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Georgia's Food Stamp Program: Feeding Georgians and Feeding the Economy

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Robert Z. Welsh

rwelsh@gbpi.org

Executive Summary

Congress will soon begin working on the Farm Bill of 2007, which will include renewal of the federal Food Stamp Program. The nation's largest and most comprehensive nutrition program, the Food Stamp Program helps low-income people purchase a nutritionally adequate diet. Nationally, more than 25 million people use food stamps to purchase food from local retailers. In Georgia the Food Stamp Program helps over 921,000 residents buy food and meet their nutritional needs each month.

Food stamps are essential to helping Georgia's working-poor families make ends meet. When combined with the federal Earned Income Tax Credit, food stamps enable a family supported by a minimum-wage, full-time worker to approach the poverty line. Food stamp benefits, which are fully funded by the federal government, also boost the local economy: nationally, the \$28.6 billion of federal food benefits that were spent in local stores and farmers' markets in fiscal year 2005 generated an estimated \$52.6 billion in economic activity and created an estimated 173,000 farm jobs.

Along with other federal nutrition programs, the Food Stamp Program has made severe hunger rare in the United States. Moreover, numerous studies have shown that nutrition assistance programs improve birth outcomes and increase children's intake of key nutrients. Yet food insecurity — the lack of adequate nutrition for an active, healthy life — remains a problem, both nationally and in Georgia. Many eligible people who need help buying food are not receiving food stamps. In Georgia, only 65 percent of eligible people participate in the program. Increasing Food Stamp Program participation by just five percentage points would generate an estimated \$72.5 million of economic activity in Georgia, supporting local farmers and retailers and helping maintain a healthy workforce.

The Food Stamp Program is targeted to those in greatest need and is able to respond quickly to changed conditions, such as economic downturns or natural disasters. This was recently demonstrated in its quick response to Hurricane Katrina. Without the need for any act of Congress, the program distributed over \$500 million in food assistance to more than 1.2 million Katrina survivors in the weeks following the disaster. Most of these households were not receiving food stamps before the disaster but found themselves suddenly in need of short-term assistance. The USDA issued another \$392 million in emergency food stamps to an additional 1 million survivors in response to Hurricanes Rita and Wilma in 2005.

The Food Stamp Program also is extremely accurate. Food stamp coupons have been replaced by an electronic debit card that can only be used to buy food, a move that has helped reduce fraud as well as the stigma associated with receiving food stamp benefits. The program has a stringent quality control system that in recent years has achieved record-high rates of accuracy in issuing benefits.

Highlights of the Food Stamp Program include:

- On average over 921,000 Georgians used food stamps every month to buy food in 2005. That amounts to 10 percent of the people in Georgia.
- Georgia food stamp households receive, on average, \$1.05 per person per meal in food stamp benefits. This modest amount is crucial to financially pressed families.
- The Food Stamp Program pumped \$1.047 billion into the Georgia economy in 2005, benefiting farmers, grocers, and small businesses throughout the state.
- During the recent recession and subsequent weak recovery, Georgia's Food Stamp Program responded to the increased needs. In 2000, an average of 559,000 Georgians received food stamps each month. That number rose steadily to 921,000 in 2005, an increase of 64.7 percent.
- Using the flexibility provided in the Food Stamp Act, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) was able to quickly issue \$500 million in disaster food stamps to 1.2 million survivors of Hurricane Katrina. Over 19,400 Georgia households received \$2.9 million in food stamp benefits due to Hurricane Katrina.

- About 38 million Americans, including nearly one in five American children, have difficulty affording food. An estimated 408,000 households in Georgia live with hunger or the threat of hunger, according to the USDA. That amounts to 12.3 percent of all households in Georgia and includes low-income working families and senior citizens living on fixed incomes.
- Nationally, only 60 percent of those eligible for food stamps receive them. In Georgia, the participation rate is estimated to be 65 percent.

By increasing the share of eligible households that participate in the Food Stamp Program by five percentage points, Georgia would provide food stamps to an additional 57,000 low-income Georgians and bring \$39.4 million into our local economy. This would result in a total of \$72.5 million in new economic activity in Georgia. To that end Georgia has acted proactively and eliminated the federal vehicle asset test, received the able bodied adults without children waiver, and implemented the transitional food stamp benefit.

Food Stamp Program In Georgia

Background

For a growing number of low-wage workers a job no longer guarantees that they will be able to afford life's basic necessities. The Food Stamp Program makes it possible for such workers to feed their families adequately.

The Food Stamp Program, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), increases the amount that low-income households spend on food. Studies have consistently found that participation in the Food Stamp Program significantly increases household food expenditures and thus the nutrients available to low-income households.

The Food Stamp Program serves a wide range of low-income people, including families with children, elderly people, and people with disabilities. About 78 percent of food stamp recipients live in households with children. Almost one in five food stamp households contains an elderly person, and more than one in five includes a non-elderly disabled person.¹

The food stamp benefit amount is modest, averaging about \$1.05 per person per meal in Georgia.² But for families receiving food stamps, this additional money for their food budget is critical, since 90 percent of food stamp households have incomes below the poverty line.³ Almost 40 percent⁴ of food stamp households have incomes below half of the poverty line, which means an annual income of less than \$8,300 for a family of three.⁵

The food stamp benefit formula targets assistance to those with the greatest need. Many factors affect a household's eligibility for food stamps, including income, expenses, and assets.⁶ Households with gross incomes up to 130 percent of the federal poverty line, or \$21,580 for a family of three are eligible for food stamps.⁷

As individuals move closer to 130 percent of poverty, they qualify for lower benefits. Therefore, very poor households receive more food stamps than households closer to the poverty line, significantly increasing their food purchasing power.

Overview of the Food Stamp Program

Food Stamps Are Essential for Low-Wage Workers

On average over 921,000 Georgians used food stamps every month to buy food in 2005. That amounts to 10 percent of the people in Georgia.⁸ In 2000, an average of 559,000 Georgians received food stamps each month which represents an increase of 64.7 percent.⁹ Leaders from across the political spectrum agree that a family supported by a full-time, year-round worker should not be poor and should not have to raise children in poverty. Yet many low-

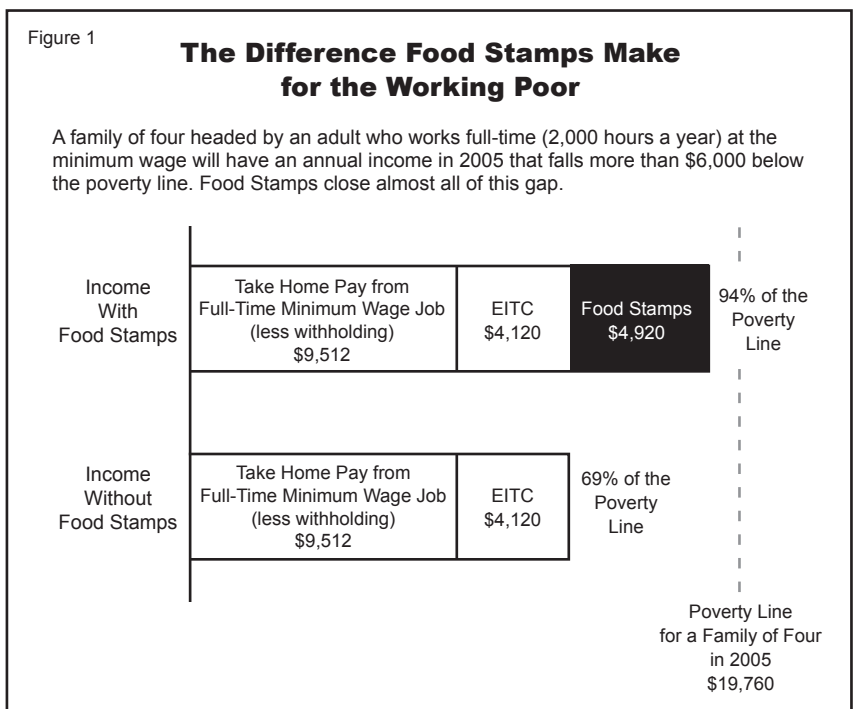
The Food Stamp Program Has Made Severe Hunger Rare in America

In the late 1960s, a team of doctors documented serious hunger and malnutrition in the South, Appalachia, and other poor areas. The findings of this study, as well as other studies conducted at that time, formed the basis for the 1968 CBS television documentary "Hunger in America." The documentary showed American children suffering from diseases related to severe malnutrition that usually are thought of as occurring only in third-world countries.

After food stamps and other nutrition assistance programs were made available nationwide, a similar team of physicians returned to very poor areas of the United States and found marked reductions in malnutrition and related problems. Summarizing this and other research, Rebecca Blank, a noted economist and dean of the Ford School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan, observed that "evidence of severe malnutrition-related health problems has almost disappeared in this country. The primary reason is food stamps."

Rebecca Blank, *It Takes a Nation* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1997); Nick Kotz, *Hunger in America: The Federal Response* (New York: Field Foundation, 1979).

wage workers cannot earn enough to keep their families out of poverty. A full-time, minimum-wage worker earns only about \$10,700 per year in gross pay — almost \$6,000 less than the poverty line for a household of three and almost \$10,000 less than the poverty line for a family of four.¹⁰ Even if one includes the Earned Income Tax Credit and does not subtract any work expenses except payroll taxes, a family of four headed by a full-time, minimum-wage worker will fall far below the poverty line without food stamps. As Figure 1 shows, food stamps make it possible for this family to approach the poverty line.¹¹ In addition, food stamps help former welfare recipients move toward self-sufficiency by helping ensure that they are financially better off when they are working than when they were on welfare. The number of working food stamp households with children is on the rise and exceeds the number that receives TANF-funded cash assistance.¹² Under the food stamp benefit formula, benefits decrease only by about 30 cents for every additional dollar of earnings. This means that food stamp families have a strong incentive to work longer hours or to search for better-paying employment because they will be better off.



Studies show that many families leaving cash assistance for employment work close to full time at very low wages. A typical such family, working 35 hours per week at \$6.50 per hour, is eligible for about \$230 a month in food stamps for a family of three. This amount can make the difference between remaining independent and returning to welfare.

Good nutrition is also vital to maintaining a healthy workforce. Research shows that low-income households participating in the Food Stamp Program have greater access to healthier food that include proteins, and a broad array of essential vitamins and minerals than other households that are eligible for food stamps but do not receive them. In addition, employees whose nutrition needs are met may be healthier and thus may take fewer sick days.¹³

Many working families turn to food stamps to make the transition to self-sufficiency, helping them keep their families healthy and fed for a temporary period. Half of those who enter the Food Stamp Program leave it within nine months. While community volunteer organizations also help to ease hunger through donations and food banks, their work is intended only for emergencies and can only go so far. Food stamps are the essential bridge between welfare dependence and self-sufficiency.

Food Stamps Have Nearly Eliminated Severe Hunger. But Food Insecurity Remains

In the late 1960s, the Field Foundation and television documentaries exposed the existence within parts of the United States of the kind of severe malnutrition that we usually think of as occurring only in third-world countries. Since food stamps and other nutrition assistance programs have become available nationwide, severe hunger and related diseases and deaths have become a rarity.

Yet food insecurity remains a serious problem, and in fact has grown in recent years. The Census Bureau administers a national survey on food security, defined as “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.”¹⁴ According to the most recent survey, about 38 million Americans, or 11.9 percent of all households, lived in households that were “food insecure” in 2004.¹⁵

“Hunger in America has been reduced. Congressionally mandated food assistance programs appear to have brought about this improvement. One reason we have made such progress can be attributed to the strong bipartisan support behind the goal of eradicating hunger.”

— Senator Robert Dole (R-KS) 4/30/79

Nearly one in five American children lived in food-insecure households. The number of individuals facing food insecurity increased by almost 2 million between 2003 and 2004 and has increased by more than 6 million people since 1999.

Georgians are not exempt from this condition. The most recent Census Bureau data shows that an estimated 408,729 households in Georgia live with hunger or the threat of hunger.¹⁶ That amounts to 12.3 percent of all households in Georgia and includes senior citizens living on fixed incomes and low-income working families struggling to make ends meet. These vulnerable Georgians find that their wages or Social Security are not enough to cover rent, utilities, medicine, and other basics, and still buy food for their family.

A recent pediatricians' report documented that infants and toddlers in families whose food stamp benefits have been reduced or terminated are more than twice as likely to experience food insecurity as comparable children whose food stamp benefits have been maintained. The report went on to warn that food insecurity contributes to young children's poor health: "even mild to moderate under-nutrition in young children is linked to problems that last throughout the lifespan."¹⁷ Food Stamps "help to protect young children from the harmful health effects of food insecurity," the report stated.¹⁸ About 80 percent of food stamp benefits go to households with children. Most of the rest go to households containing elderly people or people with disabilities.¹⁹

Many Needy People Do Not Receive Food Stamps

In 2004, the most recent year for which national data are available, only 60 percent of people eligible for food stamps received them.²⁰ Participation rates are particularly low among eligible working households (47 percent) and seniors (28 percent).

In Georgia, an estimated 65 percent of those eligible for food stamps participated in fiscal year 2003, the most recent year for which state-level data are available.²¹ Among eligible low wage workers, participation is even lower. Only 51 percent of eligible low wage workers participate.²² Almost 90 percent of food stamp households have income under the poverty level. The rest have income slightly above the poverty level, but their basic expenses are high enough to make them eligible for a small food stamp benefit.²³

There are numerous reasons why eligible people do not receive food stamps. Many people do not participate in the Food Stamp Program because they do not realize they are eligible. In addition, working people may not be able to get time off from work to apply, and people in rural areas may have transportation barriers. Some people do not want to accept government assistance. Immigrants may not realize that their U.S. citizen children are eligible for food stamps, or may have language barriers that prevent them from learning about the program. Seniors may not apply for benefits because they think someone else needs the help more.

Yet if these individuals rely instead on local emergency food providers when their money runs out and they cannot afford food, this adds to the already heavy demand those providers now face. A recent study by America's Second Harvest, the Nation's food bank network, found that emergency food providers helped about 4.5 million people each week in 2005. One-third of the food pantries were forced to turn people away, frequently because the pantry did not have enough food or because people were requesting help too often.²⁴ Any future restrictions on food stamp eligibility or benefits would likely further overwhelm providers' ability to feed all those who turn to them for help.

Despite the need to improve access to the Food Stamp Program as indicated above, the number of food stamp participants in Georgia has grown substantially over the past few years. According to the United States Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service, the average number of monthly participants in the food stamp program increased 47 percent between 2002 and 2006.²⁵

Georgia policy makers have reduced some barriers to food stamp program enrollment in an effort to increase participation. For example:

- Georgia has eliminated the vehicle asset test. This test previously counted any value of a vehicle over \$4,650 toward an assistance unit's resource limit. By eliminating this test Georgia joins more than half of all other states that have relaxed or eliminated the federal vehicle asset test altogether. It is estimated that eliminating the vehicle asset test will result in an additional 125,000 to 130,000 persons becoming eligible for the food stamp program. This could generate \$147-\$156 million in additional economic activity.²⁶
- Georgia has received the able bodied adults without dependents waiver. This waiver applies to areas of the state with high unemployment rates. This waiver allows eligible able bodied adults without dependents to receive food stamp benefits without those benefits being limited to three months within a 36 month period. Under this waiver, recipients are also exempt from mandatory employment and training activities. Receiving this waiver gives Georgia greater flexibility when offering benefits to harder to serve populations.
- Georgia has instituted a transitional food stamp benefit which is only made available to former TANF (cash assistance) recipients that have been designated ineligible due to changes related to an increase in earned income. A TANF household with earnings whose cash assistance is terminated because their income exceeds the TANF income limit, may be eligible for up to five months of Transitional Food Stamps if the assistance unit's currently certified food stamp case closes when the TANF case closes.
- Georgia was also awarded a \$1 million grant in 2006 from the United States Department of Agriculture to develop a web based food stamp application. The new technology may process applications, allow changes to be made and may eventually serve as an application enterprise for other programs such as Medicaid and TANF. Roll out for the initial online food stamp application is scheduled for the second quarter of 2007.
- Georgia implemented a direct certification system which allows children in households receiving food stamp benefits, Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservation (FDPIR) benefits, or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance to bypass the standard application and be "directly certified" for free school meals. Georgia uses a State-level computer matching system. State Food Authorities (SFAs) have query access to current FS/TANF data and Medicaid data for direct verification. Student data are matched by social security number, name, and date-of-birth.

The Food Stamp Program Is Efficient

More than 98 percent of food stamp benefits go to eligible households. The Food Stamp Program's error rate, or the sum of overpayments and underpayments to recipients, is at an all-time low, having fallen for six consecutive years. In 2003, only 4.5 percent of food stamp benefits represented either overpayments to eligible households or payments to ineligible households. By comparison, the Internal Revenue Service recently reported that taxpayers underpaid their taxes by about 16 percent in 2001.²⁷

One reason the Food Stamp Program is so efficient is that the USDA has eliminated the old food coupons. All benefits are now issued through Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards, which allow recipients to transfer their benefits electronically to a participating retailer. This has eliminated the need to print, transport, safeguard, distribute, track, and destroy the coupons, and created administrative savings for the government, retailers, and bankers. It has also helped fight fraud and misuse of benefits.

Food Stamps and the Economy

In fiscal year 2005, \$28.6 billion in food stamp benefits were spent in local stores nationwide. Eighty-six percent of benefits were spent in supermarkets; the rest went to farmers' markets, grocery stores, and other food providers.

This infusion of federal food stamp dollars stimulates the economy as a whole. The Food Stamp Program pumped \$1.047 billion into the Georgia economy in 2005, benefiting farmers, grocers, and small businesses throughout the state.²⁸ Food purchases ripple through our economy, supporting a range of jobs, from farmers to truckers to grocers. Food stamp benefits used at authorized farmers' markets provide additional customers for local farmers. (They also give food stamp recipients access to healthy, locally grown fruits and vegetables that might otherwise be unavailable to them.)

A USDA study found that every \$5 in new food stamp benefits generates \$9.20 in spending in the community. Every \$1 billion of food stamp spending results in increased demand for food that creates 3,300 farm jobs — in addition to the new jobs it helps create in supermarkets and other related industries.²⁹ According to these estimates, food stamp spending generated \$52.6 billion in economic activity and created 173,000 farm jobs in fiscal year 2004.

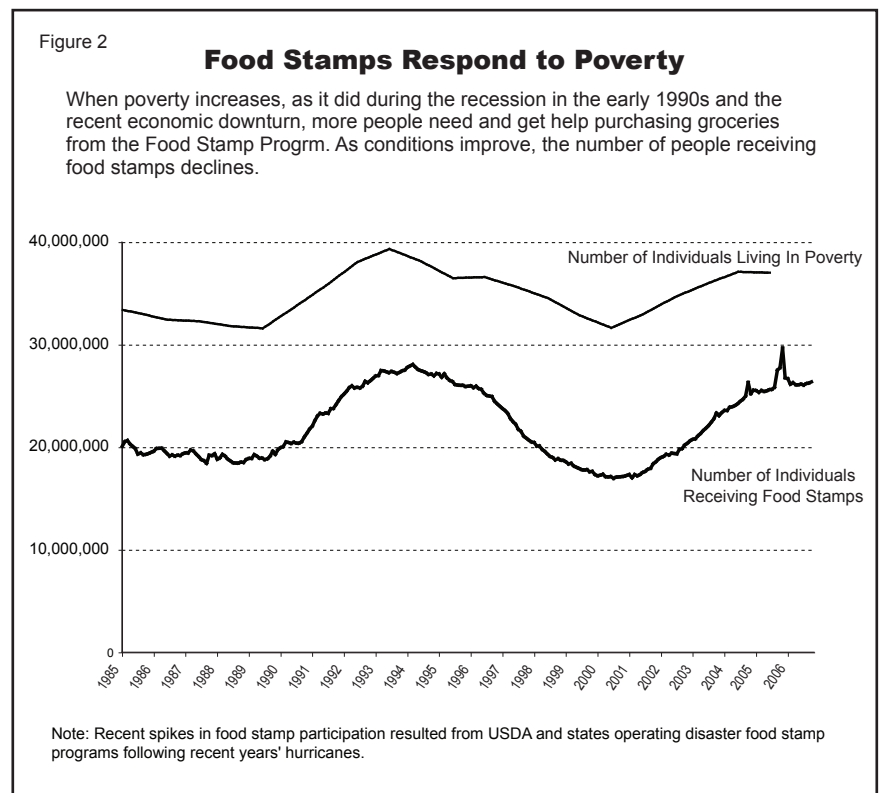
The USDA has made improving food stamp participation a priority because of the nutritional benefits it would bring to new participants and the economic benefits it would bring to local communities. According to a recent USDA report, an increase in participation of as little as five percentage points would make a big difference. Such an increase would provide food stamps to an additional 57,000 low-income Georgians, bringing \$39.4 million to the local economy in Georgia. This would result in a total of \$72.5 million in new economic activity in Georgia.³⁰

Food Stamps Cushion the Economic Impact of Downturns and Natural Disasters

In addition to protecting individuals and families against economic risk, food stamps also provide a measure of protection for the local and national economy. After unemployment insurance, the Food Stamp Program is the most responsive of all federal benefit programs to declines in employment and increases in poverty.

When a town or region suffers an economic blow and people lose their sources of income, consumption can decline as well, since people have less money to spend. That can create a steadily worsening cycle of increasing unemployment and declining economic activity. The Food Stamp Program works against this cycle by assisting a larger number of families during slow economic periods, which helps maintain overall demand for food.

This automatic response to rising need can be seen in the Food Stamp Program's quick and effective response to the disastrous 2005 hurricanes. Without the necessity for any action by Congress, the program distributed close to \$1 billion in food assistance to more than 2.2 million survivors of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma, including evacuees who were served wherever they found refuge.³¹ The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) was able to quickly issue \$500 million in disaster food stamps to 1.2 million survivors of Hurricane Katrina;³² of which, over 19,400 Georgia households received \$2.9 million in food stamp benefits. In addition, the USDA issued another \$392 million in emergency food stamps to an additional 1 million survivors in response to Hurricanes Rita and Wilma in 2005.³³



The Food Stamp Program also responds quickly and effectively to economic downturns. As shown in Figure 2 when employment declines and poverty increases, the program helps a larger number of low-income families.³⁴ During the recent recession and subsequent weak recovery, Georgia's Food Stamp Program responded to the increased needs. In 2000, an average of 559,000 Georgians received food stamps each month. That number rose steadily to 921,000 in 2005, an increase of 64.7 percent.³⁵ Conversely, when the economy is doing well and the number of poor people falls (as in the 1990s), fewer people receive food stamps.

Recommendations

The Food Stamp Program has been very successful in reducing hunger in America. While the 2002 Farm Bill made the program much more accessible, the program could still be improved to reach more needy people. A number of actions can be taken at both the state and federal levels to reach more eligible people and continue reducing food insecurity.

State Policy Recommendations

Georgia has made headway in reducing access barriers to the Food Stamp Program by eliminating the vehicle asset test, implementing the Transitional Food Stamp benefit and obtaining the able bodied adults without children waiver. To further reduce barriers to the Food Stamp Program Georgia could implement the following.

Modified Combined Application Project - Increase participation in the Food Stamp Program of low income elderly and disabled people by determining food stamp eligibility for all SSI recipients through a "Combined Application Project." Implementing a combined application between the social security administration and the Food Stamp Program will act as another point of entry for a hard to serve and underrepresented population of low income elderly and disabled persons.

Screen targeted Peachcare applicants to determine if they are eligible for food stamps - Low income health insurance programs such as Medicaid and Peachcare already serve a vulnerable section of the population who are more likely to suffer from food insecurity. Using existing health programs as an additional point of entry for the Food Stamp Program can reduce administrative overhead and prevent the exacerbation of existing personal and family circumstances that may lead to more serious health problems. The Food Stamp Program can help to mitigate serious health complications resulting from malnutrition, diabetes and obesity due to the lack of quantity and quality food resources. Although Georgia already screens qualified Medicaid applicants for food stamp eligibility it is equally important that those not qualified for Medicaid are still screened for food stamps.

All Medicaid customers with gross incomes up to an estimated 125 percent of the poverty line are eligible for food stamps. Assisting Medicaid and Peachcare applicants and recipients with the processing of a food stamp application by filing the application and sending copies of any relevant documents to the food stamp office can give families a head start and address a need that may otherwise go unidentified.

The Department of Human Resources, Division of Family and Children Services, which administers Food Stamps, should request the Department of Community Health to screen all Peachcare applicants and recipients ages 6 to 19 who appear to have gross incomes below 125 percent of the poverty line. Screening this targeted group of Peachcare customers will fill the gap between Medicaid customers who generally qualify for food stamps and Peachcare customers who generally do not. In addition, strong efforts should be made by the state to facilitate interfacing between different program databases or move toward a more uniform database system. Information technology plays an increasingly critical role in program implementation. Different programs that serve the same clients should be more consistent to reduce errors, improve efficiency, reduce administrative costs and improve the larger service delivery system.

Maximize the outreach effort to homeless and increase utilization of the able bodied adults without children and exemptions- Work with shelters, churches and other facilities visited by the homeless to improve Food Stamp access. Serving this population is extremely important because this population is more likely to suffer from a myriad of issues that may include, but are not limited to, substance abuse, psychological problems, physical/mental disabilities, and food insecurity. Providing the most basic of necessities, food, can act as an incentive to get such persons off the streets and introduced to a menu of programs and benefits that may be able to help them

address their problems however large or small.

Convene an Advisory Board to review and monitor online application - Georgia's forthcoming Internet based food stamp application system should be reviewed and monitored by interested stakeholders to ensure that the application(s) comply with Federal laws and regulations. This Board should also review a prototype of the application and offer valuable feedback regarding its practical, legal and technological implementation. It is imperative that any online application not only be user friendly but also be succinct and comprehensive to ensure expeditious processing.

Recommendations to Congress for the Upcoming Farm Bill

Build on the Food Stamp Program's strengths - The structure of the Food Stamp Program as a federal entitlement program enables it to support communities during times of economic downturn or natural disaster by automatically responding to increased need. This structure must be retained. Other important aspects of the program that should be maintained and strengthened are the national benefit structure, near universal eligibility for low-income individuals, targeting of benefits based on need, state administrative flexibility, and the extensive measures in place to ensure that the program is run efficiently.

Reduce eligibility restrictions - In three areas in particular, existing eligibility restrictions are counterproductive and should be changed:

First, the three-month time limit on receipt of food stamps by most unemployed childless adults marks the first time in the program's history that individuals have been cut off of food stamps not because they refuse to work, but because no work is available to them. This provision is also overly complex and difficult to administer. The time limit should be eliminated. Completely eliminating the 3 month time limitation, especially in light of the fact that Georgia and other states have easily obtained the able-bodied adults without children waiver which circumvents the requirement in most circumstances, demonstrates the policy's ineffectiveness.

Second, the program's restrictive asset limits make many genuinely needy people ineligible for food stamps. Most households are ineligible for food stamps if they own more than \$2,000 in assets. This asset limit has not been increased in two decades; it would have to rise to \$3,680 just to compensate for inflation over that period. The asset limit for the disabled, elderly and non-elderly should be raised to account for inflation. Also, all forms of retirement accounts, educational savings accounts, and burial funds should be exempt from the food stamp asset limit in order to permit food stamp households to plan for their financial future just as the rest of the population can. By excluding such accounts, this policy would encourage self-sufficiency and less dependence on government benefits in the future.

Ensure the adequacy of food stamp benefits - The 1996 welfare law cut the Food Stamp Program by almost \$28 billion over six years. A significant portion of these cuts came from across-the-board benefit reductions for nearly all households, including families with children, the working poor, the elderly, and people with disabilities. For example, a typical family of three with monthly income of \$1,078 (78 percent of the poverty line) is eligible for \$217 in food stamps under current law. If the welfare law had not included across-the-board benefit reductions, the household would receive \$248, or 14 percent more each month.

While Congress made some improvements in 2002 to address this problem, the real value of the food stamp benefit has continued to deteriorate over time. At a minimum, Congress should restore benefits to their prior level to ensure that households have enough resources to purchase an adequate diet.

Continue improving access to the program - Much progress has been made toward simplifying the program so that everyone who is eligible can participate. Still, about 40 percent of eligible people nationally do not participate (35 percent in Georgia).

Significant improvements were made in the 2002 Farm Bill, and those efforts should be continued by exploring ways to make it easier for people to enroll in the program and continue receiving benefits as long as they remain eligible. Such efforts, however, should be carefully designed to avoid undermining the program's current design or radically redistributing benefits in ways that could reduce benefits for the neediest households. Some initiatives that could improve access are extending "automatic certification" to all elderly or disabled people receiving SSI (so these needy individuals are able

to receive food stamps without having to apply separately) and continued efforts to accommodate the needs of people who have jobs. Also, Congress should act on the USDA's recommendations to change the name of the program to something that more accurately reflects the current program, which no longer uses stamps. A name that greater reflects the programs current method of administration, such as the *Food and Nutrition Card Program*, would be more appropriate in this day and age.

Endnotes

¹ "Characteristics of Food Stamp Households, Fiscal Year 2004," Table A-1, United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Analysis, Nutrition, and Evaluation, August 2005, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FILES/Participation/2004Characteristics.pdf>

² USDA posts the average monthly benefit by state at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/fsavgben.htm>. The benefit per meal is arrived at by dividing this number by 90 (90 meals per month).

³ See footnote 1.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ 2006 HHS Poverty Guidelines, Federal Register, Vol. 71, No. 15, January 24, 2006, pp. 3848-3849 <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/06fedreg.htm>.

⁶ For an explanation of food stamp eligibility factors and benefit calculations, see USDA's website at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/default.htm>.

⁷ See footnote 5.

⁸ USDA's data on the number of people participating in the Food Stamp Program by state can be found at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/fslatest.htm>. The percentage is calculated by dividing the number of participants in the state by the Census Bureau's population for the state, which can be found at <http://www.census.gov/popest/states/NST-ann-est.html>.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ The poverty level for a household of three is \$16,600 per year. A person working 40 hours per week for 52 weeks per year at minimum wage has a gross income of \$10,712.

¹¹ Dorothy Rosenbaum and Zoe Neuberger, "Food and Nutrition Programs: Reducing Hunger, Bolstering Nutrition," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, July 2005, online at <http://www.cbpp.org/7-19-05fa.htm>.

¹² "Characteristics of Food Stamp Households, Fiscal Year 2004," Table A-1, United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Analysis, Nutrition, and Evaluation, August 2005, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FILES/Participation/2004Characteristics.pdf>.

¹³ United States Department of Agriculture, "The Benefits of Increasing Food Stamp Program Participation in Your State," 2005, http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/pdfs/bc_facts.pdf.

¹⁴ "Household Food Security in the United States, 2003," Mark Nord, Margaret Andrews, and Steven Carlson, United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Report Number 42, October 2004 <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err11/>.

¹⁵ Ibid, Table 1.

¹⁶ Mark Nord, Margaret Andrews, and Steven Carlson, Household Food Security in the United States, 2003, United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Report Number 42, October 2004, Table 7, <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err11/>.

¹⁷ "Food Stamps Are Good Medicine for Children," C-SNAP Research Brief August 2005, page 1, http://dcc2.bumc.bu.edu/csnappublic/Food_Stamps_8-05.pdf.

¹⁸ Ibid, at 2.

¹⁹ See Footnote 1.

²⁰ "Food Stamp Program Participation Rates: 2004," Allison Barrett and Anni Poikolainen, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., July 2006, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/menu/Published/FSP/FILES/Participation/FSPPart2004.pdf>.

²¹ "State Food Stamp Program Participation Rates: 2003," Laura Castner and Allen L. Schirm, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., November 2005. Participation rates for FY 2004 are available only at the federal level. The most recent rates available at the state level are for FY 2003.

²² State Food Stamp Program Participation Rates for the Working Poor in 2003, Laura Castner and Allen L. Schirm, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., April 2006.

²³ See Footnote 1.

²⁴ "Hunger in America 2006: National Report Prepared for America's Second Harvest," http://www.hungerinamerica.org/export/sites/hungerinamerica/about_the_study/A2HNationalReport.pdf.

²⁵ USDA Food Stamp data: annual State level data-persons participating , <http://fns.usda.gov/pd/fsfypart.htm>.

²⁶ Erin Schwartz, "Improving Access to Food Stamps in Georgia," Georgia Budget and Policy Institute, Special Report, January 2005, <http://www.gbpi.org/pubs/specialreport/20050103.pdf>.

²⁷ Internal Revenue Service, IRS Updates Tax Gap Estimates (IR-2006-28, February 14, 2006), available at: <http://www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=154496,00.html>.

²⁸ USDA data: Food Stamp Program Benefits, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/fsfybft.htm>.

²⁹ The USDA found that \$1 billion of retail food demand by food stamp recipients generates an average of 3,300 farm jobs. United States Department of Agriculture, "The Benefits of Increasing Food Stamp Program Participation in Your State," 2005, http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/pdfs/bc_facts.pdf.

³⁰ United States Department of Agriculture, "The Benefits of Increasing Food Stamp Program Participation in Your State," 2005, http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/pdfs/bc_facts.pdf.

³¹ USDA data, available at http://www.fns.usda.gov/disasters/response/disaster_chart.pdf.

³² Ibid.

³³ See Footnote 31.

³⁴ Dorothy Rosenbaum and Zoe Neuberger, "Food and Nutrition Programs: Reducing Hunger, Bolstering Nutrition," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, July 2005, <http://www.cbpp.org/7-19-05fa.htm>.

³⁵ USDA data: Food Stamp Program Average Monthly Participation, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/fsfypart.htm>.

The GBPI is an independent, nonprofit, non-partisan organization engaged in research and education on the fiscal and economic health of the state of Georgia. The GBPI provides reliable, accessible and timely analyses to promote greater state government fiscal accountability as a way to improve services to Georgians in need and to promote quality of life for all Georgians.