SNAP Session 2:

Teamwork in Action: A Regional Perspective

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I was asked to speak today about two things: first, to discuss the approach used in the Southeast Region for developing SNAPs, and second, to give a regional perspective on the SNAP process in general.

In the early 1990's we created a cross-program nutrition education group in the Southeast Regional Office which we called the Nutrition Consortium. Along with other activities to promote collaboration, this group hosted two cross-program regional conferences. The first, held in 1994, was unique in that it was both our first meeting devoted solely to nutrition education and the first time a meeting involved State partners from all of the FNS nutrition assistance programs. We also included our sister Federal agencies such as FDA and the Extension Service. In addition to highlighting new concepts and materials in nutrition education, this meeting jump-started new collaborations within States. By the time we hosted our second cross-program conference in 2001, the support for coordinated nutrition education efforts had grown due to the growing awareness of the obesity epidemic and to the expansion of the Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program.

As the State representatives here from Southeast Region know, we have been promoting cross-agency planning efforts, which we called integrated planning, for a number of years. Several of the southeastern States responded to this challenge and developed multi-year plans. These plans, however, ranged from 3 to 300 pages! After the first FNS National Nutrition Education Conference in 2003, we adopted the State Nutrition Action Plan or SNAP guidelines which encouraged a more formal planning effort. The SNAP format enabled us to assist States to either develop or convert ongoing plans which could be posted on the FNS website. The regional staff always try to be respectful of each State's internal planning processes; but we encourage the final products to be in the SNAP format.

So where are we now? I am pleased to say that there are strong collaborative efforts in nutrition education in all of our States. Having said that, I also believe there is a lot that can be done to strengthen the planning and evaluation activities to better support these collaborations. This leads me to the second area that I hoped to cover today, that is, three observations about cross-program planning for nutrition education in general.

The first and most important observation is that: *Each State is unique*. States administer the FNS nutrition assistance programs through a wide variety of configurations. For example, one State may administer all of the Child Nutrition Programs from one department

while another may house them in four different agencies. Also, the amount and types of resources available for nutrition education vary widely between States. Some have received CDC Obesity Grants while others haven't. Some governors have made nutrition education and physical activity a priority while others haven't. All of this is to say that not only are our programs unique in each State, but the environment they operate in is unique.

My second observation is: *Each State's unique environment is constantly changing.* Elections change top leadership, departments reorganize, sometimes into whole new agencies! There are also changes in resources as budgets fluctuate and grants come and go. Add to this the changes in FNS program policies and funding levels. All of this has a direct impact on relationships between the FNS programs within a State.

This leads to my third observation which is: *The constantly changing unique environment in each State makes maintaining a SNAP collaboration really hard.* Regardless of how good a SNAP plan may be, it is difficult to sustain implementation over time. Earlier this morning, Alberta Frost stressed in her presentation that: "The challenge is to have a *sustained commitment* to consistent nutrition education and physical activity messages."

If I were to give any advice to staff working on developing SNAPs, I would point out that the States most successful in developing sustained collaborations are those that have a formal or structured group to support the plan. Although an initial SNAP plan in itself may be very good, the goal is not just to have a plan. If there is not a formal agreed-upon structure for the persons responsible for the SNAP, you run the risk of having a personality-driven plan (and when that person leaves the plan dies), or possibly an activity-driven plan (once an activity is completed, the group has no further purpose). Therefore, I strongly recommend that the partners collaborating on nutrition education in any State define their group's mission, put in writing the roles and responsibilities of each agency, and formalize these relationships in formal agreements such as memorandums of understanding. To summarize, I encourage you all to put effort into developing the infrastructure of the SNAP collaboration prior to turning to creating or updating the SNAP plan itself – or it risks becoming just another document on the shelf.

Putting the Pieces Together With the Illinois Nutrition Council

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In Illinois, we have been doing this for a long time. I know a lot of you have too, and I say 12 years, because that is how long I have been there, but it was happening long before I got there.

In the early '80s, our State decided that we needed to work together and they wrote legislation that was never passed. Our interagency group comes together around mutual

interest and, although we have been doing it for a long time, they won't pass a law because they don't want to fund us.

We let anybody join and let anybody play, as long as they are willing to pay to play. For the most part, everybody plays. Basically, SNAP was a snap for us and we think it is a cool thing. Because of all of our activities, our interagency group is made up of all the FNS programs, the University, lots of other people in our communities, our food service directors, advocates, local groups, the Dairy Council--which is always a crucial conversation when we say to them, the Five-A-Day people, how is that three-a-day going?

We do a lot of stuff with lots of different people and we basically let anybody come. We tried serving food but that didn't bring extra people, so we quit. We found that free parking is the best way to get you to come to a meeting, and we also conduct the meetings over the phone. Most of the people on our council live in Springfield, and I don't. So once a year I bring them to Champaign and I buy them lunch. We eat good food, it is not low in fat, and it is a tremendous meal.

Our statewide goals are these two things. They are pretty simple, straightforward, and we are working on a lot of things. They are synonymous with our vision and our goals that we have in our interagency nutrition council, so this works really well. They are also in line with our Obesity Steering Committee that is funded by CDC money and our State money. We went to them and the people who wrote the grant, and we have done it a little differently. We decided not to write a plan because we found that the plans are lovely and nobody is following them (CDC obesity plan).

So, we created six millennium communities in the State of Illinois. In those millennium communities, we went to communities that already had a plan and said okay, this is what you have to do. You have to have everybody who does our stuff use these things. We have to have good P.E. in your schools, and we feed programs into those millennium communities and we watch them change. They are four blocks square.

We didn't pick big places because we wanted succinct areas to measure change. We picked a little community in Chicago, and it is great. We are finding out lots of things and we are hoping that we find good measures so we can tell when a community is changing. We are really interested in tipping points and where things move and what happens next. We have had a great time.

We have some snappy programs and have been pretty excited about these programs. The best thing that happened is that we do March Nutrition Month at the Capitol every year because we think our legislators need to know about it. I had cancer that year, so I planned the program, got the people to grow the plants, and we gave all of our legislators a compilation of plants grown by our crops--people and fruits and vegetables that are grown in Illinois. You may not believe this, but we have a lot of them. We are really big in pumpkin, and you don't get Thanksgiving without my State. We process all the pumpkin in the country

in Morton, Illinois. It doesn't smell good getting processed, but it smells better than the soybeans on the other side of town.

After that, we decided we wanted to get more notable people to our March Nutrition Month, so we started giving out awards. We gave an award this year to our lieutenant governor. We had kids come in and they all sang and danced. Our Head of Human Services got up and sang and danced, and everybody sang and danced. This year, we didn't give them plants. The best thing I got from plants was legislators' spouses calling me and asking, "Can we plant this now?" And, I would say, "It is March, we do live in Illinois. Is your ground frozen? Yes. Well, I think it's not a good time to plant."

We found out that we also are the number-one grower of horseradish. Horseradish is one smelly plant. We made sure that our most urban legislators got a horseradish plant. They have adopted the horseradish growers. If you visit Collinsville, Illinois, we have a big water tower that says Horseradish Capital of the World.

We have been doing cooking schools and Extension for years. In the cooking schools, we teach you how to make macaroni and cheese, and then we try to add in vegetables by the end of the week. It is a very successful thing because we get all kinds of people cooking. Penny Roth came to me and said that they wanted to do them in the WIC food distribution sites. We have WIC food distribution sites because we don't have grocery stores in Chicago. We put them together and WIC asked, "How we would get people to come, and come everyday?" because we make them come every day for 4 hours. We got Catholic Charities to pay for the food, we got all these different people to kick in with materials and giveaways, and we didn't let them take anything away or get the prize unless they came every day.

It worked really well, and we are growing those programs and they are all tied to our farmers' markets. WIC does all of our farmers' markets and senior farmers' markets in our State. We sit down as a committee and decide what we are going to do for coupons and how much money we are going to have, and it has been very useful. We have a bookmobile in southern Illinois and they had a senior farmers' market. The seniors were all shut-ins and couldn't get there, so they hired the bookmobile to deliver them. We had to put a farmer on the bus, so the farmer actually exchanged the coupon, and it worked really well. We try a lot of weird stuff, but that is because I am pretty flexible with weird stuff, if you know me.

CLOCC, the Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago's Children, is another partner with us. Through Children's Memorial Hospital, they have tons of partners and they work with us. They are interested in 3- and 4-year-olds. I am working on those too. I have given up on adults--they seem to want to stay fat. I always tell people that I don't necessarily like skinny people, or I would be one and I am not. But, we have some new legislation in our State this year because of all of our interactions. We have a law that was passed this year requiring that whenever anyone applies for food stamps in the State of Illinois, they must receive nutrition education materials. It is a pretty cool law. We have got this lawyer writing bills for us.

How many of you are familiar with United Learning? United Learning was one of the first people to come up with video things for schools, and they do a lot of stuff. Discovery television bought them; they have lots of money at Discovery. Maybe you have caught a few of their channels, but they have developed a video in English and Spanish, and they have great things. We said we would like to loop that in our food stamp offices, because we have videos but we would hate to have to change them. (An update here – we are in the last stages of finalizing materials and have just ordered enough looped videos for all our Human Service offices, WIC offices, Extension offices, and childcare providers.)

The second piece of legislation is more interesting. We have an Early Learning Council in our State, devised by our Governor. He came up with the Early Learning Council and gives $30 million a year to our preschool education. He named all these high-powered people to his council. We are in the third year and our spending is up to $90 million. It runs through the Board of Education in our State.

This year our lobbyist asked if we wanted to be written into a bill. I said, what do you want us to do, we don't really need more work. He said we would like to have our interagency Nutrition Council do all the advising to this Early Learning Council on nutrition and physical activity. And, they did. And, we got a bill. We have a meeting September 27th and we went to meet with them, because they all report to the Governor.

We sat there and listened to them, and they seemed a little distraught that they had to ask us. I said, hey, it seems to me like you guys have a system. We don't want to screw up your system, but we think we fit in right here in your system and we fit well into your subcommittee system. We can be pushier if we are not the foreman of the jury, but one of the people that can coerce the foreman to do what we need done.

That is the method we have taken. We are going to make sure that all of our schools and preschools have similar information. When the new *Dietary Guidelines* and the new *MyPyramid* came out this year, our interagency group got together and came up with common materials. We use the common materials that were developed with all of us in mind, and it has worked well. I ask my staff all the time if they are bored with what they are teaching. They say, yes. I tell them the clients aren't and they haven't heard it because look at them. So, we are working on getting them to do a better job. We are working on the messenger. We cross-train across all of our programs--WIC, the Board of Education, and our other programs. We have common methods, ways to deliver and common themes going through all of our things.

How do you duplicate it? Building good relationships comes easily to some people, and other people get married and divorced a lot. We have found that no matter what they say about collaboration, in our programs everybody wins when we get together. Everything improves when we get together. We don't make a move without each other.

Last Friday, I finished doing training in two regions in my State. My Ag services called me and said they had a big load of stuff for my office. I still had a truck so I said sure, I will take it. They took the whole truck and loaded up 150 of those videos on food safety during pregnancy. I watched one of them, and they are quite good. But, I said, "They aren't us, this is what WIC does." So, I went for a walk with my WIC director this morning and said, hey, I am bringing these to you on the 27th when we go to that meeting--bring a big vehicle.

They called me and said, we are getting all these calls. Have you guys seen "Body and Soul?" They said we can't do this throughout the State. I said, we will just put it in each of our Extension offices and you can tell people that is where it is. If you are a faith-based community and want to come and use these materials, they are there. We are not going to teach them, but we will tell you how to get to them.

Those are the kinds of things that happen. We try to include each other in everything. We try to copy each other on e-mails, we talk on the phone, we have private lines, we know each other's cell phone numbers, and we really do work together. We give each other awards when necessary so that other people think it is a good idea.

This year, we have also gotten together a memorandum of understanding with all of our senior administrators. The memorandum of understanding is what got us to the Early Learning Council. We will let you know how that goes; we are pretty excited about it.

We used to look like lots of different silos sitting there doing nothing, hanging out with ourselves, playing by ourselves, doing everything alone, figuring we are the only answer to the question. Now, we make sure that we know everything that is going on. We think that this is most remarkable if you can do it. It takes a lot, particularly if you are focused on your job and focused on the goals of your group, to remember all those other people. Remember them. It makes it so much simpler. It makes work easier, and it makes everything pretty snappy.

SNAP - The Florida Way

Carole Strange, Program Administrator, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Tallahassee, FL

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MS. STRANGE: I would like to give you some information about FIFNC, the Florida Interagency Food and Nutrition Committee. Specifically as it pertains to SNAP, the Florida Way. SNAP is the State Nutrition Action Plan. Our committee is composed of various USDA programs, as well as other agencies in Florida. Our programs all share a common goal to provide and promote healthy food and nutrition and physical activity education.

FIFNC is a group of State agencies whose mission is to coordinate the delivery of effective nutrition and food safety programs and services to the public. But more important, as a group, we encourage ongoing communication among the agencies. We coordinate integrated nutrition education initiatives and campaigns that deliver a consistent message. Together, we provide a mechanism to coordinate the advocacy and outreach to other agencies and to Floridians.

The agencies we reach include the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Area Health Education Center (AHEC), Department of Children and Families, the Department of Elder Affairs, the Department of Health, the University of Florida Cooperative Extension, FDA, Southeast Region, USDA, and the Department of Education Food and Nutrition Management. Members share resources, expertise, and ideas with a focus on nutrition and physical activity.

Interagency collaboration allows us to provide a consistent and unified message. We are all singing the same tune, which means more than anything these days. In response to the USDA challenge, we promote a consistent nutrition message. We develop and deliver nutrition education with a clear and consistent behavior-focused message. USDA, FNS agencies, and other partners work together, not independently. This is a case where we are not reinventing the wheel, but everybody is working together and sharing information.

The interagency participation and collaboration allows us to provide information and materials cost-effectively and efficiently. I know that for anybody in State government, or any of these programs, one of the most important things right now is the ability to be creative and to do more with less.

In Florida, we usually have three meetings a year in central locations that are conveniently located, usually in the northeast region. We do a lot of conference calls, especially now with the cost of gas and also to minimize travel. Members communicate a lot by phone and e-mail followup. As far as each year's program development, when we get together at the meetings, we vote on the annual campaign. It is not one agency over another; everybody has input and it is all agreed upon.

As soon as we develop the campaign and everybody is in agreement, we develop a list of the tasks and a timeframe that is suitable. Then, each member who represents a State agency in the committee assumes a task--some voluntary, some involuntary--and then one agency has the privilege each year of taking a lead on that particular project, including editing, publishing, and graphics. Some of the agencies actually have budgets to put forward to the program, with others we have to do in-kind.

MS. BORGES: I wanted to share with you some of the various campaigns that we have been involved with; what FIFNC has sponsored. We have a skating cow, designed specifically for the Florida Department of Education to be more appealing to the school-age child. An apron on the cow says, "School Lunch is Fun." Basically it was to promote milk, low-fat milk.

We have the "Fresh to You" campaign, and the "Five-A-Day Florida My Way." The DOE, Department of Education, and the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services partnered to create the "Fresh to You" campaign basically to promote healthy eating among school-age children. The program was targeted to 1.2 million students in grades one through five. The program also used a report card to log their progress. The students were encouraged to go grocery shopping with their parents, to visit the store and select two fruits and vegetables per month.

The "Snack Smart, Move More" program has been extremely popular. People continue to contact our offices to get more information. The "Be Wise About Your Portion Size," the 2005 campaign, has just been launched. I am in the obesity program, and everyone, obviously, has been focusing on reducing the obesity rates. One in five Florida adults is obese. We are very concerned with the epidemic in Florida. Florida high school students are overweight and are at risk for obesity. We know that children who develop healthy eating habits and adopt physical activity habits early in their life tend to keep that lifestyle as adults. All of the campaigns promote healthful eating and snacking, and the benefits of physical activity.

We know that obesity increases the risk of diabetes and heart disease, and other health-related conditions. We want to make sure that all of the materials we produce have a focus

on healthy behavior. We include the press release, which we send to all of our partners in the agency. We conduct literature reviews and provide consumer handouts, lesson plans, and activities, in addition to the annotated website. One of the nice things about this is that you can download the information. It is camera-ready, in color or black and white, whichever is best for your agency.

We have various target groups and populations. Since it is interagency, we have one that will develop the preschool lesson plan, the elementary teams, and adults and elders. All of the contents, the contributions from all of the agencies, are taken and developed into a very beautiful manual. We have received a lot of accolades for how nicely set-up the manual is.

MS. STRANGE: In Florida, one of our Governor's initiatives focuses on strengthening families and also on and sharing family related information. This is especially true of health and nutrition oriented information. We have been working closely with Governor Bush's staff to provide information on our activities and resources. We are in the process of putting together a FIFNC website. Our site will also be featured as a link on what is called myflorida.com, the State of Florida's homepage. MyFlorida.com rotates featured links with flash messages. The FIFNC logo will be featured as a hot link and you will be able to click on it. When you do, it will take you down one page to an organization overview and information on our activities and campaigns. The FIFNC page will serve as a roadmap to individual agencies. All the information is grouped according to health and nutrition information. There will also be a link that takes you to the USDA SNAP information. We feel that for anybody who is trying to access relevant information on health and nutrition, this is will be a one-stop resource. Materials from FIFNC campaigns can be downloaded at no cost. In addition, you have the ability to search and obtain additional materials from participating agencies. We are very excited about our site.

The biggest challenges faced by FIFNC are evaluation and feedback. One thing we would say is that a lot of it is anecdotal. Also, when you are dealing with interagency collaboration, there is dedicated volunteer time for projects. This can make it difficult to get a specific evaluation component back. That is one of the issues we are looking at now. Another challenge is agency resources. We are all impacted by budgets, staff changes, responsibility. This is something that vacillates from year to year. But with a lot of dedicated committee members, we just go with the flow. Because there is no dedicated funding source for FIFNC projects, it is unknown from year to year who will be able to dedicate what portion of time

and budget to a specific project. This is one reason we take turns being the lead agency for projects.

Each year as member agencies go through their budget, we all search for dollars to be used for FIFNC. It is difficult because we can't say that "X" number of dollars go to the FIFNC campaign. The work load, assignments, and funding are the ebb and flow thing. Participating agencies contribute funds and in-kind contributions, whatever they can. One agency may pull in time for graphics, another may contribute for publication. It is a give-and-take process from year to year. In a perfect world, we would have a dedicated funding source and know that every year we would have a specific amount to do bigger and better programs and reach more and more people.

Collectively, we recognize and address challenges in an effort to make things work better and to have better campaigns. Obtaining feedback on the campaigns is a challenge. As incentives to receive feedback, you can give people certificates, do press releases, anything to acknowledge their involvement and encourage feedback. You have to let people know that you appreciate their feedback. You are only as good as the information you have to work with.

In member agencies, the higher you go up the ladder--as far as your agency heads and executives--it is important to let them know about FIFNC initiatives and let them know what you are doing and how this ties into USDA. Let them know how many people you are reaching--this guarantees the support on that level. Without that, your hands are tied to do a lot of good things locally.

The thing that we are most proud of is that there is a genuine respect among FIFNC members. Everybody realizes that the folks who are in the other agencies give up time and contribute their expertise, their ideas and, more than anything, their willingness to serve. There is a general camaraderie and respect for the professionalism of those who are willing to devote time on the committee--that and seeking out funding within their agency, both in-kind and hard dollars.

MS. BORGES: One of the things I wanted to show you was *MyPyramid*. We have a graphic artist who, if we could clone her, you would all want one of her. In our handouts, although the graphics are very colorful, they also are in black and white for those who do not have a color printer. So you can download them.

We have some excellent tools and also the various agencies have collaborated, for example, WIC has included the message on their envelopes. We have messages throughout other agencies. We have even collaborated with the Diabetes Program, and we try to get that message across. Our "Snack Smart, Move More" is an excellent tool that we can use from preschool to elder care. We encourage everyone to download this tool; it is an excellent resource--and why reinvent the wheel. We have actually had other States call and ask us how to obtain copies of it.