

The Honorable Matt Cartwright (PA-17)
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and
Related Agencies
Member's Day Testimony
March 9, 2017

Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member Bishop, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for allowing me to testify.

In Congress, one of my priorities has been nutrition programs for our most vulnerable citizens. While all Americans need to eat healthier, fruit and vegetable access and affordability is particularly limited for low-income Americans. This is why in the 114th Congress, Rosa DeLauro, joined me in introducing the SNAP Healthy Incentives Act.

As you all know, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is one of our countries most vital and successful safety net programs. Unfortunately, recent price increases in healthful foods have put the purchases of fruits and vegetables out of reach for many SNAP participants. So our legislation would expand a test program to incentivize SNAP participants with a rebate of 30 cents for every dollar they spent on fruits and vegetables. Increased fruit and vegetable intake is associated with lower rates of heart disease, cancer, and other major causes of death in the U.S.

It is with this in mind that I wish to testify today on the necessity for full funding for the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Nutrition Program.

As you know, the WIC Nutrition Program provides nutrition education, access to healthy foods, breastfeeding support, health screenings and referrals to health and social services for pregnant and

breastfeeding women, infants, and children under 5. WIC has earned the reputation of successfully protecting and improving the health and nutritional status of the families who participate.

Across the United States, particularly in rural districts like mine, WIC's time-limited services and benefits ensure that children get a strong, healthy start in life. There is clear evidence that good nutrition during pregnancy and in the first few years of life has long-term positive impacts on health. It's important to note, particularly as Congress now begins to debate the future of American healthcare, that WIC helps to lower healthcare costs. Participation in WIC reduces the likelihood of adverse birth outcomes, including very low birth-weight babies, and improves birth outcomes for high-risk mothers. Preterm births cost the U.S. over \$26 billion a year, with average first year medical costs for a premature baby of \$49,033, compared to \$4,551 for a baby born without complications. WIC—which costs about \$775 per participant per year—is directly contributing to substantial healthcare cost savings.

The Pennsylvania WIC program ranks as one of the top 10 states in respect to overall participation. In my district alone, over 22,000 women, infants and children rely on WIC *a month*. For this reason, I strongly urge the Subcommittee to allocate robust funding for WIC.

Secondly, Mr. Chairman, I wish to testify in strong support of the Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food And Agriculture (NIFA) – USDA's extramural science agency. NIFA provides leadership and funding for the research and technological innovations that will enhance American agriculture and make it more productive and environmentally sustainable.

Within NFIA, there are five programs that I wish to draw the Subcommittee's attention to: 1) Regional Rural Development Centers; 2) Smith-Lever Cooperative Extension; 3) Hatch Act; 4) McIntire-Stennis Cooperative Forestry Research Program; and 5) Regional Rural Development Centers.

These programs, collectively, provide essential research, education, and public outreach that sustains U.S. food, fiber and renewable fuel production. Full funding for these accounts will address critical contemporary rural development issues affecting the well-being of people in rural areas, like my district, that often do not have access to the necessary resources or training to advance local economic and community development. For example, in my state of Pennsylvania, Penn State has utilized NFIA funding to address behavioral health issues such as substance use and abuse, like opioids, conducting scientific research on effective ways to improve farm incomes and administering training programs to help rural areas, like my district, compete for economic development funding.

Thank you for your time.