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**THE ECONOMICS OF SNAP: UNDERSTANDING SNAP IN OUR COMMUNITIES**

**Panel Moderator: Michelle Book**

October 15, 2018 – 9:55 a.m.

*Introduction*

**Madeline Goebel**

*Director, Iowa Hunger Summit and Community Outreach, World Food Prize Foundation*

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Well, thank you, Lea, and what a wonderful panel on food recovery and food waste.

Now, for our second panel this morning, we'll be focusing on the Economics of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, better known as SNAP. Looking at our communities, we are going to be addressing and looking, along with our wonderful moderator, Michelle Book, who is the CEO of the Food Bank of Iowa. With this panel, we're going to be looking at how our communities are directly affected both by recipients of SNAP benefits but also community members at large.

To give you a little bit of background on the Food Bank of Iowa where Michelle comes from, it's a nonprofit, private organization committed to its mission of providing food to Iowa's children, families and seniors to lead full and active lives. Last year the Food Bank of Iowa distributed over more than 11 million meals. Please welcome to the stage Michelle and our panelists.

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*Panel Members*

**Jeanne Blankenship** *VP, Policy Initiatives and Advocacy, Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics*

**Regenea Hurte** *Executive Director, Iowa Hunger Coalition & Iowa Food Bank Association*

**Cheryl Kennedy** *FNS Acting Regional Administrator, USDA*

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*Panel Moderator*

**Michelle Book**

CEO, Food Bank of Iowa

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Good morning. Ooh, we are live. Yay! Good morning. How many of you were here last year, show of hands. Well, I regret that we won't have the excitement of demonstrators or thus far we haven't had the excitement of demonstrators. But I think we have a very exciting topic to share with you this morning.

So what I'd like to start with is an introduction of our panelists. Then I'll say just a brief, share a brief few minutes about SNAP itself, and then we'll go into a Q&A with the panelists. To my left this morning, we have Cheryl Kennedy. She's the Acting Regional Administrator for USDA Food Nutrition Service, from the Mountain Plains Region, which includes Iowa. Cheryl was named the Acting Regional Administrator

in March of 2018, overseeing 15 Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Programs across this ten-state region. Prior to that, Cheryl served as the Regional Division Director of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP. She began her career with FNS in 1999, with the Regional Food Distribution Program. Since that time Cheryl has worked in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, also known as WIC. And she's been the Director of Public Affairs and Field Operations. Cheryl's competitive spirit as a champion barrel racer is clearly evidenced in her unyielding commitment to those she serves.

To the left of Cheryl we have joining us today, from Washington, DC area Jeanne Blankenship. She's a registered dietitian, nutritionist, and the Vice President of Policy Initiatives and Advocacy for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Jeanne is the visionary for the Academy's advocacy platform which focuses on professional issues for dietitians and nutritional professionals, as well as food nutrition issues for consumers and the community. Her advocacy work includes issues such as coverage and reimbursement for medical nutrition therapy, malnutrition, hunger, and food security, telehealth, and workforce demands. For Jeanne, nutrition is just part of her DNA, as she learned about growing, preserving and food safety at a young age from her grandmother who was a homemaker, economist in Oregon.

Last but certainly not least is Regenea Hurte. Regenea is the Executive Director of the Iowa Food Bank Association, which is made up of the Food Bank of Iowa and the other five food banks which serve the entire 99 counties of Iowa, and the Iowa Hunger Coalition. This advocacy organization is designed to bring together all hunger fighting voices into one very powerful, loud voice. And a year ago today it was announced at this very Summit. I'll put in a shameless pitch for any of you interested in joining that organization, please talk to Regenea after today's panel. Regenea has spent ten years advocating for individuals as an attorney in Virginia. Prior to joining IFBA and IHC, she was the Public Benefits Staff Attorney at Virginia Poverty Law Center and director of Virginia Hunger Solutions in Richmond, Virginia. A strong belief in the rights of all to truly have meaningful equality, justice, dignity and happiness has been evident throughout Regenea's career, and continues to fuel all of her endeavors.

Welcome to our esteemed panelists today.

Not very long ago I visited a mobile pantry, and I met a young lady, a single Mom. Her name was Cindy, and I asked Cindy, "Are you getting what you need at the pantry, and Cindy responded, "Yes." I also asked Cindy, "Do you know about SNAP benefits?" And Cindy exclaimed, "Yes, thank God!" She had recently applied and been awarded SNAP benefits. She went on to say—her elementary school son was with her—that because of SNAP benefits, she was able to buy him new shoes for school this year, which he proudly showed off.

SNAP is the largest program in our domestic hunger safety net. It's administered by the Food and Nutrition Services arm of the USDA and offers nutrition assistance to millions of eligible, low-income individuals and their families, while providing economic benefit to our communities. The Food and Nutrition Service works with state agencies, Department of Human Services here in Iowa, nutrition educators, and retail providers to ensure that those eligible for nutrition assistance can make informed decisions about applying and accessing the benefits. SNAP is the federal name for the program which used to be known as food stamps, because each state has the leeway to name the program whatever they'd like. Here in Iowa SNAP is also known as food assistance.

In order to qualify, an individual must have annual household income below \$19,296—\$19,296. (My starting salary when I graduated from Iowa State University in 1983 was \$19,600.) Or \$39,360 for a family of four. In Iowa, SNAP reaches over 175,000 households, serving over 372 individuals. In a state

where 12% of our population was at or below poverty with children, the children in our state, 15% of our children live at or below poverty. SNAP helps 1 in 9 rural households, 1 in 7 small-town households, 1 in 8 metro households afford healthy nutrition meals that they need.

Last year this panel focused on the myths and the biases surrounding SNAP. This year we'll take a look at how SNAP benefits families, seniors, children, veterans and the communities in which they live. To begin today's discussion, I'd like to invite each panelist to share a brief overview of the role that she plays in this system, and we'll start with you this morning, Cheryl.

Cheryl Great. Thank you so much. It's such a pleasure to be here. My role in SNAP started when I was about 5, and my role at that time was a consumer of the SNAP program. My father was in a very, very debilitating injury at work and was in the hospital for 11 months. So long story short, without the SNAP program, my Mom would not have been able to put food on our table for my brother and I.

So fast forward just a couple of years, just a couple. I was selected to be the Director of the SNAP program for the Food and Nutrition Service. We have, as you had mentioned, we oversee ten states, and in that role I have three primary focuses, if you will. And that is customer service, integrity and self-sufficiency. And in customer service, what we're really trying to do is we are the compliance arm, and there's no question about that. We make sure that the program is administered accurately and with the utmost integrity with in compliance of all the federal regulations. But in doing that, we provide a high level of customer service and technical assistance to make sure that our partnering agencies at the state level are administering that program correctly. We'd much rather work with them to make sure the program is administered correctly than to go out and do a finding, let them spend the time on serving our clients.

Secondly, we have an integrity role, and that is very widespread, everything from the client side, to the retailer side. We want to make sure that the clients are getting the exact benefits that they need, that's both[inaudible] just the right amount, not too much, not too little. So we have a very large integrity component to the SNAP program, making sure that our clients get the benefits that they need, not only in the amounts but on time. And when that's not happening, we work with our stakeholders, and we go through and we actually provide business process re-engineering if needed, to help them streamline their processes if needed so that the benefits can be issued not just in time but on time.

And the third component is self-sufficiency. And when we talk about self-sufficiency from a SNAP perspective, it's not just about getting the job but it's about how we help clients live their daily lives to help them get a good nutritional start, as we know everything from being a young child. If you start with a good nutrition day, you're going to be able to learn better, concentrate better and focus better. And that goes all the way into helping our clients find well-paying, stable employment and helping them get around some of barriers that may provide that.

We also have a component in SNAP, which is the nutrition education component, SNAP-Ed, which I know we're going to hear a lot more about today.

So we have lots of different components around SNAP, and so my role in that is to oversee that our partners are administering those programs so that our clients get the best service that they possibly can at the end of the day.

Michelle Thank you, Cheryl. Jeanne, we'd like to hear from you now.

Jeanne Hard to pass the barrel racing. So I did grow up as a 4-H kid. My mother and my grandmother were 4-H leaders, and so I actually bucked the system a little bit and got to start participating before the minimum age level, which was really great.

When I was about 9 years old, my grandmother, who was previously mentioned, was an extension agent in Linn County, Oregon. And we went all over the state advocating for food safety and preservation. But she had me stand in front of the Linn County Commissioners, because as you know, with those programs the funding comes from a variety of different sources. So very early on in my life I learned to stand up and fight for these types of programs. And as I navigated my way through college, my grandmother was the one that encouraged me when I became interested in nutrition. "Maybe you should go talk to the folks over at EFNEP and see what's going on over there." So she played a central role in my life, and I'm very fortunate now to have gone through lots of years of clinical nutrition and working in a surgical environment, to now coming full circle back to policy and advocacy. And I can say that's really where my heart lies.

As an organization, we're very much committed to food, to agriculture and nutrition, and then to dietetics, and we feel like all of those things are obviously intertwined. When we think about SNAP, it's hard for us as an organization to separate it from SNAP education, because we feel like that education really does provide empowerment and tools for individuals to be able to maximize their resources. We have a very strong advocacy campaign both on the SNAP side of the Farm Bill as well as SNAP education. And we feel like our conversations with policy makers do bring in that education component. You just heard a great panel talk about food waste, and really from a system and retailers, we bring it back down to the consumer level, of how can individuals maximize their home economy and be able to use the food that they have to extend it to work with all the programs and benefits that they might be receiving?

So while we work on the Farm Bill and SNAP and SNAP-Ed, we just as much champion those other food security programs that round out that safety net. So it's not just even food programs, thinking about Medicare and Medicaid as components of that safety and looking at social determinants of health. We spend a lot of time in the regulatory environment trying to help navigate that balance between just enough regulation to make sure that the programs are being run with integrity, that we have the data and the numbers that we need about participation and outcomes. That's a side, I think, of the work that we do that's often overlooked. Everybody knows about legislation and advocacy that way, but the regulatory piece is so important, and making sure that organizations come together and share a voice is one of the things that I think our organization does particularly well.

Michelle Thank you. Regenea.

Regenea Thank you. Good morning. Oh, it's certainly a pleasure to be here. I am proud to represent the Iowa Food Bank Association, which works with pantries and soup kitchens and churches and other nonprofit organizations to provide direct assistance to individuals who are food insecure, whether those are families, whether those are children, whomever that might be. They can depend on going to the food banks, to the pantries, to the organizations that we provide supplies to, to be able to get those things that they do need.

We have food banks throughout the state, and we are certainly very, very pleased to be able to serve those agencies that are serving the folks that are facing food insecurity and hunger. The Iowa Food Bank Association also runs the SNAP outreach plan for the state of Iowa, and that covers all 99 counties; because, as I'm sure we all know, there is not one county in the state of Iowa that does not face hunger. And so certainly we are pleased to be able to reach out and provide information, provide education, provide application assistance to those who are in need of food assistance benefits. And that comes in an on-ground fashion where we attend various community events, and we go to senior centers and we go to churches and we go to community days. And we'll go anywhere, basically, that will have us, to make sure that we are able to provide that assistance to folks who want to apply for food assistance.

And we also have a hotline that allows individuals to call in from the comfort of their home to be able to complete those applications. And just so that you have it, that phone number is 855-944, FOOD, F-O-O-D. That equates to 3663 on your telephone keypad. Individuals can call that number between 8:30 and 4:30, and they will be able to speak with a live operator who will assist them, walk them through the process of submitting that application. And then those applications are in real time submitted to DHS, and DHS takes further action, DHS being the Iowa Department of Human Services. So we are certainly very pleased to offer that program and to work in a direct-access way.

We also work with the advocacy and the legislative part of it, advocating on behalf of those clients who face food insecurity as it relates to the Farm Bill, as well as it relates to the state policies that are regarding food access, making sure that they understand that, you know, many of the things... Like Michelle said, we focused last year on some of the myths and things that still permeate the societal consciousness. We need to make sure that people understand that hunger does not occur in a vacuum. Hunger is not as a result of some deficiency of character. Hunger is a result of circumstances, circumstances that anyone of us in this room could face at any given point in time. And so we make sure that they understand that these are real people.

We know that Iowa has one of the lowest, if not the lowest unemployment rates in the country. But still we have approximately 10% of our population that need to depend on food assistance in order to put complete, nutritious meals on the table. So it's not as easy as saying, "Get a job." That's not the answer. There are other barriers and issues that we have to address in order to be able to come up with a real and legitimate answer to ending hunger. I'm always so proud to say, "We are working to put ourselves out of business," and we are doing a really good job at it.

The Iowa Hunger Coalition is a broad-based advocacy organization, and our focuses are: education, collaboration and advocacy. That's what we do. We make sure that our elected representatives know that hunger is an issue, it impacts not only those folks who are facing hunger, but it impacts our education system, it impacts our medical system, it impacts our healthcare, it impacts our industries. If you're hungry, like we said before, you can't focus, you can't learn, you can't think, you can't work. It impacts all of us. And because it does legitimately impact all of us, it's going to take all of us to come to the table and lend our voices, and come up with a multifaceted, broad-based, true and effective end to hunger.

So I will copy Michelle's pitch. Certainly if any of you want to become members of the Hunger Coalition, we would welcome you, because we know that, as long as we stay in our own siloes, we are never going to come up with a definitive answer, a comprehensive answer.

We have to share all the information that we have and gather information from all of the other entities who are interested—because everyone should be interested in alleviating hunger.

Michelle Thank you, ladies. Well, something Jeanne said took me back to my childhood. I was the child of a generation of victory gardeners and spent most of my summer working in my family's garden. I swear at times my parents procreated to have free labor for the garden, and I complained about sitting under the tree shucking corn or snapping green beans. Now I realize my parents needed to do that to feed a family of six.

So where we used to be a society that gardened and preserved the bounty, a lot of that's been lost. Families, parents are working several jobs to make ends meet, trying to balance kids and family. Jeanne, can you tell us how SNAP helps families receive the nutrition they need in today's world?

Jeanne Sure. So I think it's a great point that our ability to prepare foods has changed and is very individual to the family itself. It's erroneous to think that individuals in this certain economic condition or other environmental conditions that they're in have any more or less time than we do as busy women to care for their families and prepare meals. There's been a lot of advances in technology and the types of food products that are available. And we've seen this resurgence at the same time of individuals having access to community-based gardens and other programs and services.

I like to think of SNAP, and when you think about putting together a puzzle, most of us were taught that you start with the frame. You start putting the borders together. You get the corners, and you build on that. And once you have that framework, then you can build on the inside of the puzzle. And SNAP is a lot like that. It's the framework by which the other food access programs can build upon for a very specific group of individuals. Certainly those that qualify for other feeding assistance programs that have higher income maximums may not need that same framework. But for this group of folks, it really puts together the opportunity for them to have a balanced diet, and to receive the macronutrients that they need in appropriate ratios.

One of the speakers on the last panel mentioned that some of the donations that they get are very much on the breads and pastries and carbohydrates. And the food bank system over the last 20 years has really done a fantastic job at looking at food quality and the types of foods that are distributed through their program being balanced in their approach. You may not have that same level of... I hate to use the word "control," but the same level of adherence to nutrition in some of the community-based programs, faith-based programs, and others that are offering food, or simply individuals sharing food. It might be that, oh, you've got extra rice, or you have extra corn, those kinds of things. But we know that people need protein, and those tend to be expensive sources of nutrition and probably the most difficult for us in terms of putting that puzzle together.

So for us, having that opportunity through SNAP to say these are the important things that you can put together and purchase through your SNAP benefit, and then to build upon that with the other sources that you might be receiving in terms of food access. So again, it provides that. And through SNAP education and EFNEP programs, there still is that opportunity to help empower families to prepare foods to understand that balance and not have to face that decision if they're a senior, whether or not they're going to treat an illness,

whether they're going to buy diabetes medications and supplies or eat. That treat or eat concept is really important.

I was mentioning earlier in a conversation we had about the older Americans Act \_\_\_ programs and congregate meal dining, home-delivered meals. Those are really great programs, but they provide one third, of what a senior might need for the day. So programs like SNAP are going to allow those seniors to really go a little bit further and to gain more nutrition over the course of the day, and not try to take half of a meal from lunch and make it hold over until dinner. Fruit and vegetable programs are great—we advocate for those all the time—but your whole diet can't be fruits and vegetables and grains, unless you're being very smart about your proteins and plant-based proteins.

But my point is that it takes that entire puzzle. It takes all of those pieces being put together for adequate nutrition, and SNAP gives us the opportunity and the base to be able to do that.

Michelle Regenea, I know that making certain children have the nutrition they need to learn and grow is a particular passion of yours. When you think about, those of you have children, you think about an average elementary class size around 20, that 3 of our child's classmates suffer from food insecurity. That's a frightening thing to me. Can you tell us, Regenea, more about the link between food assistance, also known as SNAP, and educational outcomes in our classrooms?

Regenea Absolutely. Nutrition has long been established as a critical determinant in academic achievement and outcomes and learning. Forty-three percent of those currently receiving food assistance here in Iowa are children—43%; 40.5% of our children here in Iowa, qualify for free and/or reduced lunch, which means they're between 160 and 185% of the federal poverty level. That is a significant thing. And that is something that certainly does, have significant impacts on their ability to learn and to retain information. Studies have long shown, that children who face food insecurity are more likely to have to repeat grades, that their testing scores can be anywhere between 1 and 3½ points lower, than those who do not face food insecurity. That if children who had been on food assistance discontinue that at any point between kindergarten and third grade, it impacts not only their math scores but their reading scores. And the studies also confirm the flip side, that children who have consistent access to food assistance, and to those types of nutritious foods and the proteins that are going to be most important, do better, performance-wise. Reading and math scores go up approximately 3 percentage points in those children who have consistent access to food versus those who are food insecure, continue to be food insecure.

Testing with the intelligence scales and the wide-range achievement scales show that both younger kids and teens, who are food insecure, score much lower than our counterparts. So it's not simply the elementary school children, it's not just the toddlers, but this is going into our teen years. And the studies have also demonstrated that that changes if there is consistent access to food. It has also demonstrated that where the benefit levels are higher, those performance outcomes increase even more. That, in conjunction with the studies that show that generally the more benefits that people have or the more funds people have with which to purchase food, they then tend to go to those more healthier options, the more protein options, the fresher fruits and the vegetables. And so not only is this a question of having the access, but at what level do we have the access? Because increasing those levels increases those performance outcomes.

And so certainly it is critical, not only to those children, because of course those children what, grow up. And so if you've had a better foundation and you're able to perform at a higher level as a child, as a younger child, then certainly that leads to better and higher academic performances and academic attainment, as you continue to go forward. If you are performing better, then you're able to perhaps get into a better school. If you're into a better school and you can still continue to perform better, then perhaps that opens doors to have better jobs and more access. If you're having more access and more jobs, then you can truly be lifting people out of poverty.

And so it is critical that we understand that, not having that access is impacting our skills gaps; it's impacting the ability to be able to do the things that we need to do. And we all know, we have that experience. If you don't have your morning coffee, if you don't have your morning bagel, if you don't have your morning egg, you just can't quite get to that level, that you need to get to to be the most productive and the most energetic and just be the best that you can be.

And so certainly if, as adults who are much more able to control and contain our actions, what can we expect of our children if they have to focus on the fact that they are hungry? They can't do what they need to do. And so that connection is absolutely critical, and we need to continue to work to ensure that people know that hunger is a foundation. It's a building block for everything else. And so that connection is certainly very, very critical, and we need to make sure that our legislators, our electeds, our anyone who's involved is realizing the importance of not being hungry in that academic achievement and attainment.

Michelle Thank you. Cheryl, beyond the immediate help that SNAP provides to families, when a senior citizen or a single Mom uses that EBT card at a convenience store or a grocery store, how did those benefits multiply through that community and that local economy?

Cheryl I think that's a great question. I do like to look at SNAP as a framework. I think SNAP also in regards to impacts it has on the economy, is like when you throw a stone into the middle of a pond and those ripples just keep going out. And I like to think about the economic impacts in that way.

And so if we were to go on a journey with those ripples, let's start with the client first. So I go in, and I spend my benefit at the grocery store on food. What that's done for me is that's allowed me to use my other funding resources, because I have a pretty tight budget, I can now use the other funds that I have to purchase things like childcare, medicine, new tennis shoes for school. Maybe it's a new shirt that I need to do to participate in a club. It helps me stretch my dollars, because I now have food dollars in there.

So then I spend that at a grocery store. So at the grocery store those benefits are spent at farmers' markets, grocery stores, convenience stores, retailers of all sizes. And that then impacts into the economy. And what we can say is that for every dollar of benefit that is spent, it really injects about \$1.79. So a nicer way to say that or a more impactful way is—for every \$5 that I spend as a client, I am providing \$9 of money into the economy through being able to purchase other things, through helping the retailers participate in the whole rest of the food system. It goes down into the trucking industry, into the farming industry.

And then let's also take it into the farming industry, as you had mentioned earlier. We have a program here in Iowa, and several states as well, Double-up Food Bucks. And what that does



is I can spend up to \$10 of my benefit money—it's matched with \$10. So now I'm able to spend \$20 into the economy and helping the farmers grow. So it's threefold. It helps me as the client stretch my dollars. It helps retailers and farmers improve and increase their revenue streams, which then increases the economic impacts downline. And it also keeps those dollars into the Iowa economy, both the food economy and the outside domestic economy.

From a national perspective, the impacts of SNAP are... We injected approximately \$63 billion into the economy. So you multiply that out, and the impact on jobs is about, for every \$1 billion spent into the economy, on the low side it creates about 9,000 jobs—that's on the low side. So if you multiple that out by \$63 billion dollars that is put into the economy, that's over a half a million jobs that SNAP creates just by its processes Just by spending that EBT, putting that EBT card at the retailers and then how it spreads out. So it's a great ripple effect on several different levels.

Michelle Thank you.

Jeanne Can I add to that also? Also, I think one of the economic impacts that oftentimes we don't talk enough about, and we probably need more research and studies, but just looking at the health and wellness component and the impact on healthcare costs and chronic disease. Because as we provide these foods and services and access to food for individuals, then it is directly linked to whether or not they're going to need certain types of healthcare or be more susceptible for certain chronic diseases. And that aspect of it seems to often be left out of economic conversations. It's something that we talk to policy makers about a lot, because going back to, it's not just about providing foods that eventually will lead individuals to have more chronic disease by the very nature of the foods that you're providing. It's about providing them access to foods that allow them to live a healthy life so that they can avoid those chronic diseases.

And I think the other economic side of it, is we talk a lot about the training component in the Farm Bill and looking at employment. Certainly just with children in schools being more attentive and having better academic outcomes, if you're an individual that's seeking employment and you're a SNAP beneficiary, then that same food is going to allow you to be more productive in the workplace as an adult. And as we think about what it takes to be successful in employment, that's a huge piece of it. And so the benefits are not just in childhood. They're across the spectrum. And I do think that the economic piece of it is a really important conversation, looking at it both locally, nationally and tying it back to healthcare costs. Because that healthcare cost for a local entity or a state is a major consideration of their budget. So anytime that we can link those two programs and say—if they participate and receive this information, receive food access, that there's going to be a reduced healthcare cost—that's beneficial for the states.

Michelle Thank you. Jeanne, that leads me right into another question. You represent and work with over a hundred thousand nutrition and dietetic professionals across the United States. How do they use SNAP as a tool in their nutrition tool chest?

Jeanne Sure, so I think with over a hundred thousand professionals, we have people working in a variety of different settings. Certainly here in Iowa with Doris Montgomery, you guys have a really great network that's been established and is a model for other states. But we're very proud to see our members serve in those types of positions, either through EFNEP, SNAP education, or other safety net program. Some of the biggest advocates for SNAP and

SNAP-Ed are actually those members in our organization that work in child nutrition programs, because they see firsthand that, if you don't just provide one meal a day or just, you know, \$135 a month of food, but if you really give children access to breakfast, lunch, after-school programs, fruit and vegetables, if you do backpack programs on the weekend, they see the comprehensive need for the family needs to be met. For the entire component of their food to be systematic, if you will. And so they are huge advocates for SNAP and build upon that.

And of course our dietitians that work in public health settings recognize the importance. It's one of the first things we do when we do a nutrition assessment is to look at food stability, and to look at economic stability with regards to the social determinants of health. And making sure that, as we provide counseling and education to that individual, that we're looking for opportunities to give them additional food, to do better with the food that they do have, to understand purchasing and storage. So as an organization, we try to do a lot on the advocacy side, as I mentioned earlier.

But we also then want to provide professional development and training for our entire membership. And so you'll see at our meetings that we're constantly providing education and pulling in our experts that work in these programs to help train other dietitians to be ready to the call to action. Certainly you see them, dietitians working in food banks, we're proud of the work that they've done there in terms of helping to provide healthier options and putting together kind of that broader nutrition's perspective from the packages that are being distributed.

Michelle Thank you. Now, Cheryl, you just talked about using that EBT card at a retailer. And so often we think of SNAP benefits as that EBT card, yet I know that EBT or excuse me, I know that SNAP is much more than the EBT card and that there's very important education and training program associated with SNAP. Can you tell us more about that and how Iowans could access that program?

Cheryl Sure, so we call it through SNAP Employment and Training Program. And first, like you said, it is more—the SNAP program has a lot of components, so it's not just about the food. But I want to be clear when we talk about the Employment and Training component of it, we know and have mentioned earlier that a lot of the SNAP clients are children, elderly and the disabled. And for those, we for sure, absolutely we want to make sure that they get the food assistance that they need.

So when we're talking about employment and training and work requirements in the SNAP program, we're really focused on the able-bodied adults who are not employed at the time or are underemployed. So what FNS does is we take on a funding role for employment and training programs. And so this is how it works.

We work with employment agencies, Workforce Development partners, and actual employer organizations as well. And we work with the state agency, in this case the Department of Human Services, and they partner and contract with employment partners who provide different kinds of employment and training components. And that can be anything from job search, job readiness, actual specific employment skills, or short-time trade skills.

Those partners then provide that training and those services to our clients using non-federal funds. Then we pay the state 50% of what those people who are contracting those services

for. So if I'm a contractor and I'm providing training, I can submit a claim to the state to get reimbursed for 50% of that training. So for me, as a training provider, I can then not only can I help, say, 10 people for easy math, I can now help 20 people. So I've been able to expand my reach that way.

We also know that not all but some of our SNAP clients are hard to place. They've had some challenges, whether that be underskilled, disabilities, homelessness, drug abuse, substance abuse, separation. So a lot of those kinds of things are hard to get employment sometimes. And so the state will oftentimes contract with community-based organizations who actually provide some of those services. So some of those services will help people get employment stable, by teaching them skills like—what happens when my car breaks down and I still have to get to work? What's your plan? So they will help those clients already have a plan for those. Or what happens when I wake up and my child has a stomach ache and I can't get them to school. Who's your backup? So they help them work through those things so that they are employable when they go to get those jobs. And those kinds of things and those training programs and job search training skills, interviewing skills, how to dress best skills. All of those can be provided through these programs.

In Iowa here, 65 of 99 counties through the Iowa Department of Human Services are running employment and training programs. In Iowa that includes 9 community colleges and the Iowa Workforce Development service. And the community colleges are providing over 60 different certificate programs, and that's including lab support help, well-being, bookkeeping, nursing, CNA assistance. All of this is very challenging work, but it's targeted to be short-term, skill-building so that people can get employed and to help bring themselves and their families out of poverty and put them on the road to self-sufficiency.

So ENT, although it is working with a lot of different pieces of the work spectrum when you think about getting them employment-ready, employment-sustainable, it really does work. And there has been so many great success stories, but one in particular that is close to home here is—There was a woman who, she went to the Cedar Valley Iowa Works Program, and she had been unemployed for seven years, sometimes working on short-term food service minimum wage jobs. And she heard about the Employment Training Program and said, “Yes, I qualify and I want to be a part of that.” So she was able to go through the Hawkeye Community College and get her certificate as a CNA. She passed and she was top of her class. She passed the state boards, and she very quickly was hired by a healthcare provider starting at \$12.60 an hour. And that was just the beginning for her. And so with that she has decided to continue to pursue her healthcare career and is advancing. And her commentary is, “I could not have done this without the help of the SNAP Employment Training Program, because not only did you give me the confidence and the hope that I could do it, but you provided transportation, scrubs, fees for testing so that she could make the test.” So it provides all those things to help her get on her feet, so she was a great success story right here out of Iowa and the great program that they run.

Michelle Thank you. Well, continuing on that theme, Regenea is our resident Iowan on the panel. We've talked a lot this morning about how SNAP benefits at a high level, how SNAP benefits our state. Can you talk just a little bit in the few minutes we have left of how you've witnessed SNAP benefiting Iowans and Iowa communities.

Regenea Absolutely. I will start with the retailer portion of it. As of 2017, which is the latest data available, there were 2,944 SNAP retailers here in the state of Iowa. They redeemed over

\$485 million dollars of SNAP benefits, almost a half a billion dollars, that came here to Iowa specifically as a result of the food assistance program. And so that is critical, especially when we have many of the SNAP retailers who are in rural areas who may be one of the only retailers in those particular areas. And so food assistance clearly provides a huge benefit beyond the individual who is receiving those benefits.

Much like you just said, I met a young lady at the State Fair this past year, and this story has an up and a down. But the up portion of it is that she was able to get food assistance benefits which freed up some of her income. She was able to get more consistent transportation, which allowed her to be able to work more hours at her job, which then allowed her to show how well she could perform on her job, which then turned into a full-time job, which then turned into being able to get academic assistance, which then turned into being able to gain more skills with the education, which then turned into being able to find a better job, which then turned into her being able to be self-sufficient. And now she understands that process and that cycle, and she now volunteers at her church when there are food distributions, to be able to help other folks on that same road to self-sufficiency.

And so it is just an amazing state builder, because when you have that security in knowing that you do have that food, the family is stronger. When the family is stronger, the community is stronger. When the community is stronger, then the state is stronger. And so certainly the impact of food assistance goes well beyond the individual, and it impacts all of us here in the state.

Michelle Wow. I learned a lot today. I don't know about all of you. We have just almost less than a minute left. If each of you could just a brief thought, what last few words would you leave with us, this group?

Cheryl I would just say that it takes all of us working together to eliminate hunger, and all of us have an impact on it.

Michelle Jeanne.

Jeanne I would just say to extend on that, we all have a voice, and it's very important that we exercise that voice, that we use opportunities with local, state and federal policy makers to talk about this issue, to talk about the solutions. I'm glad you talked about myths last year, because I think having those discussions about a lot of myths that are out there regarding the SNAP program, what it is and what it is not, are conversations that you all could have and would be very impactful, and make a difference in this space.

Regenea And just to piggyback off of that, the down part of that story was that young lady did want to tell me her name, because she was ashamed that she had even had to have benefits. So it is critical that we raise our voices and make it clear that these folks who are on food assistance are not bad people. They don't need suspicion. They need support, and that's something that we can all do.

Michelle Well, I thank you this morning for your attention, and I thank the panelists for this great information. And I know you're going to have an exciting remainder of your day. Thank you for having us here today.

## **Ambassador Quinn**

So, Michelle, thank you so much, all the panel. Thank you for your wonderful discussion. And the discussion of SNAP doesn't end here. It's going to continue at lunch. We have a special SNAP lunch for everyone. You're going to be very surprised, I think, and delighted and find it intriguing and interesting.