

**A Blueprint for a
Hunger-Free Pennsylvania**

**Inter-Agency Council on
Food and Nutrition
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania**

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Executive Summary

- Hunger and food insecurity are pressing moral and economic issues for the Commonwealth. Even though Pennsylvania is a world leader in food production and processing, far too many Pennsylvanians struggle every day with hunger and food insecurity.
- Nearly 1.2 million Pennsylvanians, almost 10% of our population, live in households at risk for hunger and about 335,000, almost 3% of all households, have someone who has experienced hunger.
- While Pennsylvania's experience is better than most states, hunger and food insecurity take a high human and economic toll in the Commonwealth:
 - Hunger makes it harder for children to learn in school and slows down their physical development.
 - Hunger exacerbates poor health issues for our senior citizens and saps the strength of the working poor; and
 - Hunger is estimated to cost Pennsylvania nearly \$3.25 billion per year and perpetuates the cycle of poverty in the Commonwealth and across the U.S.
- The Inter-Agency Council on Food and Nutrition (Council) was originally created by Governor Casey in 1988 to address hunger and related conditions of poverty. The Council was reactivated by Governor Rendell in 2004 to work cooperatively to develop and implement a strategy to address hunger issues in the Commonwealth.
- The Council is composed of representatives from six executive agencies (Aging, Agriculture, DCED, Education, Health and Public Welfare) and hunger and nutrition advocates and food providers for the hungry.
- In January 2007 the Council convened a "Hunger Summit" to hear testimony and conduct focused discussions on the roles of Pennsylvanians on their government in addressing hunger and food insecurity.
- Based on the information gathered at the Hunger Summit and additional work by the Council, it developed the Blueprint as a roadmap with the goal of eliminating chronic food insecurity by 2020. Chronic food insecurity occurs when an individual is at routine or regular risk of hunger for either short or long durations.
- The Council and the Blueprint recognize that state government alone cannot address hunger or eliminate chronic food insecurity by 2020. But, government at the state, federal and local levels working together with community partners can more effectively address hunger and the underlying causes contributing to it.

- The Blueprint recognizes the need to break down barriers between the public and private sectors and improve interaction and coordination on hunger related program and policy issues.

Why Do We Need a Blueprint for a Hunger-Free Pennsylvania?

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is a worldwide leader in food production and food processing, yet far too many Pennsylvanians struggle with hunger and food insecurity¹. While Pennsylvania produces and sells more than enough food to meet the nutritional needs of its people, we currently lack both the focus on ending hunger and food insecurity and a strategy to act on our shared commitment.

In Pennsylvania, based on an average of three years of data (2003–2005), USDA reports that 9.8 percent of Pennsylvania households experienced food insecurity at some point in the 12 months preceding the survey. In about 30 percent of those households (2.9 percent overall), one or more members also experienced hunger. Translated into human terms, an estimated 1,200,000 Pennsylvanians (one in ten) were living at risk of hunger, including an estimated 336,000 who lived in households where someone experienced hunger.

When the 2003-05 data are compared with data collected in previous years, we see a mix of findings. Compared with the previous year's data (2002-04), food insecurity is down (from 10.2 to 9.8 percent), the first such improvement in four years. Hunger is unchanged at 2.9 percent. Compared with 1996-1998 data, however, food insecurity is up by 18 percent and hunger is up by 11 percent. **Thus, while the latest report contains some encouraging news, it still shows that Pennsylvania's "hunger problem" worsened over the past decade. Pennsylvania's rate of food insecurity (8.3 percent) was 6th lowest in the U.S. in 1998. The most recent study puts the Commonwealth at 18th lowest, toward the middle of the pack.**

Food insecurity is driven by economic trends, especially the decline in the buying power of wages. It translates directly into more people who need help from pantries, food banks, child nutrition programs, and congregate meals at senior centers. As evidenced by the rise in hunger in recent years, charitable efforts are not keeping up with the growing number of people at risk. Households that meet a part of their food needs through a food pantry/cupboard are among the food insecure. During October 2006, an estimated 450,000 Pennsylvanians received food assistance in this way. Based on a Hunger Action survey of 1,172 pantries and cupboards, the number of households seeking help in October 2006 was one percent lower than in October 2005, but seven percent higher than in October 2001 when the survey was first taken.

This problem deserves attention because, simply put, hunger hurts Pennsylvania. It hinders the physical and mental development of our children, exacerbates the ill health conditions of our

¹ According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), food insecurity is "being uncertain of having, or unable to acquire enough food for all household members because of insufficient money and other resources for food."

seniors and saps the strength of the working poor. There is substantial and conclusive evidence that hunger has a number of serious detrimental effects on the health, quality of life and productivity of people of all ages. Compassion for these individuals serves as the principle motivation for many who support or engage in the effort to address their needs through both public and private programs. For many, this compassion is combined with a strong sense – often faith-based – that allowing hunger to remain is morally wrong. A landmark study, *The Economic Cost of Domestic Hunger: Estimated Annual Burden to the United States*², was released on June 5, 2007, which was Hunger Awareness Day. For the first time, the impact of hunger and food insecurity on the national and state economies was quantified.

The study revealed hunger and food insecurity costs Pennsylvania \$3,245,360,000 per year; representing the state’s share of the \$90.4 billion cost to the nation as a whole. This nearly \$3.25 billion cost burden in Pennsylvania includes almost \$2.4 billion for medical and mental health care due to increases in illness and psychosocial dysfunction; \$330 million from reduced educational achievement and lowered worker productivity, and \$517 million in expenses for charitable activities, all directly associated with hunger and food insecurity. Simply put, Pennsylvania pays a steep price for hunger.

Specific impacts of hunger and food insecurity, identified in the study as significant cost drivers, include the fact that hungry and food insecure people are 1.3 times more likely to be hospitalized and require longer in-patient stays, and 1.93 times more likely to need mental health services. Additionally, hungry and food insecure children are 2.07 times more likely to require special education, 1.6 times more likely to miss days of school, and 1.44 times more likely to repeat a grade. Food insecure students were also nearly twice as likely to be suspended from school. Other significant impacts highlighted in the study that food-deprived people were more likely to suffer from activity limiting health impairments (2.95 times); poorer overall health status (2.9 times); depression (3.5 times) and psychosocial dysfunction (7 times).

The study noted that, “These and related outcomes are linked to an increased likelihood of school failure, including dropping out of school. In their adult years, children so affected will face greater likelihood of limited employability, lessened workforce productivity, and poorer judgment and job performance.” *The Economic Cost of Domestic Hunger: Estimated Annual Burden to the United States* makes it clear that the value of governmental investments in health care, education and economic development are squandered when not paired with anti-hunger investments. Conversely, an effective effort to reduce hunger and food insecurity can yield substantial benefits not only for individuals directly affected but also for the economy of the Commonwealth.

A comprehensive strategy – “A Blueprint for a Hunger-Free Pennsylvania” – can guide the building of a Commonwealth where none suffer from hunger and all Pennsylvanians are food secure. Through a collaborative process, public and private sector stakeholders can develop, implement, and maintain an effort to end hunger and food insecurity in Pennsylvania.

²Brown, J.L., Shepard, D., Martin, T., Orwat, J. (June 5, 2007) *The Economic Cost of Domestic Hunger*. Harvard School of Public Health.

When Governor Rendell addressed audiences gathered in Harrisburg and Pittsburgh to commemorate Hunger Awareness Day, he reflected on the scope and impact of hunger, stating, “The seriousness of the problem demands that we go beyond mere recognition.” He acknowledged the commitment made by the Inter-Agency Council on Food and Nutrition to “do just that” in developing a multi-year plan and working to fulfill that commitment.

Following a brief review of actions taken in recent years by the Commonwealth to enhance food security, the Governor concluded, “With these actions as a firm foundation – and now, with a Blueprint to guide us – we can build a food secure and hunger free Commonwealth. On Hunger Awareness Day 2007, I ask all Pennsylvanians to please join me in this effort.”

All sectors of our Commonwealth can play important roles in ending hunger. The delineation of these roles is beyond the scope of this document, however, consistent with the national blueprint, it is the intent of the Inter-Agency Council to engage local government, schools and community organizations, nonprofit groups, labor and industry and individuals in a broad and comprehensive effort to end hunger and food insecurity in our Commonwealth.

Putting Pennsylvania into context: National and International Needs

At the World Food Summit in 1996, the United States – along with 185 other countries – pledged “to reduce the number of undernourished people to half their present level no later than 2015.” However, the United States is the *only* industrialized nation that still accepts pervasive amounts of hunger. The World Food Summit commitment was incorporated into the Healthy People 2010 initiative of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). It adopted a specific target – reduce U.S. food insecurity to 6 percent by 2010. In June 2004, the national anti-hunger organizations jointly released *A Blueprint to End Hunger* which called upon the nation to not only reach this goal but also to “commit itself to effectively ending hunger and food insecurity by 2015.”

Many factors affect and contribute to a household’s food insecurity, but income is suggested to be the most important. “In 2005, food insecurity was more than five times as prevalent in households with annual incomes below 185 percent of the poverty line as in households with incomes above that range.³ However, it also states that nearly two-thirds of households with incomes below the official poverty line are food secure, suggesting that while income is a very important factor, it is not the only one. **America’s Second Harvest reports that one of the biggest changes in food pantry recipients in recent years is the increasing number of employed people seeking help: some pantries report up to 70% of the households they serve include an employed adult member.**⁴

USDA monitors hunger/very low food security and food insecurity through an annual 18-question supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS) – the same survey that provides national data about employment, poverty, etc. The first survey, conducted in April 1995,

³ Nord, M., Andrews, M., & Carlson, S. (November 2006). Household food security in the United States, 2005. USDA Economic Research Service.

⁴ America’s Second Harvest: The Nation’s Food Bank Network, www.secondharvest.org

revealed that 12 percent of U.S. households were food insecure, including 4 percent with hunger. The latest reported survey data, published in November 2006, indicates that 11 percent (12,586,000) of U.S. households were food insecure, including 3.9 percent (4,428,000) with hunger. While some regions of the country have improved, others – particularly along the Gulf Coast in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita – have seen their situation worsen. Overall, little progress has been made.

With the World Food Summit and the HHS 2010 Healthy People Initiative goals looming, the United States has much to do in order to fulfill its pledge of cutting food insecurity in half in the next three years. Nonetheless, it can and must be done. Through strengthening the current nutrition programs and improving people’s access and participation, the United States can significantly impact the individuals and families hindered by the consequences of insufficient food.

One of the most devastating impacts of hunger is its role in perpetuating the cycle of poverty. Children who grow up in hungry households are more likely to under-perform in school and ultimately more likely to lead to another generation of poverty. Humans are the sum of their parts: when one part operates better it greatly enhances the overall functioning of the entire individual. Hunger impairs children’s growth and development, limits the ability of the elderly to live rewarding lives in their own homes and communities, helps perpetuate the cycle of poverty and public assistance, increases health care costs significantly, all while draining communities of social and economic resources, according to the Center on Hunger and Poverty at Brandeis University.⁵ **The Association of Nutrition Services Agencies asserts that insufficient nutrition can be both a cause and a consequence of poor health and poverty.** By removing limited access to nutritious food from the cycle, agencies can then address other problems associated with poverty and individuals are able to move further towards the path of self-sufficiency and independence.⁶

On January 17, 2007, Governor Edward G. Rendell offered a “Prescription for Pennsylvania” to increase access to affordable health care coverage for all Pennsylvanians, improve the quality of care, and bring health care costs under control for employers and employees. By understanding the eating behaviors of our citizens, which for much of our population has led to more serious diet-related conditions such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, we need to acknowledge the role that food insecurity and hunger play in affecting the overall well being of the State. The Association of Nutrition Services Agencies found that poor food access, from inadequate resources and physical complications to disease, creates a vicious cycle of poverty and bad health that impairs the well-being and productivity of millions of Americans.”⁷ The complications from such diseases and conditions then place a significant burden on our healthcare systems.

⁵ Hunger and food insecurity among the elderly, February 2003. Food Security Institute at Brandeis University. Retrieved from <http://www.centeronhunger.org/pdf/Elderly.pdf>

⁶ *The Power of Nutrition*. Association of Nutrition Services Agencies.

⁷ *ibid.*

Pennsylvania's Interagency Council on Food and Nutrition

The Inter-Agency Council on Food and Nutrition (Council) was first appointed by Governor Casey in 1988⁸, and was reactivated by Governor Rendell in 2004. The purpose of the Council is to: work cooperatively towards alleviating hunger and related conditions of poverty in the Commonwealth, and develop and implement plans and strategies which will improve the nutritional status of Pennsylvanians. In other words, the Council's job is to call attention to hunger and food insecurity, build commitment to overcoming the challenge, and focus the resources available through state government for the most effective results possible.

The Council brings together the Governor's Office and representatives from the six executive agencies that contribute to the fight against hunger and food insecurity through the administration of food and nutrition programs, including programs of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service. These included the departments of Aging, Agriculture, Community and Economic Development, Education, Health, and Public Welfare. A description of each agency's role in combating hunger and food insecurity is attached to this document as Appendix 1.

The link among these state agencies and USDA is significant in that it offers a common cooperator, common interests, and a common source of financial resources. Particularly with its State Food Purchase Program, Pennsylvania has done more than many states to share the financial burden of relieving food insecurity; however, the federal government remains the primary source of public funds. Many of these programs will be affected by the multi-year farm bill Congress will pass in 2007. Working collectively as a Council, agencies and stakeholders have the opportunity to provide significant input to our congressional delegation.

Advocates and providers in reducing hunger and food insecurity also participate in the Council as full partners in discussing barriers to improving food security, exploring opportunities to leverage resources and improve outcomes, and communicating the needs of those facing food insecurity to agency representatives. The work of the Hunger Action Center, PA Association of Regional Food Banks, Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger, The Food Trust, Community Action Association of Pennsylvania, and others enriches the Council's work and assists in statewide consistency and communication.

The Hunger Summit: Identifying the Problem in Pennsylvania

On January 18, 2007, the Council convened a "Hunger Summit" to hear testimony and conduct focused discussions on the roles of Pennsylvanians and their government in addressing hunger and food insecurity. Listening to the individual presenters were senior-level representatives of the six Council member agencies and a representative of the Governor's Policy Office. During the morning session, these representatives listened as over 30 witnesses offered testimony aimed at identifying and describing the most important actions state and federal governments should take to end hunger in Pennsylvania. During the afternoon session, participants broke into smaller

⁸ Executive Order 1988-4

groups to discuss in greater depth the current role of each department reporting to the Governor and to identify opportunities for improving the performance and effectiveness of Commonwealth government in addressing hunger and food insecurity. A summary of the individual presentations is attached to this document as Appendix 2.

Pennsylvania's Goal: Eliminating chronic food insecurity by 2020

USDA reports that nearly 10 percent of Pennsylvania households face the threat of hunger every day, with over 335,000 households including members who actually experienced hunger in the prior year. In a state where farming and food processing remain dominant economic drivers, this is simply unacceptable. Facing the reality that Pennsylvania may not reach the World Food Summit goal of cutting food insecurity in half by 2015 or the HHS goal of cutting food insecurity to six percent by 2010, the Council instead strives to eliminate chronic food insecurity by 2020. By chronic, we mean both risk of hunger that is of longer duration, such as the risk faced by a child of unemployed or underemployed parents, and risk of hunger that may be of shorter duration but occurs on a frequent basis, such as someone who relies on a food pantry for the last few days of each month because his or her Food Stamp allocation has run out.

A Public – Private Partnership

Achieving this aggressive goal will require commitment and action across Pennsylvania, and is impossible for either government or non-governmental organizations to do alone. Economic trends will continue to vary by region and community across the Commonwealth, but in every city, borough, and township, a partnership between levels of government and the private sector is essential.

The Council cannot stop job losses from businesses closing due to foreign competition. The Council cannot stop weather-related disasters that interrupt local economies. The Council cannot change escalating costs for everything from housing to energy to health care that compete for income that might otherwise be spent on food.

But, working with community partners, state agencies in the Council can help respond to the needs of laid-off employees to ensure that food security needs are met. Working with other agencies of state and federal governments, Council members can help respond to natural disasters, as was done in the 2006 flooding in northeastern Pennsylvania. Under the direction of Governor Rendell, Council agencies and other agencies of state government can be part of the solution to longer-term economic needs, whether working with employers to institute a recently-increased minimum wage, working with insurers to better manage health care costs, encouraging landlords to adopt green building technology or generate their own heat and light through solar panels, or working with school districts to increase access to school breakfast.

Informing the Council's Future Work

The Hunger Summit offered both validation of the Council's existing work plan, and recommendations for additional work to be done in meeting our goal.

Existing Work Plan

The Council adopted the following vision and mission statements in 2004, along with goals and objectives to guide its work:

Vision: Every Pennsylvanian has affordable access to nutritious locally-grown food, or knowledge of and access to services to reach that level of security.

Mission: Agencies share and communicate common vision and priorities to proactively reduce barriers to access, increase efficiencies in service delivery, and maximize resources from the state and federal levels.

Goal #1: Provide leadership, policy consistency, and resource sufficiency throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to improve food security for all.

Goal #2: Improve efficiency and effectiveness of program delivery by all agencies through cooperation and innovation.

Goal #3: Improve information flow among agencies and between agencies and constituents.

The impetus for the Hunger Summit was to hear directly from stakeholders in overcoming hunger on what agencies individually and the Council as a whole could take on in reaching all three goals, and accomplishing our shared mission.

Key Trends From Public Testimony at the Hunger Summit

1. A Commonwealth Commitment to End Hunger

The first step on the road to a food secure Commonwealth is a commitment by leaders from all sectors to a sustained and focused effort to end hunger. While the Food Stamp Program provides a first line of defense and gives the federal government a primary role in assuring food security for all Americans; state and local governments, schools, community organizations, nonprofit groups, business and labor industries, faith communities and individuals must play important roles in supporting the local private charitable hunger relief system and in working to create the political will to improve public policies and programs to end hunger. Important actors in their own right, each is also a stakeholder in the effort to improve federal government policies and programs. To the greatest degree possible, all segments of our Commonwealth and concerned citizens and leaders across the state, must commit to the goal of ending hunger; determine what actions will get us to the goal and then work together to achieve the goal. If we are to reverse the disturbing trends that consign more and more of our fellow Pennsylvanians to lives marked by

the pain of hunger and the harms of food insecurity, the Commonwealth must commit to the Blueprint goal to end chronic food insecurity by 2015.

Role of the Governor.

Several of the Hunger Summit speakers stated that the role of the Governor is paramount in ending hunger in Pennsylvania. The Governor is uniquely positioned to clearly articulate the Commonwealth's commitment and to draw attention to the scope, causes and solutions thereby raising awareness and expanding the engagement of the Commonwealth's public and private sectors. At the same time, the Governor can help create the ways and means for the effort to build a food secure Commonwealth. More specifically, speakers recommended that:

- Legislation be proposed to more permanently establish the Interagency Council on Food and Nutrition.
- A cabinet level advisor to the Governor be appointed to oversee and coordinate the Commonwealth's effort to end hunger and food insecurity, coordinating the work of the Council and enlisting the active engagement of other public and private sector leaders.
- the Governor include anti-hunger policies and appropriations as priorities on the Commonwealth's federal liaison agenda and in its engagement with national inter-governmental associations.
- An annual comprehensive report on "Hunger and Food Insecurity in Pennsylvania" be issued to describe, quantify and assess the Commonwealth's efforts and track progress toward the Blueprint's goal of ending chronic food insecurity by 2020.
- The Council develop regional and local "Councils" to help local agencies and anti-hunger organizations work together in coordinating and pooling expertise and resources.
- All Commonwealth departments be required to "cross-market" all low-income support programs in all communications with potentially eligible populations.

2. Maximizing the Impact of Federal Nutrition Programs

Council members heard repeatedly from public testimony that the most effective federal nutrition programs are entitlement programs, meaning that entities and individuals qualifying for participation are entitled to receive the benefits if sought after. Unfortunately, many Pennsylvanians do not apply due to a lack of knowledge of the program or difficulties in the application process. As a result, already available resources that should be coming to Pennsylvania remain in Washington, D.C.

Foremost among these entitlement programs is the Food Stamp Program. Participation expands and contracts in response to downturns and upswings in the economy. In Pennsylvania, approximately 1,147,000 residents participate in the program, but even at peak participation, estimates for unenrolled eligible Pennsylvanians are as high as 43%. Consequently, outreach

efforts should be expanded and continuously improved. Substantive program changes which would boost participation need to be identified and advanced. These and other reforms of rules, regulations and procedures would make this program of proven effectiveness an even more attractive and accessible option for individuals and families threatened with hunger.

Other important federal nutrition programs such as the *National School Lunch Program*, *School Breakfast Program*, *Child and Adult Care Feeding Program*, and *Summer Food Service Program* address the needs for specific populations, especially children of families with low-incomes. There is room for growth in each of these programs. For example, less than half of the children receiving free or reduced-price school lunches are also receiving school breakfasts and the summer food program is reaching only about 25% of children receiving the free and reduced-price school lunch. Expanded outreach and other efforts could improve access to these programs so that the full range of food assistance programs are offered in communities throughout Pennsylvania.

While not an entitlement program, the *Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children* (WIC) plays an important role in providing access to wholesome food and related services to certain women, infants, and children at nutrition risk. Similarly the *Congregate and Home-Delivered meals for the Elderly* administered through the Department of Aging provide vital nutrition to eligible seniors.

The Commonwealth must encourage the federal government to remove barriers that discourage enrollment in these programs while facilitating the participation of all eligible individual and entities and improving the efficient and effective administration of these programs.

Increase Participation. In working to achieve the greatest participation rates of federal nutrition programs, most efforts must center on maximizing the participation of eligible households in the Food Stamp Program. Being the first line of defense for food insecurity, many Pennsylvanians depend heavily on this program to enhance their earnings and other assistance income so an adequate nutritious diet can be obtained. In order to increase participation, we need to⁹:

- Expand and continuously improve outreach efforts
- Increase the minimum Food Stamp benefit which has remained unchanged for over 30 years
- Increase the general asset limits, which have not been increased in two decades
- Adjust both the minimum benefit and general asset limits annually to reflect cost of living changes.
- Provide proper support for the Department of Public Welfare
- Ensure sufficient resources to maintain and expand COMPASS

Most research suggests that besides consistent education and outreach campaigns, simplifying enrollment processes and participation requirements has the potential to increase eligibility rates significantly. Education alone is not enough anymore. In regards to the Food Stamp Program, people know they are eligible, but the amount of work involved in applying appears to be a

⁹ *Hunger and food insecurity among the elderly*, February 2003. Food Security Institute at Brandeis University. Retrieved from <http://www.centeronhunger.org/pdf/Elderly.pdf>

major deterrent. Through an extensive new educational and outreach campaign to those eligible, but not receiving for Food Stamps, and an up-to-date application process, the Keystone State has the tools and ability to tackle hunger in Pennsylvania.

Remove Barriers. Most low-income assistance programs were developed at different times and function independently of each other; making it a jumbled system. The funding and administration processes are also different for many of the assistance programs. Having such an independent assistance structure serving the same vulnerable populations has created a patchy and complicated system of service delivery. “The disjointed nature of benefit programs often leads to fragmented service delivery systems, time-consuming applications and recertification processes, and a lack of knowledge regarding other programs that can be critical for families.”¹⁰ The income eligibility and other guidelines for the various nutrition programs in Pennsylvania differ considerably. Occasionally, requirements of USDA Food and Nutrition Service vary among its programs, leading to differences among state agencies delivering services for FNS.

Pennsylvania Department of Welfare’s COMPASS system is a web-based service that allows individuals to learn more about, screen and apply for, and renew numerous social service programs offered within the Commonwealth. This is an excellent first step and should be expanded upon to ease the administration for both participants and social service representatives. The National Governor’s Association recently found that 85% of COMPASS applications were placed from private homes as well as a little less than half occurred during non-business hours.¹¹ This first statement implies that low-income families have more access to the internet than previously thought, and secondly, having a program enrollment options available “after hours” is extremely important to these individuals. Through expanding the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Access to Social Services (COMPASS) system to include all assistance programs, an accessible and relatively easy streamlined process of enrollment and renewal for all program applications can occur at one point of contact. The Department of Public Welfare and Department of Education already facilitate partnership in which households can submit applications for free and reduced price meals to all public school districts in which they are then prompted to apply for other available assistance programs, such as Food Stamps. Schools can also use COMPASS for direct certification and income verification purposes. Since July 1 of 2006, 15,776 income eligibility applications for free and reduced price meals applications have been submitted to school districts by households, via COMPASS. All agencies providing direct food assistance should be mandated to use COMPASS as well as receive adequate education and training in using and understanding COMPASS. The Council should pursue whatever waivers might be needed from USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service to make this happen.

3. Strengthening Public-Private Food Assistance Partnerships

Pennsylvanians are hungry today. In response, the network of charitable food providers across the Commonwealth collects and distributes grocery products; involves the community as food donors, volunteers and financial supporters; and collaborates on programs to empower the needy to meet their own nutritional needs. Together with regional food banks, this system includes

¹⁰ Hoffman, L. (August 2006). *Improving access to benefits for low-income families*. NGA Center for Best Practices.

¹¹ Ibid.

food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, food rescue organizations and other providers. This private charitable system of hunger relief – sometimes referred to as the emergency food assistance program – must remain strong and viable to meet the immediate needs of individuals and families in Pennsylvania threatened with hunger.

Many of the speakers at the Hunger Summit stated that, if we are to meet the immediate needs of people in our community challenged by hunger, the Commonwealth's private charitable food distribution network must have access to the assistance, support, and resources needed to get more food to more people more often. Pennsylvania's food banks, food pantries, and other private sector providers must continue to develop the capacity to serve including critical infrastructure needs; identify new sources of food, respond to gaps in services and new areas of need, and collaborate with other public and private organizations to meet people's needs. Federal, state, and local governments provide vital funding and/or administrative services for important food programs. Increased funding should be provided to these programs to help the private charitable network close the significant gap between community needs and available food assistance. These governmental programs work hand-in-hand with the private charitable system and are important in addressing the demands on and the capacity of the private food assistance system. These programs include:

Federal commodity food programs, *The Emergency Food Assistance Program* (TEFAP) and the *Commodity Supplemental Food Program* (CSFP), make nutritious food to low-income people in need. CSFP will require additional support to expand the program to every state and to more counties within states, like Pennsylvania, already served by the program.

Pennsylvania's *State Food Purchase Program* (SFPP), an indispensable source of critical resources for Pennsylvania's food banks, making it possible for them to acquire and distribute millions of pounds of nutritious food must be strengthened to address unmet nutritional needs.

The *Farmer's Market Nutrition Program* promotes good health for seniors and WIC families, and higher sales by Pennsylvania's farmers by making vouchers for the purchase of fresh produce available to program participants.

While not "food programs", the *Community Development Block Grant* program (CDBG) and the *Community Services Block Grant* program (CSBG) can be used by local entities in the region to strengthen the food assistance infrastructure and to provide for operating assistance.

4. Enhancing Nutrition for Low-Income Pennsylvanians

Nutrition Education. Nutrition education is active in the Commonwealth, but needs to be more vigorous in campaigning to individuals who know they are eligible for assistance, but for various reasons do not proceed with enrollment processes. The Pennsylvania Nutrition Education Network is a federally funded program through the USDA to promote and form collaborations with various entities that provide nutrition education to Pennsylvanians. In FY 2007, \$15 million federal matching dollars were used with an expected use \$16.3 million matching federal dollars for FY 2008. After the collaborations are formed, agencies are connected with the Pennsylvania

Nutrition Education TRACKS Program which provides matching funds for the expenses incurred in providing nutrition education to food stamp eligible persons. Essentially, the organization is reimbursed, dollar-for-dollar, for their nutrition education efforts. Currently, the Departments of Aging, Agriculture, Health, and Public Welfare all have nutrition education programs that to some degree could be financially reimbursed as well as ventures with other cabinet-level agencies. By encouraging each agency to partially adapt programs to deliver nutrition education within the TRACKS Program, each department can gain the federal matching dollars to fund the nutrition education programs. This is a win-win situation. Eligible Food stamp users receive needed nutrition education while cabinet-level agencies have a way to fund nutrition education programs and redirect funds to other essential programming.

Improve access to healthy foods. The use of direct “farm to consumer programs” such as farmers’ markets and initiatives like Pennsylvania’s ***Healthy Farms and Healthy Schools*** program should be encouraged. Healthy Farms and Healthy Schools provides nutrition education, healthy locally-grown foods at snack time, family and community involvement, and visits to local farms through the school. The first three years of life are a critical development period, during which the foundations are laid for growth and learning later in life. Children starting life at a disadvantage have greater odds of remaining at a disadvantage.¹² However, through this initiative, Governor Rendell states “that by helping children understand the connection between good nutrition and our state’s agriculture industry, we are making sure farming will remain a key component of Pennsylvania’s economy for generations to come.”

Increasing residents’ ability to make healthy eating choices through increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables will enhance overall the health and wellness of our community and economy. However, low-income households are 6 to 7 times more likely than other United States households not to own cars, making accessibility to fresh produce difficult, particularly for those with disabilities and the elderly population.¹³ On the other hand, as development pressures continue to drive up land prices in Pennsylvania, small farmers are finding it increasingly difficult to survive while consumers anxious for locally-produced foods are finding it increasingly difficult to locate them as farmers shy away from increasing traffic congestion and higher transportation costs. Through developing and expanding upon existing sustainable partnerships and programs between consumers and producers, Pennsylvania can work to make it easier for low-income families, the aged, and others with mobility challenges and particular nutrition needs access resources for affordable, healthy food, while helping small farmers transport their products to market and meet untapped demands for local, fresh food.

¹² *Food stamps as medicine: a new perspective on children’s health*, February 2007. Children’s Sentinel Nutrition Assessment Program (C-SNAP).

¹³ Vallianatos, M, Shaffer, A., & Robert Gottlieb. (October 2002). *Transportation and Food: The importance of access*. A Policy Brief of the Center for Food and Justice, Urban and Environmental Policy Institute. Retrieved from http://departments.oxy.edu/uepi/cfj/publications/transportation_and_food.pdf.

Moving Pennsylvania Forward

In recent years, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, through the reactivation of the Interagency Council, the Fresh Foods Financing Initiative, the adoption of new rules to improve Food Stamp program access and increased funding for both SFPP and FMNP, has taken positive steps to address the food and nutrition needs of low-income Pennsylvanians. Council member agencies have striven to provide the most effective and efficient service possible with available resources, as evidenced by the Department of Public Welfare's recent \$3.7 million performance bonus from USDA's Food and Nutrition Service for its high accuracy rates in the Food Stamp program. Further implementation of the strategies and recommended actions described in this Blueprint can greatly advance the effort to end hunger and build a food secure Commonwealth.

The national *Blueprint* concludes with a statement of fact and a call to action: "The solution to hunger in America is not a secret. We have both the knowledge and the tools. If we apply them with energy and fierce determination, we can end hunger in our country." Pennsylvania has the opportunity to lead the way in this effort and in doing so to make life better for all Pennsylvanians. Now is the time to act on that opportunity.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Summaries of State Agency Roles in Fighting Hunger

Department of Aging

Pennsylvania's Department of Aging aims to enhance the quality of life of all older Pennsylvanians by empowering the diverse community, the family, and the individual.¹⁴ Charged by the Older Americans Act and the Pennsylvania General Assembly in being an advocate for the interests of older Pennsylvanians at all levels, the Department of Aging is one of the smallest departments, but one of the largest in terms of budget and impact on residents, particularly as “baby boomers” reaching retirement age – many with at least one parent still living. Approximately 2.4 million Pennsylvania residents are over the age of 60, of which 238,000 are over the age of 85. Having the 3rd highest state percentage of elderly residents, the Pennsylvania Department of Aging oversees 52 local area agencies on aging (AAAs) in providing numerous services including meals at the senior community centers and home delivered meals in all of the 67 counties. Area agencies on aging also provide nutrition education on an ongoing basis to older Pennsylvanians.

Adequate nutrition is important for all, but has vital implications in the elderly because of their “vulnerability to health problems and physical and cognitive impairments.”¹⁵ **Poor nutrition also impedes the ability to effectively recover and heal, resulting in an increase in health care and medical costs, most of which are paid through public assistance programs.** With approximately one in five Pennsylvanian seniors living in poverty, there is an increasing need to provide adequate nutritious meals to these aging Pennsylvanians. Congregate meals are provided at the senior community centers for no cost; however the individual can choose to make a donation for the meals. Home delivered meals are provided to individuals to help them function independently in the community. However, seniors have historically low participation rates in nutrition programs, especially the Food Stamp Program. America's Second Harvest reports that, nationally, only one-third of the eligible seniors enroll in the Food Stamp Program.

Guaranteeing adequate nutrition and food for the elderly is essential to the prevention and/or delay of many of the chronic illnesses common in the elderly population. Brandeis University's Center on Hunger reports that **“food insecurity among elderly adults contributes to malnutrition, which exacerbates disease, increases disability, decreases resistance to infection, and extends hospital stays.”**¹⁶ As Governor Rendell recognized in Executive Order 2006-4, by the year 2020, one in four Pennsylvanians will be over the age of 60, and the number of citizens over the age of 65 will equal the number under the age of 15. It is important to act

¹⁴ Pennsylvania Department of Aging. www.aging.state.pa.us

¹⁵ America's Second Harvest. *Senior Hunger: Hunger and the Elderly*. Issue Brief No. 4.

¹⁶ *Hunger and food insecurity among the elderly*, February 2003. Food Security Institute at Brandeis University. Retrieved from <http://www.centeronhunger.org/pdf/Elderly.pdf>

now in developing programs to effectively ensure that the “golden years” are both healthy and active.

Department of Agriculture

The Department of Agriculture’s mission is to encourage, protect, and promote agriculture and related industries throughout the Commonwealth.¹⁷ Pennsylvania’s agricultural industry (the largest in the northeastern United States) serves as the foundation of Pennsylvania’s commitment to its constituents’ food security. Pennsylvania’s farms and food companies produce safe, nutritious, and affordable food for Pennsylvania and the world. The Department of Agriculture assures the safety of those products; assists in marketing Pennsylvania products; preserves farmland and conserves natural resources for future generations; improves water and air quality through nutrient management programs; and administers regulatory programs in animal and plant health.. The Department also administers four major nutrition programs using state and federal funds and commodities: the State Food Purchase Program (SFPP); the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP); the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP); and the Farmer’s Market Nutrition Program (FMNP). Two new matching grant programs, the Healthy Farms and Healthy Schools Act and the Farmers Market Development Act were enacted in 2006 and will take effect in July 2007. As a state recognized for its strong agriculture programs that incorporate farmers and local consumers at numerous levels, Pennsylvania’s Department of Agriculture has a major role in combating hunger.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) is a federally funded program through which the USDA buys, processes, and ships food to each state for distribution to local designated agencies. There is also a Bonus TEFAP component which happens (or not happens as the case may be) if a surplus of a food item occurs and is determined to be of use, it can then be distributed throughout the charitable food network. The amount received is determined based on the state’s low-income and unemployed population, with Pennsylvania typically receiving around \$10 million a year.

The State Food Purchase Program (SFPP) is entirely state funded – currently at \$18.75 million – and enables the charitable food distribution network to provide nutritious food to low-income families, seniors, and others in need. This program also allows for grants to meet transportation and infrastructure needs and the costs of distributing federal commodities available through TEFAP.

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) is entirely federally funded at \$4.2 million in food distribution (\$0.9 million for administration) and works to improve the health of low-income pregnant and breastfeeding women, infants, and children up to age six and elderly individuals at least 60 years of age by supplementing their diets with nutritious USDA commodity foods. In Pennsylvania this program is used almost entirely to supplement senior nutrition.

¹⁷ Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. www.agriculture.state.pa.us

The Farmer's Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) serves two main goals: good health for Pennsylvania seniors and WIC families, and higher sales of Pennsylvania-grown fruit and vegetables. FMNP is funded by the state at \$3.0 million and by USDA at \$2.9 million, for a current year total of \$5.9 million.

The Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System (PASS) is being piloted in 2007 as a partnership of the PDA and the Pennsylvania Association of Regional Food Banks to make surplus fresh Pennsylvania grown produce available to low income Pennsylvanians. A pilot project with apples in Central Pennsylvania is underway in 2007 and, if successful, the partners hope to expand the program statewide in 2008.

Department of Community and Economic Development

The goal of the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) is to foster opportunities for businesses and communities to succeed and thrive in a global economy, thereby enabling Pennsylvanians to achieve a superior quality of life.¹⁸ Through its *community development initiative*, Pennsylvania is committed to developing and enhancing its communities- from downtown revitalization to helping the individual citizens of low economic means weatherize their houses. The focus on physical and economic infrastructure improvements produce significant change for the betterment of a community. By administering the federal Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) money, Neighborhood Assistance Programs tax credits, and supporting the development of grocery stores and fresh food providers in disadvantaged rural and urban communities in Pennsylvania, the Department of Community and Economic Development plays a strong role in a communities' ability to attract and retain necessary community resources; i.e. grocery stores, farmer's markets, anti-hunger programs.

The Department of Community and Economic Development established the nation's first statewide initiative (Fresh Food Financing Initiative-FFFI) to improve access and quality of food to low-income neighborhoods. From its inception to September 2006, the FFFI has committed \$21.9 million in grants and loans to 22 stores across the state. FFFI has recently won the Environmental Protection Agency's 2006 National Award for Smart Growth Achievement, which is given in public sector to those programs that make investments to strengthen communities and promote balanced, regional development, among other things. However, more such development for struggling communities needs to occur. The DCED has significant ability to provide necessary infrastructure improvements to facilities such as food banks and then establish a program to educate and guide such facilities in managing their money more appropriately.

Pennsylvania is making great strides in understanding the relationship between improving communities and the quality of life for its citizens through designing innovative programs that enhance the workforce and create a stronger economy. These programs should be cross marketed with other programs which support working Pennsylvanians. By increasing the visibility of low income programs where individuals are most likely to be eligible and then

¹⁸ Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development. www.newpa.com

subsequently enroll, participation rates will increase and ultimately help offset the costs of those dealing with financial hardships.

As of March 2007, the unemployment rate was 3.8% in Pennsylvania, the lowest rate in 30 years. However, nearly 1.4 million Pennsylvanians, half of whom are children, make up the low-income working family, struggling to make ends meet.¹⁹ The National Center for Children in Poverty suggests, on average families need “an income of about twice the federal poverty level to meet their most basic needs.” For a state with the 17th largest economy in the world, our citizens should not be facing such hardships. The Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development has proven their commitment to the individuals and communities of the Keystone State through numerous initiatives designed to better the workforce, but as the Commonwealth pledges to end hunger, there is an opportunity to do more.

Department of Education

Department of Education. Through aiming to provide the necessary maintenance and support of an efficient system of education, the Department of Education is responsible to lead and serve the educational community to enable each individual to grow into an inspired, productive life-long learner.²⁰ Working with all levels of education, from early learning and child development to postsecondary/higher education, the Department of Education is responsible for providing future generations with the necessary knowledge and lifelong skills to become effective change agents in their communities. As the administrator of four child nutrition programs: the *National School Lunch Program (NSLP)*, *School Breakfast Program (SBP)*, *Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)*, and the *Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)* the Department of Education can make a real difference in meeting the nutritional needs of Pennsylvania’s school age children.

These programs are federally funded without any spending caps; meaning that all those entitled to receive the benefits and enroll to participate will receive them. However, if a school does not participate in these nutrition programs, than even if eligible, the child will be forced to go without. Pennsylvania, like other states, pays 10 cents from state funds per breakfast and lunch served, while depending on participation levels, some schools receive a larger match for lunch.²¹ This amounts to approximately \$28.7 million per year. Making use of at least the four main programs listed above, schools have the best opportunity to end hunger among Pennsylvania’s children.

Infants and toddlers in food insecure households are at increased risk for iron deficiency anemia, deficits in cognitive development, and behavioral and emotional problems, all of which can impede their readiness for school. There is strong evidence to show that by improving a child’s

¹⁹ A Low-Income Working Family with Children has a combined family income less than 200 percent of the federal poverty line. Family income includes cash sources in addition to wages such as interest and dividend income, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), direct public assistance, and child support, according to the January 2007 Policy Agenda to Help Pennsylvania’s Working Families Succeed.

²⁰ Pennsylvania Department of Education. www.pde.state.pa.us

²¹ Just Harvest - A Center for Action Against Hunger. www.justharvest.org

nutritional intake you directly increase their ability to learn. In one study, students who increased participation in their school breakfast program had much higher increases in their math grades and much lower rates of school absence and tardiness, which then improves a child's overall education.²² Through ensuring that children can receive adequate nutrition at school, the Pennsylvania Department of Education can make a huge leap towards ending hunger in Pennsylvania.

Seven out of 10 young children and almost 8 out of 10 school age children living in low-income families receive some nutritional assistance.²³ *Food Research and Action Center's most recent School Breakfast Scorecard (2006) ranked Pennsylvania as 42nd among states in the percentage of kids who obtain free or reduced-price school breakfasts and lunches.*²⁴ Just Harvest's latest publication reports that Pennsylvania is losing over \$25 million in potential federal funds to provide our children with adequate nutritious meals while in school. With more than 1,000 schools currently not providing breakfast, and many others serving much less than they could, Pennsylvania must ensure that children in the education system have their bodies nourished as well as their minds. This was acknowledged by Governor Rendell in his budget proposal, which among other things, dramatically expanded the availability of breakfast in schools.

Department of Health

Pennsylvania's Department of Health is responsible for promoting healthy lifestyles, preventing injury and disease, and assuring the safe delivery of quality accessible healthcare for all Commonwealth citizens.²⁵ Through striving to work together with other public and private partners in the community, the Department of Health sets forth to create durable community-based partnerships that strengthens healthy families and individuals in their local communities while enhancing the delivery of health care. Through administering the federally funded (about \$150 million) *Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)*, the Pennsylvania Department of Health has a huge responsibility in providing adequate nutrition resources for families in the Commonwealth.

The goal of WIC is to decrease the risk of poor birth outcomes and to improve the health of the participants during critical stages of growth and development. The Children's Sentinel Nutrition Assessment Program (C-SNAP) February 2007 report, *Food Stamps as Medicine*, found that **children in food insecure homes are approximately twice as likely to suffer poor health and one-third more likely to be hospitalized because poor nutrition can increase risk for contracting illness and compromise immune systems.** Lack of adequate nutritious foods for both children and their parents has strong implications for their future, especially for the many low-income individuals and families who also lack basic health care, or have minimal coverage.

²² *Brain fuel for hungry schoolchildren.* Children's Alliance.

<http://www.childrensalliance.org/4Download/hunger/2007-school-lunch-paper-SCREEN.pdf>

²³ Zedlewski, S. & Rader, K. (March 2005). *Feeding America's Low-Income Children.* The Urban Institute.

²⁴ *Obesity, food insecurity, and the federal child nutrition programs: Understanding the linkages,* October 2005. Food Research and Action Center.

²⁵ Pennsylvania Department of Health. www.dsf.health.state.pa.us/health/site/default.asp

The National Blueprint for Hunger suggests that for every \$1 provided in federal WIC benefits to pregnant women, approximately \$3 are saved in Medicaid and other directly related health costs.¹ Beyond this financial return, there are obvious benefits to recipients. The Association of Nutrition Services Agencies finds nutrition to be critical in “managing illness, reducing its complications, and extending quality of life. For the most vulnerable populations, nutrition plays a role in closing these gaps by addressing one of the most prevalent root disparities, access to nutritious foods.”²⁶

One major area of focus is on the relationship between obesity and hunger. “As far as your doctor is concerned, both terms (obesity and hunger) can be used to represent extremes of malnutrition: an intake of nutrients that, for reasons of quality, or quantity, are not conducive to health.”²⁷ Obesity and food insecurity can easily be based on an inability to purchase sufficient nutrient-dense foods on a consistent basis and then in turn, how to manage with a limited number of resources available. J.C. Dwyer states, “**lack of access to affordable, nutritious, culturally appropriate food is the very essence of hunger and ‘food insecurity’ as defined by the USDA – and as it happens, it may also be the most important single cause of obesity.**”²⁸ A recent study from the Food Research and Action Center found that “maternal obesity is one of the strongest predictors of obesity in children,” with low-income women much more likely to be overweight.²⁹ The current interest in the obesity and hunger relationship has caused “medical nutrition therapy,” or obtaining adequate nutritional intake, to become the strategy of choice for improving immediate and long term health conditions.³⁰ A solution to obesity in low-income areas is simply to allow families to attain a more uniform, nutrient rich pattern of food consumption, through such programs as WIC. Nutrition programs can play a vital role in preventing food insecurity and obesity, while increasing economic security and nutritional intake for the immediate and long term future of Pennsylvania’s citizens.

Department of Public Welfare

The Department of Public Welfare works to promote, improve, and sustain the quality of family life; break the cycle of dependency; promote respect for employees; and protect and serve Pennsylvania’s most vulnerable citizens through managing resources effectively.³¹ It is responsible for administering the **Food Stamp Program**, the largest federal nutrition program and 2nd largest antipoverty program across the nation. It is also the first line of defense among nutrition programs for many low-income families. One out of six participants are elderly, over one-half are children, and one-third of the participants live in households where at least one person works. Administered by the USDA at the federal level, Food Stamp benefits are designed

²⁶ *The power of nutrition*. Association of Nutrition Services Agencies.

²⁷ Dwyer, J.C. (September 2005). *Hunger and obesity in East Harlem: Environmental influences on urban food access*.

²⁸ *ibid*

²⁹ *Obesity, food insecurity, and the federal child nutrition programs: Understanding the linkages*, October 2005. Food Research and Action Center.

³⁰ *The Power of Nutrition*. Association of Nutrition Services Agencies.

³¹ Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare. www.dpw.state.pa.us

to enhance families' earnings and other assistance income so an adequate nutritious diet can be obtained without significant complications and hardships.

In fiscal year 2005-2006, the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare spent approximately \$110 million on administration of the Food Stamp Program; a fifty percent share of the cost with the federal government. This expenditure resulted in the purchase of nearly \$1.2 billion in grocery products. It is estimated that for every \$1 in federally funded food stamps, the benefit is nearly twice that in the local economic activity levels. Approximately one million Pennsylvanians receive an average of \$88.28 per month in food stamps (FY 2005).³² However, there is more work to do to ensure that everyone eligible to benefit from Food Stamps is in fact receiving them. Individuals, families, and neighborhoods all suffer and ultimately sacrifice important resources by having a less than full participation in the Food Stamp Program.

A recent study by the Urban Institute found that Food Stamps have the capacity to provide vast improvements in nutrition and hunger to children and families: food stamps offer the largest benefit in monetary value, to low-income families. However, the program has the lowest participation rate among all federal government programs within the nutrition safety net.³³

Food Stamps can mean the difference between hunger and healthy lifestyles. Food Stamps can help families not have to choose between food or health care and can significantly improve a working family's ability to purchase nutritious food. C-SNAP's recent report on Food Stamps found that **Food Stamps are becoming one of America's "best medicines to prevent and treat childhood food insecurity."**³⁴ Through using the Department of Public Welfare's Food Stamp Program, many Pennsylvanians will have one less barrier on the road to self-sufficiency.

³² Summers, M. (June 2006). *Making food stamps work: A report on the Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger's Food Stamp Enrollment Campaign 2003-2006*. Robert A. Fox Leadership Program, University of Pennsylvania.

³³ Zedlewski, S. & Rader, K. (March 2005). *Feeding America's Low-Income Children*. The Urban Institute.

³⁴ *Food stamps as medicine: a new perspective on children's health*. (February 2007). Children's Sentinel Nutrition Assessment Program (C-SNAP).

Appendix 2. Summaries of Statements Offered at the Hunger Summit

“The First Step to Ending Hunger in Pennsylvania”

Listening Panel for the Inter-Agency Council on Food and Nutrition:

Patricia Grim, Office of the Governor
John Detman, Department of Aging
Cheryl Cook, Department of Agriculture
JamesEtta Reed, Department of Community
and Economic Development

Patricia Birkenshaw, Department of
Education
Shirley Sword, Department of Health
Edward Zogby, Department of Public
Welfare

1. **John Weidman, Deputy Executive Director – The Food Trust:** The Food Trust conducts farmers markets and encourages the development of grocery stores in low income areas. Two ways the Commonwealth can improve access to food in low income communities are an increase in reimbursement rates for the school lunch/breakfast programs. Fund \$1 million for the Healthy Schools Program and \$1 million for the Farmers Market Development Act. Support the development of Healthy Food environment in low income areas. Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) funding should increase. Access to affordable food just is not enough. There needs to be more support of the State Food Purchase Program. Hunger and poor access to food are public health problems. Increase access to fresh foods and vegetables by continuing to support the Fresh Foods Financing Initiative. The goal is to close the financing gaps and provide funding for supermarkets to locate in low income areas. To date over 22 projects have been funded.
2. **Marianne Bellsort, Pathways:** Pathways serves Philadelphia and Delaware Counties. When families cannot make ends meet, they have to make decisions on what bills get paid before food is purchased. In Dauphin County, for instance, to be self-sufficient a family must make at least \$3,000 to make ends meet. The Food Stamp cut off is a little over \$1,000 per month. Most feel that if they work, they are not eligible for Food Stamps; 44% of people who can get Food Stamps do not. Pathways assists in outreach to correct those myths which helps families become self sufficient. FMNP allocations should be increased from \$20 per person to \$30.
3. **Marlene Kozak, Westmoreland County Food Bank:** The food bank helps to feed between 12,000 and 15,000 people per month and distributes over 5 million pounds of food per year. Their mission is to end hunger in Westmoreland County. They are now meeting less than 20% of needs. In 2005, WCFB participated in the America’s Second Harvest Hunger Study, and 300 face to face interviews were conducted. Results showed: 27% are children; 35% were employed; 30% were food insecure with presence of hunger; 46% choose between heat and food. In order to fully serve all those eligible, WCFB would need to distribute 28 million pounds of food per year; they only distribute 5 million. They need warehousing, refrigeration, more staff, and more facilities. The food bank would have to grow substantially in size and amount of staff employed to conduct the distribution properly. The annual budget would have to increase as well. Must

4. multiply the amount of money and food in Westmoreland County by 67. Must be a partnership between the public and private sector throughout the Commonwealth. When asked whether there would be room to warehouse a significant increase in the amount of food coming into the county, Ms. Kozak stated there would not be. When asked how an expansion might be financed, Ms. Kozak stated that WCFB would probably have to go into debt in order to accomplish it.
5. **Steven Gauvry – PA NEN Promoter (USDA Funded Program):** Mr. Gauvry explained what the PA Nutrition Education Program and Nutrition Education Network do. The network is a 430 member organization statewide to promote healthier eating. All are stressed by dwindling resources. PA NEN’s “Tracks” program is an additional resource to further enhance nutrition education. PA should require nutrition education in every school with 50% free/reduced lunches. USDA offers matching federal funds for nutrition education, so increased investment at the state level will yield additional federal funds, as well. Food Pantries could be a prime resource to provide nutrition education as they provide food. The PA Dept. of Agriculture could provide funding to pantries to provide nutrition education. The Dept. of Health implement the “5-a-day” program through senior centers and schools. Mr. Gauvry explained the process of getting curricula approved for use in the “Tracks” program, and that Tracks does meet Dept. of Education academic standards.
6. **Dan Gerber and Zach Battle – Urban Nutrition Initiative:** The Initiative is sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia and works through the public schools to grow vegetables in community gardens and distribute them in low income neighborhoods through a program called “Eat Right Now”. This program participates in Tracks. Mr. Battle is a student leader in the program who has worked to improve access to nutritious food in his community. Obesity is a problem in his school along with diabetes. Mr. Battle has become a food educator working through churches and recreational centers. The program began in 2000. Mr. Gerber recommended that any state initiatives on health care should include food and nutrition.
7. **Amanda Wagner – Emerson Fellow:** Ms. Wagner was a hunger fellow last year in DC and has previously worked in Tucson , Arizona on hunger issues. She is now working on federal food policies in the 2007 Farm Bill. Ending hunger is about much more than putting food in the hands and stomachs of those in poverty. Long-term access to healthy foods begins with making it easier for all schools to purchase and process food from local farmers. All PA state agencies should support food based economic development, as this increases both access to food and job opportunities. Hunger is not caused by a lack of food but by the gaps between the farmer and the eater. Ms. Wagner explained what she did at the Food Bank in Tucson to collaborate with farmers markets and provide access to fresh produce for clients on Food Stamps.
8. **Bill Clark – Philabundance:** Philabundance is the largest food bank in the Commonwealth, reaching 100,000 people per week and distributing over 18 million pounds of food last year. However, they are currently reaching less than 20% of the

people that they should be reaching. They are committed to a meeting the larger need, but that requires a significant increase in the foods they receive and in the capacity of the local pantries to accept shipments from them. The food they get through TEFAP and SFPP account for less than 5% of the food they distribute now, with the vast majority coming from industry and community food drives. They receive some food through America's 2nd Harvest, a national effort. They and their local partners need help with operating costs as much or more than they need additional food. It now costs 22 cents per pound to distribute food, given higher fuel prices and costs for refrigeration. The hunger relief system is almost entirely dependent on volunteer work force. State investments in the system should include workforce development as well as capital needs.

9. **Dr. Elise Gurgevich – Penn State Nutrition Links at Cooperative Extension:** The Nutrition Links program helps the University reach nutritionally at-risk people with nutrition education information as well as tips on food preparation and safe food handling. The program is part of Tracks. Classes for youth and adults are taught in the community. Links provided programs in 51 counties in 2006 through 280 educators and offices in each county. Extension successfully works with all departments represented on the council. Families involved in Nutrition Links programs are referred to the Food Stamp program when appropriate. Food Stamp outreach workers also come into their classes to evaluate Food Stamp eligibility on the spot. They try to link participants to all services for which they might be eligible.
10. **Mariana Chilton – Drexel University School of Public Health:** Dr. Chilton provided a notebook of “homework” from her class to the listening panel, consisting of interviews with low-income emergency room clients to assess their levels of food security and the impact hunger might be having on their families’ health. Most families they interview in emergency rooms have experienced food insecurity, and 90% are in poor health. The cost of a 3 – 4-day hospital stay is approximately \$11,000 (about the same as Food Stamps for a family of 4 for one year). Food insecurity is associated with poor child development. We need a strong State Food Purchase Program and Food Stamp Program, but WIC also needs to be supported. Dr. Chilton advocated a more holistic approach to meeting families’ needs not just in food, but in medical care, housing, energy, and raising the minimum wage plus indexing it to inflation. Hunger is the result of failure throughout the entitlement system. Commenting on USDA’s recent decision to stop using the word “hunger”, Dr. Chilton recommended that Pennsylvania continue to call it what it is. When asked whether there are gaps in existing Food Stamp outreach efforts in Philadelphia, Dr. Chilton stated that she believed more work was needed with immigrant populations in their own languages. Her research is available on line at www.growproject.org.
11. **Patrick Druhan - CADCOM:** Ending hunger is simultaneously simple and complex. How do we put ourselves out of business by ending hunger? Find ways to integrate programs and set common goals. These goals should be evaluated relevant to customer outcomes. They should be measured by nutritional empowerment and whether they meet

the holistic needs of our customers. Government should be a solution not a problem. Need to address specific instances of hunger.

12. **Karen Woodings – Central PA Food Bank:** CPFEB is in its 25th year of existence, serving 27 counties, partnering with over 500 agencies, and serving 36,000 people weekly. Increases have been reported in pantries and on-site feeding agencies. The increase has been mostly in the working poor. As the food bank with the largest service area; 18,000 square miles, they see that there are huge holes in the safety net. They have urban, suburban and rural areas in their service area. They recognize that so many more people would go hungry without the SFPP. PA has seen an increase in Food Stamp utilization rates; however, many participants are getting the minimal benefit. Ms. Woodings stated that there should be recognition of the special needs of rural areas and the higher costs per participant in serving rural people. She described the impact of losing federal funds for a special Summer feeding pilot program for children in rural communities. The CPFEB had to find other sources to keep the program going for the rest of the Summer. Ms. Woodings also stress the need to get more seniors enrolled in available programs, noting that only 16% of income eligible seniors actually received Meals on Wheels in Pennsylvania in 2003-04.
13. **Monika Kriegisch – Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank:** Monika is the Food Bank's Food Stamp Outreach coordinator. She believes that the Commonwealth can help by sustaining and increasing funds available for Food Stamp outreach education programs. Hungry children cannot concentrate on their school work. Food Stamps help assure that that does not happen. Food Stamps provide a bridge from welfare to work. They offer opportunity and hope. Lack of participation results in lost resources. A substantial portion of those eligible still do not participate. The GPCFB develops public awareness and education. Objectives need to be established to get more eligible people on the program. The community needs to be contacted. We must no longer allow lack of knowledge to be a barrier to the Food Stamp program. Economic status is not a measurement of worth.
14. **Tracy Pawleski – Giant Food Stores:** At Giant, they are proud that community stewardship is part of their company, and Ms. Pawleski indicated that more of the food industry should be encouraged to participate with the Inter-Agency Council. Giant customers donated \$10.3 million in cash and products in 2005 through food drives and check-out campaigns, and she expects their contributions from 2006 will exceed \$11.6 million. Customers donated \$280,000 in hams and turkeys earned through store loyalty programs last year. In addition to customer contributions, Giant donated \$7 million in day old bakery items to soup kitchens and on-site feeding centers last year. Giant also donated bags to the Blue Ridge Food Bank and the Boy Scouts for the Scouting for Food Program. Giant collaborates with WIC and Food Stamps, taking steps to ensure that customers paying with these benefits experience as little stigma as possible.

15. **Frank Maisano – WIC:** The PA WIC program serves 245,000 people throughout the Commonwealth: 123,700 children; 64,700 infants; 22,140 pregnant women; and 7,600 non-breast feeding women. Administered by the Department of Health, PA WIC serves 83% of the target population. Additional support and awareness is always important to improve the program. There are no waiting lists for the program at this time. Mr. Maisano discussed the importance of breast feeding and promoting it. The WIC program has aligned its guidelines with USDA’s food guide pyramid. The WIC program will need to work closely with the retail community to make the changes that are being proposed for the WIC market basket. Participants are given more options to where they can do their shopping and can go to another store if their store does not have what they are looking for. They can go to their web site for more information on the new packages: www.health.state.pa.us.

16. **Joni Rabinowitz – Just Harvest:** Ms. Rabinowitz expressed her hope that state agencies would become more proactive in helping to end hunger, including those that enforce minimum wage laws and help to create new jobs with living wages. A major cause of obesity is that they cannot afford the right foods, the healthy foods. An adequate cost of living escalator on the minimum wage would help solve this problem. School breakfast also has to be made a priority, if not a mandate. Many schools still do not have the school breakfast program. In Allegheny County, two out of three school districts do not have a school breakfast program but the statistics show that they are in need. There are more and more day care program but they are not on the CACFP program due to the stringent reporting policies and eligibility. What do other states do that we do not do? Many eligible people apply but do not get through the whole Food Stamp process. DPW should make fewer “clarifications” in Food Stamp rules, as it is difficult for volunteer staff to keep up with changes. The Compass program is a good tool for evaluating eligibility, but it doesn’t let her staff follow-up with clients to ensure they’re receiving benefits. DPW and PDA have bent over backwards to assure that Food Stamps get into the farmers market programs, but wireless POS machines just are not as reliable as regular ones. Markets need help wiring real phone lines. Ms. Rabinowitz submitted a letter from a single Mom who has struggled to keep her children with healthy food and has tried to teach them how to eat properly on a tight budget. Need funding increases in minimum wage, school breakfasts, child and adult food care programs, Food Stamp outreach. Only 57% of those eligible participate.

17. **Berry Friesen – PA Hunger Action Center:** This is the first step in renewing our commitment to end hunger in the commonwealth. It is not a question of commitment but capacity. Hunger and poverty are closely linked; but, we can err by over emphasizing the linkage. Don’t focus on poverty’s role in food security. We can solve hunger without having to solve poverty first. The data provided by the USDA food security survey reports that 2 out of 3 low-income households are food secure. They have worked out ways to keep themselves fed. Ending hunger is a goal we can achieve; but where do we start. We need to take some of the load off of the local food pantries. To achieve this, other parts of our food system need to step up. Index

the minimum wage. All of the debate is about whether or not to increase the minimum wage but we should make sure it doesn't go down. We need to increase the CACFP program funds. All agencies need to work together more effectively to achieve these goals. Eliminate the complicated and cumbersome asset test. This will bring additional money to the homes to purchase healthy foods. Each has a network of providers at a community level that can work with the public to change community perceptions. Your agencies could achieve that through a stream of funding to continue to provide Food Stamp outreach program. Programs providing nutrition education, budget shopping and how to cook the food would be a tremendous help. We need to do a better job in accessing the federal money that is available to us. All agencies should focus on providing nutrition education.

18. **Lee Ann Hocker – School Nutrition Association of PA:** The driving mission for the 2000 members of SNAPA is providing quality food selections. Members are specifically concerned about hunger in a school setting. Children have short attention spans and are unable to study properly when hunger exists in the home. Since Act 16 of 2000, there hasn't been an increase in state reimbursement of school lunches and breakfasts in the Commonwealth. The number of lunches served in the Commonwealth has increased by 16%, and 156% growth has occurred in the after school snack program. STSD students are charged only 40 cents for lunch and 30 cents for breakfast, but some still end up choosing one or the other. Participation also drops off at the end of month as parents' other benefits run out. Additional subsidies are needed to provide children with both breakfast and lunch for the entire month.
19. **Dennis McManus – Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank:** Despite the federal role, Pennsylvania should be a leader in providing hunger relief to those in the Commonwealth. Our children would learn better and experience less behavioral problems. Seniors would have fewer health issues. Hunger hurts all populations in the Commonwealth. What would it take to be the best? It would take an explicit commitment. In PA in 2007 we can and should make a declaration of the injustice of hunger. The solution is not a secret, we have the tools. We need commitment from PA government. We have resources, but we need to develop political will, and establish the Inter-Agency Council by law. Add a position in the Governor's Office to work with the Council. Properly fund existing state programs, and develop new ways to collaborate with PA's large food industry, such as through PASS, the PA Agricultural Surplus System, which distributes surplus produce through the food bank network. Teach grocery shopping and cooking skills. Examine the effect of SSI on Food Stamp benefits and vice versa. Issue a comprehensive annual report on how the Interagency Council is doing in achieving its work plan.
20. **Ann Bacharach – Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger:** The Coalition supports whatever it takes to end hunger throughout their service area. They operate a toll-free help line to connect people to Food Stamps. They do an advertising campaign for Food Stamp outreach. They need the state's help in providing free services to actually sign people up for Food Stamps, not just tell them the program

exists. Literacy levels of written forms and notices need to be easier for people to navigate the system. Not enough people know about the Compass system. Need to have advertising dollars for an awareness campaign. Ms. McManus is thrilled with the change centers; where people can report a change in their status instead of having to go into the office but it needs to be staffed properly to avoid getting a busy signal. Mr. Zogby indicated that DPW is working on reducing the literacy levels of Food Stamp forms.

21. **Ann Foor – PA Association of Human Services Administrators and Center for Community Action:** The initiative to create a blueprint comes at a critical time. Fulton County is receiving a Summer Food Service Program funding cut, as is Huntingdon County. This will have a devastating effect on their ability to provide food to their children. The Blueprint should recommend growth in the SFSP program. Each school district should have a summer program and should have adequate transportation to help children access it. Nutrition Education in the schools should also be made a priority. Teaching skills to low income clients will help improve their lives as they become elderly. A recertification process to recertify people for Food Stamps should be made easier. Seniors do not feel that the process that they have to go through is worth the small amount of Food Stamps that they receive. The number of clients served continues to climb – 1,300 households were served in Huntingdon County in 2006. Allocations of food distribution funds must increase each year so rural communities can continue to provide nutrition for those in need.
22. **Na'ilah El-aimin – Masjidullah Community Development:** They are trying to stop hunger in Philadelphia. Ms. El-aimin had a client whose cat had more food than she did because it was cheaper to feed her cat than herself. Many of her clients are illiterate or have poor reading comprehension skills. They changed the way they interviewed people. If people cannot read it doesn't matter what kind of form you put in front of them. Are the tools people friendly or government friendly? Social workers already in the home to meet other needs should be trained to aid with Food Stamp forms, but they need money to support the training and service delivery. They feed people all over Philadelphia but feed mostly home-bound seniors with trust issues.
23. **Rich Venezia – Allegheny County Department of Human Services:** The County's priority is to address all hunger issues in their county and in the SW region. How do we get it done? Through the on-going advocacy of our own state representatives. They must be encouraged to support the existing resources and understanding the barriers. PA Blueprint should include support for the State Food Purchase Program. Improve public health and slow the cost of medical care; support the school breakfast program. CACFP provides reimbursement for wholesome nutritious meals throughout the school year. It currently serves 1,100 children throughout Allegheny County. The FMNP has become a very popular program in Allegheny County. Demand for the coupons has far out weighed the supply. Increase the funding for this

program as it is a wise investment of funds. TEFAP provides millions of pounds of food for the Commonwealth but funds for the administration have always been an issue. We understand it is our responsibility to respond to the public need but we need to work together to eliminate hunger in our State.

24. **Aaron Schenck – Office of State Senator Jeffrey Piccola:** State budget and the hunger issues need to be paid attention to, such as \$162 million for WIC, \$25 million for Food Stamps. Recognize June 5th as National Hunger Awareness Day. Help with the process of Food Stamp applications. Referrals to hunger fighting organizations. PA food laws are scattered and should be consolidated into a single “Food Code”. There is a role for the Inter-Agency Council in helping provide constituent services. He listed a number of ways the Senator’s office could be involved: constituent services, Food Stamp application processing, referrals to food banks, referrals to other local charities and/or churches, community service and other acts as a public official, volunteering time with local groups that assist in the delivery of food or fight against hunger, grants to facilities and/or programs that fight hunger, press releases and other publications on subjects related to hunger and food delivery, public comment and input in other various capacities, advisory capacity as a community leader.
25. **Audrey Maretzki – PSU Professor of Food Science and Nutrition:** Each of the components of ending hunger should involve nutrition education. Each child should be afforded the school breakfast and lunch program, after school program, and summer food program. Farm to school programs should also be available so that children can try fresh food and produce from the farms. Despite significant progress, there are barriers that still remain in the Food Stamp program. The state can do even more to remove those barriers. The Farmers Market Nutrition Program should receive a funding increase. Many of the least food secure households visit the food pantry system and urgently need nutrition education. This was provided until the government decided that we could not use the SFPP funds as match for the program and a lot of people have suffered because of it. The Inter-Agency Council need to work more closely together to protect our most vulnerable citizens.
26. **Jean Beatty – Channels Food Rescue:** Many worthwhile efforts are being made to banish hunger from our communities. Hunger is not a condition in isolation but a direct result of poverty. Channels serves 100,000 people annually. She is often asked where the food comes from, and it’s from corporate donors, country clubs, caterers, vendor operations, and growers. They do not receive any funds from the State Food Purchase Program. They have a kitchen school and an after school program for children at risk of hunger. They have a nutrition education program. They would like to do more. They would like to feed more children. They need larger kitchen and warehouse facilities. They would like to recover fruits and vegetables from all farmers’ markets; however they lack the staff to do this. Channels is open to collaboration with any agency. Need job training for low-income individuals. The State Food Purchase Program should be allowed to pay for transportation and providing physical activity.

27. **Phyllita Bolden – Drexel University:** Interviews people through C-SNAP in emergency rooms in regards to Food Stamps and their eligibility. Shared stories about the people that they interview. Pleaded for the listening panel to connect themselves with those doing the work on the front lines and with the needy. They have ideas, because they live it. She provided a first person account of what she deals with each day.
28. **Stephanie Beemer – Senator Dinniman’s office, with Esther Brown and Larry Welsh:** Ms. Beemer discussed the Gleaning Project Senator Dinniman had started in Chester County as a County Commissioner. Draws from Biblical roots; to leave their crops in the corners of the fields for the widows and the hungry. The farm fresh food that is harvested is then distributed to the hungry through a central coordinating agency. Through the gleaning program, they have increased awareness and ability to provide food to local feeding programs. They have also decreased labor costs for the farmers through providing volunteers. Larry Welsh stated that the program started in 1996, and donates a portion of their harvest to over 50 feeding agencies throughout the county. While it is managed by Chester County Cares it is mainly run by volunteers. Many of the volunteers are children, which helps them learn how to help people who are in need and about where food comes from. While Chester is one of the more affluent counties in the state, there are still people who suffer from poverty within the county. Esther Brown stated that Chester County Cares runs the gleaning program as part of their work in building healthy communities. They are ending hunger in their county. The poor and the hungry are very real in their county. Food Stamps and education are essential. They welcome the opportunity to work with the Inter-Agency Council to end hunger.
29. **Dr. Hans Kersten – St. Christopher’s Hospital:** Dr. Kersten oversees the “medical arm” of the “Grow Project”. Food insecurity has been associated with failure to thrive. He described particular cases, and recommended that the state support the education and individual case tracking that goes on in the Grow Project. Dr. Kersten indicated that 75,000 children between birth and age 3 are at risk of poor brain development. He struggles with mother’s abilities to follow his recommendations, even for something as simple as using a high chair. He has attempted to reduce juice consumption.
30. **Janet Nye – CACLV:** Ms. Nye spoke on behalf of the Community Action Association of Pennsylvania. Poor people may not always be hungry and hungry people may not always be poor. But when hunger strikes, people must be able to go to pantries to obtain food for their families. So long as there is need, the SFPP must continue to grow. School breakfast should be as much a mandate as school lunch. The minimum wage should continue to be an effective tool by linking it to inflation. Smart Growth issues are very important in the Lehigh Valley, and the FMNP program helps everyone understand the importance of local farms. Their local economy needs the support of the Inter-Agency Council and the Departments that encompass it.

31. **Bonnie McCarthy – Triad Strategies:** Ms. McCarthy represents a new coalition called Pennsylvanians for Affordable Nutrition. They heard many stories during the Farm Show about the agricultural literacy levels of those applying for food assistance. There is a need to better link consumers and agencies serving low-income consumers with food producers. Challenge to recognize the benefits of safe and affordable foods and their benefits. For more than a million Pennsylvanians, the reality of having to choose between food and rent, food and heat, etc. is very real.
32. **Anne H. Ayella – Archdiocese of Philadelphia:** They take the mission of providing food to those in need very seriously, looking at hunger through the lens of their faith. Ms. Ayella offered two suggestions, neither requiring money: first, provide guidance and direction to each of the sponsors on all of the other programs. There needs to be a better cross referral system. Include audits of local providers. Best practices should be encouraged and shared state wide. Second, replicate the Inter-Agency Council on Food and Nutrition on a regional/county level, convening those groups at least twice per year to give feedback to the Governor’s Interagency Council.
33. **Rev. Shaunel Steinnegal – Hunger Action Enabler, Presbytery of Philadelphia:** In order to get to the root causes of hunger, we need to improve the buying power of people in the market place. Of great practical importance is the State Food Purchase Program. People who are served may not always have to come to a cupboard every month, but maybe only a few times per year. If people are given more direction on how to spend their funds and have access to other services such as housing and energy assistance, they may have more money for the food resources.
34. **Elaine Livas – Project S.H.A.R.E.:** Ms. Livas explained that SHARE is an interfaith community food pantry in Cumberland County serving 1,000 clients per month. When the nation was eating “junk” they received a lot of fruits and vegetables. Now that the nation is eating healthy, they are receiving a lot of “junk” food. We are feeding the poor food that we know is bad for them. It is filling up the boxes with empty calories and no nutritional value. The cost per food box has risen from \$11.08 in 2003 to \$23.15 in 2007. They have tried to emphasize nutrition to the consumers. They try to make sure that they are providing enough servings of fruits and vegetables per day in the food box, but it costs more to do the job well. Anyone can fill the boxes with pretzels and gum, but are we helping them nutritionally? More SHARE clients are unhealthy and they are not able to eat properly in order to prevent themselves from getting sick. Ms. Livas also stated that her agency has seen a 200% increase in demand for baby formula. She is focusing on sharing data with other food pantries to make sure that people are not “double dipping.” SHARE relies heavily on donations of food and local gleaning programs. They could do more with more funding for refrigeration equipment and for travel costs to buy food from local farms.
35. **Pennsylvania Association of Area Agencies on Aging:** Congregate meals improve the nutrition of senior citizens willing and able to get to senior centers. Homebound

Meal consumers are often able to go back to self sufficiency. Over time, congregate meals have decreased and home bound meals have increased. Cultural diversity is growing with the senior population, and should be addressed in food assistance among other areas. Only about 30% of eligible seniors participate in the Food Stamp program, primarily due to the low minimum benefit. The FMNP program, the SFPP and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program should receive additional funding, but not through adding sales tax on food. There are 2.4 million people over the age of 60 in the Commonwealth, and one in five seniors live in poverty in the Commonwealth. We know good nutrition contributes to good health so we need to make sure that our seniors are taken care of properly. Good nutritional habits should be incorporated in all programs.

36. **Reverend Sandra Strauss – Pennsylvania Council of Churches:** There are several strategies that can help those in need. Pennsylvania did increase minimum wage but did not index it to the cost of living, a needed step. PA needs to do a better job in using federal food assistance programs. Need to develop strategies that will help boost the usage of services. PA must support local agriculture. Rev. Strauss recommended public contracts to support local land use for agricultural benefit.