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Before the

Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development

Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies

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National CSFP Association

The Honorable Robert Aderholt:

Mister Chairman and Subcommittee members, thank you for this opportunity to present information regarding the USDA/FNS Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP). The National Commodity Supplemental Food Program Association (NCSFPA) requests that the House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee fund CSFP for FY14 at a sufficient level to at least maintain current services, and an additional \$5 million to begin CSFP operations in six states with USDA-approved plans (Connecticut, Hawaii, Idaho, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island). NCSFPA would also like the Subcommittee to take notice of the fact that on February 1, the state of California began a waiting list because they are at their maximum caseload. Currently participating states have requested 117,052 additional slots to meet the rising demand for nutritional assistance among the nation's vulnerable senior population.

In FY12, 97% of all CSFP recipients were low-income seniors. With this in mind, it is interesting to note that NCSFPA has proposed, as part of the next Farm Bill, a full conversion of CSFP into a seniors-only program, with sufficient time allowance for currently participating mothers and children to transition off of CSFP. This recommendation was adopted in both the House-reported and Senate-passed Farm Bills last year, and we have urged both committees to maintain this language in further Farm Bill action this year.

CSFP is a unique program which brings together federal and state agencies, along with public and private entities. In FY12, the CSFP provided services through 150 non-profit community and faith-based organizations at 1,800 sites located in 39 states, the District of Columbia, and two Indian Tribal Organizations (Red Lake, Minnesota and Oglala Sioux, South Dakota).

USDA purchases specific nutrient-rich foods at wholesale prices from American farmers including: canned fruits and vegetables, juices, meats, fish, peanut butter, cereals, grain products, cheese and dairy products. State agencies provide administrative oversight and contract with local community and faith based organizations to warehouse and distribute food; certify eligibility; and provide nutrition education to participants. These local organizations build broad collaboration among non-profits, health units, and area agencies on aging to provide easy access to the program. This partnership reaches even homebound seniors in both rural and urban settings with vital nutrition and remains an important “market” for commodities supported under various farm programs.

CSFP continues to be a testimony to the power of community partnerships of faith-based organizations, farmers, private industry and government agencies. The CSFP offers a unique combination of advantages unparalleled by any other food assistance program:

- The CSFP specifically targets our nation’s most nutritionally vulnerable populations: low-income seniors and young children.
- The CSFP provides a monthly selection of food packages tailored to specific nutritional needs. The nutritional content of the food provided has improved with the introduction of low-fat cheese, whole grain products, canned fruits packed in fruit juice or extra light syrup, and low sodium canned vegetables.
- The CSFP purchases foods at wholesale prices, directly supporting American farmers. The average food package cost is estimated at \$20.02 while the retail value is \$50.00.
- The CSFP involves the entire community. Thousands of volunteers and private companies donate money, equipment, and most importantly time and effort to deliver

food to needy and homebound seniors. These volunteers not only bring food but companionship and other assistance to seniors who might have limited support systems.

The 1997 report by the National Policy and Resource Center on Nutrition and Aging at Florida International University, Miami-- Elder Insecurities: Poverty, Hunger, and Malnutrition indicated that malnourished elderly patients experience 2 to 20 times more medical complications, have up to 100% longer hospital stays, and incur hospital costs \$2,000 to \$10,000 higher per stay. Proper nutrition promotes health, treats chronic disease, decreases hospital length of stay and saves health care dollars. America is aging. CSFP must be an integral part of Senior Nutrition Policy and plans to support the productivity, health, independence and quality of life for America's seniors, many of whom now need to continue working at least part-time beyond retirement age to afford basics.

In the most recent (2007) CSFP survey, more than half of seniors living alone reported an income of less than \$750 per month. One-half of respondents from two-person households reported an income under \$1,000 per month. 25% were enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and 50% said they ran out of food during the month. 70% of senior respondents said they choose between medicine and food.

In 2012 an informal senior participant survey revealed individual accounts of the value of CSFP benefits. An Arkansas recipient tells us that they would not otherwise be able to eat the balanced meals that CSFP provides each month. Arkansas program operators talk about the importance of interaction between seniors and program staff, saying this interaction is very important for the well-being of recipients, and recipients are able to live more stable, self sufficient lives as a result. Colorado participants say that they would not be able to have juice and cereal without CSFP, and many appreciate the program because they are homebound.

Seniors in St. Louis, Missouri, say that CSFP foods help them get through to their next checks. Participants in Nebraska say that they don't know what they would do without this food, calling the program a "lifesaver". New Hampshire participants tell us that they use CSFP as a primary source of nutrition each month and would see a dramatic loss in food availability without the program. One Wisconsin recipient said that they would starve without the program, while others said that CSFP on their limited income meant that they could pay their telephone and electric bills.

The CSFP State and Local Agencies are committed grassroots operators with dedicated volunteers fulfilling a mission to provide quality nutrition assistance economically, efficiently, and responsibly. In cooperation with USDA, NCSFPA seeks to meet the current and emerging needs of CSFP participants. NCSFPA wishes to commend the Food Distribution Division of Food and Nutrition Service of the Department of Agriculture for their continued innovations to strengthen the quality of the food package and streamline administration.

The House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee has consistently supported CSFP, acknowledging it as a cost-effective way of providing nutritious supplemental foods. We urge the Subcommittee to provide sufficient funding in order to allow us to maintain our current service level and to also strongly consider our request for funding the 6 additional states to begin providing nutritional assistance to their vulnerable seniors.

Again, thank you for your continuing support. We look forward to working with you on behalf of CSFP participants.