

USDA
Tribal Consultation Quarterly Session
February 29, 2012

Thank you very much. Welcome, everybody; and thanks for joining us today. Today is another one of our quarterly Tribal Consultation meetings. My name is Tim O'Conner. I'm the Associate Administrator for the Special Nutrition Programs here at FNS, the Food and Nutrition Service; and I'm going to be your consulting official today. I'd like to welcome all the tribal leaders and members to today's consultation session.

Prior to today's meeting, we reached out to you with information about various program areas and regulations that we wanted to consult on. We have a fairly full agenda, but it's not the only agenda. We're going to want to hear about any issues that you have as well. We're going to talk on our agenda about some regulations that we have coming up in several of our programs. We're also going to spend some time talking to you about farm-to-school grant solicitation that's coming up. I'm looking forward to hearing from you on all of the topics.

Before we get started though, I'm going to turn it over to Barbara Lopez, who's going to talk about the logistics for today's meeting. As I mentioned, we have several items we want to share with you. Barbara will go through the materials, but first I wanted to start with introductions. I welcome everybody joining us to participate. Today's session is being recorded, as you heard, and will be transcribed and included in the official consultation records. So we want to make sure we capture your name and tribe for the record.

Barbara, can you take it from here?

Thank you so much, Tim; and welcome everyone. As Tim mentioned, we did provide several handouts for today's session via e-mail. Those handouts include the agenda, as well as a description of each consultation item that we have for today. The handouts were e-mailed last week, as well as yesterday, with a follow-up earlier this morning. If you did not receive them, please let us know during introductions; and we can make sure to e-mail you all the handouts to make sure you have them in front of you for today's consultation meeting.

We do want to start with introductions. You can press “*1” on your phone, and you'll be able to join us and participate in introductions. The operator will assist us in recording your name and your tribe and will connect your line with us. And as it was mentioned, today's session is being recorded. It is part of the official consultation record. So we want to make sure we capture everyone that's joining us today to include it in that official consultation record.

We welcome everyone to join. Please press “*1” on your phone.

And, operator, we'll have you help us, please, to do introductions.

Attendees:

Georgia Barros, Western Association of FDPIR, Nez Perce Tribe, Idaho

Gloria Goodwin, White Earth, Minnesota

Members of the National Association for Food Distribution Program in Indian Reservations (NAFDPIR)

Tina Butler

Arlene Vanderus, Torres-Martinez Band of Cahuilla Mission Indians, California

Maurice, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Mississippi

Dorothy Palmer, Program Manager for Food Distribution, Colville Confederated Tribes, California

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Ryan Bandolvier, Program Manager for the FDPIR Program, Montana

Verna Henderson, Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe, Washington

Beatrice Panteah, FDPIR Program Director, Pueblo of Zuni, New Mexico

Melissa Baker, Western Regional Office, Food and Nutrition Service

Arriana Moccadine, FDPIR Coordinator, Makah Indian Tribe, Washington

Representative from Five Sandoval Indian Pueblos, Inc., New Mexico

Charlotte Perry, Food and Nutrition Director, Catholic Diocese of Memphis, Tennessee

Greg Breasher, Mountain Plains Regional Office, Food and Nutrition Service

Kathy Sweitzer, Mountain Plains Regional Office, Food and Nutrition Service

Lorna Patricio, Food Distribution, Tohono O'odham Nation, Arizona

Francine Smith, Building Broken Places (Faith-Based Organization), North Carolina

Lou Hankins, Southwest Regional Office, FNS

Fi Davis, FDPIR Director, Osage Nation, Oklahoma

Lisa Mullens, FDPIR Director, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Yvonne Theodore, Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, Michigan

Laura Jackson, Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, Michigan

Rosa Coronado, Special Nutrition Programs Director, Southwest Regional Office, Food and Nutrition Service

Andrew Rave, FDPIR Director, Ho Chunk Nation, Wisconsin

Forest Farris, Food Distribution, Commodity Programs Manager, Montana

Chris Henley, Southwest Regional Office, Food and Nutrition Service

Marilyn Mayfield, Inter-Tribal Council, Miami, Oklahoma

Darian Dickson, Gila River Indian Community, Sacaton, Arizona.

Shauna Wemigwase, Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa Indians, Michigan

James White, FDPIR Director, Seneca Nation, New York

Members of the NAFDPIR Board and Midwest Planning Committee

Denise Dodson, Nutrition Program Director, Ho Chunk Nation, Wisconsin

Connie Martinez, FDPIR Director, Pueblo of Acoma, New Mexico

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Jessica Chui, Midwest Regional Office, Food and Nutrition Service

Patti Schock, Food Distribution Division, Food and Nutrition Service

Mark Johnson, Family Nutrition Programs, Northwest Regional Office, Food and Nutrition Service

Adrienne Vingiello, Family Nutrition Programs, Northwest Regional Office, Food and Nutrition Service

Connie Martin, Lummi Nation, Washington

Cheryl Sanders, Tribal Leader, Lummi Nation, Washington

Elaine Lane, FDPIR Director; Lummi Nation, Washington

Nancy Jordan, LSNO Director, Lummi Nation, Washington

Rosa Jacobs, Treasurer's Assistant, Lummi Nation, Washington

Florence Cannon, Midwest Regional Office Food Distribution Household Program, Food and Nutrition Service

Troy Littleraven, FDPIR Director, Cheyenne and Arapahoe Tribes, Oklahoma

Peggy Bazant, FDPIR Program Director, Red Cliff Reservation, Wisconsin

Thank you so much, and thanks everyone for joining in introductions. I'll hand it over back to Tim O'Conner.

Thanks, Barbara; and thank you, everybody. And welcome again. This is a continuation of a series of tribal consultations we've begun and which we plan to continue because we here on behalf of the Administration take the consultations with all of you very seriously. We want to make sure that we have a strong relationship, a strong nation-to-nation relationship, with each of the tribes that we're working with. And as part of this, we want to make sure that we're consulting with you on any items you want to bring forward, as well as any of the items that we've got on our agenda today. These regularly-scheduled consultation sessions were created as a starting point for us to have the opportunity to meet regularly and consult on issues and program topics on a consistent basis. The sessions are not our only opportunity, but they're one of many opportunities that we seek to have throughout the year.

Before we get to the agenda items, I want to just open it up and see if anybody has any issues that they'd like to bring up at the beginning here, any topics, any questions that you have; and we'll come back around to see if there's any at the end. Maybe some ideas will come up as we go through the agenda or whatever. But let's start right now, and I'll give you all an opportunity to see if you have anything you want to put in front of us at this point.

And, operator, we're going to open the session for consultation. So folks can press "**1" if they have an item they would like to put forward. And we'll check with you, please, operator.

Thank you. If you would like to ask a question or make a comment over the phone, please press "star one." Please unmute your phone and record your name clearly when prompted. Your name is required to introduce your question or comment. And if you'd like to ask a question or make a comment over the phone, press "star one." To withdraw your question or comment, press "**2."

One moment, see if we have any questions or comments over the phone.

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We want to add and discuss the Regional Vendors Distribution Pilot and the Voucher Program.

Okay, I think we are prepared to talk about the pilot to begin with; and so we'll be getting to that as we go through. Is that okay? Unless you wanted to do that now, we can just cut in and jump the agenda if that's what you want to do.

Well, why don't we go ahead and just talk about the pilot right now. Dana? I have Dana Rasmussen with us here, who was going to give us an update on it. So, Dana, why don't you go ahead and talk about where we are with this.

Thanks, Tim. I think many of you know the background if you're involved with FDPIR. As we provided in prior consultations, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service is considering a pilot of a regional vendor distribution model. Under the current national warehouse model which we use, we buy food for the FDPIR Food Package. The distribution of the food to participate in Indian Tribal Organizations, or what we call ITOs, and State agencies administering FDPIR is performed by two USDA-contracted warehouses in Missouri. Under the pilot, we would contract with the regional vendor or vendors to supply food to some FDPIR programs. The vendor or vendors would buy FDPIR-approved foods and distribute them directly to ITOs and/or State agencies that run FDPIR.

Now, we intended to issue a Request for Proposal, or RFP, by now; but we were required to address some administrative contracting issues to the satisfaction of the Department. On a positive note, those issues have been addressed; and we're now preparing to move forward with a draft RFP for the Industry to comment. We expect that to go out very soon. And once that does and we get comments back, we'll be able to go out with a Request for Proposal. I think we can stop there and request any questions. Thank you.

Yeah, thanks, Dana. Did you have particular questions about it? I know that we've been talking about this for a while with the community; and it's taken us longer, frankly, than we thought it would to get this off the ground. We did run into some issues internally, somewhat bureaucratic, in terms of trying to get the solicitation out. But I think what's happened in the last week is that we've broken the final log jam on our side. So as Dana said, we'll be getting this on the street very soon; and you'll hopefully finally see the progress that we've been talking about.

But I don't know, I didn't catch the name of who raised the issue. I'm hoping that this gives you an update. And I don't know if you have any particular questions for us, for Dana about it.

We were just looking at the timeliness of it and how they're going to select the programs that will be a part of this pilot project.

Well, this is Dana Rasmussen again. Back in the summer of 2011, we went out to those tribes administering FDPIR; and we asked if they were interested in participating. We did get interest from about 30 tribes. Now, during consultation sessions we held last summer, we convened a panel which was comprised of board members from the National Association of Food Distribution Programs on Indian Reservations (or NAFDPIR) and staff from FNS and the Farm Service Agency to develop recommendations for potential geographic groupings. And the panel came to an agreement on potential groupings back in August of last year. So from that, we issued the Sources Sought Notice, getting further information from interested vendors. Once we go out for Request for Proposal and we see what vendors would be willing to do and the groupings that they would be willing to serve, then we would have a better idea of which Indian tribal organizations and State agencies would be participating in the program.

So, Dana, the process is we're going to be going out and seeking interest on behalf of vendors who are willing to do this.

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And as part of that, as I understand it, they'll be expressing how big a project they want or where they want to do it, that kind of stuff. From that expression of interest, we'll then be able to select which tribes would be part of this.

That's correct.

Okay. Is that helpful? Does that answer the question?

Well, we were just wondering in the state of Washington who was the people that participated in this.

I don't have the list handy of those tribes that expressed interest, but we can get that information for you.

If you could, please? This is Connie from Lummi; and we were just trying to see who had expressed interest from our area here in the state of Washington.

Will do. We'll get back with you on that.

All right, thank you.

The next question comes from Judy Fisch. Your line is open.

Okay, this is not in regards to the regional project. It may seem like something that's specific to my state of California, but it actually potentially could affect all programs. As you may or may not be aware, the state of California is what we call a "Cash-out state" for the administration of SSI benefits, what each state is given under that. They have a share of costs, just like we do; and they're given the option to either allow their clients who are eligible for SSI, which is Supplemental Social Security benefits for very low-income elders or disable people -- the State has the option to either allow them to get Food Stamps or to put an amount into the State's portion of their benefit check that's called a "cash buyout" for a food allowance.

In my understanding -- it may have changed since I last looked -- but California is the only state in the country that does this cash out thing. The end result, with us being a very small part of the people eligible for food and nutrition services, we cannot serve through our FDPIR Program any SSI clients because it would be a duplication of services. The reality for the people that we would like to be able to serve is that they received in general maybe \$700 a month -- around there, \$700 or \$800 -- some people even less. Some people have come into my office with a monthly benefit check of \$200 or \$300, but the State puts in maybe \$10, \$20, even \$30/\$40 maximum of what they call a "food allowance."

We had raised this at our Western Regional meetings and also at the NAFDPIR meeting that there should be a waiver of the disqualification for FDPIR for people in that situation only if their total allocation is still beneath the income limit. My feeling is that it's really unfair, and it's just horrendous to have to turn away people that are that much in need; and they have no other recourse because they're either elderly or unemployable because they're disabled. And because of a technicality that really has more to do with Food Stamps than us, we are not able to serve them. I know it's in the regs. I know the law needs to be changed in order to for it to be different. But I really feel that if a state opts to do that, they should be held accountable for some parity. You know, if they're going to give a food allowance and there's no choice in the matter, that that food allowance should be equal to an amount that can adequately feed that person.

So I just wanted to bring that up because of course, to me, it's very dear to my heart because we have to turn away elderly people and disabled people who really need our help because the law just doesn't match the needs of our clients. So I just wanted to bring that up.

Thank you. I'm familiar with the SSI Cash-out status in California. It's been there for as long as I know. This is the first time I've heard about the tie-in frankly with FDPIR. Let us take a look at that, and we'll see.

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Every other state, if their receiving SSI, they're categorically eligible.

Correct. You know, it is just California. It used to be other states, but it's only California now.

Well, you know, if it has to stay that way, I feel that the State should be held liable to at least give them an amount in their cash allowance that's equal to what they would be eligible for with Food Stamps or, you know, the amount with our program, or give them the option to come in and get their Food Package because at least our old people would be able to eat.

We hear you. So let us take a look at that and see if we can get back to everybody with what we can find out, okay?

Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

Okay.

Next question comes from Georgia Barros. Your line is open.

Oh, hi. I was just wondering if there was any further work being done, you know, for the adding of the traditional foods or cultural foods to the Food Package. Is there going to be a survey or any type of way to retrieve what's good in each region? And if it is possible, how long would it take to have it available for the Food Package?

Hi, Georgia.

Dana Rasmussen here again. We typically handle any additions to the Food Package via our Food Package review work group process. And that work group primarily consists of NAFDPIR -appointed members. They did give us a list of items that they'd like us to consider [unidentifiable] back in December when we had a face-to-face meeting.

The next step is for us to look at those items on the list, and we're already pushing forward on a couple here and there. For example, one item that we're looking to implement very soon would be basically a fruit and nut mix -- sort of like a trail mix, but equal parts of, I think, five items.

Oh, okay. So would that be like similar to like the raisins or something -- you know, going to be handed out like in a prepackaged mix?

Sure. Assuming it's implemented, it would likely be placed in the peanut butter/peanuts category; and that's where you would distribute it from as far as the Food Package goes.

Okay.

Of course, there are other items out there under consideration; but we're still in the preliminary stages of research there.

Okay. You know, like even some of the programs, you know, asked about the canned salmon -- if that's going to be replacing tuna; and I don't know. I haven't heard anything regarding this, so I'm hoping that we would be able to get both and that, you know, would be nice. But that's a couple of programs that did ask me, so I thought I'd bring that up.

Thanks, Georgia. Yeah, tuna we have an issue with their domestic suppliers. And as part of USDA, when we go out and purchase food, we have to meet a domestic requirement for that food; and it simply isn't there for the tuna. Now, for the salmon, we're hoping to get that back in the Food Package later in the calendar year.

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Okay.

And we'll keep you apprised as to our progress there.

Okay. So one of the things I know, like some are seasonal food items, but I'm hoping that once it does become available that programs can take advantage of it because instead of just getting a small order of it and not everyone being able to try it out or even have enough to last more than two months. That's, you know, not fair to the clients because we get them introduced to it again and then we don't have any more to bring back. You know, you can't order it because it's no more. And so I think if it's something a little more consistent too that we'd have it available. So that's the other main one of the complaints, you know, like the soups. You know, we had mushroom soup first; and then now we don't have that. Then we had the cream of chicken, but now we don't have that now either. So we're back to the tomato and the vegetable soups. So I think it's really important that once we get it that it'll be a large enough supply to meet the demands for it.

Thank you, Georgia.

Okay, thank you, Dana.

Next question comes from Martin. Your line is open.

Martin wanting to comment on the addition of traditional and cultural food in a manner –

What we are wanting to ask is because the cultural and traditional foods differ from region to region and tribe to tribe, that if there was a possibility of a Voucher Program designated to each tribal entity and its food sources, then that would be able to meet the need. And that's why we were asking about the Voucher Program.

Well, that's something to consider. This is Dana Rasmussen again. I think one thing that we're looking to do with the regional vendor pilot is to hopefully incorporate some of those local and traditional foods into the Food Package. That's one of the goals with the pilot is to see what's out there and to see what vendors could get for FDPIR on a regional basis.

So is the Voucher Program moving, or is that something that still on the back burner yet?

We don't have a Voucher Program moving – certainly something we can think about.

Okay, yeah, because that's what I was wondering because they said it was brought up in the Western Region; and we were going to see if we could get it put back on the agenda at the next regional meeting – the tribal meetings that are going to be held too or the consultations. So thank you.

Thank you.

And right now, I show no further questions or comments.

Okay, thank you, operator. And, Tim, I'll hand it back to you. We're ready to start with the agenda items.

Thank you, and thank you all for your questions and your comments. Let's start in on the agenda, and we have a couple of things that we want to talk about beginning with SNAP. We've got three regulations in SNAP that are coming up that we wanted to let you know about, and see if you have any comments or concerns that you wanted to let us know about.

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As you know, we have an Executive Order that requires us to be reaching out to everybody and letting you know what's happening. But, you know, even beyond the Executive Order, we'd like to be able to get your comments whenever we can; and so here we go with these regulations.

The first one we're going to talk about is entitled the "Immediate Payment Suspension for Fraudulent Retailer Activity." It's a Proposed Rule. It's currently being drafted, and I've got Dan Wilusz from our SNAP Program here who's going to talk a little bit about this. Dan?

Well, thank you, Tim.

As you heard, my name is Dan Wilusz from SNAP; and this rule – it's a relatively short rule. And as Tim mentioned, it's currently being drafted; and it will probably be published in the late summer, early fall. So anyway, as many of you know, households that are participating in SNAP currently use EBT cards, which are similar to debit cards, to pay for food with their benefits. There are no more coupons or Food Stamps anymore. As a fraud prevention effort, the primary proposal of this rule will authorize the Department to withdraw the payment of redeemed program benefits to a suspected retail food store in situations involving particularly egregious circumstances pending administrative action to disqualify the firm for fraudulent activity.

What does this mean in English? Say we currently have a store that is transacting an average of about \$100 per day in SNAP benefit transactions. Then all of a sudden, the store transacts, say, \$20,000 in benefits in a single day. With this new rule, the EBT processor will put a hold on these benefits and not automatically transfer the \$20,000 into the store's bank account. We, meaning FNS, would then investigate the store; and if it's legitimate, we would return the \$20,000 to the store. If it's not, we would withhold the funds and take administrative and/or criminal action against the store. I mentioned \$20,000 – that amount, it was just made up. The actual procedures and amounts involved in this Rule would be determined in consultation with our Inspector General's Office. For obvious reasons, we're not going to be publishing the procedure or amount. That way the criminals would just, you know, look at that benchmark and go somewhat underneath it to try to game the system. And that's about it with this Rule. And if there's any questions, I don't know if we take questions now or later.

Sure. Thanks, Dan. Does anybody have any questions or comments about this particular regulation?

Operator, we're going to open for consultation, please.

Sure. As a reminder, if you'd like to ask a question or make a comment over the phone, please press "star one." Please unmute your phone and record your name. One moment to see if we have any other questions or comments. I do have a question or comment over the phone.

Gregory, your line is open.

Oh, I was trying to get on board with the previous discussion; but I have no comment on this particular SNAP Proposed Rule change. My question mostly deals with the three Proposed Rules that we're looking at for comment by April with regard to the shelter utility deduction. I was curious – and I'm hoping that somebody could maybe help – and I'm reading through this, and I understand that Alaska was given a total of \$350 for a shelter utility deduction. And I understand – there was no explanation as to how or why that amount may have been amounted to. I suppose – I'd just be curious. You know, \$350 will buy a half a drum of oil in the village. And I'm just curious if there was going to be consideration for maybe increasing that shelter utility deduction for Alaska.

I'm going to ask Dana to talk about that. He was going to give an update on it. But, Dana, why don't you go ahead?

Yeah, let me go ahead and give you a quick update on the Rule; and then we can talk about the questions that you have, Greg, if that's okay with you.

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Now, on January 11th, we published the Income, Deductions and Resource Eligibility Proposed Rule in the Federal Register. This is for FDPIR. We wanted to let you know that the Proposed Rule is available for viewing and public comment at www.regulations.gov. Public comments are due on or before April the 10th. Importantly, the proposed provisions would simplify program administration and would promote conformity with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (or SNAP). The Proposed Rule would have four changes to the FDPIR regulations.

One, we would eliminate the Resource Standard from consideration when determining FDPIR eligibility. Second, for households with elderly or disabled members, we expand the current income deduction for Medicare Part B medical insurance and Medicare Part D prescription drug coverage premiums to include other monthly medical expenses over \$35. It would also establish an income deduction for shelter and utility expenses. And we'd have some verification requirements and other proposals in there to bring the regs up to date with these provisions.

Now, regarding the proposed shelter and utility reduction, we – by proposing this, we were responding to a June 2009 Resolution from the National Association of Food Distribution Programs on Indian Reservations (or NAFDPIR). And that resolution noted that shelter expenses such as home heating fuel and utilities may impact a household's ability to obtain food, and such factors are not currently factored into FDPIR eligibility determinations. Under our Regulatory Proposal, an FDPIR applicant household would receive a standard deduction if it incurs the cost of at least one allowable shelter and utility expense. We would propose to indicate that the types of allowable shelter and utility expenses would conform to those allowable for SNAP, bringing the two programs in line in that regard. The proposed types of allowable shelter expenses would include but wouldn't be limited to rent, mortgage, Condominium and Association fees, property taxes, the cost of fuel for heating and cooling, electricity or fuel used for purposes other than heating and cooling, water, service fees for one telephone. So these are the types of expenses that we would include.

Finally -- I think this gets to your question, Greg -- the amount of these deductions would be regionally based. USDA would set these regional deductions, and we would base it on SNAP data, on what their programs' participants are getting for their deductions. We'd set these regional amounts for the first year of implementation, and then adjust them annually based on any changes to the data. So by using the SNAP participant shelter deduction data to formulate our regional amounts, we would be bringing the two programs, FDPIR and SNAP, further in line again as these two programs are alternatives to one another.

So as a reminder on the Rule, comments are due on or before April the 10th of 2012, and you can go to www.regulations.gov to obtain that Rule to review it. I think we also have it at the Tribal website for today's call, and we do look forward to your comments. Are there any questions I can help you with?

Can you hear me?

Yeah.

Oh, okay. No, that's useful. I appreciate the clarification, Dana. I guess I was more concerned with knowing whether or not Alaska – is that the Alaska standard deduction for SNAP, \$350? And is it possible to maybe consider revisiting this in the future as maybe for amendment?

Well, it would include the standard deductions available in Alaska; but it would also be combined with those for Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon and Washington. Essentially, we're weighting the deductions to FDPIR participation.

Well, it's definitely going to be a – you'll definitely, probably see an increase in participation with these new proposed Rules for FY13. I appreciate that – having an opportunity to comment on them through this teleconference.

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Thank you, Greg.

Is there anybody else in the room?

Dana, the question has come up -- Will this Rule have any impact on the standard /earned income deduction?

No, it would not. And you're referring to the 20% earned income deduction that's out there, correct?

Correct.

It would not have an impact on that.

Thank you.

Are there any other questions or comments on either the FDPIR Rule or on the Rule that Dan talked about on the Retailer Fraud Rule and SNAP?

Good afternoon, Tony Nertoli. I'm at the same meeting with these various directors here. When will this Rule go into effect in terms of being equal to SNAP?

Well, first thing, what we would do -- this is Dana Rasmussen again. Your comments would be due on or before April 10th if you had any comments that you wanted to provide formally for the Rule. After that, we would take a look at those comments and consider them for development of a final Rule. And then we would go through the entire Rule-making phase again. And it would take some time, but we're hopeful that we can get something done in the next year or so.

In essence, we're halfway through the process with the publication of the Proposal.

So we're looking at implementation in FY13 -- 2013.

Right. And the Rule does -- when it provides the base numbers, it does assume implementation in FY13. I would assume that would be an optimistic goal given the rule-making process, but we wanted to give you some sort of baseline to reference.

Thank you. Any other questions or comments?

Yes, I do have a couple more. Shauna, your line is open.

My question was the same as the 20% standard deduction -- just to make sure that we would still get that. So I think you've already answered my question. Thank you.

Thank you.

Next question/comment comes from Georgia Barros. Your line is open.

Hi. Mine was, you know, with the utility and shelter expense. Related to that too, will the client have a choice of using either one, or they can utilize both?

Under the Proposed Rule, all they would have to do is show that they have one of these expenses. Doesn't matter which one it is.

Okay.

And then they would qualify for the entire deduction.

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Then would this be just for the elderly or disabled or anyone applying for -- ?

It would be anyone applying for the program, yes.

Okay. All right. I think that helps a little bit more, so –

I'm sorry, one moment here.

Your line is open.

Okay, and also I wanted to comment on the ruling for the Executive Order for the immediate payment and fraudulent. I think that would be good to be looked into and being sent out because of you hear some of the clients or Food Stamp recipients will – you wonder why they are going to like this little tiny store or something and finding out, you know, some may not be purchasing the right food items and might be exchanging it for something else. So I just think that's a good idea.

Okay, thank you.

Is that it in terms of comments and feedback on those two Rules?

I show there's no further questions or comments.

Thank you, operator.

Let's move on to the next SNAP Rule, and that's one on employment and training. Many of you may know that we have an employment and training part to the SNAP Program. Jackie Windfeldt from SNAP is going to give you a general overview of that. Jackie?

Thank you, Tim; and good afternoon, everyone. I'm going to give you an overview of a Rule the Department intends to propose that will establish outcome performance measures for the Staff Employment and Training Programs and require the reporting of these measures. So here's some background.

Each state SNAP Agency is required by the Food and Nutrition Act to implement an Employment and Training Program (or E&T Program) designed to help members of SNAP households in gaining skills, training, employment or experience that increases participants' ability to obtain regular employment. State agencies may operate E&T Programs in-house or contract out these services. The SNAP agencies have a great deal of flexibility in determining where they will offer SNAP E&T services and what services they will provide.

The Food and Nutrition Act requires that USDA monitor SNAP E&T programs to ensure their effectiveness in terms of the number of E&T participants who gain and retain employment. The Proposed Rule would establish outcome performance measures to evaluate the program's effectiveness. Currently, State SNAP agencies provide outcome performance measures voluntarily in their annual SNAP E&T plans. The Proposed Rule would establish a set of standard measures and require annual reporting of such measures on the FNS-583 Form. These staff agencies have the option to report outcome performance measures for all or some of the SNAP E&P participants who obtain employment. The Proposed Rule would become effective in Fiscal Year 2015.

Thank you. Any questions or thoughts from anybody about that Rule?

And, operator, we'll check with you, please. We're going to open the session for consultation.

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As a reminder, if you would like to ask a question or make a comment over the phone, please press “*1.” Please unmute your phone and record your name. One moment, please.

And right now, I’m showing no questions or comments over the phone.

Thank you.

The last SNAP Rule we want to talk about today has to do with provision of benefits in SNAP in emergency situations. Mary Rose Conroy from SNAP is here to talk about that. Mary Rose?

Thanks, Tim. Good afternoon, everyone. I want to take just a few minutes to briefly discuss a Proposed Rule that’s under development for the Disaster Supplemental Assistance Program. The Rule is entitled Emergency Supplemental Nutrition Assistance for Victims of Disaster Procedures.

The Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 provides authority for the Secretary of Agriculture to establish temporary emergency standards of eligibility for the duration of an emergency for households who are victims of a disaster which disrupts commercial channels of food distribution. And this provision of the Act is reflected in Title 7 of the Code of Federal Regulations at 280.1. Currently, that’s an interim regulation; and we intend to amend this SNAP regulation because the current regulation does not expand substantially upon the D-SNAP section of the Food and Nutrition Act.

In 1995, the Food and Nutrition Service developed the Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Guidance, which provides policy guidance to State administering agencies for all phases of program operation in order to provide detailed guidance to State agencies as they plan, operate and assess their D-SNAP operations. FNS plans to publish a Proposed Rule for D-SNAP that will codify long-standing policies from the Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Guidance. Subjects to be addressed in the Proposed Rule will include the circumstances that qualify a State agency to operate a Disaster SNAP and how State agencies can obtain FNS approval for such a program. Requirements for the content and submission of State plans of operation; household eligibility requirements, including circumstances that will qualify a household for Disaster SNAP assistance and procedures for calculating income eligibility; certification process requirements, including requirements for State Disaster SNAP certification system; certification procedures, and standards for client and employee fraud prevention; benefit issuance procedures; data reporting requirements, including required elements for daily and final reports; and finally, requirements for post-disaster reviews of operations.

This Rule is currently under development and the Notice of Proposed Rule is anticipated on May 1st of 2013, at which time the Rule would be available for public comment.

Thank you. Can we open it up for questions and comments?

I do have a couple questions already. They might be just late after the last topic. One moment.

Next question comes from Forest Farris. Your line is open.

Thank you. My question has to do with the employment and training for SNAP. As we’re trying to move forward and make FDPIR and SNAP more equitable, why is that program not available to the FDPIR people, requiring them to have to leave that program and go to SNAP to get the benefit of that?

This is Tim. It’s a good question. I don’t know the answer to that off the top of my head. We’ll have to take a look at it. We’ll have to get back to you. I’m sorry. Thank you for bringing it up.

Forest, were you done with your question?

Yes, thank you.

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I show no further questions. As a reminder, if you'd like to ask a question or make a comment over the phone, please press "*1." Please unmute your phone and record your name. One moment, please, to see if we have any other questions or comments. I do have another question or comment.

Gregory, your line is open.

Thank you. I guess I'm more interested in knowing – this is interesting information that's never been brought to my attention before; but in the past -- it's nice to know what SNAP's proposing in the form of changes to make it more readily-available and accessible against fraud and providing help for its clients in employment and training. I guess I'm more concerned – or I have a question with regard to the process. Most of the SNAP programs that are implemented throughout our nation are administered by State agencies which have some limited collaboration with Tribal agencies. And we've got field agents in Alaska that are – I'd just be curious how many of the field agents in the state of Alaska that are administering SNAP benefits or receiving applications from clients were given information about this opportunity to maybe comment on any of these proposed changes on SNAP -- aside from many of us who are FDPIR administrators.

Yes, Greg, that's a good question. I don't know that there's been any extraordinary outreach to the field agents. They used to be called "fee agents," right?

Yes, I don't know if there's any particular outreach to those folks in the rural areas of Alaska. Certainly they'd be able to – if they're getting word from the State agency or whatever – they'd be able to respond as anybody could. But like I said, we don't do anything special to reach out to them to get their input in particular. I don't know what the State does though in terms of trying to get their input.

Here's my follow-up question to maybe just more of process to ensure that there is no duplication of services between beneficiaries applying for SNAP and for FDPIR. What's the USDA's policy with regard to administering SNAP, collaborating with FDPIR administrators and ensuring that when we're checking their files that if we have access to State files or to cooperate on that basis to get that information so that we ensure that there's no duplication of service?

I know for our state, we're fortunate enough to have a Memorandum Agreement with our State so that we have electronic access to their online database; and in return, we provide them with reports biweekly of all the participants that are applying for FDPIRs to ensure that there's no duplication of effort. I'm hearing some grumbling that it's real difficult sometimes to get State cooperation to provide some information with regard to who's receiving SNAP benefits. And I was just curious what the USDA's position is on that – I guess, "encouraged cooperation" between the two programs.

Let me make sure I understand. Is the issue that you have that you're not getting the information from the SNAP agency –

No.

.—or that it's not going the other way either?

No, there's no problem in Alaska. The problem seems to be I'm hearing concern that there's some difficulty working and collaboration between some tribes with their State agencies that are administering SNAP to provide access to information on who's receiving SNAP benefits, so that there's no duplication of services. And I was just curious on the USDA side, since you're contracting with State agencies who administer SNAP, what the USDA's position is on encouraging that collaboration between tribes and State agencies so that there's no duplication of services.

Well, off the top of my head, Greg, I'm not aware of anything in particular. I'm trying to remember my SNAP background, whether there's anything in SNAP Rules that requires that kind of back and forth conversation. But we'd certainly want that to be in place. If it's not happening in a particular state or

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whatever, it needs to be raised to the Regional Office so that somebody can step in and try to make sure that it does happen in a constructive way. So, I mean, this probably isn't the best place to do it. But if any of your colleagues are expressing any difficulty in the regard that you're talking about, they really need to get in touch with FNS so we can make sure that things get answered, okay?

Okay, I was just wanting to make that comment.

Yeah. No, it's helpful. You know, we're constantly doing [unidentifiable] evaluation reviews in all of our programs and stuff, and trying to provide oversight and stuff. So we want to make sure that things run smoothly. So any kind of input that we get about any kind of operational difficulties is really helpful to us.

Yeah, we're real grateful to have a Memorandum of Agreement with the State of Alaska so that we have this mutual arrangement where we're able to check every applicant for FDPIR against the State's database. So we're real pleased with that arrangement. So I was just wondering what kind of encouraged collaboration could be made from your office to ensure that there's a smooth transition for other agencies throughout the nation.

Maybe there's a model there that we need to start exporting to others if we need to. But thanks, Greg. I really appreciate the comment. And I'd encourage anybody on the phone or anybody that you're in touch with, if you're running into these issues to please get in touch with FNS and we'll take a look at it, okay?

So any comments on the three SNAP Rules that we've gone through? Any other questions or comments on those?

I do have another question or comment over the phone.

Sure.

Judy Fisch, your line is open.

Yes, I had a question about the requirement you were speaking of for job training. I would hope that there would be some kind of waiver in there for people who are disabled or the elderly or for some other reason. You know, we don't want to make people jump through some job training hoops when they're, you know, permanently not going to be able to work. Some people are just in that situation and, you know, many of our clients – it seems like it would be difficult – not impossible if we had to – but difficult to implement such a program as what you're suggesting with the SNAP program for mandatory job training of some kind and then the State agency or the ITO having to report on that annually.

Jackie, do you want to talk about that a minute?

Yes. Thanks, Judy, for pointing that out. Participation in the SNAP Employment and Training Program is one of the work requirements under SNAP. And the Employment and Training Program has actually been around since the late 1980s. There are federal exemptions to the SNAP Employment and Training Program, and being elderly or disabled is one of those. Having small children is one of those. If you're already working for 30 hours a week, you're exempt. Any of those individuals can volunteer for an Employment and Training Program. But those populations are protected and federally exempt from mandatory participation in the Employment and Training Program.

And I also want to point out that states decide within the population that is subject to work requirements who they're going to refer to Employment and Training services. SNAP participants over the age of 16 and under the age of 60 are subject to SNAP work requirements and State agencies decide who they're going to focus their resources and services on within that population.

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To my knowledge, I don't think the FDPIR Program has ever had that as a component – you know, a requirement. I could be wrong. Maybe it's something I haven't been doing since I've been doing this job, but I don't believe it's ever been something that we've had to do.

Right, the work requirements are just for SNAP.

Okay, thank you.

Thank you.

And right now, I show no further questions or comments over the phone.

All right. I think many of you know that we have 15 different programs that we operate here at FNS. And we have yet another regulation we want to tell you about. This has to do with the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, and I'm going to ask Mara McElmurray to talk about that one.

Hi. I work on the program at the federal level. I'm going to give you a brief history and overview for those of you that might not be familiar with the program. It started in 2002 as a pilot with a limited number of states; and in subsequent years, there was a slight increase. Then in 2008, two pieces of legislation made significant changes to the program; one being it extended the program nationwide to the 50 states, District of Columbia, and Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. And the program provides funding for eligible schools to serve free fresh fruits and vegetables during the school day. In order to be eligible for the program, you must be at an elementary grade level; must participate in the lunch program; and also very critical is you must have a high percent of students that are eligible for free and reduced-price meals. Schools would submit a yearly application, and schools have to agree to spend \$50 to \$75 per child, per school year.

The goals of the FFVP are to create a healthier school environment. It does expand the variety of fruits and vegetables for children. It increases their consumption of fruits and vegetables, and in the long run, has a positive impact on their present and future health.

We recently published a regulation on the program that put the program's current administration procedures, current guidance, policy and implementation memos into a regulation. It was published on Friday, February 24th. It is available on our School Meals public website at www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/governanceandregulations. Comments must be received at FNS on or before April 24th.

There are two ways in which you can make comments on the regulation. One is through www.regulations.gov, and they'll walk you through the procedures once you get there. We also can receive written comments, on or before April 24th, sent to Julie Brewer, the section head for the programs. And that information is in the regulation -- the address and how to go about commenting.

And that's just it in a nutshell. Does anyone have any questions?

As a reminder, if you'd like to ask a question or make a comment over the phone, please press "star one." Please unmute your phone and record your name. One moment, please.

I do have a question over the phone.

Charlotte Perry, your line is open.

This is Charlotte Perry with the Catholic Diocese of Memphis. I deal with school nutrition. I have a question about the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program.

Certainly.

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With this program – is this in addition to what the new regulations that are coming out with the Michele Obama plan? Would this supplement that, or would this be a separate program from the breakfast and lunch program altogether?

That's a good question. Thanks for asking. It is a separate program, and the fruit or vegetable snack must be provided outside of either the breakfast or lunch program.

Okay. With this, is this a grant program? Would this enable you to purchase equipment to hold the food at temperature or to serve the food? Or is it just strictly for the produce itself?

Well, the congressional intent of the money is the majority of it should go the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables. However, schools are permitted to keep a percentage of the funds for equipment that they might need, such as an additional cooler or renewable supplies, things like that. And also something new was that states are able to keep a portion of the grant for the State administration of the program.

Okay, also when you stated that the persons receiving this grant would need to have a high percentage of free and reduced students –

Correct.

Is that by school or by district?

It's by school.

And also, as a component to doing this program, would there need to be an educational component with this? Or would this just be a snack-type program where you're introducing new fruits and vegetables to children?

Well, we're trying to make it a complete picture. There is not a federal requirement to have nutrition education; but we do ask that schools incorporate that. I mean, it just serves to improve the school environment and to make it more interesting for children – you know, learning about the program. I've been to several sites, and I've seen that schools incorporate it into their curriculum – math, sometimes geography, history. So it makes it very interactive and very innovative and interesting for the kids. So that would be a very important component that we do stress to schools.

Okay. Is there a limit as far as how many schools may qualify per district?

No, there is not. It's up to the – the states are actually the ones that solicit the applicants and select the schools. And we do ask that they look at the schools and start with their highest percentages and go down until their money runs out. But there's no specific limit. In the earlier versions of the program, there was a limitation to it -- a certain number of schools; but that no longer exists.

Okay. All right, thank you very much for the information.

Sure.

Thank you. Any other questions?

And right now, I show no further questions or comments over the phones.

Thank you very much.

Next thing I wanted to talk about today is a grant solicitation that is going to be coming out that those of you on reservations or working in your communities may be interested in. The Helping Hunger Free Kids

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Act, which was signed into law about a year ago, provided our agency with some resources to be able to try to put in place good farm-to-school projects. So what we're going to be doing in the next month or so is putting out a grant solicitation where folks can come in and ask us to provide them with money to do some planning around that or to actually help them implement a farm-to-school program. This is going to be something that goes on for a while. What you're going to see in the next month or so with this grant solicitation is the beginning of a process to try to make that we do have a good dynamic and robust farm-to-school program.

So I wanted to give you a heads up about that; and because there's going to be competition for this, I can't really talk too much about it until it really gets out. But I want to make sure that those of you in Indian country do have a heads up and are looking for it. And we'll make sure that that comes to your attention so that you'll be able to see whether or not it's something that you want to take advantage of.

Let's see, the last thing that we had on our agenda for today, and then we'll open it up for comment again, is to just give you a quick update about a report that we've released; and that report has to do with addressing child hunger and obesity in Indian country. It was a report that we were asked to do by Congress, and we submitted it to Congress in January. And I think you should all have, if you've accessed the materials and stuff, a summary of that report; and that summary contains a link to the full report. So I'm not going to go through the findings or what's in there or whatever, but I wanted to make sure that you saw that and could see that it came as a request from Congress; and, like I said, just make sure that you know that it's out there.

Are there any questions on those last two items that I just mentioned, the report and the grant solicitation?

As a reminder, if you'd like to ask a question or make a comment over the phone, please press "star one." Please unmute your phone and record your name. One moment, please.

I do have a question over the phone – couple of them.

Charlotte Perry, your line is open.

Yes, I was wondering on the farm-to-school grant would the farms that the schools would be soliciting from or working with – would they have to be a USDA-approved farm? Would there be some kind of connection where someone went out and said that this particular farm would be able to sell to local schools?

Not that I'm aware of. Are you referring to the GAPP Program?

No, I'm not.

Okay.

I was just trying – I wanted to make sure – I did not know if with local farmers in our area if there were certain requirements they needed to meet before a school could ask for bids or enter into a contract with them on the farm-to-school.

I'm not aware that there is anything. And we have a lot of schools around the country that have farm-to-school relationships right now – where schools are buying locally produced products and stuff to be using in the school lunch and breakfast programs and in other programs and whatever. So the grants are really offered up to foster those relationships. There may be some requirements in localities or states that would govern who you can contract with. But the grant program that I'm talking about is really aimed at sort of fostering the implementation of the relationship.

I see. Would this by chance be – would this grant also pertain to school gardening?

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It could down the road, but right now it's aimed more at trying to link local farmers or regionally-produced foods to the schools.

I see. Okay, thank you.

Okay?

The next question comes from Judy Fisch. Your line is open.

Hi. I was just wondering with the farm-to-school program if there was any way that a tribe perhaps that runs an education program or a preschool kind of thing – I know that we're eligible to have summer lunch programs. And I was wondering if there is any kind of provision for a tie-in from a tribally-operated education program as opposed to a State-operated school.

Yeah, we are interested in making sure that tribally-run schools will be able to participate in the grant program. The other thing I want to make sure everybody understands is that this is our first use of this money. So you'll be able to see as we anticipate this, as long as the monies are still there down the road, you'll probably see other grant possibilities. We're also hoping to be able to do some other things, like provide technical assistance to schools and states or whatever that want to get into the farm-to-school area. So you'll be hearing more from this – I'm sorry, from us – about the whole farm-to-school program. This is really just our first big foray into it as a result of the provision in the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act. But we are looking especially to try to get schools from the reservations involved in it.

Okay, let me qualify that a little bit. I know it's different in different areas; but what I'm referring to is a tribal government effort to provide education and services – perhaps not at school – like an education center, computer lab, library, kind of programs. In California, we don't have tribal schools. And, you know, there's been a freeze on that. Well, you probably don't know; but there has been a freeze on creating new tribal schools since 1995. But we do have several after-school programs and tribally-supported learning programs that do provide the opportunity – particularly in the summer for summer lunch. But we also have other events and activities that go on involving providing a nutritious snack for kids. What we have here is basically the tribe just pays out of their own pocket because we have no really suitable resource for doing it. With our education grants we get from the BIA or other sources, it's sort of okay; and we can do nutrition demonstrations. But as far as providing a daily snack that's nutritious for children, we really don't have that resource.

Judy, that's a great comment; and it's not something that I had heard before. So I really appreciate it. I'm not sure that this grant solicitation will accommodate the situation you're talking about. But like I said, we'll be doing these down the road; and we'll also be providing technical assistance to folks. So let me see what we can do about that, okay?

All right. Thank you very much.

Any other questions?

I do have another question from Gregory. Your line is open.

Oh, thank you. This is more in regards to just process. I just need clarification, and hopefully you can tell me. This teleconference is I suppose predominantly attended by FDPIR administrators. I suppose I'm just curious what the USDA has done or FNS has done to inform the tribal members of the National Congress of American Indians or other confederated organizations with tribal members about these types of teleconferences or whether or not the USDA has an adopted consultation policy in place that it's going to be accessing or at least reaching out to these other organizations to help participate in some of these wonderful questions and proposed rule changes that you're providing us?

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Hi, thank you so much for your comments. This is Duke Storen. I'm a colleague of Tim O'Conner and Barbara Lopez. We have reached out to NCAI, and they have helped us publish our consultation schedule, which this is part of. We do these calls quarterly, and we also do consultations at in-person meetings periodically throughout the year. And so if you've got suggestions of organizations that you belong to you that you think would be helpful in getting the word out to tribal leaders, we would certainly appreciate any assistance. We also have a direct mailing list to tribal leaders, both a hard copy postal mail as well as e-mail. And we invite them to participate in these consultation sessions through that effort as well. So we really – although we did have a lot of FDPIR Directors who were vocal in their questions and comments today, as Tim mentioned, this is about all of our programs at the Food and Nutrition Service. And it is really intended primarily to be a consultation with tribal leaders as opposed to simply an information-sharing session. The fact is that we achieve both ends because of the mix of participants, and that's great; but first and foremost, our endeavor here is to do consultation with tribal leaders.

Barbara, I don't know if there's anything you want to add to that.

Duke, you captured it correctly. I would like to mention that we do contact tribal leaders – 565 leaders – as you mentioned via e-mail, as well as through regular postal mail, with information about the various topics that we're going to be consulting on. We contact tribal leaders about a month and a half in advance. We also invite them to share with us any consultations items that they would like to consult on. And we also work closely with the USDA Office of Tribal Relations. They have a USDA Action Plan for consultation and guidance regarding consultation policy. We work closely with them to see how we can improve upon our consultation process.

Greg, did that answer your question?

One moment.

Greg, your line is open. Did that answer your question?

No. No, there's another follow-up comment. Okay, just to help you out –

Sure.

Not only here at this meeting but a lot of fellow program people are on this; and USDA needs to recognize that within our tribal structures, you're talking to the people that not only are not only running the program, but our tribal leaders are going to come to us to ask us about these recommendations. Or if you're coming from a tribal leader, they came to us first and asked us about the program. So I have issues when I see this is for tribal leaders. We're going to go back to our tribal leaders. And in many cases, the people at this table are tribal leaders within our structure. As an example, we've got a couple of people here that would be qualified as elders and are well-received within their community. So I think you guys need to learn a little bit more about tribes too.

Okay, thank you.

Okay, I do have a couple more questions. Forest Farris, your line is open.

Thank you. I have a couple questions again in regards to the SNAP and the FDPIR Program. It may seem kind of trivial, but I get a lot of comments from the six tribes that we represent that, Why is it that a SNAP person can get a free cell phone; FDPIR people aren't? We're supposed to be parity-type programs, and there is a significant advantage for those people to have that if they're under SNAP.

Well, thank you for bringing that up. We heard about this last year, I think. I first heard about it last year at the NAFDPIR Conference. And we have some good news for you. Duke, do you want to talk about that?

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We worked with the FCC, and they passed a resolution I think the last day in January through their regulatory process; and FDPIR is now one of the programs it does confer eligibility for the Lifeline Program just like SNAP does. My guess is, they haven't gotten the word out very well. I have a call into FCC next week to try to make sure that the literature in the Lifeline Program – which is operated through a variety of vendors, TracFone and others – not sure where it is in your part of the country, but we did get that changed.

That is very good news. The other thing I wanted to bring up – I read a report, and I can't remember exactly which one – talking about the average EBT benefit and the average FDPIR benefit. And I have to assume, looking at the FDPIR benefit level being quoted there as the actual cost of the food that USDA purchases rather than retail value. So it appears that SNAP benefits are \$138 average, and the FDPIR benefit is like \$78. And I think then people are reading that incorrectly because that's not a true evaluation between the two programs.

I'm trying to remember how that was put together. Dana, do you remember how the values worked?

Yeah. Forest, that was an estimate of retail value to retail value.

Okay, apparently that doesn't jive in our state for what we get; but, okay, I'll take another look.

And, Forest, you're making a good point that we had to look at data that was available; and sometimes we don't have the data when it comes to reservations and different areas where costs may be higher. So that was purely an estimate. It could very well undervalue the retail value of the FDPIR Food Package.

Okay. Thanks, Dana. The last comment, I guess -- I do have one more – is I have a concern when we're in one hand talking about obesity and diabetes on tribal reservations; at the same time we're pushing, it seems to me, for more and more SNAP people who, I think, are abandoning the FDPIR Program. And when you look at the healthy eating index, the FDPIR Program far exceeds the average American's, let alone what is being purchased for SNAP. So is there something in the works to try to show people that the FDPIR Program on tribal reservations, for example, is a better program than the SNAP Program?

I don't know that we have anything in the works here, but we'd certainly be interested in working with tribes to make that case. We know that the FDPIR Program is tremendously valued by the tribes and by the people who are receiving it. So if there are things that we can help you out with to try to help make that case with the populations in your area, we'd be more than willing to work with you on that.

Thank you.

Next question comes from Charlotte Perry. Your line is open.

Hi. I had a question for you regarding our invitation to attend these meetings. It was brought up earlier that these are for FDPIR distributors and tribal agencies. And we are a faith-based organization. And it was my understanding that we would work in with this same group, although we don't do FDPIR. And I was wondering if that was an error – if this is even something that we should be attending, if we're encroaching upon another area that we should not be?

Thank you. This is Duke Storen again from FNS. These calls are set up for tribal leaders.

Okay.

To the extent that they consult and include those that operate programs or whoever it is that they wish to participate on their behalf, that's great. That does not mean we don't want to hear from you and update you on our programs; and we have lots of other outreach opportunities, ranging from webinars to conference calls and list serves. And maybe we could get your information and make sure you get

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hooked into some of those. We have an outreach coalition, for example, that covers a lot of this same ground with people who are in the faith-based and community organizations around the country. So I don't think this is the right avenue for you, unless a tribal leader asks you to participate on their behalf.

All right.

But that doesn't mean that we don't want to hear from you, and we'll find a way to do that.

Okay, well certainly. And I just wanted to make sure that we were in the right organization.

Okay, thank you.

The next question comes from Gregory. Your line is open.

Oh, thank you. Thank you. I wanted to follow up on a comment; but, you know, through the whole course of the thing, I frankly lost my train of thought. But I know that Roxanna has a comment. And before I had it over to her, I really appreciated Forest's comments with regard to how healthy this FDPIR Food Package is compared to the SNAP. And I want to echo his concern with regard to the notion that the cost of the foods is really disproportionally – well, a can of beans, if you will, will cost, what -- \$0.59 in our AIS database. But if I go to a village, and I've traveled to 19 already, that same can of beans is going to cost the consumer at least \$2.10. So there's a real inequity on that basis.

And I would just be curious – I appreciate the hard work you're all doing to reach out to us. I am more interested in knowing what kind of timeline we can receive with regard – I keep hearing this, "We'll work with you on that," "We would like to work with you on that," and "We want to cooperate with you and support you on that." And I would just want to make sure that there's some follow up.

I know what it was I wanted to ask, is we've got this resolution from the Alaskan Ordinance – ATT Telecom. If you have a resolution and it is in effect and recognizing FDPIR, it may be eligible to receive the Lifeline, is it possible that you might be able to post that on the Website so that we have access to such a document and that we might be able to utilize it so that when we go out and do social marketing and education of the benefits of FDPIR that we could let the applicants know that this is something that they may also be eligible for?

Sure, well try to get that regulation changed from the FCC and make it available on our Website and push data out through our distribution channels.

This is maybe after you've talked to them next week, we'll figure out what that's going to be.

Yeah, and we're certainly – the conversation next week is about them making sure they change their marketing materials to be reflective of this change.

Okay, that's enough for me. But I know that Roxanna had a follow-up comment.

Good afternoon. Kevin, I guess the timing on this is perfect as far as getting the word out on the improvements to the Food Package and the healthy eating index and what FDPIR has to offer. And the thing that you could probably help us with would be funds. FDPIR has recently established a Marketing Committee, and we put together some plans and goals to try to put together some video, audio and print materials using recognizable Native Americans. And our goal is to, you know, because of the tight community and the connection within Indian country, we're asking these individuals to donate their time and their image to this project.

We're hoping to be able to utilize community colleges and local photographers and videographers to help us get this put together and then work with FNS to produce some materials. And I recently had a conversation with Laura Castro, and I think our biggest challenge is going to be the money to be able to

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pull all this together and get it into a finished product. So any funds that you can help us with in this area, we'd greatly appreciate it.

Thanks, Roxanna. Thanks for bringing that up. I'll be working with Laura to make sure that we stay in contact with you as you move along; and we'll see how we can work in concert with you, okay?

Great, thank you.

Next question comes from Judy Fitch. Your line is open.

Hi. Just briefly, I wanted to mention that I hope that under the FNS administrative people that we have now that we're not going to experience like we did in the past with the bison meat where even though it was recommended by our Food Package Committee and advocated for by tribal leaders for years, they finally got it authorized in the Farm Bill and then USDA stopped the purchase of it because of saying that it wasn't appropriated as a line item in the budget.

And I know they did try to appropriate some this year, but we all – you know, in our National and also the Western Regional meeting kind of felt that that was a slap in the face because it's really hard to advocate with Washington agencies and with the lawmakers to get such a provision that traditional foods are important. And they are; they're very important to our people, and you're talking about marketing, you want to get the buy in of our native people. You need to offer foods that they're comfortable with and they want to eat. And when we got answers a couple years back from the USDA – and I know it's different people now. I'm just saying I hope we don't see that again -- that we fight so hard to get, you know, authorization in the law and then we're stuck because of not placing it as a priority in the administrative budget. That's all. That was my comment.

Well, one other thing – and thank you very much. You know, we did get the authorization to do it; and like you said, we didn't get the money to carry through on that authorization. But we're still not giving up hope. And I know that you've heard this from us before, and you know whatever – but we're still trying to figure out how, within the current budget that we've got, we can provide bison to folks. And like I said, you've heard it before. But we have not given up, and hopefully, we'll be able to do this. Admittedly, if we had the funding that was authorized for that provision, it would be a bit easier; but we haven't given up.

I understand what you're saying; but administratively, the FNS makes decisions that are changes in our Food Package. For example, the hamburger meat or the rotini – those things don't have a separate line item. Why is it that our traditional food that's authorized – I mean, it's just doesn't click in my mind that we would need a specific designation in the Appropriations Budget when there are other items that administratively are chosen as, "Well, this is to your benefit to have more healthy foods," and this and that. When tribes and consultations and advocates from FDPIR and NAFDPIR for years have been saying we need this, but then there has to be a special line item. To me, that is not equity.

I understand. Thank you, Judy.

Judy, were you done with your question or comment?

Are you ready for the next question?

Fi Davis, your line is open.

I want to ask, and I'm interested to knowing, if the report that was to Congress on the child hunger and obesity, how it was paid for – if there was money taken out of our administration budgets to pay for this report; and if it was, how much did it cost us?

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It was not taken out of any of the budget for FDPIR. The report was something that we did with research funds that we have here in the agency. So there wasn't anything sacrificed from the program in order to do it.

So you have research funds available for us to do research projects?

Federal agencies have lots of different line items in their budget; and so ours, yeah, we get some money for research and the balance – some money for general administration, and the vast majority of our funds go into operating our programs. So there is a separate line item for research, and those monies aren't interchangeable with program dollars.

Okay, thank you.

The next question comes from Shauna. Your line is open.

Hello, yes, I would like to know where I can get some good news about the Lifeline Program – Website or if you will be sending that information to all of us -- because I'm actually on the Website for the Lifeline phone and I'm in Michigan, and it does not say FDPIR as a qualifying to the assistance program. It says Food Stamps. So my question is, is where can I go to find that or will you be sending that out?

Yeah, we're going to do two things. One is we're meeting with the FCC next week to talk to them about getting the word out – making their vendors change their outreach and program materials to be reflective of this change. And then when we have something, as soon as we have it, we're going to put it on our Website; and then we'll send something out to all those on this call and let them know that it's available.

Okay, that would be great because I do have elders in remote areas. And we have to go to their homes, you know, off in the woods. And they don't have phones at all. So this would be actually a great resource for my tribe to be able to [unidentifiable].

Great. Yep, we'll get the word out.

Thank you.

And I show no further questions or comments over the phone.

Well, thank you.

Thank you, operator.

And I wanted to, in closing, thank everybody who participated today. I hope you got some good information from us. I know that we got some really good information from you, both in your comments and your questions. You've given us some homework to do, which we will do; and look forward to getting in touch with you at the next quarterly call and for some of you, at meetings and stuff between now and then. And please feel free if you have any questions that pertain to our programs insofar as they intersect with your tribes to get in touch with FNS through your regional offices or directly here, and we'll see what we can do to work out any issues and stuff that you've got.

We like to think that our doors are open. And one of the things that you might want to comment on is whether they are or not – or whether they need to be open in a different way. But I really want to say thank you for the input that we've gotten from you. It is very valuable to us and will improve how we go about doing our business.

So thank you very much for your time today. Hopefully, we got through everything for you; and have a great afternoon. Thank you.

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Thank you so much for participating in today's conference call. You may disconnect your lines at this time. Thank you and have a great day.