

Welcome

Eileen Kennedy

Good morning. I am delighted to be here.

I first became involved with the issue of hunger back in the Johnson days of the Great Society. It was a time of renewed focus to hunger and nutrition problems in the United States. We had charismatic personalities, like Bobby Kennedy traveling around the country and giving visibility to problems that had been hidden. About 15 years ago, a report by the President's Task Force on Food Assistance stated, "It has been long an article of faith among the American people that no one in a land so blessed with plenty should go hungry. Hunger is simply not acceptable in our society."²

It was a wonderful period not only for defining the problems of hunger and malnutrition in the United States, but also for recognizing what we should do about them. Events in the late 1960's and early 1970's, including the 1969 White House Conference on Food, Nutrition and Health, catalyzed not just a definition of the problem but even a plan of action. Fairly soon after the 1969 conference, the country had the nationwide expansion of the Food Stamp Program, nationwide expansion of the National School Lunch Program, creation of the School Breakfast Program, and the creation of WIC and EFNEP. Shortly thereafter, the Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs emerged, which is the predecessor of *Dietary Guidelines*.³ A lot of positive events were launched that gave serious Federal attention to food and nutrition problems. The issue of hunger has also come to be called, more appropriately, "food insecurity." Our nutrition safety net has matured over the years. We can be proud when we look at the body of evidence on its effects.

²U.S. President's Task Force on Food Assistance. *Report of the President's Task Force on Food Assistance*. 1984.

³U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Nutrition and Your Health: Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. Home and Garden Bulletin No. 232. 1980; successive editions published every 5 years.

The job never seems to be done, though. Dramatic changes have taken place—most recently welfare reform. There is a continued need to think about the tools we use to assess welfare reform's impact and the impacts of other changes on food security and the nutritional well-being of the poor. We need to acknowledge that families continue to slip through the cracks. Even more importantly, we need to identify why those families are missed and then to develop an action-oriented agenda. Research activities and forums such as this will help shape how we move forward with our nutrition safety net.

The Office of Analysis and Evaluation kindly invited me to the 1994 conference. I talked about some of my own research, which was monitoring activities done mainly in Sub-Saharan Africa. The audience was primarily domestically oriented. Several people asked, "With the magnitude of the food insecurity problem in developing countries, don't you find it a bit odd giving serious attention to the domestic issues?" My response then was similar to what it is now: I think we have to be honest that the magnitude of food insecurity in America is not directly comparable to what we see in developing countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. I do think of food security as a continuum, though, going from very poor to better-off countries. Food security is a matter of degree. It is a relative issue that depends on the development of a particular country. Even though the United States has immense wealth, we still need to think about the meaning and context of food security in our own country.

One measure of a country's wealth and development is the percentage of income spent on food. ERS provided the most recent statistics for me. By this measure, the United States is doing extremely well. On average, we spend only 6.5 percent of our income on food at home. This compares with 18 percent in Japan, 50 percent in India, and unfortunately 40 percent and rising in Russia. Food security has come to be defined in a global context as access, and by "access" I mean physical access, economic access, access by all people at all times to enough food for an active and healthy life.

Despite the low percentage of income spent on food at home in the average U.S. household, food insecurity continues to exist in the United States. The problem is disturbing, in part because research increasingly finds that food insecurity is linked to a number of adverse health and social outcomes. We are going to hear about these connections from a number of speakers. One example is that food insecurity has been linked to increased risk of infection. We also know there are dietary inadequacies, including, from our own survey data, a number of nutrient deficiencies. Major medical complications and costs result from diagnosis and treatment of problems related to nutrition-based conditions. Preliminary evidence suggests an association between food insecurity and hypoglycemia. A recent concern, which is receiving a great deal of attention in the U.N. system, is the “fetal origins of disease”: the sequelae of being born small—not simply low birth weight but being born small—may have enormous second- and third-round effects that only show up 20, 30, or 40 years later. A global agenda is emerging for studying the fetal origins of disease, and we are thinking about how to look at it in the context of the United States.

The available evidence also tells us that food insecurity in this country should not be addressed by simply focusing on diets that provide the bare essentials. We need to think about the whole issue of the overall appropriate diet that sustains a healthy and nutritious life and allows one to perform at an optimal level. That is why we are here today.

As a result of the conference’s discussion, we will have a better understanding of the problem, how widespread it is, and how we can develop instruments to measure our progress; who the people are; and where they live. And, as I said, let’s not forget the last part, what we will do about it. The discussion and the research that will follow will help us study not only the magnitude and causes but also some solutions for food insecurity and inappropriate nutrition.

I am delighted to take a closing moment to talk about a new initiative out of the Department of Agriculture. Secretary Glickman recently announced the creation of the Community Food Security Initiative. It’s a result of conferences like this one and the compelling information we have been getting as policymakers travel around the country listening to people. Many people say that our Federal nutrition safety net is a key for dealing with food insecurity and the nutrition problem, but that it is not the total answer. We can measure success in a community by its ability to deal with the problem of food insecurity in local communities and local areas. Our emphasis in the Community Food Security Initiative is not taking over community work, but encouraging and facilitating grassroots activities that complement the Federal safety net. We need to think about new ways to measure food insecurity, and about the mix of activities that could be used appropriately at the community level. We want to make sure our policy and programs are brought together in the most aggressive and efficient way to combat food insecurity. Whatever we do has to be broad-based, evolving, and innovative, and involve more than just one level. Clearly the Federal Government will be involved, and we will continue to work with local and State governments. Over the next couple of years, we want to examine how we work with communities, including non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

This conference is an enormous opportunity to bring together different groups, to discuss the contribution of research, and to think about linking research more effectively to policy and programs. Other outcomes will be to think about scientifically based and better validated tools related to food security and nutrition, about the forward-looking research agenda, about the Federal agenda, and about partnering with our larger cadre of research institutions. I am looking forward to today’s discussion and the guidance that will come from this meeting.

Julie Paradis

Good morning. It is a real delight to be here this morning with Eileen and Linda, who are absolutely committed to fighting hunger. I would like to associate myself with Eileen's remarks. It has been a pleasure to work with her ever since I was new on the Hill at the end of the 1980's. No one can doubt her understanding of nutrition and hunger issues, or her commitment to eliminating hunger and working with those involved in the hunger programs. Linda Meyers and I have known each other for a year or so since I joined the administration. Under Secretary Shirley Watkins and I have been delighted working with Linda and her boss, Surgeon General David Satcher. They are as committed as we are to eliminating hunger in this country, which we believe is a very real possibility.

Secretary Glickman, Under Secretary Watkins, and I have been working with many others to strengthen partnerships among the Department of Agriculture's mission areas, as well as partnerships with several Federal departments including HHS, Education, Transportation, Justice, and Labor. The Secretary is committed to be the country's leader to eliminate hunger, and as we traveled around the country, we learned that community groups too have partnered among themselves to comprehensively meet the needs of low-income families. For example, many hunger projects and programs expanded their scope. They saw the same families each month, and they thought about how to help these families achieve true self-sufficiency. Hundreds of these groups have added new components to their hunger fight. They are now providing job training and life skills. They have gotten involved in economic development and community development. The ultimate solution to hunger is to eliminate poverty. All those concerned about hunger need to think comprehensively about this complex problem, as communities around the country have already begun to do.

One vital need that we must address as we identify strategies that effectively address hunger is to also identify outcome measures that show the impacts of the work being done, so that we might

garner additional support. I think that is the real value of this conference. We need food security measurement on a regular basis to see the outcomes, and then to tie our programs and community-based initiatives to those outcomes.

In the 5 years since the first conference in 1994, the problem of hunger in America—while not yet approaching the size and severity experienced in other countries—has in many respects grown more acute, in spite of a robust economy. It is an ongoing problem for the American conscience. While we believe it is solvable, it continues to go unsolved. We need to work together to determine why that is so.

The first conference laid out the guidelines for measuring and defining the scope and severity of the problem of food insecurity. That was a truly important task, for not everyone yet believes that there is hunger in America. In the early 1980's, policymakers suggested that hunger was not a problem because the economy was doing better. Those of us who worked with the nutrition programs knew that to be absolutely false. If you tell people that there are 300 billion stars in the galaxy, they believe you without question, but if you tell them that the porch railing has wet paint on it, they have to touch it to make sure. Well, people believe that times are good, but they have to touch the porch railing to believe that hunger exists. Your work can help us show in concrete and measurable terms the depth and the magnitude of the problem of hunger.

The 1994 conference also helped to establish the pattern of interagency partnership and the cooperation that has been a hallmark of the Food Security Measurement Project. Hunger cannot be addressed successfully by just one agency or one initiative. Food insecurity is connected to the larger problem of poverty, and we need to find creative and interrelated solutions.

We at the Food and Nutrition Service have adopted a mission statement that states our role in this effort: "FNS reduces hunger and food insecurity in partnership with cooperating organizations by providing children and needy families access to food, a healthy diet, and nutrition education in a

manner that supports American agriculture and inspires public confidence.” It is crucial to our mission to have a sound and reliable measurement tool to gauge the severity of the problems of food insecurity and hunger. Our safety net of nutrition programs has been a lifeline for millions of families and children, but we know that there are millions more who still struggle to meet their most basic needs.

In 1990, Congress recognized that the methods and resources devoted to monitoring the nutritional status of Americans needed to be improved. The result was the creation of the National Nutrition Monitoring and Related Research Act. USDA and DHHS put together a 10-year plan to carry out this congressional mandate. One of the plan’s challenging tasks was the development of a scientifically sound and reliable measure to monitor the severity and prevalence of food insecurity in the United States as a whole as well as at the State and local level. The task was assigned jointly to FNS and the National Center for Health Statistics at HHS. We are proud of the way it has been carried out through a multiagency public-private partnership. The food security measure has gained widespread acceptance in government and from the scientific community. We are incorporating the measure into our evaluations of program effectiveness and in our plans for improving and enhancing program services. The measure has also been proposed as a target for nutritional adequacy in the government’s major public health initiative, Healthy People 2010. The Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics uses it as one of the key indicators of well-being for America’s children. It will be used in several major surveys to help understand the causes and consequences of hunger. Even more importantly, it will help us to make Federal nutrition assistance programs more effective. Increasing our abilities to accurately and reliably measure hunger and food insecurity in America are issues of the highest priority, not just at the Food and Nutrition Service but to all of USDA.

I thank you all so much for your hard work in developing and implementing this measure as we seek to better understand the scope and magni-

tude of a problem that should not even exist in a country like the United States. Armed with the tools that you all have provided, we stand a real chance of success.

Linda Meyers

I am honored to be here among such a dedicated group of individuals. I welcome you all, along with my USDA colleagues, on behalf of the Department of Health and Human Services and my boss, Assistant Secretary for Health and Surgeon General, David Satcher, who mentioned the other day that he was part of the Physicians Task Force on Hunger a number of years ago.

I have used the term “success story” when asked about hunger measurement and whether we know how many people are hungry or food insecure. The measures that were developed are products of collaboration among government, academia, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector. There have been great strides in operationally defining and measuring this concept called “food security.” Ten years ago, there was barely consensus on even a general definition. Such a limited agreement was the reason there was no hunger or food security measure in Healthy People 2000, coordinated out of the office that I represent. Now there is a definition and a series of measures. I think it is safe to say that Healthy People 2010 will have at least one measure of food security.

We now have a substantial high-level commitment to increasing food security, including the *U.S. Action Plan on Food Security*.⁴ I think it is the first of its kind for the United States, but it will not be a real success story as long as children go to bed hungry, as long as adults have to choose between the asthma medication and food, and as long as there is any food insecurity in the United States.

To achieve success, we are challenged a number of ways. We are challenged to refine research tools to obtain measures of community food

⁴U.S. Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Service. *U.S. Action Plan on Food Security: Solutions to Hunger*. 1999.

security; standard indicators that can be widely used at Federal, State, and local levels; and instruments that capture information on older persons, the homeless and institutionalized populations. In a welfare-to-work environment, we are challenged to monitor changes in nutritional status and food security and to better understand determinants and consequences. We are challenged to continue to improve coordination. We are challenged to continue to improve the translation of data into information that will drive action at Federal, State, and community levels.

Surgeon General Satcher speaks often of three evolving priorities for the health of Americans.

One relates to increasing awareness and understanding of global issues such as infectious diseases, food security, and hunger. He also speaks of eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in health, pointing out that it is not a zero-sum game and that closing the gap among the most vulnerable will improve the health of all Americans. The third priority is achievement of balanced community health systems—a priority that emphasizes disease prevention, health promotion, access to health care for all, and a healthy start for every child. Achieving any of these priorities will require reducing food insecurity of communities, households, and individuals. Your work is critical to meeting these challenges.