



## **Chairman Robert Aderholt**

*Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and  
Drug Administration, and Related Agencies  
House Committee on Appropriations*

**Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services  
Hearing on the FY2017 Budget Request  
February 24, 2016  
Opening Statement As Prepared**

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I want to welcome all of you to today's hearing. This morning we will examine USDA's Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services Mission Area. Our witness is Under Secretary Kevin Concannon, who is joined by Ms. Audrey Rowe, Administrator of the Food and Nutrition Service, Ms. Angela Tagtow, Executive Director of the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, and Mr. Michael Young, Budget Officer at USDA.

USDA's nutrition programs account for 78 percent of total resources in the Agriculture Appropriations Bill. Your request for fiscal year 2017 is approximately \$111.8 billion, a \$2 billion increase above the fiscal year 2016 enacted level. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is USDA's largest program serving more than 45 million people per month with a requested program level of \$81.7 billion – an increase of \$840 million above last year despite a continued drop in the unemployment rate. For Child Nutrition Programs, the President's budget projects that total funding needs will approach \$23.2 billion in fiscal year 2017 – a \$1 billion increase over last year. This is also an increase of nearly \$4 billion since fiscal year 2014, largely due to more students receiving free meals through the community eligibility provision. The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, or WIC, accounts for the single largest discretionary program in the bill. The budget proposes level funding for WIC at \$6.35 billion to meet the estimated 8.1 million participants each month.

While we find bipartisan support for vital supplemental nutrition programs, we need to reduce costs in these programs where necessary as with any other mission area. The Administration has been incapable of providing Congress with any suggestions on how to curb spending within nutrition programs. For example, SNAP and WIC participation has declined, yet the President's budget would not allow those savings to be realized. Instead, the Administration continues to increase spending by expanding or creating new programs, such as the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children, or Summer EBT program. This pilot program has had bipartisan

support. However, the Administration knows their proposal to expand this program to the tune of \$12 billion over 10 years is simply not feasible in this budget climate and through the annual appropriations process.

As we work through the fiscal year 2017 process, my goals for this Subcommittee are 1) increasing oversight, efficiency, and the need for effective outcomes, 2) keeping rural America vibrant, 3) supporting American farmers, ranchers and producers, and 4) protecting the health of people, plants and animals. Without a doubt, Federal nutrition programs help protect the health of vulnerable populations by providing them with the food and nutrition they need. However, I believe we can do more to meet the first goal of increasing oversight and efficiency and the need for effective outcomes.

The Office of the Inspector General issued a report in September that examined the FNS quality control process for SNAP error rates. The OIG found that SNAP's low error rates have been understated. SNAP participation rates grew to historically high levels throughout the tenure of the Obama Administration, and so I have found it curious that the program could simultaneously have historically low error rates. The report shed some light on this process, and the OIG offered a lengthy number of sound recommendations to strengthen the quality control process that I hope FNS is taking seriously and will begin implementing.

On a positive note, I want to thank the Department for ensuring that the final 2015 Dietary Guidelines for Americans were focused on dietary and nutrient recommendations and were more balanced than the advisory committee report. I appreciate the leadership of Secretary Vilsack and all of you to ensure the recommendations remained within the scope of the law.

As you know, the FY 2016 omnibus requires the National Academy of Medicine to thoroughly review the dietary guideline process in its entirety. It is imperative that the review process and those selected to serve on the review panel be as unbiased and transparent as possible. To that end, I appreciate you holding stakeholder listening sessions last Friday on the dietary guidelines process. I think this is a critical step in making sure all interested parties get a chance to offer input and constructive criticism that should be taken into consideration for the future.

Since becoming Chairman of this Subcommittee, I have fought for flexibility and common sense within the school meals programs. I was pleased to include a provision in both the fiscal year 2015 and 2016 omnibus bills that allows States to grant schools exemptions from the current whole grain requirements. Nearly 2,500 school food authorities have taken advantage of this common sense flexibility, and more should be done to help schools serve healthy meals in a reasonable manner. I know both the House and Senate authorizing committees are continuing their work to reauthorize the child nutrition programs. As they move forward, I am hopeful they

can find workable solutions that will give schools greater control in operating their school meals program.

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