Teamwork in Action: A Regional Perspective

Candice Stoiber, MS, RD, Chief, Program Operations, Supplemental Food Programs, Northeast Regional Office, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Boston, MA

I will talk about the activities that we engaged in to work with our State and local agencies to promote SNAP in our region and here I go!

Here's a SNAP goal about one common statewide nutrition education goal, across FNS program lines: "To identify one common statewide nutrition education goal and to develop a collaborative cross-program plan that FNS Programs work together to develop, implement, and achieve." Before SNAP and before the national conference in 2003, we had a loosely formed NERO Nutrition Committee. Our committee was mostly about sharing information. We weren't engaged in doing a lot of other kinds of activity. But, we saw the initiation of SNAP and some of the FNS corporate priorities on nutrition as an opportunity to strengthen our Nutrition Committee and take more advantage of promoting SNAP.

As we were forming and working with our Nutrition Committee to support SNAP, we identified with two goals of the SNAP process. One of the goals was consistent messages. For us in an FNS regional office, this was an area that we thought we could really improve. One example is that, at the same time that SNAP was coming on the scene, the Food Stamp Nutrition Education Framework was also being introduced. We realized at that time that the Framework also impacted WIC, Child Nutrition Programs, and our other Special Nutrition Programs, and that we needed to have a consistent message. So again, that was something that we bought into right away.

The other goal that we had for SNAP was that we felt that SNAP could help us in the region to maximize our resources. For us, and this I think was also true of our State agencies, when we talked about maximizing resources, everybody was working pretty hard on their daily functions and their daily responsibilities. The way we saw that we might be able to maximize resources was by reducing the duplication because we had a lot of duplication. We were overwhelmed, just as an example, by the nutrition meetings that we needed to attend and sometimes we had too many people attending them, but we didn't necessarily have the right people attending the meetings. Again, the formation of the Nutrition Committee made us consider that, once we got together and put a calendar together, we could reduce the duplication and actually improve our use of resources.

We bought into SNAP and decided that, before we encouraged and sold this to our State agencies, we needed to survey our State agencies and try to identify what they were doing. So, we sent out a survey and asked States for their input on the kinds of collaborations they had and who they were collaborating with.

Remarkably, which was a very good thing for us, most of our States are already involved intensely in different types of collaboration. They didn't always meet the SNAP models and by that I mean they didn't necessarily include all of the FNS programs. They might not have involved, for instance, the Child Nutrition Program or another FNS program, but they really had a lot going on.

Through that survey, we could identify that our States already had a lot of successes. That made us remember not to go out there and tell them that they had to start something brand new and shiny, because they could build on what was already going in their States. That helped us move forward with SNAP in some cases much faster than we were really prepared to do. But also, it gave State agencies credit for the work that they had already been doing.

That survey also looked at some of the setbacks that States had. There's a resource issue, just money. We weren't going out there and offering State agencies a lot of new money. There were communication issues. Some of our State agencies are not in the same city. It wasn't easy for them to add on another conference call or another meeting. So that was something they needed to address and try to work through. We tried to assist them as much as we could. Those were all things that we worked with our States to do.

We had a vision to promote consistent messages and maximize resources to our States. But one of the things that we didn't want to do was to approach our States individually. For instance, we didn't want to have the WIC person out there to meet with one State organization and then have the Child Nutrition people go out separately. We felt like we needed to mirror what we expected State agencies to be producing through their SNAP.

That's one thing we felt was very successful with our State agencies that we would go out there as a group. Sometimes, it wasn't physically visiting them because resources are tight. Sometimes, it was a conference call. But, that also helped us because frequently, for instance, a Child Nutrition Program would identify setbacks or challenges that they had and the person from our office that dealt with Child Nutrition Programs could relate to that and maybe help them address that challenge a little bit more thoroughly than someone who wasn't working in that area.

We feel like what we've done has been very successful. The States in our region have established a SNAP goal. Five of our seven States have active SNAPs and we hope to have all of the SNAPs in our region by the end of this fiscal year.

Putting the Pieces Together With the Illinois Nutrition Council

Penelope G. Roth, MS, RD, WIC Director, Illinois Department of Human Services, Springfield, IL

My message to you today is that, in Illinois, when you think of "SNAP" it's "INC," it's our Interagency Nutrition Council. We did exactly what Candice was describing and that is to build on existing partnerships and resources in our State.

The Interagency Nutrition Council has been in existence in Illinois for over 12 years, and I think longer than that. We had groups meeting together. Extension led our group for a while, and there was legislation in 1994 in our State that wanted to create this Interagency Nutrition Council. It was passed but it had no money and therefore it was not necessarily enforced. But, we felt it was a good idea. We thought that we really shouldn't let money be in the way of going ahead with this Council. We've been in existence, formally, since 1994. We came together out of mutual interest and to share and network. That was primary among the activities that we would do and it remains very important today.

SNAP was a snap in Illinois; it was not hard. In 2003, when we met together here in Washington, it was a little difficult because we had a few different partners together with us at the table to identify our goal, and we came up with a goal related to schools at that time. We went back to our State and started talking more about this and realized we needed a broader goal. We have two goals now that we're working on. As I said, we initially established that school environment goal and then we added on the goal of promoting healthy eating and active lifestyles. That better describes what our activities are about.

Let me tell you a little bit more about our Interagency Nutrition Council. The mission of the council is to promote health and wellness through nutrition education, coordination of services, and access to nutrition programs so that all Illinois residents can achieve food security.

We identified guiding principles and objectives for each year. Our objectives this year are to share information among food assistance programs and to increase access to community nutrition programs. In particular, we're looking at access to fruits and vegetables across the State, providing educational opportunities related to food assistance programs, and encouraging involvement in nutrition programs in community collaborations.

Our Interagency Council representatives include State agencies with food assistance programs. We have Department of Human Services, Department of Public Health, our Department on Aging, our Department of Ag, and University of Illinois Extension. We have our advocacy groups, the Food Bank Association, School Nutrition Association, a hunger coalition. We have other groups--the Dairy Council and Catholic Charities, among others. We are always open to others joining our group. My goal is that this conference will identify other partners to invite to join us.

"SNAPpy programs" is what we are about. What have we done? March National Nutrition Month is our opportunity in Illinois to bring our partners together at the State capital and to showcase our programs. In particular, we've identified the importance of fruits and vegetables. Our partners in Extension have delivered fruit and vegetables to our legislators with special messages on them. We've been able to present awards and identify outstanding programs. It's an opportunity where we catch some attention from a variety of groups to get our messages across. We work together with our partners in the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program so the Department of Human Services has both the WIC, the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition programs. We partner with the Department on Aging, Catholic Charities, and Extension to get the messages through our farmers' market opportunity.

We have food centers with the WIC program, 18 of them across the city of Chicago. In those food centers, we have kitchens, which we need to take advantage of more and more. We do that by partnering with our Extension families and WIC families who offer cooking schools through the summer. We're looking to expand those. "CLOCC," the Consortium to Lower Obesity in the City of Chicago, is another group we partner with that comes to our Interagency Nutrition Council to address our concerns about child overweight and obesity legislation.

As we work together--and it was 1994 when we first came together--we've been becoming a more formalized group. That may be the result of the SNAP, which has led to us being a little bit more documented, having an actual plan, and recognizing the need for some memoranda of understanding among our State agencies.

We've been identified in legislation in the past year to work with an Early Learning Council that exists in our State to address early childhood issues. We've been asked to coordinate with them on nutrition and physical activity issues. That is an area that we're looking forward to. Another area that we've been identified with is a Food Policy Council which was established in Illinois for the first time. A number of our "INC," Interagency Nutrition Council, members will be seated on that council.

The point of all of this is to maximize our resources, to not duplicate what everybody is doing, and to really strengthen our partnerships because we all have the same goals. Being interconnected with everyone else in the State makes our work go better in Illinois.

New York's Approach and Experience - It's a SNAP

Patricia O. Race, MEd, RD, CDN, Director, Nutrition Policy and Health Promotion Unit, Division of Nutrition, New York State Department of Health, Albany, NY

One of the things that's special about New York State is that we have a number of nutrition programs that fall within the Department of Health, Division of Nutrition, where I'm located. My unit is charged with--and has been for the last 10 or 11 years--collaborating the efforts among those programs. We had a head start on this collaboration and partnership thing. But, when the idea of SNAP came forward, we looked to the other partnering State agencies.

To give you a little bit of background, within our Department of Health we have WIC and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program. We also have a program called Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance (HPNAP) which has both State and Federal funding and provides support to the emergency food organizations. This program has a Food Stamp Nutrition Education Project. The other partnering State agencies involved in our SNAP are the Department of Education, which is the Child Nutrition agency; the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, which in New York State oversees the Food Stamp Program; and the Office on Aging, which is Senior Nutrition Programs. So, we had a head start within the Department of Health, but we really had to pull in the other State agencies for the SNAP experience.

Our experience started where everybody else's did, in 2003 at the last FNS conference. At that time, during the networking sessions, the representatives from New York State chose two goals for our State. One was to prevent obesity and overweight, because that was something that we had already been working on quite a bit. The other was to promote fruits and vegetables. That was something where we saw there was going to be great opportunity for collaboration. We don't receive any "5-A-Day" direct funding in New York State, but everybody thought that that was something that we could work on promoting, despite the fact that we don't have a set pot of funds.

We happen to be in the Northeast Region, so we were participants in of one of the meetings that Candace referred to. In the summer of 2004, USDA called us and said we'd like to come and have a joint meeting to talk about SNAP and how to be involved with SNAP. We weren't really sure after the 2003 meeting where to go with it, so we said, great! USDA representatives from a number of the programs participated and we had participation from all of those partnering agencies that I mentioned.

During that meeting, we decided we were going to stick with the two goals. Nobody had thought a whole lot about them. Over the next couple of months, from summer through about December, we worked on a draft plan. The plan went back and forth between the State agencies, comments were solicited, and we came up with what we felt represented some of the things we had started working on collaboratively and other things that we could begin working on.

One of the big areas of collaboration that we already had in place over the past 10 years was "Eat Well, Play Hard (EWPH)." I think Penny mentioned that they had looked at building on pre-existing collaborations and everyone agreed that that was the place to start. In New York State, EWPH is a childhood overweight and obesity and chronic disease intervention. For the past 10 years, we've focused within the Division of Nutrition Programs, on these three messages: increasing developmentally appropriate physical activity; increasing fruits and vegetables; and increasing access to low-fat dairy for those who participate in our programs. These goals were for WIC, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, and Commodity Supplemental Food Program. We looked at what else we could do with these programs and include some of those same messages throughout the other collaborating programs.

More recently, Action for Healthy Kids came about in 2002. As a result, there were some things already going on in New York State between our Education Department and Nutrition, and some of the other organizations that were looking at what could be done in the school environment.

In 2003, New York State was a recipient of one of the CDC grants for the Obesity Prevention Program, We had three big efforts, where different partners were coming together, and we needed a way to pull them all into one. SNAP gave us the opportunity to pull it all together.

The biggest piece of work was in 2003 and 2004, related to the development of a New York State statewide Obesity Prevention Plan. The CDC grant was the impetus for this. Partners participated in a steering committee for the statewide plan, and we held 14 community forums throughout New York State. It wasn't just State partners that got to participate in plan development, it was local partners as well. Local WIC agency staff, Cooperative Extension staff, daycare providers, and schools within those communities helped to shape this particular plan which we are now working under.

I've just picked a few of the highlights. One of the other things that came about around the same time as the development of the SNAP was that the NYS Child and Adult Care Food

Program was awarded a Team Nutrition training grant. We brought together some of the partners that had participated in some of the other activities--State education, our CACFP Program, an organization in New York State called "The After-School Corporation," and our newly formed Obesity and Overweight Prevention Program staff. The group designed the program which will offer training to 12 after-school programs receiving mini-grants The training will happen the last couple of days of September and will focus on USDA's *The and Fruits and Vegetables Galore*, two Team Nutrition curricula. We hope these mini-grants will reap some very innovative efforts within the after-school settings. We hope, as we build on SNAP, to take what we learn and bring it to some of the other partners.

WIC has been a focus of some of our efforts over the last year. The Obesity Prevention Program funded a train-the-trainer for Fit WIC in New York State. Now there are 16 State staff that have been trained as Fit WIC trainers. We're a very large State and we have a very ambitious goal to complete Fit WIC training for every local WIC agency--there's around 100 agencies. So far, 16 local agencies and almost 300 staff have been trained. It's ambitious, but the partnering with some of the other programs has really helped us.

Our "Eat Well, Play Hard" Program has a local component and this is something that has helped us promote the goals in SNAP. We fund 10 projects that cover 14 counties in New York State. The idea behind those projects is to take the coordinating work that's happening at a State level and bring it down to a local level. The communities get funding to facilitate promotion of the core "Eat Well, Play Hard" messages, which are increased fruits and vegetables, physical activity, and low-fat dairy in existing local settings, such as WIC agencies. They also work with schools and with day care providers. Most of the funded programs are county health departments; some of them are subcontracted to Cooperative Extension. There's a very strong linkage there and we're looking at models that we can then transfer to other communities to promote these obesity prevention strategies.

The "SPIN" collaboration came out of New York State Action for Healthy Kids. SPIN is Schools and Professionals in Nutrition: Partnering for Successful, Healthier Students. I just want to say that it was a Team Nutrition session that I went to at the 2003 conference that got us started down this road. I believe that Wisconsin had a program called "Adopt an RD" or "Adopt a Nutritionist," and they had partnered with the Dietetic Association to train nutritionists to go in and work with the schools. Our Action for Healthy Kids Collaborative was looking for something to work with us on, so this came out of that interest. SPIN is a training initiative to increase the resources available to schools and to help them get to those wellness policies that they need to have in place by the end of this year. We partnered with the NYS Dietetic Association and our State Education Department and sent out a training team. We completed 12 trainings statewide from June to May '05.

We've trained almost 700 nutrition professionals; 281 of them agreed to be matched with a school and work with them one-on-one. We just finished the training in May and, so far, we have 12 schools that have requested to be matched with a nutrition professional. We haven't done a lot of the outreach yet to schools. We hope that next year we can report a little more about what's going on with this partnership.

In closing, if you're working on your SNAP and just getting started, obviously it's a big plus to have some collaborations already happening, but it's also a challenge because the partners may not be the same. So, you really have to keep your eye on the prize, keep your eye on the goal. That's what you're all working toward. We, like most other States, have to work across several State agencies. We're lucky enough to have them all at least in the same city--not all in the same building--but at least we're in the same city, so we meet periodically.

It is very challenging to find the time to maintain the partnerships and followup on the accomplishments because everybody's doing their day-to-day work, and you really have to make an effort about once a year. We're looking forward to tomorrow morning's networking breakfast because it will give us the opportunity to take that next step--and sometimes you have to go out of State to find that time.

Building SNAP on a Solid Foundation for Collaboration in Iowa

Brenda L. Dobson, MS, RD, Nutrition Services Coordinator, Iowa Department of Public Health, Des Moines, IA

Building on existing collaborations is a key place to start and gives groups some extra energy in the early months and years of these types of activities. So, why did we pick fruits and vegetables? We had an existing research base in Iowa from a number of focus groups related to parents and their efforts to introduce fruits and vegetables to their young children. Clearly, fruits and vegetables are one of the Team Nutrition messages. We also had just begun a Special Project Grant through the WIC Program focusing on increasing the vegetable intake of young children.

But, probably the biggest reason we chose fruit and vegetables is the "Pick a Better Snack" social marketing campaign that some of you learned about at the 2003 conference. We had already formed some very strong partnerships between key players and proposed members of State SNAP Teams. We decided to build on that collaboration and continue to focus on fruits and vegetables, specifically to formulate additional partnerships to promote fruit and vegetable consumption.

We have several objectives or focus areas, and I will share some information about each of those with you. One of our first areas of focus was to increase partner participation. We have strived to do this by inviting new partners to share their activities related to fruit and vegetable promotion and by sharing updates at our regular meetings. We also have made a strong effort to collaborate with State chronic disease programs, and I'll give you a couple specific examples shortly. We've spent a lot of time in the actual promotion of fruit and vegetable intake and will talk about this particular activity.

There have been a number of Team Nutrition workshops that have reached both schools and the Child and Adult Care Food Program audiences related to and using "Pick a Better Snack" materials. The project CDs, which include all the materials for the campaign and many posters developed specifically for the Child and Adult Care Food Program, are a couple examples of activities that have taken place through those key workshops.

The fruit and vegetable program schools all receive "Pick a Better Snack" posters, banners, and other materials. We have 25 schools funded by USDA, and 28 schools operating under some CDC funding.

The Food Stamp Nutrition Education Project has made fruits and vegetables the primary focus for fiscal year '06. "Pick a Better Snack" lessons are being revised to incorporate the new *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, and will identify more opportunities for incorporating fruit and vegetable lessons into classroom curricula. The "Pick a Better Snack" materials and messages will also be distributed more broadly to food assistance offices than they have been previously.

The "Chef Charles Club" is a nutrition education project for older adults that's made possible by funding from the Iowa Nutrition Network, the Department of Health, and the Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program. It's designed for Congregate Meal participants and includes a monthly newsletter, a Bingo game, and an instructor's guide for demonstrations based on the messages related to fruits and vegetables, physical activity, food safety, food security, and resource management.

We also had the Iowa Medical Society get involved with distribution of "Pick a Better Snack" in the past year and a half. Both the Society and its spouse organization, the Alliance, have distributed materials to district presidents and to limited numbers of provider offices. University Extension has been very involved in promotional activities as well--both through the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) recipes which feature fruits and vegetables in almost all of their recipes, and in their annual calendar distributed to their program participants. They use "Pick a Better Snack" messages wherever possible. Again, "consistent messages" is a theme that you're hearing from all of us this afternoon. The "Growing in the Garden" curriculum has also been revised to include a "Pick a Better Snack" lesson.

The Iowan's Fit for Life Intervention is probably the best example of working with some of our other State programs. That is the name of our CDC Obesity and Overweight Prevention project in Iowa. The intervention project in Iowa will involve "Pick a Better Snack" and ACT in the schools. This is the "Pick a Better Snack" curriculum with some additional activities related to physical activity. Food service training will be provided to those intervention schools as well. "Pick a Better Snack" materials will be used broadly in groceries and businesses in those select communities, and community forums also will be held to help identify environmental changes in those communities that can have an impact on the food choices of children and the community in general. Those are just four of many activities that are built into that intervention project.

"Pick a Better Snack" has a second logo to incorporate the physical activity component that I've mentioned a couple of times. The Department of Education has also been very busy with promotional activities through Team Nutrition grants in particular. You just heard Pat talk about some of the things that have happened in her State related to those grants.

In Iowa, 74 Team Nutrition grants were given to local communities; 45 of the 74 addressed fruits and vegetables. They included schools, Child and Adult Care Food Programs, and summer feeding programs. You can see that the messages are being spread through a number of programs and venues that reach families with children.

School food service training events have also focused on and used the USDA resource, *Fruits and Vegetables Galore*, helping kids eat more fruits and vegetables. This is a very valuable resource to help food service personnel rejuvenate their cafeteria with fruits and vegetables and to promote their intake. This resource has been used in summer workshops for food service staff, and is a regular part of the food service basics course in the new manager's workshop that's sponsored by the Department of Education.

Team Nutrition also funded some PSAs that were produced and aired by Iowa Public Television this past spring. These images from the website show the 1-minute, 12-second PSAs that were called "Supermarket Safari," a safari in the grocery store looking for fruits and vegetables. This PSA was aired 217 times, from April to June, for a total of three and a half hours. It mentions a variety of fruits and vegetables and it's targeted to our youngest consumers, to young children who are watching public TV.

There are a number of links also available on this web page. The IPTV web page can be found at www.iptv.org/kids; it is mentioned at the very end of the PSA. There parents can find links to several books appropriate for young children that talk about fruits and vegetables. They can also find website links to additional activities related to fruits and vegetables. That's been an exciting project under Team Nutrition.

One of the newest nutrition education pieces was developed in collaboration by SNAP team members including the "5-a-Day," "Pick a Better Snack," and the WIC Programs. Just before it went to print, thankfully, the *Dietary Guidelines* were released that change the way we talk about fruits and vegetables to the number of cups per day that different ages of the population should consume. Our newest piece, "Eat colorful fruits & vegetables every day," is used very broadly in the State with a wide number of audiences.

Another area of focus has been to increase the resources on websites. We heard in our opening presentation how important it was for *MyPyramid* to be available on the Internet. We believe that we need to have more information readily available to Iowans and other consumers across the country. So, we have added links related to "Pick a Better Snack" and other nutrition resources to the University Extension website, the WIC website, and the Iowan's "Fit for Life" web page.

We also have produced a couple of new resources. The State Nutrition Network has developed a piece called "Pick a Better Snack the Color Way," another way to get the important message out about variety. This is available on the web and each of the fruits and vegetables listed on that particular page is an active link to "Pick a Better Snack" recipes and information about using and how to select and store those fruits and vegetables. The materials from the WIC special project grant promoting vegetable intake in young children that I mentioned earlier are also available on the Department's web page. One of those lessons revolves around the "Pick a Better Snack" message and materials. Check this web address to find these materials: www.idph.state.ia.us/hpcdp/nutrition_resources.asp.

We are also concerned about food security issues, particularly access of those with limited income to fruits and vegetables. That's an ongoing concern of many. Through the Governor's Food Policy Council, the food security task force hopes to have a brochure template developed that communities can use to list their local food assistance programs and contact information. The Food Policy Council itself is not a member of the SNAP Team, but there is some overlap in membership between some of these entities.

We also have been focusing on increasing intake of locally grown fruits and vegetables--first, for low-income groups through our Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs that I know you're familiar with, both for WIC and for the senior audiences. In Des Moines, there is also a community food security grant known as "Digging Deeper." This grant is a very innovative project and its major goal is to develop sustainable, edible gardens in low-income neighborhoods in Des Moines, including fruit trees because Iowa historically has produced a large amount of fruit. I say historically because the fruit production has not stayed at those levels.

At King Elementary School, there are gardens planted, maintained, and harvested by volunteers and people who live in those communities. One particular garden includes a butterfly garden, a patch of prairie, wildflower garden, a berry patch, vegetable beds, and two orchards. There are a number of these gardens located in the city of Des Moines. This has been a fun project to watch unfold.

Another avenue for increasing intake of locally grown fruits and vegetables is to look at the production--what's available that's locally produced. Rich Pirog, at Iowa State University, who works for the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, has consulted the SNAP Team and ERS in developing an interactive web-based tool that is known as a "produce market potential spreadsheet."

This interactive tool will allow individuals to look at supply and demand by county and at the economic benefit of local production to meet demand. The simple version of the tool will allow the user to examine the difference between the demand and the supply for any of the fresh produce items. There is data in this tool for more than 35 fresh fruits and vegetables that are produced in Iowa. So, the user can examine scenarios as to what they would like to produce and the retail economic impact if those fruits and vegetables were produced and consumed in Iowa. The simple version should be available to the public very soon; they were hoping to have it shortly after Labor Day.

There will be an advanced version eventually that will let you go beyond this level. For example, a nutritionist could use the advanced version to model a scenario showing what the economic impact would be if residents of Iowa were to follow a diet given the current recommendations for fruits and vegetables and we could supply those fruits and vegetables by production in Iowa.

That's just a quick look at some of the activities the Iowa SNAP Team has been involved in, directly and sometimes tangentially in sharing information and resources. The core members of the Iowa SNAP Team include:

- **Child Nutrition**
  - NLSP
  - CACFP
  - SFSP
- **Food Distribution**
  - CSFP
- **TEFAP**
- **Food Assistance**
- **FMNP & SFMNP**
- **WIC.**

Many other organizations and initiatives have also been involved. In fact, we find that our informal conversation and communication is sometimes just as important as the formalized communication when we have our regular meeting.

SNAP Wrap-Up: Vision for the Future

Session 1 Speaker: Jessica Shahin, Associate Deputy Administrator, Food Stamp Program, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Alexandria, VA

Session 2 Speaker: Alberta Frost, Director, Office of Analysis, Nutrition, and Evaluation, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Alexandria, VA

Session 3 Speaker: George A. Braley, Associate Administrator, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Alexandria, VA

This conference focuses on establishing connections--connections between people, programs, science, and the community. It underscores our overall aim to make the nutrition education provided through FNS' nutrition assistance programs more deliberate, collaborative, and integrated. SNAP is one of several activities that FNS has undertaken to achieve this. This will benefit the families we serve by providing them with a coordinated, integrated package of services and messages that span all the programs that a low-income family might access.

Many FNS program participants receive or are eligible to receive benefits from multiple FNS programs. For instance, a mother may participate in WIC, receive food stamps, and have

older children that receive free lunch and breakfast. Ideally, our programs will operate together to form a package of nutrition services for this family. Just as the food benefits come together to meet a family's need for food support, so should the nutrition education provided in each program compliment the skills, knowledge, and behaviors taught in others. Our task is not easy. Today, Americans are flooded with competing messages and environmental settings that promote sedentary activity and high-fat, high-sugar foods. The food industry alone spends billions of dollars each year on food advertising. In contrast, all of FNS' nutrition assistance programs combined receive approximately $600 million for nutrition education.

Nutrition education that is linked across programs maximizes our resources and increases the strength and impact of our messages. A nutrition education initiative targeting preschool children is more likely to reach children, their families, and their community, with sufficient frequency and intensity when it is coordinated and integrated among the WIC, Food Stamp, Child Nutrition, and Commodity Food Programs.

Today, many experts believe that it is important to address not only policy issues involving the individual, family, and community, but also the social and physical environment as well. We acknowledge that our programs have limitations regarding what they can do in the areas of policy and environmental issues. Nonetheless, there is a lot that we can do.

It is clear that no single program has the resources to support the type of ongoing, comprehensive interventions needed to make behavior change a reality. We must engage in effective collaborations at all levels to be successful. Therefore, FNS is committed to furthering the SNAP effort and building stronger linkages between FNS programs to achieve the behavioral outcomes that are needed.

Cross-program collaboration at State and community levels includes working together, especially with other FNS programs, toward a common goal of reinforcing and amplifying each other's efforts. Collaborative projects necessitate commitments of staff support and time, as well as cost sharing among all involved entities. State Nutrition Action Plans offer the framework for this unique opportunity to work together, create synergy, and achieve results.

FNS' commitment to cross-program collaboration and SNAP is evident in our current program policies and standard operating procedures. For instance, current guidance includes encouragement to work with other FNS programs. To ensure common understanding, we have developed and disseminated cross-program policies on physical activity promotion and the use of incentives. In addition, the new Food Stamp Nutrition Education (FSNE) Guiding Principles emphasize the importance of collaboration among stakeholders at the local, State, regional, and national levels. States are asked also to include information on their collaborative efforts in their annual Food Stamp Nutrition Education Plan. We aim to help solidify the existing commitment to collaboration across programs by issuing an overarching policy document for FNS nutrition assistance programs regarding collaboration in 2006.

We are also looking at whether we can maximize our national impact by focusing on a small set of key behavioral outcomes across programs. We will examine whether some dietary behaviors may have greater potential to reduce the risk of diet-related diseases in the FNS target population.

We recognize that we have more work to do in easing program restrictions that impede or appear to impede an integrated approach to nutrition education delivery. This work includes seeking additional funding for cross-program initiatives, finding ways to allow for greater flexibility in program regulations in order to facilitate cross-program interventions, and applying current policy in a uniform way across our programs and in all of our regions.

Since the 2003 FNS Nutrition Conference, many of you have taken those difficult first steps towards strengthening relationships and identifying common goals. We are counting on you to help continue this momentum. Today, you've heard what some States are doing to develop and implement their SNAPs. Through this sharing of experiences, we hope that you have gained some ideas on how to assist and bolster your State's SNAP efforts and renewed your determination to persist and stay on course.

To continue this sharing process, we encourage you to share your achievements via the SNAP website. There are successes and lessons learned that occur throughout the SNAP process. Each step is important. If your State has recently overcome barriers and you are now having your first meetings to discuss SNAP objectives—that is an accomplishment that other States just starting out may learn from.

The FNS Regional Offices are available to work with States in the development of their SNAP. To support State cross-program and SNAP efforts, we will be holding cross-program nutrition education meetings in each FNS Region over the next few years.

When you return to your State, we encourage you to work on your SNAP. Build on the ideas that surface during this conference, continue the dialogue with your State SNAP team, meet regularly, implement activities according to your timeline, and refine objectives and tactics. Continue to update and expand your SNAP by involving new partners that share our goal.

We thank you for all your hard work and dedication since the last conference. Our vision for the future is that cross-program collaboration among our programs will be a standard operating procedure, SNAP will be a routine process, and FNS programs will work in concert to deliver consistent nutrition education messages through all program channels to reach America's children and low-income households and communities.

SNAP is a new process to facilitate collaboration and work toward a shared vision of improved nutrition among children and low-income Americans. Working together, we can achieve this vision and make a difference in your State and across America. Thank you!