

The Society for Nutrition Education (SNE) is pleased to submit the following statement for the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Department Operations, Oversight, Nutrition and Forestry's hearing record on the Review of the Federal Food Stamp Program and its Impact on Children's Health. As the Subcommittee begins work on critical issues in the 110th Congress, you and your colleagues have the opportunity to protect and enhance the vitality of citizens by supporting initiatives to educate Americans on living healthful lives. SNE urges you to support public policies that promote effective nutrition education in an environment where this education can lead to health for all.

SNE believes the food and nutrition assistance programs, such as the Food Stamp Program (FSP), are a front line defense in preventing hunger and food insecurity among children.

As Congress reauthorizes the Farm Bill in 2007, SNE urges you to support a strong Nutrition title that reauthorizes and improves the Food Stamp Program and the Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program (FSNE).

SNE's recommendations and Congress's actions with the Farm Bill are made in the context of a United States where lifestyle-related diseases, such as obesity, diabetes, cancer and hypertension cost the economy over \$117 billion annually, causing an ever increasing burden on tax payers and private industry. Nutrition education is critical to lowering risks for these diseases and saving our economy these escalating costs.

The U.S. food supply is rife with nutrient-poor, inexpensive food choices while nutrient-rich choices, such as fresh fruits and vegetables are expensive, especially for low income individuals. At the same time, local producers have difficulty competing for market share in the current industrialized food system. Further, our agricultural production, and thus our food supply, is out of balance with the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. According to a recent report by the USDA Economic Research Service, "For Americans to meet the fruit, vegetable, and whole grain recommendations, domestic crop acreage needs to increase by an estimated 7.4 million harvested acres." Current agricultural subsidies favor a select and narrow set of commodities being grown that predominantly support large scale livestock operations and a highly processed food diet while not supporting fruit and vegetable production.

Lastly, in this context, hunger and food insecurity continue at unacceptable levels for a country with our wealth. Too many people in our community are living with hunger or on the edge of hunger. National surveys document that more than 38 million Americans live in households that experience food insecurity.

These issues are of great concern to SNE as an international organization of nutrition education professionals who conduct research in education, behavior, and communication; develop and disseminate innovative nutrition education strategies; and communicate information on food, nutrition, and health issues to students, professionals, policy makers, and the public. SNE is prepared to work with you and the members of the Subcommittee to address health issues through public policies that support effective nutrition education in a health-promoting environment.

SNE urges Subcommittee members to craft a 2007 Farm Bill and FY 2008 budget which invests resources to make the U.S. food and agriculture system better able to advance public health, provide food and nutrition education for low income families, protect the environment and strengthen community-based food systems.

SNE's 2007 priority areas as they relate to the Food Stamp Program and related programs affecting children's health include:

Food Security

The Food Stamp Program

The Food Stamp Program is a crucial and effective investment in meeting the urgent needs children. It has reduced the terrible consequences of malnutrition and has helped prevent the problem of hunger from becoming worse in our communities. More than 80 percent of food stamp benefits go to families with children, allowing their parents to obtain food at grocery stores for meals at home. Through the nationwide use of Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards, program utilization has been streamlined for transactions for consumers and store clerks, and EBT has quantifiably reduced the chances of program abuse.

Food Stamps pay dividends for low-income consumers, food producers and manufacturers, grocery retailers and communities. As food stamp purchases flow through grocery checkout lines, farmers' markets and other outlets, those benefits generate almost double their value in economic activity, especially for many hard-pressed rural and urban communities desperately in need of stimulus to business and jobs.

The Food Stamp Program's basic entitlement structure must be maintained while greater resources are provided to the educational components of the program and provisions that fight hunger in our communities. There are several key areas for program investment:

- Improve adequacy of benefits. Neither the average food stamp benefit level of \$1 per person per meal, nor the \$10 per household monthly minimum benefit is sufficient to help program participants purchase an adequate diet. With limited funds to buy healthy food, people rely on cheaper foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt and low in essential vitamins, minerals and fiber. This has contributed to obesity and poor nutrition and has a negative impact on health.
- Improve access to health promoting foods in low income neighborhoods by supporting innovative community food security programs that focus on local foods and by expanding support of FSP Electronic Benefit Transfer capabilities at Farmer's Markets.
- Improve access to food and nutrition education through Food Stamp Nutrition Education.

- Allow Food Stamp Nutrition Education to assist community food security projects and better utilize social marketing strategies to impact nutrition behaviors from a community perspective.
- Encourage FSNE programs to meet the nutrition education needs of older adults as a priority area of the Program.
- Expand access to the Food Stamp Program. The Food Stamp Program reaches on average only 50% of the estimated eligible population and only 30% of older adults estimated eligible for the program. And hundreds of thousands more are just above eligibility cut off points. People in need of food but excluded from the FSP include working poor families and older adults with savings slightly above decades-old and outdated resource limits, many legal immigrants, and numerous indigent jobless people seeking employment. These populations are in need of more streamlined access to the program and its benefits.
- Continue program simplification and streamlining for caseworkers and clients. While food stamp outreach and nutrition education are achieving important advances, these efforts need more resources, and enrollments are hampered by shortfalls in state technology and supports. Too many eligible people—especially working poor and older adults—are missing out on benefits.

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) provides food to pregnant women, children and older adults. SNE supports the Commodity Supplemental Food Program. Specifically:

- Change income eligibility to 185% poverty for all participants
- Expand CSFP to all states.

School Food

The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program

In addition to the Food Stamp Program, schools are a critical venue for providing and encouraging healthy diets for children. Federal initiatives included the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable program which has been a success in the states where it is being used by 25 schools. It is getting fruits and vegetables into the diets of children of all income groups, but especially those that come from low income families. Unfortunately this success is reaching only a very small percentage of America's children who have a dreadfully low intake of fruits and vegetables and would benefit greatly from this program. SNE recommends:

- Expansion of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable program to all 50 states.
- Use of incentives for schools to purchase locally and regionally produced fruits and vegetables in the program.

While school food is not generally the purview of the Farm Bill or of the Food Stamp Program, we want to take this opportunity to remind the Subcommittee that the Farm Bill indirectly affects children and schools through the commodity program and other related programs. SNE is concerned that children often encounter nutritionally poor food and beverage choices in their schools at the same time schools are educating about health through good nutrition in the classrooms. This gives the message that good nutrition is a theory, but not important in the real world. SNE supports policies that promote a health-promoting food environment along with nutrition education in all schools. Specifically, SNE recommends:

- Limiting foods of poor nutritional value in schools which compete with school food.
- Expanding funding for food and nutrition education in schools.

The Society for Nutrition Education is committed to working with the Subcommittee to address the nutrition-related challenges facing our country. We look forward to your support during the year in advancing public policies that promote effective nutrition education in an environment where this education can save our nation money and lead to better health for all.

We appreciate your consideration of our views. If you have any questions about our positions, please contact Mary Ann Passi, SNE Executive Director at 317-328-4627.