of the country -- challenges with
12 economic dislocation in the ag and manufacturing
13 sectors, lack of affordable or available health care
14 and other services, and host of problems related to
15 infrastructure deployment, including water, sewer, and
16 broadband.

17 In 1972, the Rural Development Act gave the
18 Secretary of Agriculture the responsibility for
19 coordinating federal rural programs. In 1990, the
20 Presidential Initiative on Rural America created the
21 National Rural Development Partnership and the State

1 Rural Development Council, or SRDCs. In the 2002 Farm
2 Bill, the National Rural Development Partnership was
3 authorized giving SRDCs and the National Rural
4 Development Coordinating Committee important and unique
5 authority to help rural America. The Farm Bill's
6 Conference Report set rather high expectations for the
7 Partnership. Quote, "We expect the NRDP to make
8 significant progress towards the goal of better
9 coordinating the rural policies and programs of federal
10 agencies and developing greater collaboration between
11 the federal government, the states and others with
12 resources to invest in rural areas."

13 For about a decade now, the work of the
14 Rural Maryland Council has been instrumental in helping
15 to mobilize rural communities to assess their long-term
16 needs and marshal the local, state, federal and private
17 resources necessary to help them meet their community
18 and economic development objectives. For example, the
19 Rural Maryland Council has been an effective catalyst
20 to help bring greater coordination of federal and state
21 resources to bear on modernizing small community water

1 and wastewater facilities.

2 As a result, upwards of 100 rural
3 communities have recently had wastewater system
4 assessments completed. Moreover, USDA and several
5 agencies are about to enter a formal agreement to
6 regularly convene to coordinate the funding of water
7 and sewer improvements in our rural areas, and thereby
8 cost-effectively leverage and stretch increasingly
9 limited public dollars in a way that best advantages
10 rural citizens.

11 In addition, the Council, working with and
12 through numerous public and private partners, was
13 recently successful in getting the state government to
14 establish a development corporation to focus much
15 needed development assistance on Maryland's underserved
16 agriculture, forestry and seafood industries. The
17 Council also working with the rural health community
18 and others has focused unique attention on prescription
19 drug availability and affordability affecting rural
20 seniors and families.

21 And the Council has been involved in a

1 number of other entrepreneurial development and
2 community development programs and policies which has
3 markedly helped rural towns and counties. For its
4 efforts, the Council has twice been recognized by USDA
5 with "rural impact awards" for notable rural
6 development achievement.

7 What we are asking USDA to do is to support
8 in the 2007 Farm Bill three things -- continue to
9 reform and improve the delivery and structure of rural
10 programs to better serve all people living in rural
11 communities; reauthorize the National Rural Development
12 Partnership language and expand this important program
13 to all 50 states; also, for USDA to support adequate
14 funding for the NRDP through both discretionary funds
15 as well as line-item appropriations. Thank you very
16 much for your time.

17 MS. JACKSON: Will Mark Silbergeld come
18 forward.

19 MR. SILBERGELD: Thank you for the
20 opportunity to address this listening session. My name
21 is Mark Silbergeld. I am senior fellow and director of

1 international issues for Consumer Federation of
2 America, which is a membership, an organizational
3 membership federation with over 300 national, state and
4 local members with offices in Washington, D.C. I did
5 have some remarks which I would like to get into the
6 record on the sugar program which is not the subject of
7 this morning's hearing and I hope I can just leave my
8 printed comments with the secretarial staff.

9 I want to speak about Food and Nutrition
10 Service programs on behalf of my colleague, Carroll
11 Tucker Foreman, who is CFA's senior fellow and director
12 of food and nutrition issues and a former assistant
13 secretary of agriculture who was in charge of both FSIS
14 and FNS during the Carter administration.

15 We would like to note first that Secretary
16 Johanns was present at numerous of the hearings on the
17 programs on the producer side and we regret that he's
18 not here to hear the comments that are being made about
19 the programs on the consumer side. I certainly hope
20 that he will get that remark as well as the substantive
21 remarks that we have to convey because it reflects or

1 at least seems to reflect priorities. We hope it does
2 not reflect the same priority that is reflected in the
3 current budget reconciliation bill now before the
4 Congress in which \$600 million is proposed to be
5 shifted from the consumer side to the production side.
6 And we think those priorities need to be reversed as
7 part of the administration's policy and reflected in
8 the 2007 Farm Bill.

9 Specifically with respect to FNS, I will be
10 very brief and some speakers have addressed this issue
11 before. This nation has a nutrition problem. It has
12 an obesity problem. That problem has been recognized
13 by the federal government. HHS has programs to seek to
14 address that. It would make a lot of sense if our Food
15 and Nutrition Service programs reflected that same
16 concern by giving foods that are in the higher
17 priorities in the dietary guidelines more emphasis in
18 feeding programs and foods that are recommended be
19 consumed in lesser quantities to be given less
20 emphasis.

21 And that is easier to do of course in

1 school feeding programs and other child programs
2 because the food provisions are direct and they're not
3 in the form of stamps. But we think that ways need to
4 be found as well to deal with this in the Food Stamp
5 and weight programs where people are given some options
6 as to what they buy, A, with federal assistance, and
7 that some shift in that priority should help deal with
8 that issue. Thank you for your time and I hope that
9 these comments and these listening sessions will result
10 in some shifts in priorities in the 2007 Farm Bill.

11 MS. JACKSON: Will Steve O'Grady come to
12 the microphone.

13 MR. O'GRADY: Thank you. My name is Steve
14 O'Grady and I'm the director of operations and
15 logistics for Operation Blessing. I wanted to tell you
16 a little bit about our organization. Last year we had
17 the opportunity to deliver over a hundred million
18 pounds of food and relief supplies within the United
19 States. That consisted of over 3300 truckloads. And
20 we were able to supplement over 68 million meals. And
21 I oversee that operating budget. And we were able to

1 do that at an average price of about 5.2 cents a pound.
2 All of our funding is private in nature. We require no
3 funding from the government. We have a completely and
4 totally self-sustained refrigerated trucking system of
5 tractor-trailers that we drive across the country.

6 And what I have been finding out over the
7 past couple of years is we have a network of over 5,000
8 churches, food pantries, soup kitchens and other
9 organizations that we serve both either directly or
10 through intermediary organizations where we bring in
11 larger quantities and they will subdivide it for us.

12 And what's been happening is corporate
13 donations and other business food resources are on the
14 decline, and the two primary areas that I have seen in
15 this is one, both for good purposes from a business
16 perspective, just-in-time inventory. In addition to
17 that, there has been a niche market that's developed
18 over the past three or four years. It's a secondary
19 food distribution market that brokers will come in and
20 they'll cost-contain the cost of production to the
21 manufacturer and will pay them their cost and then they

1 will in turn sell to other organizations at a
2 discounted price. And this includes many nonprofits
3 that would at one time be able to get these foods
4 freely donated from corporate America. Now they're in
5 a position where we have to pay for them.

6 In addition, what we're finding out is I'm
7 learning more about the TEFAP program and that's
8 specifically what I'm here to speak about. At the
9 federal level it's a very inviting and very simple
10 program as I read it, and I do want to learn more about
11 it. The concern that I have had over the past, some
12 directly, mostly indirectly, is access to the program
13 at the state level without more encumbrances that occur
14 where you are required to either become a member of a
15 support organization or are required to pay some sort
16 of maintenance fees in order to receive this food.

17 And, what I want to bring to the table also
18 from a taxpayer and a cost-containment perspective is,
19 we are self-funded. We do have trucks and
20 transportation that can pick up this product and we can
21 responsibly distribute it within our network. We're

1 not asking for any administrative reimbursement or
2 grant assistance as part of the TEFAP program. What
3 we're hoping to do is be able to broaden the NGO
4 involvement at the state level. And I don't know how
5 we can do that from the federal side but if there were
6 some sort of either, I don't know if it's tightening or
7 loosening the guidelines, that would require the states
8 to look at more organizations to be primary recipients
9 to get into the secondary level there to really feed
10 people.

11 We have hundreds of thousands of people in
12 Appalachia that are not being field properly because
13 food resources are not getting to them through the
14 TEFAP program. And there's many other places in the
15 country like this, and we bring the resources to the
16 table to help expand the TEFAP program into these areas
17 where these people currently aren't being served. I am
18 hoping as part of the 2007 Farm Bill initiative that
19 you will be able to broaden the scope of the
20 organizations that would qualify at the state level.
21 Thank you.

1 MS. JACKSON: Will Berry Friesen come
2 forward.

3 MR. FRIESEN: Deputy Undersecretary Coler,
4 Administrator Jackson and Deputy Administrator Shahin
5 and Mr. Christensen, thank you for providing us with
6 this opportunity. My name is Berry Friesen. I'm with
7 the Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center, a group
8 committed to ending hunger, reducing food insecurity
9 and promoting healthy eating. Because of the limits of
10 time, I will confine my comments to the Food Stamp
11 Program this morning. Because of low wages for many
12 jobs food insecurity is making inroads into the working
13 class. Given the overall direction of the global
14 economy there is every indication that this trend will
15 interest in years ahead. And my written comments have
16 data to support that. I won't recite those data here.

17 I want to applaud the Bush Administration
18 for what it has done in the past five years, to
19 streamline and simplify the program. These changes
20 have made it easy for wage-earning families to
21 participate in the programs, so, thank you. Looking

1 ahead, we urge the administration to continue making
2 the program more accessible to households that are
3 struggling to move to self-sufficiency. Certainly
4 there are inexpensive ways we can do this, such as
5 changing the name of the program but beyond that we
6 urge the administration to support raising the asset
7 limit. It has been at \$2,000 for a long time now and
8 it has not been adjusted to reflect inflation nor has
9 it been adjusted to reflect this administration's
10 emphasis on America as an ownership society. We do not
11 want households to be pauperized before qualifying for
12 food assistance. The longer that we leave the assets
13 limit at \$2,000, the more we are moving in that
14 direction.

15 Secondly, we recognize there is a trade-off
16 between precise targeting of benefits and the
17 streamlining of procedures. We want the program to
18 retain the capacity for precise targeting but as I've
19 already said, we want the program to make access
20 available to those who may be content with an average
21 allotment. A good example of this latter approach is

1 the combined application pilot between FNS and Social
2 Security Administration which provides Food Stamps to
3 SSI recipients without separate Food Stamp application.

4 Recently we've seen the Food Stamp Program
5 perform very flexibly and promptly in response to the
6 needs of millions of people displaced by hurricane
7 Katrina. This outstanding performance was achieved
8 because the program has a national structure and
9 because the USDA has ample authority to waive
10 requirements which stand in the way of effective
11 administration. This performance would not have been
12 achieved had the current House proposal Block Grant
13 Program been in effect. The House proposal would set
14 in motion the process whereby the program could become
15 a slush fund for fiscally strapped state governments
16 and over time it would lose the capacity to fulfill
17 it's mission. Therefore, our third recommendation is
18 that the administration oppose efforts to change the
19 national structure of the program.

20 A wonderful aspect of the Food Stamp
21 Program is that it enables low-income families to use

1 the same food distribution system that everyone else
2 uses, a system that provides a bountiful and varied
3 food supply including all of the foods that the USDA's
4 dietary guidelines recommend for all of us. But
5 there's a serious problem in this regard and it was
6 described earlier this year in a study conducted by the
7 Boston Medical Society. It found what it cost in
8 Boston for a family to follow the dietary guidelines
9 and it found it needed about \$650 a month, which is 30
10 percent more than the thrifty food plan provides. This
11 puts us all in an untenable position. USDA assumes a
12 family will spend \$500 on food but then tells them
13 through the dietary guidelines that they should spend
14 650.

15 And we're in that same contradiction
16 because we're out in the community giving pep talks to
17 people about eating healthy, knowing full well that
18 they lack the resources to do that. To resolve this
19 contradiction, to promote better health we encourage
20 the administration to ask Congress to increase the
21 monthly allotment levels for households that elect to

1 use their Food Stamp dollars for a healthy food plan.
2 The amount of the increase will be based on the kind of
3 market study that was performed in Boston. And to
4 preserve consumer choice, households could choose
5 whether they want a restricted food plan or a healthy
6 food plan.

7 Obviously, this approach will introduce
8 difficult implementation issues and perhaps those would
9 be insurmountable. Our point today is that for Food
10 Stamp households follow the dietary guidelines and make
11 healthy choices, they need a significant enhancement in
12 the buying power of their allotments.

13 Our last recommendation is that the
14 reauthorized program better integrate Food Stamp
15 nutrition education with TEFAP. We have tried to
16 integrate nutrition education with food distribution
17 and food pantries and have often found ourselves
18 swimming upstream against FNS requirements. We hope
19 the next Farm Bill will encourage Pennsylvania and
20 other states to bring nutrition education back to our
21 pantries. And we believe you could do that by a

1 mechanism which would allow us to count
2 privately-funded or state-funded food that's
3 distributed in pantries in situations when that's
4 appropriately combined with nutrition education and
5 involves the head of household as an active participant
6 in that process. Thank you.

7 MS. JACKSON: Before Sheila Christopher
8 comes forward to the microphone, I would like to call
9 to the front of the room, Cheryl Cook, Marlene Kozak,
10 Zach Sugg and Joyce Rothermel. Sheila Christopher.

11 MS. CHRISTOPHER: Good morning. My name is
12 Sheila Christopher. I'm with the national CSF, PA
13 association. Supplemental food program, CSFP, began in
14 1969 to supplement protein, calcium, iron and vitamin A
15 and C for low income mothers and children. Pilot
16 programs in 1983 added seniors as eligible
17 participants. The USDA purchases nutrient rich
18 forwards including canned fruits and vegetables, juices
19 meats, fish, peanut butter, beans, cereal, grain
20 products, cheese and other dairy products at wholesale
21 prices. State agencies contract with community and

1 faith-based organizations to warehouse, certify and
2 distribute and educate individual participants.

3 Local agencies build tri-coalitions between
4 private nonprofit, health units and area agencies on
5 aging for ease of access, even when their seniors are
6 homebound. In FY '05, the CSFP operated through 150
7 nonprofit agencies and 18 other sites in 32 states, the
8 District of Columbia and two Indian reservations.
9 Thirteen states do not have CSFP. The limited number
10 of projects in states operating CSFP has made it
11 difficult to provide nutrition support to many seniors
12 with inadequate diets and income.

13 A national program available to all states
14 would address this growing need and it would help
15 garner support for farm commodity and price support
16 programs that are an integral part of U.S. agricultural
17 policy. Six out of the top ten states with the highest
18 concentration of persons over 65, Arkansas,
19 Connecticut, Florida, Maine, Rhode Island and West
20 Virginia, do not have CSFP. Currently 90 percent of
21 the national participants are seniors. Variations

1 among the states and proportion of seniors served are
2 based on historical service patterns and the
3 enforcement of priority service and funding
4 limitations. The shift to senior caseload is a
5 consequence of several factors, including increased
6 availability of WIC for mothers and children and
7 growing numbers of low-income seniors with poor
8 nutrition and health conditions.

9 In a recent survey -- and I'll refer you to
10 charts one and two -- 55 percent reported that they had
11 run out of food in a month. 67 percent reported they
12 used their food money to pay for medical bills. In the
13 same survey, chart 3 and 4, CSFP senior participants in
14 a household of one, more than half reported an income
15 of less than \$750 per month. Of those in A household
16 of two who responded to the survey, more than half
17 reported income of less than a thousand per month.
18 Nationwide, women and children have program priority.
19 Changing demographics of needy populations, broader
20 access to WIC and varying need among states indicate
21 that it's time to change the current law priority. All

1 low-income seniors should have the advantage of direct
2 nutrition assistance in the form of proper foods with
3 nutrition services and education.

4 With the aging of America, CSFP should be
5 an integral part of USDA's senior nutrition policy.
6 New initiatives and positive outcomes of nutrition
7 assistance to seniors must be strengthened. A 1997
8 report out of Florida International University
9 indicated malnourished elderly patients experience more
10 medical complications, have longer hospital stays and
11 incur higher costs, medical costs. Proper nutrition
12 promote health and treats chronic disease, decreases
13 hospital length of stay and saves healthcare dollars.
14 And please refer to the chart five.

15 Also, this survey referenced only 25
16 percent of the senior participants are receiving Food
17 Stamps for the program. CSFP would benefit by new
18 initiatives to demonstrate individual and program
19 outcomes of CSFP, restore financial guidelines to
20 seniors to original level of 185 percent of poverty,
21 implement programs in five states with approved plans

1 to operate CSFP, Arkansas, Delaware, New Jersey,
2 Oklahoma and Utah, set program priority at greatest
3 need within a project area or let each state set its
4 priority for service under a plan approved by the
5 Secretary of Agriculture, and finally, make CSFP a
6 national program available to all states.

7 The mission of CSFP is to provide quality
8 nutrition assistance economically, efficiently and
9 responsibly, always keeping the needs and the dignity
10 of our participants first. We commend the Distribution
11 Division for their continued innovations to strengthen
12 the quality of the food package and streamline
13 administration. Thank you on behalf of the national
14 CSFP Association.

15 MS. JACKSON: Will Cheryl Cook come to the
16 microphone.

17 MS. COOK: Thank you. Good morning. It's
18 nice to see you and nice to see you again, Ms. Jackson.
19 I'm Cheryl Cook. I'm the Deputy Secretary of the
20 Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. You have my
21 written statement. And Pennsylvania is very ably

1 presented here this morning so I'm going to zero in on
2 just a couple key points if I may. In my role as
3 Deputy Secretary I have the privilege of serving as
4 Pennsylvania's Chair of our Interagency Council on
5 Human Nutrition and the Departments of Aging,
6 Agriculture, Community and Economic Development,
7 Health, Public Welfare.

8 Our common denominator is that all of us
9 have a relationship with you. We are constantly every
10 month when we meet searching for ways to do our jobs
11 better, to better serve our customers, to save money
12 where we can. And if I could give you one message for
13 the next Farm Bill it would be to more openly and
14 directly support interagency councils because we all
15 stand to benefit from agencies at the state level
16 better coordinating financial support if you can do it
17 but I understand how those things go, believe me. But
18 at a minimum make some space on your Web site, maybe in
19 some ways that we can share good ideas among states so
20 we can steal ideas from each other and most importantly
21 some more flexibility for Ms. Jackson to be able to do

1 some rule waiving and red tape cutting to let us maybe
2 do a little better.

3 To give you one example of that,
4 Pennsylvania's COMPASS program was one of the first
5 online Food Stamp Application Programs run by our
6 Department of Public Welfare. The Department of
7 Education has a pilot going now through COMPASS,
8 fifteen school districts through which they are
9 automatically certifying kids for National School
10 Lunch, at the same time, signing them up for Food
11 Stamps. It's working very well. Department of Health
12 plans to look at COMPASS as a way to do that same thing
13 with WIC and discovered that they couldn't take that
14 information anyplace other than at a WIC clinic. Kind
15 of got in the way of using the online system. It's one
16 of those areas where maybe at the regional level is a
17 pilot perhaps or -- to waive the rules where it makes
18 sense to do it. Some more of the regional
19 administrator level.

20 Second point I wanted to make was on the
21 senior partners market nutrition program, one of the

1 innovations of the 2002 Farm Bill. It's terrific.
2 Pennsylvania has one of the largest senior populations
3 in the United States and the largest rural senior
4 population in the United States. It is the most
5 popular program that the Pennsylvania Department of
6 Agriculture administers. We match the roughly \$7
7 million in federal funds that we have two, with \$2
8 million of state funds because it's just that
9 important.

10 Legislators are calling all summer long
11 wanting to go know where can we get more coupons, how
12 do we get this program out to seniors in my area.
13 Obviously we need more money. We also need a little
14 bit more flexibility around things like growing
15 seasons. We're doing a lot with group houses and high
16 tunnels and trying to find ways to extend our producing
17 growing season in Pennsylvania and hopefully we will
18 extend the applicability of that program and anything
19 we can do to extend that program, expand that program
20 is going to be welcome in Pennsylvania. It's also one
21 of the few chances I get to get my bureau food

1 distribution and my bureau's market development working
2 on the same project, which is kind much fun. Everybody
3 is so silo'd anymore, it's nice to have a way to talk
4 to fruit and vegetable growers, one of the fastest
5 growing sectors of agriculture in Pennsylvania and
6 match them up with the Food Bank Network and
7 multistakeholders in senior farmers in nutrition.

8 I guess the third point I wanted to make is
9 something that has been bothering me for a long time,
10 and it's not part of my written statement, is that in
11 the Clinton administration I had the privilege of
12 serving as stage director for rural development in
13 Pennsylvania for the first seven years. In the last
14 year I lost my mind and went to Washington, D.C. as the
15 Acting Associate Administrator for Rural Housing
16 Service and saw that nationwide what I had been seeing
17 in Pennsylvania was true as well. And that is, as my
18 colleague from Maryland has already said, good food
19 important, clean water to drink and safe place to live
20 is important, too.

21 Rural development is outdoing tenant

1 certifications and their Section 515 multifamily
2 housing program, they're taking income statistics for
3 the section 504, Maryland grant program which is
4 available to people only below 50 percent of median
5 income in the county. There's just no question. Those
6 folks are eligible for a lot of the programs being
7 administered.

8 So I would encourage you as you look for
9 ways to partner with other agencies that you look
10 elsewhere than USDA, how many times do we ask people to
11 give their income information to USDA. There's got to
12 be a way we can simultaneously sign somebody up for
13 affordable housing and other Food Stamp benefits on the
14 other side. So, that's it for me. Thank you very
15 much.

16 MS. JACKSON: Will Marlene Kozak come
17 forward.

18 MS. KOZAK: Good morning. I'm Marlene
19 Kozak. I'm the executive director of the Westmoreland
20 County Food Bank in Pennsylvania. I'm here to talk
21 about Commodity Supplemental Food Bank Food Program in

1 Pennsylvania. That's CSFP. The CSFP program began in
2 Pennsylvania in 2002 and the Westmoreland County Food
3 Bank was part of the pilot project in that year. The
4 program supplements the diets of seniors and low income
5 mothers and children with protein, calcium, iron and
6 vitamins A and C.

7 In Pennsylvania, 15,575 CSFP food packages
8 are distributed monthly with 15,400 to our senior
9 population and 175 to WIC graduates. However, there
10 are nearly 300,000 seniors in Pennsylvania who are
11 eligible for the program but who do not receive monthly
12 CSFP food boxes because there's not enough funding. In
13 Pennsylvania the CSFP program operates in the following
14 manner.

15 The USDA purchases nutrient-rich foods
16 including canned fruits and vegetables, juices, meats,
17 fish, peanut butter, meats, cereal, grain products,
18 cheese and other dairy products at wholesale prices.
19 State agencies contract with community and faith-based
20 organization to warehouse, certify, distribute and
21 educate individual participants. Local agencies build

1 broad coalitions between private nonprofits, health
2 units and area agencies on aging for ease of access,
3 even when those seniors are homebound. In fiscal year
4 '05, the Pennsylvania CSFP program operated in only 30
5 of our 67 counties. In the currently participating
6 counties there is a certified waiting list of over
7 4,000 seniors. In the remaining 37 counties there is
8 an uncertified waiting list of over 6,000 seniors.

9 In Pennsylvania, the average monthly income
10 of seniors receiving the benefit of this CSFP program
11 is \$766 with an average Food Stamp benefit of \$56.12.
12 However, please note that the senior Food Stamp
13 participation in Pennsylvania is only at 31 percent.
14 In Westmoreland county we serve almost 1500 seniors
15 through CSFP program with over 100 people on the
16 waiting list. And I urge that we receive adequate
17 funding so that all of the counties in Pennsylvania can
18 offer this program to seniors and all of the people who
19 are eligible can receive the CSFP nutritious food
20 package.

21 In summary, CSFP would benefit by new

1 initiatives to demonstrate individual and program
2 outcomes, to make CSFP available to all qualified
3 seniors in all states, to set program priorities at
4 greatest need within a project area or let each state
5 set its priority for service under a plan approved by
6 the Secretary of Agriculture. I would like to thank
7 you on behalf of Pennsylvania CSFP. Thank you for your
8 time and attention this morning as well.

9 MS. JACKSON: Will Zach Sugg come to the
10 microphone, please.

11 MR. SUGG: Good morning. I'm Zach Sugg
12 with the World Resources Institute in Washington. I
13 thank you guys for inviting my comments this morning.
14 Our concern is primarily with the achievement of
15 conservation environmental bill, which is a little off
16 topic so I will be very brief. Within the Conservation
17 Title, we encourage USDA to explore the many innovative
18 performance-based approaches to conservation payments
19 that are being tested in pilot projects around the
20 country.

21 Design payment is based on the achievement

1 of environmental objectives rather than on practices
2 that may or may not achieve them, at least cost will
3 ensure that we get the biggest bang for our
4 conservation buck. We hope that in evaluating the
5 environmental impacts of the Farm Bill, USDA will not
6 restrict its analysis to just those programs appearing
7 in the Conservation Title. We encourage USDA to take a
8 broader view and to consider the environmental impacts
9 of all the farm policies appearing in the bill.

10 Thanks.

11 MS. JACKSON: Before Joyce Rothermel comes
12 to the microphone, I would like to call to the front of
13 the room, Julie Zaebst, Nancy Jackson, Catherine
14 Pemberton and Dr. Lorelei DiSosra. Joyce Rothermel,
15 you may begin.

16 MS. ROTHERMEL: Good morning, everyone. My
17 name is Joyce Rothermel and I serve as the chair of the
18 Government Relations Committee of the Pennsylvania
19 Association of Regional Food Banks and my day job, CCO
20 of the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank. We're
21 sorry this hearing isn't being held in Pittsburgh as it

1 was originally scheduled but we're glad to be here. On
2 June 3rd, 2004, 13 members of the national anti-hunger
3 organizations, called NAHO, published a blueprint to
4 end hunger. It is based on the principles outlined in
5 the millennium declaration to end hunger in America
6 previously issued by NAHO in December of 2003. Since
7 its promulgation last year, another million Americans
8 are threatened by hunger and food insecurity as poverty
9 has grown in our country.

10 The blueprint maps out an effective and
11 targeted strategy to address hunger throughout the
12 United States. In the document it states, "The
13 fastest, most direct way to reduce hunger is to improve
14 and expand the national nutrition programs so that they
15 can provide people at risk of hunger with the resources
16 they need. The Food Stamp Program must be improved and
17 expanded."

18 The architects of the blueprint know what
19 to do to reduce and end hunger in food insecurity, as I
20 think you do, too, but noted the changes required will
21 not be achieved without stronger political commitment

1 to make them. While broader measures to reduce poverty
2 also are needed to address the fundamental cause of
3 hunger, which is poverty, changes in the 2007 Farm Bill
4 can go a long way to accomplish the ambitious goal of
5 the blueprint, to end hunger and food insecurity by
6 2015 and live up to the official U.S. commitment to cut
7 hunger and food insecurity in half by 2010, which was
8 pledged as a part of its Healthy People, 2010
9 initiative in concert with the World Food Summit of
10 1996.

11 We echo the recommendations in the
12 blueprint to end hunger in five ways. Number one, to
13 close the gap between eligibility and participation in
14 the federal food and nutrition programs, like in the
15 Food Stamp Program, the WIC program, the Commodity
16 Supplemental Food Program, the emergency food
17 assistance program, the child and adult care food
18 program and the summer food program.

19 Number two, base Food Stamp benefits on a
20 realistic food plan that more accurately reflects what
21 it costs to feed a family. All aspects of the benefit

1 structure must keep pace with inflation. The basic
2 benefit level of the Food Stamp Program continues to be
3 \$10 a month, the same as at the time of the inception
4 of the program over 35 years ago. We are opposed to
5 the block granting of the Food Stamp Program and any
6 movement in granting super waivers to states.

7 Number three, push states, communities and
8 schools to offer all programs. Currently-funding
9 levels restrict expansion of the Commodity Supplemental
10 Food Program into all states, even those who have
11 approved plans to operate the program. Many school
12 districts do not offer the School Breakfast Program.
13 Only a small percentage of children who qualify for
14 free and reduced meals during the school year have
15 access to the summer food program. Four, strengthen
16 the commodity programs for emergency food assistance.
17 Both TEFAP and CSFP are effective and need to be
18 expanded. TEFAP needs more funding for commodities and
19 program administration. With the aging of America, a
20 senior nutrition program making the Commodity
21 Supplemental Program an entitlement program would go a

1 long way in ending hunger and food insecurity among our
2 senior population.

3 And, finally, emphasize outreach in
4 education. Just as the federal government works to
5 improve public understanding of other public health
6 problems and their consequences, it should undertake a
7 major public campaign on the problem of hunger. In the
8 area of nutrition education, good work is being done
9 with WIC and CSFP clients; however, the funding for
10 nutrition education for the Food Stamp-eligible
11 population has been greatly reduced by a change in the
12 interpretation of the USDA regulation restricting their
13 qualifications of acceptable public matching funds, as
14 Mr. Friesen had talked about in his testimony. In
15 Pennsylvania this has recently eliminated many
16 successful programs, especially among children who are
17 Pennsylvania Food Bank Network.

18 We encourage a legislative correction to
19 this recent situation through the 2007 Farm Bill. In
20 Pennsylvania despite a well-funded State Food Purchase
21 Program began in 1983 and passed into in 1990, our food

1 and insecurity and hunger numbers continue to grow.
2 Our state government supplements federal funds for the
3 school breakfast and the Farmers' Market Nutrition
4 Programs. Our Commonwealth has put up matching funds
5 for Food Stamp outreach activities, assisting in
6 drawing over 250,000 additional qualifying participants
7 into that program over the past three years. We have
8 worked hard over the past 25 years to form a strong
9 private sector Food Bank Network of over 200 Food Banks
10 serving our 67 Pennsylvania counties that work closely
11 with our Department of Agriculture and Deputy
12 Secretary, Cheryl Cook.

13 Without these recommended improvements in
14 the 2007 Farm Bill, we fear a rising burden on
15 charities throughout this nation, including
16 Pennsylvania, and more critically a rise in hunger and
17 food insecurity rather than an important step in the
18 education of eliminating them, in the direction of
19 eliminating them. And finally, I would like to see the
20 name of the program, of the Food Stamp Program changed.
21 This is a "PS," and I know I'm on red. There's a

1 silent witness outside this library today, that's in
2 the shadow of it in which people are lined up at The
3 Daily Bread food program here. Please record their
4 silent testimony today as a part of this hearing.

5 Thank you.

6 MS. JACKSON: Will Julie Zaebst please come
7 to the microphone.

8 MS. ZAEBST: Good morning. Thank you for
9 giving me this opportunity to comment on the Nutrition
10 Title, the next Farm Bill. I represent the greater
11 Philadelphia coalition against hunger. We're a
12 nonprofit organization committed to fighting hunger and
13 food insecurity to outreach, education and advocacy. A
14 little bit about our organization, we work with more
15 than a quarter million households in southeastern
16 Pennsylvania that are forced to skip or cut the size of
17 their meals in order to survive. Many of these
18 households are eligible for Food Stamps but they're not
19 currently participating in the program.

20 For nearly four years now the coalitions
21 been reaching out to the tens of thousands of eligible

1 Philadelphia residents who are not receiving this
2 critical nutrition benefit. Our staff and volunteers
3 provide eligibility screening and application
4 assistance via the Food Stamp Information Hotline as
5 well as in-person Web sites around the city. The
6 lessons we've learned from our work on the ground are
7 directing us for the recommendations I'm making today.

8 Our staff and volunteers consistently
9 expressed disbelief that so many families struggle to
10 put food on the table, are not eligible for Food
11 Stamps. Of particular concern is the categories of
12 people who have been excluded from program
13 participation regardless of their income, resources and
14 expenses.

15 While the 2002 Farm Bill restored
16 eligibility to many legal immigrants, we continue to
17 find many needy families who are ineligible for the
18 program simply because of their immigration status.
19 Students and institutions of higher education face
20 similarly complex rules that often serve to exclude
21 those in great need. It is important that we as a

1 nation support both legal immigrants' and students'
2 efforts towards self-sufficiency. The Food Stamp
3 Program can and should provide this critical support to
4 all legal immigrants and students.

5 Our staff and volunteers also see countless
6 clients in great need who only qualify for a small
7 benefit, especially among the elderly and disabled.
8 The Food Stamp benefit levels must reflect what it
9 costs to feed a family a nutritionally adequate diet.
10 The formula for calculating benefits take into
11 consideration the amount families today spend on
12 housing, utilities, healthcare and childcare, all of
13 which have risen significantly since the program was
14 established.

15 We recommend raising the minimum benefit to
16 \$25 per month and we believe that all aspects of the
17 benefit structure must keep pace with inflation. Often
18 those who are eligible for only a small benefit, as I
19 said, are elderly. Their rate of participation in the
20 Food Stamp Program is very low. Pennsylvania is second
21 only to Florida in its percentage of elderly residents,

1 and nearly 10 percent of our clients are elderly. We
2 are especially concerned about this group and are
3 interested in ways to make the program more attractive
4 and accessible to the elderly.

5 We have several ideas targeted specifically
6 at households with elderly and disabled members. One,
7 increase the minimum benefit to \$50 per month for these
8 households; two, increase the access limit to \$5,000;
9 three, extend the recertification period to four years,
10 and four, standardize and expand the medical deduction.
11 Reforms such as these will help to improve Food Stamp
12 Program participation rates in ways that outreach
13 simply cannot do.

14 During the first year and a half of our
15 outreach campaign, coalition staff and volunteers
16 screened over 8,000 households for eligibility and 75
17 percent of the households we spoke with appeared to
18 qualify for the program. Even armed with knowledge of
19 their eligibility and information about the application
20 process, however, less than half of these eligible
21 households went on to submit an application. Of the

1 applications submitted by our clients who were screened
2 as eligible and often given application assistance, 22
3 percent were denied. While many of our clients were
4 persistent -- they filed second and even third
5 applications, in some cases -- these statistics suggest
6 that the program's lengthy and complex application
7 procedures remain a major barrier to access.

8 Nearly 40 percent of the denials issued to
9 our clients were due to the client's inability to
10 produce necessary verification documents. Despite the
11 fact that staff and volunteers gave every client a
12 checklist of the required verifications, gathering this
13 immense amount of documentation still proved to be to
14 great an obstacle to otherwise eligible families.
15 Reducing this verification burden would improve program
16 access significantly. We would therefore recommend
17 that states have access to databases, such as the
18 federal directory of new hires, that would facilitate
19 the verification of wages and other household
20 information.

21 The coalition has learned a tremendous

1 amount from its experience in conducting outreach to
2 Philadelphia residents over the past several years.
3 One of these is that a rigorous evaluation of outreach
4 efforts is critical. Despite our success in providing
5 eligibility screenings to more than 8,000 households,
6 further analysis revealed that in fact 55 percent of
7 those screened as eligible never submitted an
8 application.

9 This combined with the high rate of denial
10 among households that did submit applications suggest
11 that even the best outreach efforts run headlong into
12 the Food Stamp program's numerous eligibility
13 requirements and ongoing paperwork; thus, we believe
14 outreach must go hand-in-hand with efforts to simplify
15 the program's complex administrative procedures.

16 The 2007 Farm Bill presents us with an
17 opportunity to make the changes necessary to simplify
18 the program, to make it more accessible to Americans
19 and I sincerely hope you will take advantage of this
20 opportunity. Thank you.

21 MS. JACKSON: Will Nancy Jackson come to

1 the microphone.

2 MS. N. JACKSON: Good morning. I'm Nancy
3 Jackson. I'm president of the Benefit Programs
4 Organization of Virginia, or BPRO as we're commonly
5 known. We are a statewide group of social service
6 employees responsible for determining eligibility in
7 giving Food Stamps in the Commonwealth of Virginia.
8 Joining me today are David Bremmer, a local front-line
9 supervisor from Charlottesville, Virginia, and Linda
10 Norris, Chairwoman of the BPRO Food Stamp Committee.
11 We are also being supported today by members of the
12 Virginia League of Social Service Executives, which is
13 the professional organization for our local directors.
14 One of these representatives, Carolyn Gregory Adams, is
15 also our founding president. Our state partners from
16 the Virginia Social Service's home office are also here
17 today to support us.

18 BPRO believes an increase in the minimum
19 Food Stamp allotment is of urgent necessity. The
20 formal proposal is to increase the Food Stamp minimum
21 allotment from \$10 to \$25. As front-line workers,

1 supervisors and administrators of the Food Stamp
2 Program, we have long been aware that the current
3 minimum allotment on participating households is
4 insufficient to meet the needs of the elderly,
5 disabled, and working poor.

6 The purpose of the Food Stamp Program is to
7 alleviate hunger and malnutrition. The minimal
8 allotment not been changed since 1974. Before you are
9 three sets of food. In Box A, which is right here,
10 these are items which could be purchased with \$10 of
11 Food Stamps back in 1974. In Bag B are items which can
12 be purchased with \$10 of Food Stamps today. The
13 contents of Box C, which is on the far end, are the
14 items that can be purchased with \$25 in Food Stamps
15 today. These are identical or nearly identical to the
16 items that could be purchased back in 1974. To
17 maintain the purpose of the Food Stamp Program, the
18 minimum allotment needs to be increased.

19 Another reason to increase the allotment is
20 to meet the special dietary needs of the elderly and
21 the disabled. The elderly have unique dietary needs

1 because of the medical issues associated with the aging
2 process. The increasing costs of fuel and medications
3 forces many of the low-income elderly to choose between
4 paying the costs of medicines, paying for heat in the
5 winter or purchasing food, and unfortunately food is
6 often neglected.

7 Additionally, the current 10 dollar minimum
8 allotment is a deterrent to many elderly, disabled and
9 working poor. In our experience with front-line
10 workers and administrators, many of those receiving
11 small allotments do not bother to review their
12 benefits. We frequently hear it isn't worth my time
13 and effort for only \$10.

14 The participation rate in Virginia at the
15 time our proposal was written was 58 percent for those
16 eligible for Food Stamps. Of those households,
17 approximately 15 percent receive less than \$25 and of
18 that total, 15 percent, 84 percent are elderly and
19 disabled. The current Farm Bill offers performance
20 bonus money to states with high or approved
21 participation rates. Our local staff -- are committed

1 to increasing participation, yet, we cannot help but
2 feel the frustration of our consumers when they receive
3 only \$10. To fund the increase in the minimum
4 allotment, an increase of approximately one percent in
5 cost to the program can be expected. In order to
6 offset this cost, we suggest raising the standard
7 deduction as is currently applied instead of increasing
8 it annually.

9 Another possibly funding will be to
10 maintain the current maximum allotment instead of
11 making the annual cost of living increase each October.
12 Instead, instead we propose that the cost of living
13 increase be given at the bottom of the allotment
14 tables. The changes suggested could be made before
15 reauthorization of the Farm Bill, of 2007, by including
16 them as part of a budget reconciliation amendment.
17 U.S. Department of Labor's Web site contains a consumer
18 price index calculator. By using this calculator we
19 can see that \$10 in 1974 has the same buying power
20 today as \$37.79. All of us on the local level have
21 long been aware of the need to increase the minimum

1 allotment. Today we present you the information and
2 proposal to make these changes. Thank you for the
3 opportunity to share the thoughts of the 2,000
4 eligibility workers in the State of Virginia that BPRO
5 represents.

6 MS. JACKSON: Will Catherine Pemberton come
7 to the microphone.

8 MS. PEMBERTON: Good morning. My name is
9 Catherine Pemberton. I'm a program specialist with the
10 Division of Benefit Programs in the Virginia Department
11 of Social Services. And I am here on behalf of Duke
12 Storen, who is the Director of the Division with the
13 responsibility for the implementation of the Food Stamp
14 Program as well as other safety-net and workforce
15 development programs such as Medicaid. We believe that
16 the reauthorization of the Farm Bill presents an
17 important opportunity for the country too build upon
18 success and better address food insecurity, improve
19 nutrition outcomes, assist low-income individuals in
20 moving toward self-sufficiency.

21 Toward that end, our comments will focus on

1 recommendations that will help the country achieve
2 those goals and also to make the Food Stamp Program
3 more efficient. Our first recommendation is to
4 eliminate all or most of the expense questions from the
5 application. Predicting the application processing
6 time and requirement for applicants would increase
7 participation and reduce administrative cost. In
8 Virginia and other states, the increasing caseload in
9 the Food Stamp Program is putting a significant strain
10 on the eligibility service infrastructure at the ground
11 level. We have had a 25 percent increase in our
12 caseload in Virginia and it's getting harder to
13 convince our state legislature to put more money into
14 Social Service bureaucracy. So, that strain can and
15 does lead to errors, if not in the Food Stamp Program,
16 then in the other programs administered by the same
17 eligibility staff.

18 The eligibility determination of the Food
19 Stamp Program is relatively simple and requires a
20 reasonable amount of information in correlation with
21 the TANF program. It's the benefit calculation that

1 drives up the administrative cost. Eliminating most or
2 all these questions would make the program simpler to
3 administer, thus reducing errors and saving
4 administrative costs and make it easier for applicants
5 to apply.

6 Considering expenses helps charity
7 allotment to a household's true circumstances to a
8 certain extent but unless the household has an elderly
9 or a disabled member, shelter is capped, medical
10 expenses are not considered, often day care is capped
11 and one of the big expenses low-income households face,
12 transportation, is not addressed at all. An
13 alternative methodology would be to categorize
14 households according to demographic factors and adjust
15 the allotment amount according to a grouping of
16 characteristics, for example, earned income, annual
17 disability.

18 Our second recommendation underscores the
19 recommendation from our partners in BPRO in Virginia,
20 and we would like to see the minimum allotment reduced.
21 Research shows that participation rates are correlated

1 with allotment amounts, and this is most often true
2 among the elderly who perceive the application process
3 as too bureaucratic and cumbersome for a ten dollar
4 allotment; in other words, the taxi ride and the
5 application process aren't worth the \$10 that you get.
6 Raising the minimum allotment could be achieved by
7 foregoing increases at the other end of the allotment
8 spectrum. And we think that participation would show a
9 much more significant increase if allotments went from
10 10 to \$30 than from those allotments going from 300 to
11 \$320 at the other end of the scale.

12 Our third recommendation is to provide
13 adequate resources for the Food Stamp employment and
14 training program. It is not funded at a significant
15 level to provide meaningful workforce experience to a
16 large number of eligible individuals. Many states
17 either don't operate the program statewide or severely
18 limit the opportunities. In Virginia we only operate
19 24 of 120 localities and we only spend \$229 a person.
20 This is in serious contrast to our TANF program which
21 is first in the country in job placement and second in

1 the country in job retention and spend \$1600 per
2 individual.

3 Our fourth recommendation is to change the
4 parameters of the demonstration projects. Currently
5 demonstration projects must show cost neutrality using
6 only benefit dollars and account relation; allowing the
7 cost neutrality calculation to include savings from the
8 administration would cause greater creativity and
9 encourage efficiency. Additionally, the outcomes to be
10 demonstrated should be broadened to include more
11 general measures of well-being and self-sufficiency.
12 The ability to test service delivery strategies which
13 set out to make individuals self-efficient is critical
14 if we want to help families transcend poverty and
15 dependents. Our fifth recommendation is to change the
16 name. And we know you all are doing that. We just
17 want to chime in on that.

18 In conclusion, efficiency, assets and
19 program integrity are the hallmark of an effective
20 program. The Food Stamp Program has the opportunity to
21 increase that, though, by simplifying the application

1 process and raising the minimum allotment. By the same
2 steps, it would reduce errors because the complexity of
3 the program would be significantly eliminated. Less
4 time and money would be spent on eligibility
5 determination, quality control processing, enabling
6 those funds to be reinvested in client services and
7 benefits and workforce services. At least half the
8 population in the country is on Food Stamps at one
9 point in time or another. It is no longer a welfare
10 program. It is truly a nutrition program with the
11 potential to become a significant workforce services
12 provider. Thank you very much for the opportunity to
13 speak.

14 MS. JACKSON: Before Lorelei DiSosra
15 speaks, I would like to call to the front of the room,
16 Terry Lally, Greg Shupe, Susan Topping and Indivar
17 Gupta.

18 DR. DiSOSRA: Hi, good morning, almost good
19 afternoon, to Deputy Undersecretary Coler and to
20 distinguished other officials from USDA and also
21 colleagues at this end of the table, who are about to

1 speak, so, thank you very, very much for the
2 opportunity to be here this morning and for all that
3 you have already done to help all Americans eat a
4 healthier diet. And we look towards the next Farm Bill
5 as a way to look at the agenda as we look forward so
6 that we can deal with the issues of obesity all the way
7 and improve people's health in this country. I'm here
8 today to speak about nutrition policy priorities in the
9 2007 Farm Bill.

10 My name is Dr. Lorelei DiSosra. I'm the
11 vice president for nutrition and health at United Fruit
12 and Vegetable Association in Washington, D.C. And
13 united is one of the national trade organizations that
14 represents the fruit and vegetable growers, shippers,
15 processors, brokers, wholesalers and distributors.

16 The 2007 Farm Bill provides an excellent
17 opportunity for all you of us to look at, how do we
18 move more closely to get agricultural policy in line
19 with health and nutrition national objectives at the
20 same time. And, we believe that it is a great
21 opportunity when we look at Farm Bill and fruit and

1 vegetable policy to really move that focus to more, to
2 increase fruit and vegetable consumption and then those
3 programs will be more effective in doing that, at the
4 same time helping the produce industry and helping
5 Americans to eat more fruits and vegetables. The
6 dietary guidelines for Americans which all of you are
7 aware of recommend 5 to 13 servings of fruits and
8 vegetables a day.

9 For most Americans, most Americans eat less
10 than half, they eat less than half of the previous
11 dietary guidelines. They eat really a lot less than
12 the current dietary guidelines. So for all Americans
13 it means more than doubling their fruit and vegetable
14 consumption. And this is really important because
15 eating a diet that's rich in fruits and vegetables will
16 help Americans reduce the risk of chronic diseases and
17 also deal with the obesity epidemic.

18 For children, which is what I'm going to be
19 addressing this morning, there are a couple of programs
20 that we really like to focus on and ask you to focus on
21 in the next Farm Bill, that would make fruits and

1 vegetables more available and more accessible to kids
2 in schools because we know that this will help increase
3 fruit and vegetable consumption.

4 So, among United's top priorities for the
5 next Farm Bill are to expand the fruit and vegetable,
6 USDA's Fruit and Vegetable Program to every state in
7 the country and to double the funding for the DOD fresh
8 program because of the impact that that plays in making
9 more fruits and vegetables available to schools.

10 The USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program
11 is one that I'm passionate about, as Steve and Jessica
12 know, and together with my colleagues at USDA I have
13 worked on since the day that President Bush signed the
14 last Farm Bill in May of 2002. And I have worked with
15 my colleagues at USDA to get this program up and
16 running on a pilot basis and to see it expanded to
17 where we are right now. So, we would urge you to
18 expand this program to every state in the country and
19 to also double the funding for the DOD Fresh because
20 that allows us to get more fruits and vegetables into
21 school meals.

1 And I submitted my full testimony, and
2 thank you very, very much. We think this is a win-win
3 for everyone. It's a win for kids. They will be
4 healthier. It's a win for the produce industry and
5 it's a win for also everyone, for all of you that
6 administer and manage the food nutrition programs
7 because these programs that I have mentioned to you
8 today are successful and so that takes care of the
9 issue of accountability. Thank you very, very much.

10 MS. JACKSON: Will Terry Lally come to the
11 microphone.

12 MS. LALLY: Good morning. I'm Terry Lally
13 and I'm a registered dietitian. I'm here on behalf of
14 the American Dietetics Association and the Maryland
15 Dietetics Association. The public needs an
16 uncompromising commitment in their government to
17 advance nutrition knowledge and to help people apply
18 that knowledge to maintain and improve their health.
19 Millions of Americans benefit from USDA food assistance
20 programs; yet, we still see hunger in the U.S.
21 Coexisting with hunger is a national epidemic of

1 overweight and obesity. In fact, overweight and
2 obesity is the largest manifestation of malnutrition in
3 the United States today, i.e., overfed but
4 undernourished.

5 With that said, the next Farm Bill needs to
6 address four key areas, the first being USDA's food
7 assistance programs must be available to those in need
8 and must be adequately funded, improving the
9 nutritional status of mentioned needs to rise in
10 priority in food assistance programs, other food
11 programs and surely for all Americans. That's key area
12 number two. The third, increased investment in
13 nutrition education and nutrition research is necessary
14 and it must be sustained. And the last, having
15 up-to-date knowledge of the nutrition composition of
16 the food supply is essential for all work in food,
17 nutrition, and health to bear fruit. If we expect
18 consumers to take personal responsibility for making
19 healthy choices, then we also have a responsibility to
20 make sure that they're adequately prepared. Their
21 government must invest in the nutrition research and

1 education necessary to give Americans that knowledge
2 and ability to make our own nutrition decisions. These
3 nutrition recommendations and programs for the public
4 must be based on sound science.

5 Only the federal government has the public
6 mandate and the resources to carry out research on
7 human nutrition needs and to develop dietary guidance
8 that forms the basis for all federal nutrition
9 programs. We believe federal research exploring the
10 relationship between diet, especially dietary patterns
11 and health is particularly important. On behalf of the
12 ADA and the MDA, thank you very much for this
13 opportunity.

14 MS. JACKSON: Will Greg Shupe come to the
15 microphone.

16 MR. SHUPE: Good afternoon, Deputy
17 Undersecretary Coler and other distinguished officials
18 and compatriots. My name is Greg Shupe. I am the
19 director for the Office of Transitional Services in the
20 Maryland Department of Human Resources. My office
21 administers the emergency food assistance program for

1 state. Last year we distributed five and a half
2 million pounds of TEFAP food through the state. I have
3 to begin by telling you how critical this program is in
4 a state like Maryland. Though we are by all accounts a
5 high-income state, that income is not evenly
6 distributed demographically.

7 Geographically we are a high-cost state and
8 have many people struggling. This food goes to a lot
9 of people who don't meet the usual standards of poverty
10 but are still struggling to make ends meet. We know
11 from our EFOs that they're seeing over the past two
12 years a 25 percent increase in demand for food. So, we
13 would just say that as we look at the rising cost of
14 housing in particular markets, Maryland being one, and
15 the predicted and inexorable rise in energy costs, that
16 the demands for food is going to go up. The folks from
17 Virginia aptly pointed out we're forcing people to
18 choose between housing, utilities, food and healthcare.
19 That's not a fair choice.

20 You asked for some strengths in the
21 program, and let me first start by thanking you for

1 changing the rules and allowing us to use more
2 administrative dollars, balancing that with our
3 entitlement. That allowed us to start taking bonus
4 foods again. When I came to the office in 2000, we
5 basically stopped taking bonus foods. There was no
6 money. We couldn't afford storage and distribution.
7 The changes in some internal things we've done to save
8 money have allowed us to take millions of pounds of
9 bonus foods, which is in all of our interest to put
10 that food into distribution and I thank you for the
11 flexibility for that.

12 Second, I want to compliment you for the
13 range and selection of foods. It allows us to give the
14 pantries and soup kitchens a lot of choices of quality
15 items, things that meet the demands and needs of their
16 particular populations. We know it's not easy to do
17 that but we certainly do appreciate that particular
18 range.

19 And the final thing to the Regional Office,
20 which has been very supportive, always responsive,
21 always quick to answer our questions to come down and

1 work with us. I know you all have stolen our TEFAP
2 administrator. You have been helpful in the transition
3 as we try to fill that position so we're grateful for
4 that.

5 Two issues I would raise. The first is an
6 ongoing one. For states like Maryland the continued
7 use of the poverty index as a basis for allocating
8 funds penalizes us. As I said, we are a high-income
9 state. It doesn't mean we don't have a lot of people
10 in need. In Maryland people who are well above the
11 poverty level still do not make ends meet, not with the
12 cost of housing, insurance, other costs in this state.
13 Most of the programs that use needs-based eligibility
14 have already abandoned the poverty standard or used
15 multiples, 150, 200, 300 percent of poverty level just
16 for eligibility but we continue to allocate funds based
17 on the number of people below poverty. In a state like
18 Maryland, the poverty index is virtually meaningless
19 because of the number of people who are over that
20 fiscal struggle every day.

21 So, I would ask that you take a look at how

1 that is done. And realizing I don't want to take up a
2 bigger slice of a fixed pie but with a growing demand
3 and need for food, I think that should be looked at
4 because there are people who struggle even though
5 they're not technically poor by the federal standard.
6 I would point out that the woman who invented that
7 standard in the sixties admits that it's simply not a
8 valid way of looking at poverty.

9 The final issue I would raise is the
10 continued or expanding use of commercial labeling on
11 TEFAP products. While it's great in terms of building
12 confidence and acceptance among the consumers, we are
13 concerned that it makes it difficult to track once
14 they're in the mix in the food supply. We have had a
15 number of cases, you may be aware, of alleged fraud,
16 sale and misuse of TEFAP products. Without being able
17 to identify those products clearly, it would have been
18 almost impossible to do any sort of investigation or to
19 take any sort of legal action.

20 And the other issue that we're concerned
21 about has never arisen but should we have to track food

1 for a recall, we're not sure how that would work. So,
2 while we applaud the use of that because it makes
3 people more comfortable with the food, we are concerned
4 that it may not serve us in other ways. I just ask you
5 to take a look at that. I again thank you for the
6 opportunity to speak.

7 MS. JACKSON: Will Susan Topping come to
8 the microphone.

9 MS. TOPPING: Good morning. Thank you. My
10 name is Susan Topping. I'm from the Capital Area Food
11 Bank. I work to help organize the Anacostia Farmers'
12 Market as well as run the education programs at
13 Claggett farm, a joint collaborative between the
14 Chesapeake Bay Foundation and the Capital Area Food
15 Bank. Organically-grown produce made available the
16 same day it was harvested need not be a luxury item.
17 Protecting the health of the environment with your food
18 dollars should not be an effort only the financially
19 elite can afford to support. Empowering people with
20 the choice to spend their income, both hard-earned and
21 essentially provided in a local food system that builds

1 community wealth while ensuring long-term community
2 health should be the ultimate goal for all of us.

3 The strengths and accomplishments of using
4 the Food Stamp Program at Farmers' Markets include Food
5 Stamp recipients are able to use Food Stamp dollars to
6 purchase high quality, locally-grown fresh produce.
7 The mobility achieved by point of sale's POS terminals
8 enable Farmers' Markets to generate a neighborhood that
9 lacks access to fresh, healthy and nutrition fruits and
10 vegetables.

11 As consumption of fresh fruits and
12 vegetables increases, so does community health. Areas
13 for further improvement, new technology inevitably has
14 attention, however, due to the potential usefulness to
15 Anacostia, Farmers' Market shoppers the Capital Area
16 Food Bank sees this program as a crucial investment to
17 creating food-secure families in the Anacostia
18 community. Due to the inconsistent and unreliable
19 functionality of the mobile POS terminal and the
20 difficulty in creating solutions through a complex
21 system, the Capital Area Food Bank feels it is not

1 using the technology to its fullest extent.

2 EBT customers are double and triple charged
3 during transactions. DC-EBT customers wait no less
4 than one month to be reimbursed due to overcharges from
5 machine errors; meanwhile credit and debit customers
6 are reimbursed within days. POS terminal reports are
7 inaccurate and the organization itself loses sales due
8 to signal failure and other technical difficulties.
9 Nearly all transactions require a phone call to
10 customer service in order to ensure a successful
11 transaction, information centers have conflicting
12 information, machine customer service, front-end and
13 back-end financial processing, USDA and D.C.
14 government. I was told by one entity that the feature
15 that protects customers from being charged multiple
16 times during a transaction was untrustworthy, then
17 through another avenue in the customer service section,
18 another department, I was told that the equipment was
19 accurate and trustworthy.

20 Suggested avenues to improve EBT sales at
21 Farmers' Markets, offer many grants to businesses and

1 organizations willing to invest in pilot programs,
2 potentially covering POS terminal costs for six months,
3 for a year, encourage greater collaboration between
4 USDA, financial processors, EBT, POS terminal
5 businesses. This joint effort will enable a
6 streamlining of vendor processing and therefore
7 increase vendor participation in Food Stamp programs at
8 Farmers' Markets. Thank you so much. I appreciate the
9 opportunity.

10 MS. JACKSON: Just a brief announcement.
11 We will be taking a ten-minute break after the next
12 speaker. Will Indivar -- I'm sorry, Indivar Gupta --
13 you're here.

14 MR. DUTTA-GUPTA: Yes, I'm here. Thank
15 you, good morning. Fine. I'm Indivar Dutta-Gupta, an
16 Emerson Hunger Fellow working with DC Hunger Solutions.
17 And I want to thank Jessica. We are obviously, have
18 dinner with her during our training which was great and
19 I wasn't so surprised after that conversation how well
20 you guys, sorry, how well the USDA responded to the
21 Katrina disaster and I do applaud you guys for that.

1 So, D.C. Hunger Solutions is a private,
2 non-profit anti-hunger advocacy and public education
3 project housed at the Food Research and Action Center.
4 D.C. Hunger Solutions is dedicated to fighting hunger
5 and improving the nutrition, health and well-being of
6 children and families in the District of Columbia. And
7 I would also like to thank Ms. Jackson. I was, just
8 yesterday morning I heard her speak at Public Charter
9 Schools celebrating the National School Lunch Week and
10 we appreciate your promotion of that program as well.

11 But in particular I would like to talk to
12 you guys about the Food Stamp Program and hopefully I
13 won't just be reiterating what some other people have
14 said. But the three main points that I would like to
15 get across or suggestions for changes in rules that I
16 think will certainly help the people of the District of
17 Columbia and throughout the country, and first is
18 restore eligibility to all income eligible legal
19 immigrants. I, myself, am a naturalized citizen and we
20 needed help most when we first came, not so much, as
21 much, five years later. And fortunately we were able

1 to get in the 1980's.

2 And then second, eliminate the requirement
3 of the face-to-face interview both in the initial
4 application and also for recertification. And the
5 third rule I request that you consider changing is
6 increasing both the minimum and maximum allotment for
7 low-income families. I think people have made a pretty
8 strong case for that here so I won't get into that too
9 much.

10 But first I would like to focus on the
11 first recommendation, that is, restoring eligibility
12 for income eligible legal permanent residents. In my
13 day-to-day work, I work with immigrants and most of
14 them would, pretty much all of them, actually with
15 permanent residency and there's just an unbelievable
16 amount of confusion. There, are I can think of maybe
17 12 to 13 exceptions to this rule although the
18 requirement of how long you have to stay for residents
19 qualifying for Food Stamps. But one thing that I think
20 that maybe some people overlooked and didn't realize is
21 that even getting Food Stamp benefits to children is

1 burdened by this requirement for their parents because
2 the parents can't, and I think a lot of us may not
3 completely understand why we're making some of the
4 decisions we're making and it's just way too
5 complicated, their kids can qualify, they can't, why
6 not, and in what situations. And I would really urge
7 you to consider looking at those rules, and I think
8 that that would not only help obviously the parents
9 themselves but the children as well.

10 And the second recommendation that I would
11 like to talk about, as far as waiving the face-to-face
12 interview requirement is, well, I would like to give
13 you an example and that is an actual example that D.C.
14 Hunger Solutions recently faced and that's a woman
15 named Ms. Pringle. She was a gas station cashier, a
16 mother of three, living in Southwest Washington, D.C.,
17 and she asked us for help because she lost her Food
18 Stamp benefit last month. She was on the Food Stamp
19 Program. She was a participant. And the reason why
20 she lost it is because she, her daytime work conflicts
21 entirely with every hour that the Food Stamp service

1 centers are open, and this is probably a story that
2 gets replicated across the country and even more she
3 can't take personal phone calls even over the phone at
4 work. She can't take ordinary personal phone calls.
5 So, she receives a letter saying that her benefits for
6 herself and her children have all been cut.

7 And, I think that we can really make a
8 significant difference for a lot of working families
9 and as we heard not just in Maryland but even in urban
10 areas there are more and more working families who are
11 sometimes even working two jobs who still need Food
12 Stamp benefits, and simply by waiving the requirement
13 that they have to go to a face-to-face interview. A
14 lot of states have waivers and they've shown
15 successfully that you can avoid fraud and you can still
16 serve people well, meet the accuracy and other
17 requirements and get out the benefits to people who
18 need it most. So, thank you so much for listening to
19 us and I hope this was of some help.

20 MS. JACKSON: We'll be taking a short break
21 now. Please note on the clock, we will be starting

1 promptly, promptly, at 12:30.

2 MS. COLER: I will call out the names of
3 our next four speakers. If you could come forward,
4 Frederick Landau, Dr. Jack Osman, Todd Post and Joe
5 Canny.

6 MR. LANDAU: Hi. I'm Fred Landau. I'm the
7 executive director of the York County Assistance
8 Office, with the Pennsylvania Department of Welfare, a
9 former Food Stamp recipient. And briefly it's good we
10 had Snyder's of Hanover snacks because they're a
11 product of York County. My main focus today is to talk
12 about our elderly customers. And you have heard an
13 awful lot about the problems that they have on the
14 minimum allotment of \$10 a month. In 2002, the
15 proposal to raise that allotment to \$25 lasted through
16 the first several rounds but then was cut because it's
17 not budget neutral.

18 I was a little distressed today to hear
19 people say we can make it budget neutral by taking
20 benefits away from the people at the other end. It's
21 never going to be budget neutral but it's the right

1 thing to do. The 10 dollar a month allotment is not
2 workable. It keeps a lot of people from participating,
3 as you have already heard, and we also need to look at
4 making it more than that for the two-person households,
5 among our seniors, so as not just to be satisfied with
6 a 25 dollar or a 35 dollar minimum allotment that's the
7 same whether it's a one-person or a two-person
8 household. Since we were looking at \$25 in 2002, I
9 think that it's reasonable that five years later we
10 really should be considering an increase of that
11 allotment to \$35 a month and moving forward from there.

12 The other thing that hurts our seniors is
13 the Electronic Benefit System that has proved to be so
14 beneficial in, throughout the Food Stamp Program and
15 actually the nationwide aspect of it really served the
16 evacuees from Katrina very well, as they moved from,
17 into Pennsylvania and we were able to serve them and
18 get them their Food Stamp benefits that they had in
19 their account. But for our elderly customers,
20 particularly with those on the minimum allotment, the
21 way they used coupons in the past was that they would

1 accumulate them. And, until they had 40 or \$50 worth
2 of Food Stamps, and then used them at the supermarket.

3 The rules on EBT now cause their benefits
4 to be withdrawn from their account if they haven't used
5 them promptly enough, which is to add to the
6 administrative costs because then when they contact us
7 and say what happened to my Food Stamp benefits, I went
8 to use it and it wasn't there or it was less than I
9 thought, we have to go back in and reconcile the fact
10 that it was withdrawn from their account for not being
11 used, reissue their benefits, where if we could either
12 for that population allow the benefits to accumulate
13 longer, so, have an indicator there so that their
14 benefits aren't snatched so quickly from them and they
15 can accumulate benefits and go out and have their
16 holiday meal by using their benefits as they used to
17 when they used Food Stamps.

18 The other thing that I wanted to talk about
19 was outreach, because in York County our office
20 received an award last month at our management meeting
21 for having increased our participation by 25.4 percent.

1 And, that's the second year in a row that we've
2 received an award within the Department for increased
3 participation. I was mentioning to Joe that we
4 received our first Food Stamp error in three years,
5 also this past year, so, it was kind of bittersweet.

6 But we've done that by targeting
7 populations that we already knew about. This past
8 year, we targeted the people who are receiving Lideen
9 (phonetic), and we did it locally by sending a letter
10 to everyone who received Lideen who was not getting
11 Food Stamps and invited them to participate in the Food
12 Stamp Program. The income limit's the same. They
13 already have a lot of information on their household.
14 I made that suggestion as a statewide initiative and
15 it's on the list of things to do. And, it's competing
16 for a lot of resources in terms of a systems analyst
17 and a programmer to write some very simple programs
18 that would match data that we already have and do
19 outreach to these folks.

20 What the states need is the ability to go
21 after small amounts of money to develop those kind of

1 outreach matches. We can be rewarded for increasing
2 our participation rate but that's after the fact, so,
3 that this idea in Pennsylvania to go out after every
4 Lideen household that is not getting Food Stamps and
5 send them an application and do it on a statewide basis
6 needs a small amount of funding for a programmer and a
7 systems analyst and in tight budget times that money is
8 not there within the state budget. So, those kinds of
9 small pots of money are needed by the states. Thank
10 you very much.

11 MS. JACKSON: Dr. Jack Osman.

12 DR. OSMAN: In the words of a former
13 wealthy presidential candidate, I'm all ears. And I'm
14 thankful that you, Deputy Undersecretary Coler have
15 these listening sessions along with the USDA and food
16 nutrition service. I'm here today wearing several
17 different hats. My name is Jack Osman. I'm in the
18 Health Science Department at Towson University. I am
19 also a lifelong member of the American School Health
20 Association. It is very interested in working toward
21 maintaining and improving the health of our school-age

1 population.

2 My goal here is to strongly recommend that
3 the Farm Bill expand its trial offerings of the fruit
4 and vegetables to include at least 100 schools in each
5 and every state of our great nation. We know that
6 children can be taught to make nutritionally sound
7 choices. Americans only consume 2.3 servings of fresh
8 fruits and vegetables. That's woefully short of the
9 old 5-A-Day program. The new MyPyramid Program
10 recommends nine servings of fruits and vegetables a
11 day. We have a lot of work to do to get to that level.
12 "Do you want fries with that?" I'm sorry. Chips and
13 fries, French fried potatoes do not constitute a
14 serving of the fruit and vegetable group; however, some
15 of the government data does reflect French fried and
16 high-fat, high-salt products such as potato chips. As
17 you know, they are devoid of nutritional density and
18 clog the nation's arteries. If we are to achieve the
19 goals of healthy America, 2010, we need to advocate
20 stronger health education, nutrition education of our
21 school-age population. How are we ever going to

1 achieve the goal of nine servings of fruits and
2 vegetables without creatively sneaking in more fruits
3 and vegetables into the school programs and the homes
4 across America?

5 We have an ethical and social
6 responsibility to infuse government-based programs with
7 nutrient density. The significant increase in fruits
8 and vegetables during impressionable school years will
9 carry over into adult nutrition behaviors and save this
10 nation billions of dollars in healthcare costs. We
11 know that intelligent fruit and vegetable consumption
12 will decrease heart disease, it will decrease obesity
13 and prevent obesity and also prevent cancer. Fruits
14 and vegetables come multicolored, from asparagus
15 asparagus to zucchini. We have very rich source of
16 soluble and insoluble fiber.

17 We have minerals and vitamins and
18 phytochemicals that have been demonstrated to reduce
19 the initiation stage of cancer. Therefore, we need to
20 expand the school-based program offerings in this Farm
21 Bill of 2007, and I submit to the recorder a resolution

1 from the American School Health Association regarding
2 fruits and vegetables intake in schools.

3 I am also a member of the National Sweet
4 Potato collaborators group, a group of scientists who
5 try to advocate increasing this wonderful
6 nutrient-dense vegetable. I grow a few tons of sweet
7 potatoes at my farm in Pennsylvania and I am a sponsor
8 of the Pennsylvania Sweet Potato festival. Please
9 don't relegate sweet potatoes to holiday foods only.
10 Farmers who grow sweet potatoes can produce more
11 nutrition per acre than with any other farm products.
12 The national average of sweet potato intake has fallen
13 under four pounds a year. It used to be 26 pounds a
14 year in the 1930's but in the New Millennium it's way
15 down to under four pounds a year. Sweet potatoes have
16 been ranked as the number one vegetable by the Center
17 for Science and Public Interest. And this incredible,
18 eatable vegetable needs to become a weekly staple in
19 the American diet and it can easily be done by infusing
20 creative usage into nutrition and farm bills of the
21 future. We need to increase the consumption of this

1 wonderful vegetable.

2 In closing, in summary, I say that
3 collectively we can improve the health of the nation.
4 We need creative educators trained in health education
5 and nutritional sciences to assist tweaking the
6 governmental bills like this one on the table. I
7 encourage you to do so. And, as my gift, I have,
8 George Washington Carver sandwich, sweet potato, also
9 peanut butter, which he is famous for discovering, with
10 a little marshmallow fluff and cinnamon without sugar.

11 MS. COLER: I had a sweet potato for dinner
12 last night. And Ms. Sweeney (phonetic) here has the
13 best recipe for sweet potato pie, so, thank you.

14 MS. JACKSON: Will Todd Post come to the
15 microphone.

16 MR. POST: Good afternoon, Ms. Coler, Ms.
17 Shahin, Ms. Jackson, Mr. Christensen. My name is Todd
18 Post and I'm with "Rest of the World" Institute which
19 is the Research Educational Division of the "Rest of
20 the World", a national nonprofit with 55,000 members.
21 "Rest of the World" Institute produces a hunger report

1 every year and in that report, we kept the trends,
2 hunger trends from both international and presently.
3 We analyzed those trends and try to explain those.

4 We hope some particular issues, each,
5 report, I had the privilege of being the editor of this
6 year's report. In this year's report we focused a
7 substantial amount of the report on Food Stamp Program
8 and what we look at specifically is whether the Food
9 Stamp Program can provide recipients, Food Stamp
10 benefit recipients with a nutritious diet so that they
11 can lead a healthy life-style, as Ms. Coler said was
12 the goal at the beginning. We have spoken to members
13 of the anti-hunger community. We have spoken with
14 federal and state administrators. We have spoken with
15 people in the emergency food system. We have spoken
16 with Food Stamp recipients themselves, of every age.

17 And what we've found overwhelmingly north
18 and south, east and west, is that the Food Stamp
19 benefit is not adequate to provide recipients with a
20 healthy diet. There are many reasons. I think as you
21 are probably aware, the poverty rate the last five

1 years has gone up every year. So has food insecurity
2 data, much the same, and as we know the minimum wage is
3 the lowest, adjusted, lowest, inflation is the lowest
4 it's been in 50 years. This is especially hard on
5 working families, one of the target groups USDA wants
6 to increase Food Stamp access for.

7 In talking with working families what we
8 found is that for most of them, the ones we talked to
9 who choose not to participate in the Food Stamp Program
10 even though they're aware is they feel it's just not
11 worth it, it's not worth the effort for them to go get
12 certified and then recertified.

13 As we know, working families, their incomes
14 fluctuate frequently, which means that they have to get
15 certified more often, which means more time off from
16 work. Many of them are, you know, presently on several
17 jobs, and, taking care of their children. I've talked
18 with a woman who felt it wasn't worth it to take, go to
19 the Food Stamp office because she couldn't take time
20 off from work and still get her child to school on
21 time. You know, I think the sort of thing is these are

1 families who are doing everything right. They're
2 trying to do what they can, play by the rules but the
3 system doesn't seem to be working.

4 So what we hope that in the next round of
5 the Farm Bill you will consider is administrative
6 changes that will make it easier for working families
7 to participate. We also would ask that you consider
8 raising the benefit. Many working families, as I said,
9 are working two jobs, sometimes three jobs. The food
10 plan assumes that working families will have time to
11 prepare meals from scratch and so we're learning most
12 families don't have that kind of time. Most of them,
13 so as we saw from some of the demonstrations, the foods
14 that are available in the food plan make it difficult
15 for families to provide, you know, have food for their
16 children. So, we would like to see not only increased
17 benefit size but we would also like to see nutrition
18 education become more started upon.

19 We feel that families that know how to use
20 food better are better able to take advantage of the
21 benefit. I have spoken with one recipient who spoke

1 about not knowing how to process foods and because her
2 income was so low she did not have the luxury of being
3 able to experiment because if she ruined the meal, she
4 didn't have any food. So, anyway, we hope you consider
5 those recommendations in the 2007 Farm Bill. Thank
6 you.

7 MS. JACKSON: Before the next speaker
8 begins, will Adrienne Wojciechowski come forward, Kevin
9 McGuire, Elizabeth Pivonca and Jennifer Adach.

10 MR. CANNY: Good afternoon. I am Joe
11 Canny, representing Cheri Zeman, who is the Executive
12 Director of United Community Ministries, or UCM, which
13 is a comprehensive, multifaceted private social
14 services agency operating in the southeast part of
15 Fairfax County, Virginia. UCM provides a broad range of
16 client services including emergency assistance, food
17 services, child care, employment training and many
18 others. During the past fiscal year we have served
19 something in excess of 7500 families -- individuals,
20 rather, and more than 3,000 households.

21 Food services are a major part of our

1 program. Although Fairfax is one of the most affluent
2 communities and counties in the United States, we have
3 a substantial number of families and individuals who
4 need assistance in meeting their basic living needs.
5 In a typical week, UCM provides food services to some
6 250 to 300 families in addition to a substantial
7 homeless population. Much of the food that we're able
8 to provide is going by businesses and individuals and
9 much of it is obtained from the Capital Area Food Bank
10 and America's Second Harvest Organization, but we have
11 to rely also on the food received under the emergency
12 food assistance program, TEFAP. TEFAP is a valuable
13 component of our overall efforts and we commend the
14 Department of Agriculture for maintaining this program
15 and for your interest in strengthening it as part of
16 the 2007 Farm Bill reauthorization.

17 We find the current program to be effective
18 and helpful, but we wish to offer suggestions for
19 improvements in two areas. First, you find that the
20 commodities that are available to us under TEFAP often
21 do not provide sufficient variety and quality to meet

1 the nutritional needs of our clients. Simply put,
2 there is often not enough protein or quality protein in
3 the commodities package and of course there's no fresh
4 produce, which is critical to a complete nutritional
5 diet as speakers have pointed out.

6 As a result, we find we are able to
7 effectively use the TEFAP program only two times a year
8 rather than on a regular monthly basis as the program
9 allows. And we have to purchase meat or eggs or other
10 protein with donated funds to supplement the TEFAP
11 commodities. So we strongly urge that the commodities
12 menus be improved to regularly include substantial
13 portions of salmon, tuna, beef, beef stew, and achieve
14 other proteins in order to enable us to provide, use
15 the program to provide a well-balanced nutritional
16 package to our clients.

17 Second, we find the paperwork requirements
18 overly burdensome. For example, requiring clients to
19 certify in writing as to their eligibility each time
20 that they receive food places an unnecessary
21 administrative burden both on them and on our limited

1 staff resources. It makes the program more cumbersome
2 than it needs to be. We routinely monitor the
3 situations of our clients, and we assure that all
4 applicable eligibility requirements are met as a
5 condition of our continuing operations under state and
6 local regulations.

7 We recognize that the repetitive
8 eligibility certification requirement is a part of
9 Virginia's procedures implementing TEFAP and is not
10 mandated by USDA regulations; however, we strongly urge
11 that USDA adjust or clarify the food assistance program
12 requirements to enable states to rely on their routine
13 certification of compliance by a comprehensive social
14 services agency such as UCM. Repeated written
15 eligibility certifications by individual clients should
16 no longer be required by states.

17 Finally, your invitation letter asks for
18 views as to how any increased costs might be offset.
19 We recognize that by improving the nutritional content,
20 content of the food assistance menus will entail some
21 additional program costs. Those cost increases might

1 be offset to some degree by streamlining the paperwork
2 and eligibility compliance processes to reduce the
3 burdens on service providers, state agencies and on USDA
4 itself.

5 At the end of the day, we suggest as other
6 speakers have, that USDA should make a simple, direct
7 policy commitment to increase the TEFAP budget in order
8 to improve the nutrition quality the program. Thank
9 you for the opportunity to speak. Keep up the good
10 work and keep up the TEFAP program and help us improve
11 food service to our clientele in the future. Thank you
12 very much.

13 MS. JACKSON: Would Adrienne Wojciechowski
14 come to the microphone.

15 MS. WOJCIECHOWSKI: Thank you, Deputy
16 Undersecretary Coler, for allowing me to give my
17 comments on the 2007 Farm Bill. Adrienne
18 Wojciechowski, with The Nature Conservancy. We're an
19 international, nonprofit conservation organization with
20 chapters in every state here in the U.S., as well as
21 being in 29 other countries with over a million

1 members.

2 Our mission, which many people wonder why
3 we're here today with food nutrition being the main
4 aspect, is to preserve the plants, animals, natural
5 communities that represent life on earth by protecting
6 the lands and waters they need to survive. This is
7 directly connected to USDA's work in the Farm Bill.
8 Not only is there the aspect of food and nutrition but
9 the open spaces that we care about are directly
10 connected to assistance in all parts of the world
11 related to the ecosystem services that are provided by
12 these open spaces, farmland, working forests, are all
13 directly connected.

14 So, I would like to talk to you a little
15 bit about question four and how the farm policy can
16 best achieve conservation and environmental goals. We
17 feel that by maintaining habitat-friendly agriculture
18 and forestry land and increasing employment available
19 for long-term and permanent easement have great
20 effects. Here in the state, here in Maryland, that's
21 done great work to preserve what ag-lands they have

1 left as well as forest lands. And, much like the food
2 program, there are choices that farmers and landowners
3 have to make and sometimes conservation isn't the first
4 or the easiest choice to make, just like facing the
5 problems with food and energy costs this winter.

6 We feel, we would like to see revisions in
7 the 2007 Farm Bill to eliminate incentives that
8 encourage conversion or intensify production of
9 ecologically sensitive plans. Encouraging conversion
10 also back to native habitat, that discourages
11 conversion to more intense uses, especially
12 development. Individuals who benefit from many of the
13 programs that you provide don't have the benefit of
14 making choices when it comes to where they live, clean
15 water and clean air. Open spaces do that. There are
16 numerous ecosystem services that are offered that
17 aren't being paid for that the federal government can
18 help provide.

19 We would also like to see more measures of
20 success employed to measure and refine program
21 implementation and allocations. It might be easier

1 sometimes for your programs to measure how many kids
2 receive the lunch or breakfast or summer programs, or
3 how many dollars are spent on Food Stamps, but your
4 counterparts in NRCF and FSA are having a really
5 difficult time in finding out how much wildlife
6 benefits were received, or fresh water, with a variety
7 of programs and practices that they undergo. Abilities
8 to help them measure that will really help share the
9 environmental benefits they would be getting across the
10 country.

11 We would also like, too, for there to be
12 increased resources for monitoring compliance with
13 existing conservational requirements. I know you guys
14 do a lot of work to make sure that there is less and
15 less fraud and abuse in your programs but the ability
16 for the other parts of USDA to maintain improved
17 conservation on the land so that the folks who are
18 receiving cuts are also balancing the environmental
19 needs of the land are difficult and aren't being met as
20 fully as they would, that they should.

21 I would just like to add that as we focus

1 on food nutrition and family sciences and finances,
2 there are a lot of hard decisions that the citizens in
3 this country have to make when it comes to food
4 nutrition. The same is true for our farmers and forest
5 landowners and the ability of the federal government to
6 help them make better decisions to effectively manage
7 their land and provide ecosystem services of clean
8 water, clean air. Open spaces and wildlife are things
9 that would be a great resource and additional benefits
10 that we need in the 2007 Farm Bill. Thank you.

11 MS. JACKSON: Will Kevin McGuire come to
12 the microphone.

13 MR. McGUIRE: Good morning. Welcome to
14 Maryland. I just wanted to give my beliefs and my
15 boss, Governor Robert Ehrlich, And Lieutenant
16 Government Michael Steel and Secretary Christopher
17 McCabe, we're just happen to have you guys here in
18 Baltimore. We want you to stay here and spend some
19 money. First of all, I'm really happy to be here with
20 the folks here from the Food and Nutrition Services. I
21 must say that you are one of the federal agencies that

1 I deal with on a daily basis and I must say it's been a
2 good and productive relationship with Maryland.

3 I want to say that the Food Stamp programs'
4 many strengths and accomplishments, the program
5 obviously provides Food Stamps to the working poor, the
6 elderly and the disabled, encourages outreach for the
7 Food Stamp Program and it's flexible during times of
8 disaster and if you're not sure about it you guys are
9 first ones on the ground.

10 My first experience in Maryland was with
11 Hurricane Isabel and I must say you have really done a
12 great job relating to Hurricane Katrina and with
13 Hurricane Rita, not just down in the Gulf but also in
14 our ability to serve evacuees but to serve in an
15 efficient and effective way here and I must say we
16 congratulate you for doing that. Other federal
17 agencies have not been that quick off the spot for, and
18 I just have to really applaud you for it.

19 There are several program features that
20 contribute to your success and I feel should be
21 preserved. First, encourage states Food Stamp outreach

1 and nutrition education efforts. I think that program
2 should still be marketed and continue to be marketed as
3 a food nutrition program. I think that's very
4 important. Maryland actually takes some general funds,
5 even in tight budget times we feel that funding and
6 nutrition education program has a lot of benefits.
7 Just beyond giving people food, we feel people should
8 be able to make healthy choices in any given foods that
9 they eat.

10 This is especially important in fighting
11 the sort of national epidemic of obesity. And I that
12 think one of the things in this Farm Bill that we
13 should do is try to consider ways to provide incentives
14 to recipients of Food Stamps for healthy eating. As
15 you may know, we had submitted a waiver in the past or
16 creating a healthy incentive for people to get credit
17 for eating fresh foods and vegetables. I feel that
18 something like that should be considered or at least
19 allow states to do pilots in that way. We also feel
20 that we have been achieving further breakthroughs in
21 allowing the flexibility that the Farm Bill has allowed

1 us to have.

2 I just feel that states in the local Food
3 Stamp offices are closer to the problems faced by Food
4 Stamp customers and we really know the rules and how
5 the benefits interact with what's going on, on the
6 ground. Also we feel we can attain further
7 improvements through further simplification of the
8 rules. The last Farm Bill certainly allowed states to
9 make those choices and we just believe maybe we should
10 be permitted to find other ways to make, you know, to
11 further along such as change in eligibility periods
12 that would fit us and match up with other programs that
13 we have as well as to align sanctions and
14 disqualifications that other programs have.

15 And the other thing, maybe consider even
16 eliminating the possibility of some face-to-face
17 interviews that go on that I have heard before that may
18 get in the way to access to the program. Consider ways
19 to simplify shelter and medical costs through standard
20 deductions, streamline the federal regulatory process,
21 increase flexibility for states by avoiding

1 prescription regulations; in other words, eliminate the
2 need to have most waivers. Eliminate the able-bodied
3 adult, the ABAWD work requirements. We just feel that
4 it is difficult to do and that there is probably other
5 ways that we could find to get it done through the
6 asset program itself, use the standard shelter
7 allowance based on average regional housing costs and
8 also to have a standard utility allowance set at the
9 federal level by region rather than have each state
10 come up with the amounts. This would eliminate the
11 disparity among the states, allow a standard deduction
12 for all elderly disabled members that the residence
13 will allow for medical costs.

14 Immigrants, eliminate the five-year ban for
15 Food Stamps for immigrants who have been lawfully
16 admitted to the United States for permanent residence.
17 It's difficult sometimes to administer the program on
18 the ground. We want to make sure that as many people
19 as possible that are eligible for program get in. We
20 also want to make sure that just on a regulatory, on a
21 sort of practical basis, it's a difficult thing to do.

1 There's opportunities for greater integration of
2 eligibility rules and procedures.

3 Rules can be changed to align certification
4 and eligibility periods as well as we can probably
5 target benefits to match in individual circumstances
6 about by standardizing medical, shelter and utility
7 deductions for two or more tiers depending on a
8 household's stated costs. Having more than one
9 standard allowance or deduction could in part balance
10 the individual's circumstances and increase program
11 simplification.

12 We were asked to address how we could
13 balance the value of national uniform rules and
14 benefits with the value of advanced state flexibility.
15 With the options that the states have the rules already
16 differ from state to state and enhanced state
17 flexibility would eliminate some of the problems of
18 administration. We really want to if we could possibly
19 get away from the idea of waivers, because it's
20 difficult for us to plan. We have to apply for waiver,
21 wait to get it. Then we only get it for two years. We

1 apply then for an extension; we may or may not get it.
2 And I just think it would just be simpler if we could
3 just eliminate the uncertainty that's involved.

4 There's other ways to encourage more
5 effective use of technology. We want to continue to
6 improve grants to states from improved application
7 processing. We were recently awarded a grant to do
8 that. We applaud it and we're going to go ahead to do
9 that. Continue to fund more matches, particularly to
10 the National Directory of New Hires but also allow a
11 state to match its Food Stamp file against the
12 disqualified recipients system. Right now it has to be
13 done one-on-one. Maryland has close to 300,000 people
14 on Food Stamps. Everybody, to check on 300,000 names
15 is just not a practical thing. I think that we can
16 save money on this by eliminating people who are not
17 eligible.

18 I understand that it's difficult to offset
19 the cost of expanding eligibility, increasing benefits
20 or providing additional funding to states but let me
21 remind you that this program, we're really talking

1 about poor people and we're talking about people in
2 need and that we want to help as many people as we
3 possibly can.

4 And I know that when we actually, you know,
5 are talking about this, we're a wealthy nation but also
6 a compassionate nation and I think that whatever
7 problems we may have and try to fill them out, I'm very
8 confident that we can find ways in order to answer
9 those problems and find a solution and actually help
10 those people who are most needed in our country. And I
11 just want to say thank you very much.

12 MS. JACKSON: Elizabeth Pivonka.

13 MS. PIVONKA: Very good, very good. Thank
14 you. It's a pleasure to be here this afternoon. Hello
15 to everybody. I wanted to introduce myself, Elizabeth
16 Pivonka, president of the Produce for Better Health
17 Foundation. And if you're not familiar with the
18 Produce for Better Health Foundation, we actually are
19 an organization that began working with the federal
20 government on the five-day program that you are
21 probably familiar with and USDA is a partner in that

1 program, and we really appreciate all the support that
2 you've given it. What we do as a foundation is work
3 with not only the fruit and vegetable industry, fresh
4 and frozen, but we also work with public health
5 professionals nationwide to try to increase
6 consumption. Our mandate as Produce for Better Health
7 Foundation is to increase consumption for better
8 health. So, we have heard a lot of great comments
9 today from people who understand your programs very
10 thoroughly. I understand fruits and vegetables. I'm
11 not as proficient on some of the programs but I do want
12 to respond to four different areas, two of them
13 specifically in what you asked us about and two others
14 perhaps that you didn't ask us specifically about.

15 My main emphasis is on fruits and
16 vegetables, increasing consumption of fruits and
17 vegetables. By the way, the dietary guidelines, the
18 2005 dietary guidelines are the strongest that we have
19 ever had and this is really your opportunity to try to
20 keep ad policy in line with nutrition policy and what
21 an opportunity it is for all of us for the health of

1 our nation.

2 The first area is to develop more effective
3 efforts through the Food Stamp nutrition education
4 program and direct Food Stamp benefits to encourage
5 increased consumption of fruits and vegetables among
6 Food Stamp participants and those eligible for Food
7 Stamps. This cornerstone program should be enhanced to
8 continue to serve those most in need, while at the same
9 time provide incentives, which you've heard about a bit
10 today, through education and innovative strategies to
11 encourage participants to eat more fruits and
12 vegetables.

13 I would also encourage you to look beyond
14 traditional nutritional education approaches and consider
15 more funds be spent on a combination of paid
16 advertising and media relations. In the end these may
17 prove more cost-effective, believe it or not. I harken
18 back to some work that the center for science of public
19 interest has done on a one percent campaign where they
20 were trying to encourage people to switch from whole
21 milk to one percent or less milk and they actually

1 found, they compared some traditional nutritional
2 education versus public relations versus mass media and
3 public relations and they found that it cost over two
4 dollars more per person to switch from home health to
5 one percent or less via traditional nutrition education
6 versus ten cents per person if they used public
7 relations and mass media. So I would at least take a
8 look at that.

9 The Bird Campaign that CDC is now running
10 as well showed an increase, and you may be familiar
11 with it -- showed increased physical activity in
12 "tweens" and they showed that those who are more
13 exposed to the message are the ones who had increased
14 exercise and/or positive attitude towards improved
15 physical activity. So we would encourage you to take a
16 look at that.

17 Secondly, provide increased funding for
18 effective and efficient fruit and vegetable commodity
19 purchase and increase funding for the popular DOD Fresh
20 Program. I actually moderated a session this summer, a
21 school nutrition association meeting and I asked the

1 audience, there were a bunch of food service
2 professionals and I asked them what they thought about
3 the DOD Fresh program. They all loved it. And do you
4 what the biggest barrier was for them? Not enough
5 funding. They loved it and it was a great way to
6 increase fruits and vegetables in that program.

7 Thirdly, I would like to suggest that we
8 expand the USDA Snack Program, School Fruits and
9 Vegetable Program -- I always want to call it the Snack
10 Program, I know I'm not supposed to -- where we work,
11 everything is fruits and vegetables so I have to
12 sometimes refer to it as the snack program. But it's a
13 tricky program, to think that kids don't like fruits
14 and vegetables is really wrong. We've seen firsthand
15 that these kids when they have good-tasting fruits and
16 vegetables, they do it like it, they do eat it and it
17 replaces some of the other foods that are less
18 nutritious for them.

19 Lastly, the one thing that I wanted to
20 mention, and this is something that I mentioned to
21 Secretary Johanns at a hearing down in Florida a few

1 weeks ago, and that is the growers of this country
2 really could use some help in marketing their products
3 from a national perspective. So I would think it's
4 critical that USDA consider in this next Farm Bill the
5 establishment of some sort of fruit and vegetable
6 domestic marketing program to provide consumers with
7 motivational messages that entitles them to eat more
8 fruits and vegetables. I think it's appropriate for
9 the USDA to do this.

10 I think what you have done with MyPyramid
11 is great, MyPyramid for Kids, it's a great start.
12 There's a whole lot more that needs to be done. And I
13 really think that at least in the work that we have
14 undertaken with supermarkets and promoting fruits and
15 vegetables through the produce department, they would
16 do a whole more if there was some national media
17 efforts around it. And while I know your programs are
18 focused on the underserved, I think there needs to be
19 some consideration for really targeting the population
20 at large, given our obesity epidemic and given the high
21 cost, if we don't spend some money now to try to

1 prevent that from a food perspective, we're going to be
2 paying for it down the road, and we already are in
3 Medicare and Medicare. So those are the four areas
4 that I wanted to share with you today and I'll put my
5 written comments in with the others. So, thank you
6 very much.

7 MS. JACKSON: Will Jennifer Adach come to
8 the microphone. According to our list, we have one
9 more speaker, Jayne Thomisee. And if you will come
10 towards the front.

11 MS. ADACH: Hi, good afternoon. My name is
12 Jennifer Adach and I represent Save-A-Lot Grocery Food
13 Stores. I really thank you for the opportunity to be
14 here today to offer our comments from the retail
15 perspective on the Food Stamp Program. Let me just
16 take a few minutes to talk about Save-A-Lot. We're a
17 division of SuperValue. We operate more than 1200
18 value-oriented stores in urban, rural and suburban
19 markets. We serve more than 4 million customers each
20 week helping them save up to 40 percent on groceries.
21 We operate in uniquely different markets. We're often

1 in neighborhoods where other grocers cannot go so
2 usually in most cases we're the only grocery store to
3 serve the community. A significant percentage of our
4 customers are on public assistance or fixed incomes and
5 many receive Food Stamps or WIC; however, we know that
6 many families in the communities that we serve are
7 still unaware they might be eligible for Food Stamps.

8 We have been a proud partner of the local
9 field offices of the Food & Nutrition Service,
10 including the Towson Field Office right here in
11 Maryland, on several outreach activities to increase
12 awareness of the Food Stamp Program as well as
13 nutrition education. In Baltimore, just a few weeks
14 ago, we were able to partner with the Towson field
15 office, the Maryland Department of Human Resources and
16 the City Department of Social Services to host Food
17 Stamp events outside two of our stores. We were able
18 to not only provide information on Food Stamps, but the
19 volunteers from the City helped eligible individuals
20 fill out the application form and provided face-to-face
21 interviews on site. This proves to be a significant

1 barrier to Food Stamp application and we would love to
2 see more activities like this be replicated across the
3 United States. We posted similar events in
4 Philadelphia, the greater Philadelphia Coalition
5 Against Hunger, we heard from earlier. We also worked
6 with, in Hampton, Virginia, with the Virginia
7 Department of Social Services and the Federation of
8 Virginia Food Banks.

9 I'm taking the time to list our partners
10 because I would like to highlight that public-private
11 partnerships are vitally important to strengthen our
12 communities. Far too many people still remain unaware
13 of Food Stamps and their eligibility. As I said
14 earlier, we would like to encourage other states to
15 reach out to retailers to create similar partnerships
16 for outreach. We have also teamed up our Food Stamp
17 outreach activities with cooking demonstrations on
18 healthy eating. Nutrition education is an important
19 component of our Food Stamp outreach. We feel that
20 it's important not to limit the food items that a
21 person can access with their Food Stamps and assure

1 they're able to tap into a wide variety of healthy and
2 nutritious foods.

3 We feel that it is a priority to continue
4 the Food Stamp Outreach National Campaign and also fund
5 outreach activities in states. We would also like to
6 emphasis the importance of nutrition education. For
7 eligible seniors we understand that a considerable
8 barrier, as we have heard many other speakers today
9 talk about, is the ten dollar minimum benefit. While
10 you can get \$10 to stretch out over a variety of meals,
11 we understand this holds many seniors back from
12 applying for Food Stamps. We would also like to add
13 our voice to those encouraging consideration of raising
14 the minimum benefit levels.

15 The transition to electronic delivery of
16 benefits has been a great success. Both Save-A-Lot and
17 our customers have been pleased with the system.
18 However, we would like to offer a practical observation
19 that has been offered to me by our store managers.
20 They encounter EBT cards in various conditions, from
21 worn-out magnetic stripes to tapes to cards that are

1 held together with many pieces of tape. We would like
2 to encourage states to seek out to clients whose cards
3 may be worn out and need to be manually entered, and
4 replace their cards. There also does seem to be a bit
5 of confusion on our customers' part who have the EBT
6 cards as to whether or not there is a replacement fee,
7 because that does seem to vary state by state or even
8 office to office allowing for user replacement of cards
9 to make sure that EBT remains efficient.

10 Finally, I would just like to go into a
11 little, a few of the lessons that we have learned from
12 Hurricane Katrina. We do have several locations across
13 the United States, including several in the Gulf Coast.
14 I really would like to commend the work that the USDA
15 did down in the Gulf Coast area. We received many of
16 your updates and helped keep us up-to-date on what was
17 happening, but it did highlight some areas that can be
18 improved upon, in particular procedures that can be
19 automatically in place to ensure consistency in
20 communication.

21 First of all, we would just like to say

1 that WIC vouchers and recipients in federally-declared
2 disaster areas should be automatically accepted by any
3 other state and that should be communicated in advance
4 to any authorized retailers. We would like to just
5 offer a few comments on the federal floor limit. We do
6 believe that that should be guaranteed. We know that
7 some retailers have spoken about \$25. We actually
8 would say around 50, \$75, increasing the federal floor
9 limit when a federal disaster declaration has been
10 made.

11 The hurricane also highlighted the vital
12 need for programs like Food Stamps, and the dominant
13 part they play in people regaining their footing.
14 Every day in the communities we serve -- that Food
15 Stamps help families access healthy, nutritious foods.
16 Cuts to the Food Stamp Program would hinder any
17 progress that these families are making on their way to
18 self-sufficiency.

19 I would like to thank you for your time and
20 please feel free to contact me with any further
21 questions or any other information that we can provide.

1 Thank you.

2 MS. JACKSON: Will Jayne Thomisee come to
3 the microphone.

4 MS. THOMISEE: Good afternoon. Thank you
5 for the opportunity to speak. My name is Jayne
6 Thomisee and I'm the campaign coordinator for the
7 National Peace Corps Association, which is the
8 nonprofit alumni association of returned Peace Corps
9 volunteers. We are based in Washington, D.C. We have
10 150 affiliate groups across the country, including one
11 here in Baltimore, and are all committed to advocacy
12 and service both in developing countries and here in
13 the United States. I would like today to speak to the
14 broader context of interconnection of all the programs
15 being addressed within the next Farm Bill. We at NPCA
16 are very concerned about the current budget cuts and
17 within agricultural budget and the trend that was being
18 established as we move toward the next Farm Bill.

19 The current budget shortfall pits
20 mega-farms that receive up to millions of dollars in
21 subsidies against the poorest Americans who depend on

1 nutrition programs to keep food on the table. In these
2 times of budgetary cuts, the Agriculture Committees of
3 Congress are being forced to choose between nutrition
4 programs, conservation programs and commodity programs
5 or subsidy programs. Determining where to make these
6 cuts means Congress must prioritize the actual
7 contribution of each of these programs. And Congress
8 should choose to orient taxpayer's dollars to the
9 needy, not to large, heavily subsidized farms.

10 Last year, over 250,000 citizens in
11 Maryland alone received Food Stamps to supplement their
12 food budget. As everyone in this room has attested,
13 Food Stamps are the foundation of American social
14 support. However, in facing current budgetary cuts,
15 some Congressional leaders have said that a large
16 portion of cuts should come from the Food Stamp Program
17 rather than from the Farm Subsidy Program. While some
18 Congressional leaders cite fraud and abuse as a reason
19 for cutting Food Stamps, despite that fact a recent
20 report from the Government Accounting Office found that
21 fewer than 2 percent of benefits go to ineligible

1 households. However, at the same time, the Agriculture
2 Commodity Program is rife with loopholes that have
3 resulted in up to one-third of farm subsidy payments
4 going to eligible recipients, with overpayment rates in
5 the tens of thousands of dollars.

6 Loopholes in the current rules allow
7 subsidy recipients to draw virtually unlimited
8 commodity payments, despite rules that are meant to
9 limit payments to \$360,000 maximum. Here in Maryland
10 the top 10 percent of subsidy recipients receive over
11 half of all payments. In fact, 72 percent of farm
12 commodity subsidy recipients here in Maryland, I'm
13 sorry, 72 percent of Maryland farmers receive no
14 subsidies at all. President Bush and bipartisan
15 congressional leaders have proposed a cap of \$250,000
16 per recipient in the closing of these loopholes.
17 Payment caps have also supported by Secretary Johann
18 and we're very grateful for his efforts in this regard
19 as well as his effort to significantly reform commodity
20 programs. Here in Maryland a cap of \$250,000 would
21 affect no farmers as there is no recipient in the state

1 that receives more than \$250,000. Nationwide about 2
2 to 3 percent of farmers, farm recipients would be
3 affected.

4 Capping subsidies is a fairer solution to
5 solve the budget shortfall than slashing other
6 agricultural programs such as Environment Conservation
7 Program, Food Stamp Program, which benefit a greater
8 number of citizens across the country. Here in
9 Maryland, in addition to their being over a quarter of
10 million residents that benefit from Food Stamp
11 Programs, over 3,000 farm recipients benefited from
12 conservation programs that promote environmental
13 stewardship.

14 Capping subsidy payments would provide
15 enough savings out of the Commodity Program to protect
16 nutrition programs from cuts and would be an important
17 step toward a more equitable and sustainable farm
18 program. Furthermore, capping commodity subsidies will
19 help to address the program of low commodity prices,
20 overproduction and agricultural dumping into foreign
21 markets. In these critical times, this is an important

1 step that we can take to ensure that our nation is a
2 global leader in safeguarding the neediest both at home
3 and abroad. Thank you.

4 MS. COLER: Good. Well, thank you,
5 everyone, for your time and, most importantly, for your
6 comments. I can tell that there's a lot of thought put
7 into everyone's recommendations and I really do
8 appreciate it. We are at the beginning of this
9 process. As I mentioned, Congress will be
10 reauthorizing these programs in 2007. So, I encourage
11 you to keep this level of involvement and enthusiasm as
12 the debate continues. Ultimately these decisions will
13 be made by Congress, and I know that the Committees of
14 Agriculture both in the House and Senate will be having
15 hearings the country as well. So, I encourage you to
16 submit your comments and to continue to be part of the
17 dialogue.

18 I personally learned a lot today. I think
19 there are some great suggestions, some new obstacles
20 that hadn't been articulated to me before raised today,
21 and that's just very helpful to know that the obstacles

1 that those of you that participated in these programs
2 or participated in the specific programs, that you
3 raised, it helps us as we try to find better ways to
4 deliver the benefits.

5 So, again, thank you very, very much. I
6 appreciate it. There will be a summary of this forum
7 posted on the Web site. We will be compiling
8 information from all the different forums at the end of
9 November when these are completed. And for those of
10 you that addressed additional titles or other titles of
11 the Farm Bill, I'll be sure to share those comments
12 specifically with those mission areas, but we do
13 practice, share everyone's comments across. So, it was
14 interesting to see how the different titles often do
15 interact and how not just the Nutrition Title but other
16 programs play a part in how USDA serves people in this
17 country. So, again, thank you very much. We look
18 forward to continued dialogue.

19 (Session concluded at 1:25 p.m.)

20

21

1 State of Maryland.

2 Baltimore County, to wit:

3 I, ROBERT A. SHOCKET, a Notary Public of
4 the State of Maryland, County of Baltimore, do hereby
5 certify that the within-named proceedings personally
6 took place before me at the time and place herein set
7 out.

8 I further certify that the proceedings were
9 recorded stenographically by me and this transcript is
10 a true record of the proceedings.

11 I further certify that I am not of counsel
12 to any of the parties, nor in any way interested in the
13 outcome of this action.

14 As witness my hand and notarial seal this
15 24th day of October, 2005.

16 _____
17 Robert A. Shocket,
18 Notary Public

19
20 My Commission Expires:
21 November 1, 2006