



Chairman Robert Aderholt

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

**FY 2016 Budget Hearing - USDA Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services
March 17, 2015
Opening Statement As Prepared**

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 75 percent of total resources in the Agriculture Appropriations Bill. Your request for fiscal year 2016 is approximately \$112.4 billion, a \$2.1 billion increase above the fiscal year 2015 enacted level. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is USDA's largest program serving more than 46 million people per month with a requested program level of \$83.7 billion. For Child Nutrition Programs the President's budget projects that total funding needs will approach \$21.6 billion in fiscal year 2016 – a \$2.2 billion increase since fiscal year 2014. 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 \$6.6 billion to meet the estimated 8.5 million participants each month.

As we work through the fiscal year 2016 process, my three goals for this Subcommittee are 1) improving the management of the agencies and programs within our purview, 2) targeting funds to the most important programs and functions, and 3) promoting U.S. agriculture, free and fair markets and safe food and medicines.

Without a doubt Federal nutrition programs meet the second goal as they play a key role in combatting hunger and providing millions of Americans with the food and nutrition they need. USDA's nutrition programs meet the third goal as they help provide those in need with nutritious foods produced by America's farmers and ranchers. However, I do believe more can be done to meet the first goal by improving the oversight and management of FNS programs and spending.

For example, this Administration has been incapable of providing Congress with any suggestions on how to curb spending within nutrition programs. SNAP participation has slightly declined,

yet the President's budget won't allow those savings to be realized. Instead, the Administration takes those savings and increases spending on programs States are not currently using or that have little to no measure of success. The President's budget proposes cuts to the crop insurance program, and Secretary Vilsack said in an interview that this proposal was a way to help keep projected farm bill savings on track. But in case the Administration missed it, farm bill nutrition savings are not materializing as projected either, so where in this budget is a proposal to ensure the nutrition savings stay on track? All of these examples demonstrate a missed opportunity to show some evidence of fiscal restraint.

I will acknowledge, as I did last year, that I appreciate the Department using realistic participation rates in submitting the request for WIC funding. WIC has maintained a fairly high level of bipartisan support, and we must ensure sufficient oversight at the Federal level. Eligibility for the program has expanded and this should be reviewed. States need to be monitored more carefully in their efforts to manage the program, and instances of fraud must be prevented.

Since becoming Chairman of this Subcommittee, I have fought for flexibility and common sense within the school meals programs. Make no mistake about it, I want to ensure students receive healthy and nutritious meals, and I believe we can do that without bombarding schools with costly, burdensome regulations. Reducing childhood obesity rates is going to take time. While most of us would agree with the Administration's end goal, your timeline has often been inflexible and unrealistic.

I was pleased to include a provision in the fiscal year 2015 omnibus that allows States to grant schools exemptions from the current whole grain requirements, and I think most States will take advantage of this common sense flexibility. I know more should be done to help schools, which is why I am a cosponsor of the bill being introduced by Representative Noem that will give schools greater control in operating their school meals program. The child nutrition programs expire this fall, and I hope the Administration will come to the table and work with the Republican Congress to find reasonable solutions to the challenges schools are facing.

And finally, I cannot stress enough the importance of your role in making sure the final 2015 Dietary Guidelines for Americans are strictly focused on dietary and nutrient recommendations. The most current science must be used and the statutory directive must be followed – and this goes beyond just sustainability and statements on meat consumption. While I appreciate Secretary Vilsack's comments that he understands his role and he knows he has to follow the law - and Commissioner Hamburg from the Food and Drug Administration made similar statements two weeks ago - that message needs to be clear throughout the entire Administration.

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