

**Statement of Kevin Concannon  
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Before the House Committee on Agriculture  
Subcommittee on Department Operations, Oversight,  
Nutrition, and Forestry

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Good morning, and thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Fortenberry, and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to discuss the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR).

I am pleased to be here today to give an overview of this important USDA program that fulfills a vital need to serve low-income Native Americans who live on or near reservations. FDPIR is an alternative to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly the Food Stamp Program) and is authorized under Section 4(b) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008. The Program provides food packages of nutritious USDA foods on 275 Indian Reservations, pueblos, rancherias, and Alaska Native Villages. Five State agencies and 99 Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) provide this assistance to approximately 90,000 participants each month.

***History of FDPIR***

The FDPIR was born from the Needy Family Program, which predated the Food Stamp Program and utilized surplus food donations while operating in many counties and Indian Reservations in the 1960s and 1970s. With the effort to make the Food Stamp Program available nationwide in the 1970s, there was also an effort to phase out the Needy Family Program. Several Tribes that were operating that program, however, were reluctant to move toward food stamps because stores that accepted food stamps were not always conveniently located and may not have offered products at affordable prices. The Food Stamp Act of 1977 afforded low-

income households on reservations the option of participating in either the Food Stamp Program or FDPIR; if they so choose, participants are actually able to switch between the two programs each month according to their need and preference. However, access to healthy and affordable food remains limited in or on many reservations.

### ***How FDPIR Works***

Today's FDPIR is an updated, modern program that is attuned to nutritional goals and purchases food specifically for the food package rather than relying on surplus items. USDA ships food to the ITOs and State agencies based on their orders from the list of available foods. These agencies store and distribute the food, determine applicant eligibility and provide nutrition education to recipients. FDPIR operates on established Indian reservations, which are located mostly in the West, Midwest, and Southwest and are often very rural. There are a number of ways that participants can obtain their food packages, including pick up from a local warehouse, delivery to a central location within the community, or from "store locations" at some reservations. ITOs have latitude to decide how to set up their food delivery system to be responsive to participant needs in their community. USDA provides administrative costs to administering ITOs and State agencies to support program delivery. The President's budget for this program for fiscal year 2011 is \$110 million which breaks out to approximately \$72.9 million for food purchases and about \$37.1 million for administrative funding.

### ***FDPIR Food Package***

FDPIR provides a variety of food items to participating households to help meet their nutritional needs. Included in the food package are: frozen meats, canned meats, fresh and canned fruits and vegetables, juices, peanuts and peanut butter, vegetable oil, soups, pastas, rice, cereals, cheese, beans, flour, and low-fat bakery mix.

The food package is reviewed on an on-going basis for its nutritional profile and customer satisfaction by the FDPIR Food Package Review Work Group that includes representatives of the Tribally- and State-appointed FDPIR directors, procurement specialists from the Farm Service Agency and the Agricultural Marketing Service, and nutrition and health experts from the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Indian Health Service.

A clear focus of the work group has been to reduce fat, sugar, and sodium levels and to improve food package appeal and convenience to participants. We are very proud of the FDPIR Food Package Review Work Group and what this partnership has accomplished so far. The Work Group is considering more improvements to the food package, such as more fruits, vegetables, meats, reduced- fat dairy products, and whole grain selections.

One recent item under consideration for the FDPIR food package is bison. This item has been popular with Tribes. However, due to its higher cost, bison has only been offered with specific Congressional appropriation. In recent discussions with the FDPIR Food Package Review Work Group, the possibility of offering this on a seasonal basis has been discussed, and we are working to see if this can be accommodated. As we come closer to a resolution, we will be advising the Committee of our progress.

Over the past several years, all USDA foods--including those offered under FDPIR--have been subject to nutritional review and the items in the package now have reduced sodium, sugar, and fat content. FNS is guided in this effort by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Before leaving the discussion of the food package, I want to explain something we call DoD Fresh. Started as a pilot in October 1995, in cooperation with the Department of Defense (DoD), the program allows DoD to supply fresh fruit and vegetables directly to schools. Due to

its success, DoD Fresh was expanded to include purchases for FDPIR, thereby allowing the programs to order fresh fruits and vegetables using DoD purchasing agents. About 91 percent of FDPIR programs are enrolled in this option, allowing for a variety of fruits and vegetables probably not available any other way. Households may select the fresh produce in lieu of the canned fruits and vegetables when they pick up their monthly food package.

To give an example of the fresh produce offered through DoD Fresh, some recently added selections include more apple varieties, asparagus, avocado, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, cherries, seedless grapes, honeydew melon, kiwis, Romaine lettuce, nectarines, plums, and radishes.

FNS is working with other USDA agencies to encourage local and regional food production as part of the overarching strategic plan of the Department. FNS is exploring how traditional foods important to many Native communities can be incorporated into FNS' nutrition assistance programs. With regard to Native communities, we already possess the authority to purchase traditional foods. Incorporating these more culturally appropriate foods will improve farm income within reservation communities.

### ***Food Package Quality***

The 2008 Farm Bill required USDA to review the nutritional quality of the food package provided for FDPIR, comparing its content to scientific standards including the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and nutrition benefits under SNAP. We also made comparisons to the Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs), the Thrifty Food Plan nutrient standards and the Healthy Eating Index-2005. To quote from the summary of the FDPIR Food Package Nutritional Quality: Report to Congress:

*The FDPIR food package provides a nutritious variety of foods, and sufficient calories to meet the energy needs of most sedentary individuals and many*

*moderately active children. While, similar to American diets in general, there is room for improvement in the quantities of fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy products and whole grains, the nutritional content of the package is considerable. **Individuals consuming FDPIR foods in the quantities provided would achieve a HEI-2005 score of 81 out of 100, considerably better than Americans in general (58 out of 100) and SNAP participants (52 out of 100).** The efforts of the FDPIR Food Package Review Work Group, a partnership between FNS and the American Indian community to improve the food package, have contributed to the package's quality.<sup>1</sup>*

### **Web-Based Ordering**

FNS is currently in the midst of major system changes that will affect the ordering process for our program operators. In the coming months, FNS and other agencies will be transitioning to Web-Based Supply Chain Management (WBSCM). WBSCM is an initiative to replace the aging Processed Commodity Inventory Management System (PCIMS) and satellite systems including USDA's Electronic Commodity Ordering System (ECOS). WBSCM is a commercial off-the-shelf system featuring standard e-commerce food order entry, real-time order and shipment status, online viewing of shipment documents, and an integrated enterprise supply chain system. It will make doing business with USDA easier by increasing collaboration, data and information visibility, efficiency, and improving service to customers, suppliers, and business partners through a seamless, efficient supply chain.

WBSCM is slated to go live at the end of this month (June 2010). This will impact FDPIR because FNS must temporarily stop most food ordering in mid-June. FNS has been preparing FDPIR ITOs and State agencies for this transition by providing training sessions on the new system and encouraging all ITOs and State agencies to order the foods they need to serve

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<sup>1</sup> The entire report can be found at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/menu/Published/FoodDistribution/FDStudies.htm>

full food packages to participants in advance of the mid-June cutoff date. Ordering through the new system will start at the beginning of July.

### ***Nutrition Education Materials***

Complementing the foods offered in the FDPIR are several nutrition education initiatives. We are working with Tribal communities and other health organizations to continue to understand the health and nutritional challenges facing those who receive FDPIR services. American Indians in general face high rates of over weight, obesity, and diabetes. Our concern over these diet-related illnesses is linked to our broader concerns with the obesity epidemic. Strengthening FDPIR is one of the many steps USDA will be taking to contribute the Administration's goal of solving the problem of childhood obesity within a generation. Over 16 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native adults served by the Indian Health Service have been diagnosed with diabetes, about twice the rate found in U.S. non-Hispanic whites. Diabetes-related mortality for these groups is about three times the national rate. In addition, up to 75 percent of American Indians are lactose intolerant, potentially limiting their use of low-cost dairy products containing lactose and presenting a challenge in delivering adequate calcium, potassium and vitamin D.<sup>2</sup> We at USDA want to be sure that our programs are responsive to concerns about diet-related illnesses.

We understand that we need to be part of the solution and. USDA is committed to ensuring that we have materials and support for increasing nutrition awareness and effecting wise food choices. We provide FDPIR participants with information about nutrition and suggestions for making the most nutritious use of USDA foods. Available materials include:

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<sup>2</sup> FDPIR Food Package Nutritional Quality: Report to Congress – Summary, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Research and Analysis, November 2008. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/>

- USDA food fact sheets that provide storage, preparation tips, nutrition information, and recipes are accessible on the FNS website:  
[www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/fdpir/cfs\\_fdpi.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/fdpir/cfs_fdpi.htm)
- “A River of Recipes: Native American Recipes Using Commodity Foods” – A collection of tried and true recipes submitted by program participants (accessible on the web site at: [www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/recipes/hhp/fdpir-cookbk\\_river1.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/recipes/hhp/fdpir-cookbk_river1.pdf)). Also, we are developing another book containing 40 culturally relevant recipes using USDA foods along with photographs and graphics. Some of these recipes were submitted to us by program participants.

In FY 2010, we distributed seven different nutrition education videos in DVD format to each ITO and State administering FDPIR. The videos can be shown to program participants in waiting areas, during nutrition education classes and special events, and in other venues. Topics covered include how to analyze food labels, eating healthy portion sizes, and choosing healthy beverages.

In FY 2007, we initiated a FDPIR NutritionTalk Listserv. The listserv plays a role in promoting open communication and an exchange of information between tribal communities, USDA, and other agencies and organizations that provide diverse nutrition education, materials, resources, and/or health-related services to participants in FDPIR.

Administering agencies are responsible for providing nutrition education to participants. Federal administrative funding is available for these activities, which can include individual nutrition counseling, cooking demonstrations, nutrition classes, and the dissemination of information on how USDA foods may be used to contribute to a nutritious diet and on the proper

storage of USDA foods. In FY 2008-2010, we awarded nutrition education grant funds totaling approximately \$1 million each year to ITOs. These grants were created to enhance the nutritional knowledge of participants and to foster positive lifestyle changes for eligible household members through intensive, integrated nutrition education interventions.

Additionally, we are currently working in conjunction with USDA's Food and Nutrition Information Center to develop a nutrition education training module for FDPIR staff providing nutrition education to recipients. The module will be available via the internet. It will provide tips on making nutrition education fun, advice on serving low-literacy recipients, and information on reading food labels, nutrient basics, food safety, and other topics. We are also developing a depository site where nutrition education and technical assistance materials for FDPIR recipients, and best nutrition education practices can be shared by ITOs and States. FNS is committed to working with Tribal governments to ensure that the administrative and delivery mechanisms for FDPIR ensure to the greatest extent possible the dignity and self-worth of those receiving package benefits.

### *Administrative Costs*

Funding for administrative costs in FDPIR has been a concern for the ITOs and, in 2005, FNS convened a FDPIR Funding Work Group comprised of FNS staff and representative of the Tribally- and State-appointed Program Directors to develop a funding methodology that would be fair and easy to understand.

This was a large and difficult undertaking — bringing divergent perspectives together to solve a common problem. The result was a funding methodology that allocates funding among the FNS Regional Offices, with 65 percent of the funds allocated based on each Regional Office's share of the national number of FDPIR participants, and 35 percent allocated according

to the number of FDPIR programs in the region. Each Regional Office continues to negotiate with individual FDPIR administrators on the approval of their annual program budgets, within the amount of funds allocated to the Regional Office.

Another important enhancement for FDPIR was \$5 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Recovery Act) funding last year to purchase equipment and improve facilities. Funds were used for the purchase of trucks and warehouse equipment and needed upgrades or repairs to heating and cooling systems, roofing, and warehouse structures.

### ***Comparison to SNAP***

I mentioned earlier that FDPIR was intended to be an alternative to SNAP. In fact, household eligibility is very similar between the two programs. For example, under both programs, a household's net monthly income must be less than 100 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. However, under SNAP, states have options like waiver authority (where, for example, the requirement for face-to-face interviews could be waived), categorical eligibility, and other rules allowing for flexibility. In FDPIR, the original design goal was to keep the income and resource limits at the same level as SNAP so that most households would be eligible for both programs. Month-to-month switches between the programs are allowed. The more complex features in SNAP were not carried over to FDPIR so that the program would be easier to administer. The benefit delivered also makes the two programs differ. In SNAP, as household income rises, the amount of SNAP benefit decreases up to the minimum allotment. In FDPIR, there is no benefit reduction from the full food package amount, making the food package a better deal for those with net monthly incomes close to the income limit.

There are also practical and cost limits to what is available for delivery in FDPIR. While USDA does work continuously to improve the healthfulness and variety of the foods we offer,

large grocery stores can offer thousands of items that can be purchased with SNAP Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards; this variety of food choices is one widely reported reason that households switch from FDPIR to SNAP. Under the Recovery Act, the law raised the Thrifty Food Plan allotment by 13.6 percent starting in April 2009, giving households in SNAP increased purchasing power and improving the comparative attractiveness of SNAP to FDPIR.

### ***Future Considerations***

As we move forward, we will continue to look for opportunities to support the nutrition needs of Native Americans, not only through FDPIR but our other nutrition programs as well. For example, we are currently exploring strategies for encouraging greater use of traditional native foods through the school meals program. The 2008 Farm Bill gave schools greater flexibility to preferentially purchase locally-produced unprocessed agricultural projects. USDA is now working with Bureau of Indian Affairs and Bureau of Indian Education to improve school lunch offerings in BIA schools, while encouraging farm-to-school market opportunities for farmers and ranchers, increasing access to traditional foods, and implementing the First Lady's 'Let's Move' initiative focused on reducing childhood obesity within BIA schools.

FNS remains committed to meeting its responsibilities as identified in the Presidential Memorandum regarding Tribal Consultation and Collaboration, and the Secretary's Action Plan for the Department with regard to implementation of EO 13175. We recognize the responsibilities USDA and FNS hold with regard to Tribal governments and their citizens and we respect the government-to-government relationship. USDA's Strategic Plan additionally recognizes and incorporates these important responsibilities. To those ends, FNS is working with Department officials to craft a plan to actively engage with Tribal governments in

consultation with regard to FDPIR. We would be glad to brief the Committee at a future date concerning the outcomes of those consultation sessions.

Looking forward, it is clear that FDPIR continues to fulfill a unique place in the Federal food safety net. No other nutrition assistance program combines the reach into Indian Country with the opportunity for local administration. Yet we are always looking to improve the program and will continue to work closely with partners such as ITOs, State agencies, and Congress to ensure that we are doing all we can to assist the Native American community.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to answering any questions that you may have.