

TESTIMONY

For the House Committee on Agriculture's Member Day
December 6, 2023

Congressman Lloyd Smucker
Pennsylvania's 11th Congressional District

Thank you, Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Scott, and members of the committee, for providing us the opportunity today to discuss the importance of our agricultural communities and ensuring reliable access to fresh and nutritious foods.

This morning I want to express my support for two programs that are important to my constituents. I proudly represent Pennsylvania's 11th District, which is the breadbasket for our Commonwealth. Lancaster County alone represents 19% of all agricultural production in Pennsylvania. In Lancaster¹ and York² counties, there are more than 7,000 farms which generate more than \$1.7 Billion in annual sales. These farms make up a sizeable portion of the Commonwealth's dairy, poultry, and hog farmers, as well as grain, fruit, and vegetables growers.

Food security is national security. As the committee considers critical agricultural programs for the next Farm Bill, I want to express my support for ensuring programs which provide access to healthy, nutritious foods are accessible for vulnerable populations facing food insecurity.

Importance of WIC:

WIC provides crucial access to healthy foods, as well as nutrition education for low-income mothers and children under the age of 5 who are found to be at nutritional risk. WIC is a well-tested safety net to ensure that newborn children and their mothers have access to necessities such as infant formula, whole wheat bread, eggs, and milk. In Pennsylvania's eleventh district, there are more than 10,000 individuals who benefit from the WIC program³.

Unfortunately, prices for foods covered by WIC have skyrocketed due to record inflation driven by "Bidenomics." Food prices increased 3.5% in 2021 and then 11.4% in 2022.

I support Congress funding WIC to meet the needs of vulnerable families struggling to keep up with inflation.

If the WIC program does not keep up with rising food costs, up to 15,200 Pennsylvania applicants could be denied assistance, and up to 118,800 Pennsylvania applicants could lose

¹ USDA 2017 Census of Agriculture, https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/Pennsylvania/cp42071.pdf

² USDA 2017 Census of Agriculture, https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/Pennsylvania/cp42133.pdf

³ Pennsylvania Bureau of WIC, <https://www.pawic.com/documents/ProgramData/PA%20WIC%20PPT.pdf>

access to the fruit and vegetable program⁴. A core function of the federal government is to ensure a safety net exists for those in need, and I strongly believe any assistance should be a hand up, not a handout. WIC plays a vital role in giving women and children in need a hand up by allowing families to grow up healthy and be prepared for school. No child should have to go to bed hungry.

I understand Congress must make many tough decisions on how to reduce government spending. I serve as a member of the Budget Committee and care deeply about tackling our nation's growing debt. One of the best ways we can send our nation's debt to GDP trajectory on the right path is to boost productivity and in turn grow our GDP. This is one of several reasons why I support fully funding WIC, to not only protect the most vulnerable among us by providing them with food security, but also the ability to be more productive and prepared at school and in the workplace.

Importance of GusNIP:

The second program I want to highlight and express my support for is GusNIP. GusNIP was created in the 2018 Farm Bill. The program develops and evaluates projects which incentivize and increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables amongst SNAP recipients.

If a SNAP recipient purchases \$5 from a participating retailer or farmers market on fresh fruits and vegetables, they will receive a \$10 voucher to be used on fresh fruits and vegetables. Since 2019, GusNIP has provided over \$270 Million in funding to 197 projects to improve health and nutritional outcomes of participating individuals and households⁵.

GusNIP serves as a positive example of ways the federal government can incentivize healthy dietary patterns. In fact, studies have shown that individuals who participate in nutrition incentive programs eat more fruits and vegetables than the average American. They also report consuming them the longer they participated in these incentive programs. Eating more fruits and vegetables leads to more positive health outcomes, thereby decreasing pressure on our overstretched health care system.

I am a proud cosponsor of the GusNIP Expansion Act of 2023, introduced by Rep. Rick Crawford. This important legislation will help the GusNIP program reach more constituents, including my own, to access healthy fruits and vegetables and will help ensure a healthy workforce for the future while reducing healthcare costs.

Because GusNIP works with local farmers, expanding the universe for eligible grant applicants helps ensure GusNIP dollars are spent locally on local farms, keeping the money within local communities.

⁴ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/young-children-and-new-parents-in-every-state-could-be-turned-away-from-wic-or-have-their>

⁵ USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture, <https://www.nifa.usda.gov/about-nifa/press-releases/usda-nutrition-incentives-improve-access-healthy-food>

Conclusion:

I urge my colleagues to continue supporting both the GusNIP and WIC programs. To have national security, we must have food security. And that security includes access to healthy fruits, vegetables, and infant formula. A population that doesn't worry about its next meal can focus on cultivating a 21st century workforce, reducing health care costs, expand life expectancy, and support our local farmers.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.