

The Society for Nutrition Education (SNE) is pleased to submit the following statement for the Senate Agriculture Committee record for the hearing on the Role of Federal Food Assistance Programs in Family Economic Security and Nutrition. As the Committee 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); the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC); the Farmer's Market Nutrition Programs for WIC and seniors; the School Meal Programs including Team Nutrition; the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program; and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) are all front line defenses in preventing hunger and food insecurity among families, especially children, older adults and families at highest risk, and also promote nutritional health.

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 Food Stamp Nutrition Education (FSNE). We urge increased support for USDA's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), in the Research Title. We also urge increased support for the Farmer's Market Nutrition Programs, the Fruit and Vegetable Program and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program. These programs are national priorities for the health of low income families and older adults. Please assure that the Farm Bill and the Fiscal Year 2008 Budget Resolution reflect these national priorities.

These 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.

Also important to this context is the fact that 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. Research has demonstrated that WIC and Food Stamp recipients receive more nutrients in their diets than their low-income counterparts who do not take part in the programs.

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 Committee to address health issues through public policies that support effective nutrition education in a health- promoting environment.

SNE urges Committee 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 farm bill include:

Food Security

The Food Stamp Program

The Food Stamp Program is a crucial and effective investment in meeting the urgent needs of older adults, people with disabilities, children, and low-income working and unemployed adults. 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. Much of the remainder goes to older adults and persons with disabilities. 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
- Provide foods that are targeted to the nutritional needs of older adults
- Expand CSFP to all states.

The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program

The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable program, piloted in the 2002 Farm Bill, 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.

Health Promoting, Sustainable Food Systems

SNE members believe there are critical links between agricultural policy in the Farm Bill, nutrition, and the health of all Americans. Using the Farm Bill to increase access to health promoting and sustainably produced foods for all America's citizens, especially those of low income, is a priority of SNE.

The Farmer's Market Nutrition Programs

The Farmer's Market Nutrition Programs (FMNP) for WIC participants and for seniors have been very successful. They both give health promoting local foods to participants, while at the same time open markets for local farmers. SNE specifically recommends:

- Expand funding for the Farmer's Market Nutrition Education Programs for WIC participants and for Seniors.
- Expand the FMNP to FSP participants as an opportunity for participants to purchase health promoting local foods at farmer's markets.
- Simplify the Senior FMNP to reduce administrative burden.

Health Promoting Food Systems

Adjust agriculture production policy to be more consistent with and supportive of the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Specifically:

- Support increased fruit and vegetable production in the United States by possibly expanding the list of commodity crops to include specialty crops such as fruits and vegetables for human consumption.
- Simplify regulations to allow schools to buy food from local farms, make allowances for providing fair prices to farmers selling to local schools, and

support school wellness policies with funding to ensure that nutrition education can be provided.

- Create new and expanded food systems programs to help communities develop retail food markets, urban agriculture projects, and marketing networks to address the needs of underserved neighborhoods.
- Provide incentives and assistance for organic methods used by farmers by expanding the National Organic Certification Cost-Share Program to encourage more farmers to transition to organic production.

Nutrition Education and Research

The Farm Bill addresses nutrition education in the Research Title VII, as part of the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension System through the state land grant universities through the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). EFNEP operates in all 50 states and several territories and has been recognized by the Government Accounting Office as the most effective federal nutrition education program. Cost-benefit studies in several states have shown that for every dollar invested in EFNEP, health care costs can be expected to decline by at least \$3.63 up to \$10.00. An independent study by the Produce for Better Health Foundation assessed how federal programs were addressing the gap between current consumption patterns of fruits and vegetables and the recommended levels of intake. They reported that EFNEP is by far the most effective Federal program in increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables. SNE recommends:

- Expanding USDA's Cooperative Extension Expanded Food and Nutrition and Education Program, which has been proven cost effective in improving the diets of families and youth by working with them face-to-face in low-income communities.
- Expanding research to address the role of health promoting food and nutrition education in the prevention and intervention of disease.
- Supporting research and education related to community food security, sustainable agriculture and organic production, the risks of biotechnology, and food safety threats related to the use of antibiotics and hormones in dairy and livestock production.

School Food

We understand school food is not generally the purview of the Farm Bill, but the Farm Bill indirectly affects school food 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.
- Expanding the fruit and vegetable program in schools as addressed above.

The Society for Nutrition Education is committed to working with the Committee 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.