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Opening Statement of Chairman Frank D. Lucas
Committee on Agriculture
Subcommittee on Nutrition and Horticulture
Agricultural Program Audit - Examination of Title IV Nutrition Programs
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As prepared for delivery

I'd like to thank Chairwoman Schmidt for holding this hearing, and I'd also like to welcome Ms. Rowe to the Subcommittee today.

I believe that we would be holding these audits regardless of the time period in which we will be writing the next Farm Bill.

With 14 separate titles covering a wide variety of programs ranging from nutrition to forestry, it's important for all of us to understand why our current policies are structured as they are. We also need to know how our separate programs work together to form a comprehensive framework to support America's farmers, ranchers, and consumers.

These audits are meant to develop a deeper knowledge of agricultural policy so that our Committee Members are better able to develop the next Farm Bill.

But in our current fiscal climate, the audits have taken on greater significance. There are proposals for billions and even trillions of dollars worth of cuts to get our fiscal house in order. Farm Bill programs will not be spared the chopping block.

Considering that farm and nutrition programs together make up less than 3 percent of the national budget, large cuts will be challenging.

This Committee is charged with supporting our country's agricultural industry, and ensuring that our consumers have a safe, high-quality, and affordable food supply.

To meet that responsibility, we must ensure that we have well-designed farm programs that can function efficiently in the face of budget cuts.

As Chairwoman Schmidt mentioned, nutrition programs make up more than 75 percent of Farm Bill spending. The SNAP program is the largest of these programs.

In 2008, we worked to improve the integrity of nutrition assistance under SNAP. But there is still room for improvement.

For instance, many states are using Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility, which makes most—if not all—households categorically eligible for SNAP if they receive any non-cash Temporary Assistance for Needy Families benefit.

Of the 42 states that have adopted broad-based categorical eligibility, only 1 has imposed an asset limit. That means that there is no limit on the amount of assets a household can hold, while still receiving nutrition assistance.

Categorical eligibility is meant to simplify program administration, but I know that it also raises some questions about whether we are really targeting families most in need.

Certainly we shouldn't be sacrificing the integrity of this program for ease of administration.

We all need to eat, and when families fall on hard times, SNAP is a valuable resource that helps ensure no one goes hungry.

But in the current economic environment we need to ensure that SNAP benefits are going to those families that truly need support. I'm concerned that broad-based categorical eligibility increases opportunities for waste, fraud, and abuse.

We are spending more than twice the amount on SNAP now than we were in 2007. Program participation has nearly doubled in that time.

We have a responsibility to ensure that the \$69 billion we are spending on nutrition assistance is being used properly, and is helping the people it is meant to help.

That's exactly the type of information we need to gather in these audits. Are the Title IV programs being targeted effectively? Are taxpayer dollars being spent properly? Are there areas that we can streamline or eliminate?

It won't be easy, but we need to find savings throughout Farm Bill programs.

I look forward to learning more about the Food and Nutrition Service's perspective on these challenges, Ms. Rowe, and I thank you again for your testimony today.

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