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Agriculture Committee
October 22, 2010

[LR453]

The Committee on Agriculture met at 1:30 p.m. on Friday, October 22, 2010, in Room 1525 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on LR453. Senators present: Tom Carlson, Chairperson; Annette Dubas, Vice Chairperson; Brenda Council; Russ Karpisek; Scott Price; and Ken Schilz. Senators absent: Merton "Cap" Dierks and Norman Wallman.

SENATOR CARLSON: Welcome to the interim study. I'm Senator Tom Carlson, Chair of the Agriculture Committee. Our research analyst to my right is Rick Leonard and our committee clerk at the end of my right is Barb DeRiese. The Vice Chair of the committee next to Rick is Senator Dubas, Senator Annette Dubas from Fullerton; and next to her is Senator Brenda Council from Omaha; and over to my left is Senator Scott Price from Bellevue, and as far we know, Senator Karpisek from Wilber, and Senator Schilz from Ogallala will be here. Senator Cap Dierks and Senator Norm Wallman were unable to attend this afternoon, but we're going to start because we like to start on time. Before we begin, please turn off your cell phones and pagers if you haven't done that. Those that are going to testify...how many of you are going to testify this afternoon? Okay, good. And we don't have a particular order so once it's time to come forward, come forward and get into the chair here and face the committee. If you haven't testified before, relax and try to enjoy it. We're not going to be difficult with you. And there's a green sheet---right, Barb---to fill out so everybody needs to fill one of those out before you testify and then put that sheet in the box there that's by Barb so that this is...so that we have accurate information on who has testified. If you do not choose to testify but would like your name entered into the official record as being present at the hearing, there's a form by the door that you can sign that will allow that so your presence would be recorded. And it's possible, too, if you don't want to testify verbally and if you have something in writing that you wish to submit, you could give that to Barb and she'll be able to enter that. We do have two pages that are helping us today: Sonya---raise your hand, Sonya---is here from Verdigre, and Ayisha from Bellevue. So they are our pages.

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If there's something that they could help you with don't hesitate to ask them. They'll distribute any material that you may have that you want to get to the committee. When you get in the chair, to begin with, please give your name and spell it, even if it's Smith, because that makes it clear on the recording that's being taken and so we can be accurate, so that on the transcription we have an accurate record. Now we don't have a big number of people testifying but we do have enough that it's most effective if you keep your remarks to 5 minutes or less. And then after you're finished with your testimony, don't get up and leave right away because there will be questions from the committee, and it's not to make you feel nervous but it's just to clarify whatever it is that you may testify about. So try and keep your remarks to 5 minutes or less and then be ready for questions. Are there any questions before we begin? Okay, I'll ask Senator Council to introduce the study.

SENATOR COUNCIL: Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, fellow members of the Agriculture Committee. I'm Senator Brenda Council. I represent the 11th Legislative District and I introduced LR453, which is the subject of today's hearing. I will be brief in my opening remarks because we do... [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Would you spell your name? (Laughter) [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: C-o-u-n-c-i-l. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Thank you. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: I guess I do have to set the example properly. And I will keep my opening remarks limited because I think the committee would benefit greatly from those who are appearing this afternoon to testify. The purpose of the introduction of LR453 was my belief that there were public and economic health issues facing distressed communities across the state of Nebraska that related to the availability of fresh foods, fresh produce, fresh fruits. And that in doing some research I came upon the term "food

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deserts" and food deserts are areas where access to fresh foods, fresh produce, fresh fruits is limited. In many cases the limitation is due to the economic conditions of the particular area. You'll find food deserts in urban areas. You'll find food deserts in rural areas. And the objective of the study was to, first, try to perhaps come up with an agreeable definition of a food desert and a way of identifying food deserts that exist in the state of Nebraska, and then utilizing that information to begin to develop some policy interventions to address the elimination of food deserts. And if you'll see by some of the material that has been gathered during the course of the study, and I would like to at this time to acknowledge and express my appreciation to our research analyst and anyone who has assisted Mr. Leonard in conducting the research. You have a couple of articles that address this issue. But if you look at those articles you'll see, for example, that grocery stores, while meeting the public health needs of the residents in the area, also help to drive the economic engine of those communities. And when we look at policy intervention, potential legislation, I would remind my colleagues on the committee that when we look at economic development legislation that has been enacted over the last decade, those initiatives expressly exclude retail operations. So we have not had a mechanism in this state to encourage or assist the development of grocery stores. And so this is an opportunity for us to look at what has occurred in other states like Pennsylvania and New York and how they have enacted legislation to spur the growth of grocery stores, the development of markets for locally produced goods, and to provide that linkage as we discussed, preliminary early on, between farm and school in terms of providing fresh produce. We've looked at the SNAP program and access to SNAP recipients to fresh produce, which would be accomplished through an increase in farmers' markets as well as an increase in grocery store developments in particular areas. So with that, I would like to begin the testimony. We have some people here who have been intimately involved in looking at the issue of food deserts. We have representatives who are involved in food production, processing, marketing; some who are community-based organizations who have been working both on the production and distribution as well as the health initiatives. So with that, I will conclude my opening and turn it over to the witnesses who are prepared to testify, unless you have any questions.

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SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Thank you, Senator Council. Are there any questions? Okay. And we'll ask you to close as we get to the end of the session. Okay, whoever is willing to step up first and testify, come forward. And as Senator Council was giving her introduction, Senator Schilz joined us and Senator Karpisek is on his way. Welcome.

[LR453]

PAM EDWARDS: (Exhibit 1) Thank you. It's good to be here. My name is Pam Edwards, P-a-m E-d-w-a-r-d-s. Good afternoon and thank you, Senator Carlson. My name is Pam Edwards. I'm a registered dietitian and the current president of the Nebraska Dietetic Association. I speak on behalf of 600 registered dietitians who are Nebraska's food and nutrition experts. Thank you for the opportunity to present information concerning food deserts. Senator Carlson's staff requested the help of the Nebraska Dietetic Association about this topic. Specifically, our association was requested to provide the description, causes, and consequences of food deserts, specifically providing linkages of limited food access to adverse health outcomes. In addressing this issue I will provide information gathered from the Center for Disease Control, the Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity , and the American Dietetic Association. And also with the report I'll submit, I have attached a report from the American Dietetic Association. Two other registered dietitians, who are members of the Nebraska Dietetic Association, will also be presenting today on data and research gathered from their work with Nebraska communities affected by food deserts. As Senator Council pointed out a few minutes ago, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, food deserts are defined as areas that lack access to affordable fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, and other foods that would provide a wide range of healthy food choices. To begin, a report from the Yale Rudd Center includes the following as causes of food deserts: Low-income areas have fewer supermarkets and groceries than do predominantly middle- and high-income neighborhoods; stores in low-income neighborhoods stock fewer healthy items and

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have lower quality fresh produce; when the fresh produce is available, higher costs are associated with those food items; and public transportation is often lacking to the supermarkets and grocery stores. There are many consequences of these food deserts, according to a CDC review and a report on food insecurity published by the American Dietetic Association, and these include convenience stores, or some of you may know as C-stores--such as Kwik Shops, Kum & Go, etcetera--and Dollar Stores are usually the neighborhood grocery stores in food desert areas. Convenience stores stock a higher percentage of processed food items containing higher sodium, fat, and sugar content compared to fresh food items. Food insecurity is prevalent in these lower income areas. And the risk of chronic disease and chronic disease occurrences are higher in lower income and food desert areas. Low-income people, minorities, and rural residents suffer the highest rates of preventable, diet-related diseases linked to insufficient consumption of healthy foods. Diseases often reported are obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. Moving from consequences to interventions, there are currently a number of programs that can provide a variety of intermediate interventions. These include private and public agencies ranging from Second Harvest such as in the Lincoln area, that's the Food Bank is part of Second Harvest; to Women, Infants, and Children, the WIC programs. Recently these programs have been improved to include more education and incentives for participants to choose fresh food products. In addition, long-range programs need to include both local farmers and education. And I just want to note that related to local farmers, at a December 3, 2009, public hearing related to LR42, examining the farm-to-school programs, the Nebraska Dietetic Association presented information in support for the development of farm-to-school programs in Nebraska in order to reconnect students to the food they eat, and also to provide education to school and farm communities concerning the benefits of local foods, fresh foods. Some other examples and benefits of potential food desert intervention programs involving farmers and education include: farmers' markets that boost the incomes of local farmers while increasing the access to fresh produce and dairy products to underserved families and individuals; community gardens which help residents in low-income households to supplement their meals with fresh produce, and I

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can speak to one in Lincoln and I'm sure there are others throughout the state; farm-to-school initiatives that assist local farmers in selling fresh produce directly to school meal programs; food recovery programs that rescue wholesome food from being thrown away and instead provide food to community groups serving those in need--the Food Bank of Lincoln is one of those programs; incentives and/or grant funding to attract supermarkets to underserved areas; and nutrition education and cooking demonstrations provided by registered dietitians that provide tasty quick recipes to individuals and groups unfamiliar with preparing and serving fresh produce, and there's been a big push in this area in the recent years. In summary, changes to the environment are essential to help individuals make changes to improve their food choices. Decreasing the incidents or at least delaying the onset of chronic diseases can decrease health-related costs that burden the government and individuals' quality of life. According to the Yale Rudd report, bringing supermarkets to low-income areas and helping smaller groceries expand their stock of healthy and affordable food items is a win-win situation for communities and residents who would gain an access to healthy foods, and gain an increased potential to reduce obesity through healthy eating; would gain more jobs; would gain increased revenue; and increase potential for commercial revitalization, and gain the capacity for building of community organizations and coalitions. And in addition, local businesses could benefit from market expansion and revenue, more foot traffic to neighborhood stores, and contributing to the community's public health and economic well-being. Thank you. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Thank you for your testimony. Questions of the committee? Senator Council. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Yes, and thank you, Ms. Edwards, a very complete and comprehensive response to our request for input into this process. And when you've been looking at these areas, for example, diet-related health issues, have you come across any way to quantify the costs of not addressing food deserts, the cost to the state, for example, in increased healthcare costs or any of those issues? You have any

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source that we may be able to look to? Because one of the things that we need to accomplish here is a cost-benefit analysis. I mean, you have certainly laid out many of the benefits of eliminating food deserts, but oftentimes we're asked to quantify... [LR453]

PAM EDWARDS: Sure. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: ...that savings or quantify the benefit or what are the comparable costs. Do you have any sources to direct us to, to try to develop that kind of data? [LR453]

PAM EDWARDS: I'm thinking that Mary Balluff and...we have two registered dietitians. I don't...can I ask or do you guys have... [LR453]

_____: I didn't bring that information. [LR453]

_____: Wanda has it. Wanda has it. [LR453]

PAM EDWARDS: Wanda has those. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Okay. Great. [LR453]

PAM EDWARDS: It is available... [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Okay. [LR453]

PAM EDWARDS: ...and someone...Wanda will be producing that in just a little bit. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Thank you. [LR453]

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PAM EDWARDS: And if there is additional information, I know that we can certainly look into it for you. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Thank you. [LR453]

PAM EDWARDS: Yeah. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Other questions? Senator Dubas. [LR453]

SENATOR DUBAS: Thank you, Senator Carlson. Pam, do you know, I know like for farmers' market there's a senior's program for fresh fruits and vegetables. Does the SNAP program allow purchases at farmers' markets also? [LR453]

_____ : We have a SNAP person also. [LR453]

SENATOR DUBAS: Okay. (Laughter) We'll wait for that person then. Thank you. [LR453]

PAM EDWARDS: We came prepared. (Laughter) [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Great. [LR453]

SENATOR DUBAS: You've got all the bases covered. Thank you. [LR453]

PAM EDWARDS: Yeah. Any other questions? [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: All right. Other questions? Well, I have one, because going back to...I guess I'm looking for the various elements that are really the problems. Now one of them is distance to, I'll say, a good grocery store. I don't know that that's a universal

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problem. It certainly is if it's somebody that doesn't have the strength or the health to walk that distance. I guess I think of in the last 10 years been to Europe a few times and see those people, a lot of them seem to walk a long way every day to get food and then bring it back. So I can understand that is a problem. Maybe that opens up a possibility for an entrepreneur that would have a delivery business. But what other elements are there? Can you help identify and make it a little clearer in my mind and maybe some of the others, what are the real challenges? [LR453]

PAM EDWARDS: Well, I think some of the real challenges are that there may be some grocery stores and supermarkets that are in areas that choose not to have healthier products, whether that's for their bottom line or what it is, so some incentive for them to make those selections available for the customer. Others are that there's just...they....the C-stores have become, I mean, I think we all know if you go to a C-store, convenience store, those would be like at your gas stations where you walk in and you can buy milk, you can buy bread, you can buy cereal, you can buy canned items, and eventually you'll find one or two that on their counter they'll have a basket of very overripe bananas or something like that, and that's about the extent of the fresh produce. The food that's sold there is very expensive. I mean it's expensive for me, so you can imagine for lower income that it's terribly expensive. But they have the choice of either buying it or they have no food. So I think those are...it's multiple problems with it: the availability of the stores that are there but what they're offering, or just not the availability and other than these small convenience store type items...type items that are sold. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Thank you for that answer because a convenience store is convenient, but it is expensive. And so I suppose that ends up, those that truly can't go any farther distance to get food, they make a choice of spending their money unwisely probably. But then there are others that can't go any farther so that's a little different situation. [LR453]

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PAM EDWARDS: Yeah. I just...I'll enter a real...this is a personal experience and it was a long time ago when I was a dietetic intern in Dallas, Texas. And one of our public health experiences was, we had to go do a study of a grocery store that was in a lower income area of Dallas. And this was in the late '70s, mid-'70s. Even at that time, I mean, those...I don't think we knew them as food deserts but the cost of food there was unbelievable, much, much higher than in the middle-, the upper-income areas in some of the wealthier parts of Dallas, and we had to make that comparison. So this is something that's been around, but I think our attention to it has really been heightened in recent years. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Thank you. [LR453]

PAM EDWARDS: Uh-huh. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Any other questions? Thank you for your testimony. [LR453]

PAM EDWARDS: Yeah. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Next testifier. Welcome. [LR453]

MARY BALLUFF: (Exhibit 2) Thank you. Good afternoon. My name is Mary Balluff, M-a-r-y B-a-l-l-u-f-f. I'm a registered dietician and I work for the Douglas County Health Department, and I thank you for the opportunity to be here today. I've provided you with a written testimony that also includes some maps that illustrate some of the work that we have done. I'm not going to read my testimony to you. I'm going to highlight some of the things that are in the testimony for you, and then I will be glad to answer questions. In the spring of 2009, the Douglas County Health Department set out to measure the parameters in Douglas County for access to healthy foods. And in that measurement we used the nutrition environment measurement system, which is a survey tool developed by Emory University and it's an evidence-based tool. That tool allows a volunteer to go

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in to supermarkets or convenience stores, any retail food outlet, and do an observation that looks not only at the type of food that's there, the quality of the food, the price of the food, and the number of options or selections there are within a food, within a food group. We actually conducted this survey in April of 2009. We started out by getting a list of groceries and convenience stores from the Department of Agriculture. There were 507 establishments on that list. We culled the list to 417, eliminating those kinds of stores that were single food options. In other words, we were looking for stores that could provide the full array of nutrients that we would need, so they would need to have fruits and vegetables, lean meats, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products. And so we took out those stores that were butcher shops or bakeries, those kinds of things that would have a single kind of food group in them. We ended up with a list of 417 and then we trained volunteers to take a format to go out, an assessment tool to go out and evaluate each of those stores looking for the items that we had talked about previously. Of those stores, of the 417, there were an additional 33 that were reduced, were eliminated: 16 of them by the time we got there no longer were in business, 15 of them had very limited food items, and in 2 cases the managers refused to have us review their particular store. This was a project that was done by the Douglas County Health Department, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. We had worked with the Nebraska Grocers Association. What we found was, within Omaha there was 72 stores that had full access to all five food groups and an adequate selection in each one of those food groups. You will see two maps that have been provided for you. The first map shows you the locations of the stores, but they all have...they are the large pink circles. Those are the stores that have a full access with a one-mile radius around them. The one-mile radius was selected because both the San Francisco project, which has done...San Francisco Department of Health has done exclusive research in this area, and the Centers for Disease Control suggest that it takes a population of about 10,000 individuals to support a grocery store. So in Omaha, 10,000 participants is about a one-mile radius. So what you will see is a one-mile radius, which is access to those stores. We also showed you on there stores that ranked a three or a four. They had three of the food groups represented with adequate selection or four of the food groups

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represented. We wanted to further look at this, besides knowing what was available in those stores, is to look at this geographic mapping of this to really begin to tell us where there were parts of our city that were nutritionally fragile. In other words, it would be difficult for someone, they had to travel more than a mile. And we also went in and did a secondary analysis to look at the store capacity within those fragile areas. So when those areas which...if you look at the second set of maps shows you exactly where those fragile areas are. You can see that there are...we did a secondary analysis to look and see whether within those areas there were stores that perhaps a combination of stores would make up the full access that we needed. In other words, there might be a butcher shop and a convenience store that had...next door to each other and you could actually get all five food groups. On top of this we overlaid, in the second map you can see we overlaid the incidence of obesity, fruit and vegetable consumption, population density, death rates from cardiovascular disease, and income on top of those to be able to see where our highest risk areas were to make sure that we were really being considerate of where the most...the greatest need would be. In a solution to this what we have attempted to do is to identify, within those areas of highest needs, grocery stores that may, in fact, have a three or a four rating and trying to go back into those grocery stores or convenience stores to train the owners of those stores in terms of such things as the food handling for perishable foods, the product placement to enhance healthier food choices, tips to increase shelf life. And that's the project that we're working on now is to try to take those resources back in and create within those areas of very fragile nutrition stores which may, in fact, help to shore up that and create the kinds of access that we're really looking for. We also are working with neighborhoods in those areas to try to find out what it will take for those neighbors to really want to use a store in their community, what they think of the store that's there, and how they can be a part of it. The final part of this will actually be the Douglas County, the Douglas-Sarpy County extension office will actually do some in-servicing in the stores in terms of providing some nutrition education, some samples of healthy foods, and other on-site resources so that when customers do come into those new stores that we develop, and we hope to develop eight of them by 2012, that they will be

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a very useful resource to that community. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Thank you for your testimony. Questions? Senator Council. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Thank you. And thank you, Mary, for coming and bringing the information. I guess I want to start with your last comment about the stores you plan to develop. These are new developments or expansions of existing...? [LR453]

MARY BALLUFF: These are existing establishments. The reason we chose to use existing establishments is it's very difficult to bring new stores into an area when you already have a partial capacity there. So we will be working with store owners. We have not identified all of them at this point in time. We have only identified the areas. We will go back in, and working through the Grocers Association and the Nebraska Petroleum and Convenience Store Owners Association, try to identify those owners and discuss with those owners if they would be willing to do this very project with us. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: And what kind of incentive, if any, is there to these store owners to participate in the project? [LR453]

MARY BALLUFF: Well, we have two kinds of incentives. One, is some incentives to help them develop the capacity initially to do that, which would be to perhaps buy a cooler for them or some new shelving, something that would be needed to help them put this...these kind of products into their store. The second is, is that we have information from other healthy corner store projects that have been done across the nation that when this is accomplished that many of those stores do have a bottom line that improves over time; that those products really are salable, especially when you have worked with the neighborhood as we plan to do, and that they actually find a profit margin around those. So we will help them figure out the business plan to make that possible. [LR453]

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SENATOR COUNCIL: Okay. And is this utilizing grant dollars? [LR453]

MARY BALLUFF: These are grant dollars. These are Centers for Disease Control dollars under... [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Out of the obesity grant? [LR453]

MARY BALLUFF: Under the obesity grant, communities putting prevention to work. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Okay. And speaking of communities putting prevention to work, looking at the last graph, so that I'm reading this properly,... [LR453]

MARY BALLUFF: Correct. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: ...I'm focusing in on the 11th Legislative District. Although it's not specifically delineated, I know it on sight. Am I reading this correctly that there are only three areas where there were five out of five? Is that the...the three concentric circles there are...? [LR453]

MARY BALLUFF: Yes. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Okay. So... [LR453]

MARY BALLUFF: Yes. So what you can see is that area, the dark brown and the lighter brown areas that go up there, those are high-risk areas and you can see there is no coverage in those areas. There are several areas within Douglas County for which that exists. [LR453]

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SENATOR COUNCIL: Okay. And that's what I wanted to direct my colleagues' attention to is that...I mean, you can see it where there is no access. [LR453]

MARY BALLUFF: Correct. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: You have these health disparities and you have the worst of the combined factors in those areas where there's no access to fresh food. [LR453]

MARY BALLUFF: That is correct. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Thank you. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Thank you. Other questions? Senator Price. [LR453]

SENATOR PRICE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much for your testimony, ma'am. First to ask a question, I'm glad to hear that you're going to use...or you're exploring to use existing storefronts, because the first thing I thought about driving in the area, fairly familiar with it, is it's awfully difficult to get the logistic support. If you want to bring in fresh produce, we talked about this last year in one of our hearings of getting the fresh food to schools, if you're in a rural area, perhaps there's a little more room for the truck. But if you're going to try to bring a 53-foot produce truck, you know, from Nash Finch into an area, I mean, that's going to be...so I didn't know if you'd looked at that or is there any attention given to some of that for how you actually would get the product and the produce to a store. I mean, if a small van is bringing it in, there may be a way to look for a different logistic way of approaching it versus just trying to bring it in. I mean, I think that sometimes is a problem in stores. [LR453]

MARY BALLUFF: We actually...that's part of the reason that we have been talking to the Nebraska Grocers Association and the Nebraska Association of Petroleum and Convenience Store Owners. One of the things that they're going to help us work with is

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to help with the distributors in that area to try to figure out if there's a mechanism to use the current distributors and, if not, how we can actually enhance the distribution. In Minnesota one of the products that one of the processes that they have used in some of their rural communities is to think about other vendors who come in on a regular basis. For example, in Minnesota they used Frito-Lay, who comes into every convenience store along the route, and they collaborated with them in order to have the Frito-Lay driver also drop off produce as they went through so...in small amounts that were what the store actually needed. And that's one of the parts of the business plan is to figure out exactly what you do need and how you actually acquire those things. [LR453]

SENATOR PRICE: Great. And then to piggyback off what Senator Council brought up, if I go a little farther south there on Highway 75, I still see in south Omaha area, the southeast area where we have a lot of coverage. [LR453]

MARY BALLUFF: Right. [LR453]

SENATOR PRICE: You have all five, and multiples overlapping, yet we still have the worst combined factors as you've put down here. How much time do you spend saying, why is it that even when you have the five, and you have overlap, that you still have the worst factors because it would be important that we know that so maybe there's a way to mitigate that going forward. The reason that was brought to mind is lately there's been a push on the TV about Omaha is ranked 141st out of 162 cities nationwide for their health. You know, get up off your duff and go move, and do eat right and do things. So when I look at that media campaign going on, do you have something in mind or something that's been tried and proven to say, hey, now let's take it to the next step? Because even if it's there, it's not helping. [LR453]

MARY BALLUFF: This project is one...this particular project is one of nine initiatives under that very grant that I was talking about. Within this initiative are also things around school gardens, around farm to school, there are also components on transportation

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elements, bike share programs, many of those kinds of things. In addition, we have many partners who continue to work in these areas in terms of providing more education and more information about them. So we are working on many venues. Actually the commercials that you are talking about are part of this large project. So...and Omaha does rank 142nd out of 182 metropolitan areas in terms of five health factors. [LR453]

SENATOR PRICE: Okay. So you do...but, I mean, is there something that you've seen somewhere else, not coincident to this project but has already been tried and proven, like you said with the Frito-Lay vans up north, something that's been done to say, even with the five factors here, of, you know, having all five food groups available we've improved and taken it from the worst to the middle by doing the two following things. Probably educational in nature, you know what I mean, to say now that we've provided better foods and you're utilizing them, we're seeing results, instead of just saying, now we've taken the economic incentives, put everything in there, and we're not improving. [LR453]

MARY BALLUFF: We have seen them in those areas where they are healthy corner stores that they actually do improve those. And I do want to clarify with you that part of this grant that we've gotten, we're 1 of 50 cities across the nation. And the very effort that is being done is to look at the strategies, the most...the evidence-based strategies that are most likely to succeed. And each 1 of those 50 cities is taking a look at a certain set of strategies and we have...we will be working over the next two years to implement those strategies, and we will then be comparing and getting the very answer that you're asking for, which of those strategies really make the most financial sense and which of those have the greatest impact. So this project is one of those that should help us answer that question as a nation. [LR453]

SENATOR PRICE: All right. Thank you. [LR453]

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MARY BALLUFF: Uh-huh. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Other questions? I'd like to go back. What was the statistic you gave on population necessary to support a store? [LR453]

MARY BALLUFF: Ten thousand citizens to support a community...to support a grocery store. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: And that must have something to do with the size of the store too. [LR453]

MARY BALLUFF: Those are considered full-service grocery stores, yes. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. [LR453]

MARY BALLUFF: So if you have a full-service store that can, you know, you can actually provide the nutrition quality that you need for 10,000, that would be the maximum. So that's why we use the one-mile radius. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: That's quite a challenge. And I think of my rural community of 6,000 and we have two large grocery stores. So it's got to have something to do with per capita income too. [LR453]

MARY BALLUFF: That's very much true. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Any other questions? Senator Schilz. Sorry. [LR453]

SENATOR SCHILZ: Thank you, Senator Carlson. Thank you very much and that kind of piggybacks on where I'm at. I think in my district food deserts are very real and it's not to the point of, you know, how many people and how many stores you have within there. I

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have two counties...well, one of them doesn't even have any sort of services at all. Banner County, Nebraska, has no services. You can't even stop at a convenience store and buy anything because there's not anything there. So if you've talked about access, it's a huge deal. The other community, the other county is Arthur County and they were very inventive on what they did. In fact, in order to maintain a grocery store, the students from the high school went together and they created what is called the Wolf Den. And that's a grocery store that's run by the school because the community doesn't have enough dollars to make one go. So in our area we've had to become very creative on how you do that. And, you know, we talk about 10,000 people, I think Banner County has something like 750 people that live in the county. The nearest community is Scottsbluff or Kimball, and each one of those is at least 20 miles. So if any of those dollars are available for rural areas, it would be great to find out how to get ahold of those. [LR453]

MARY BALLUFF: We are partnering with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services and I know they plan to take this very same...a similar tool out to rural communities. The criterion that you would use in terms of 10,000 and in terms of distance will be very different... [LR453]

SENATOR SCHILZ: Right. [LR453]

MARY BALLUFF: ...in a rural situation than an urban situation. In an urban situation you have mass transit and some of those things that make this possible that may not make it possible in rural communities. So I want to make sure that you understand that all the criterion that we used here apply most to our urban parts of our county. We do have areas in the more rural parts of our county which we may have to go back and take a look at. In fact, we intend to go back and look very carefully at those because the rural issues are different than the urban and we have a county that has both issues. [LR453]

SENATOR SCHILZ: Sure. Thank you. [LR453]

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SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Other questions? I do have one other observation here and it's a question. In the areas that Senator Council is obviously concerned about, how do the convenience stores do in those areas? [LR453]

MARY BALLUFF: Across our community, convenience stores had anywhere from zero, meaning that they only had pop and candy, no milk, those kinds of things, all the way up to we have one convenience store that borders almost on Senator Council's area that actually got a five. And it's a store that actually puts fresh produce in. He has seen his need and convenience stores can do that. So they are across the board but the largest majority of them have zero to two items or two groups. So they have perhaps milk and bread. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Do you think that's because then they've...those that, say, have one or two of the categories, they've kind of paired their business down to where it's at that level they can still make a profit and so they're satisfied with that, which if they were, I would understand. Is that what's happened? [LR453]

MARY BALLUFF: They actually see that as their function. Their function is a convenience store is meant to be a convenience store where you can stop by and they may carry bread and milk so that you can stop and pick those up. They haven't seen their need as being the purveyor of nutrition and entire nutrition. We feel that there may be some within these high-risk areas that when we go back to them and ask to incentivize them a little bit, that they might be interested in seeing that as their need. That's part of the reason for the interview and the survey with the store owners to make sure that we understand what the store owner wants to have happen, and so that we can match a store owner who sees his place in the neighborhood as that and a neighborhood who sees that they would be willing to really shop at a local store. [LR453]

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SENATOR CARLSON: I wonder if a complicating factor isn't, too, with convenience stores, that you can buy a meal at the convenience store. It may not be a very good meal but it's a meal, and you can buy it cheaper than you can at a full-service restaurant. [LR453]

MARY BALLUFF: We'll have some discussing to do with them to encourage them to have high-quality nutrition products because some of those other products are cheap to sell and easy to manage. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Thank you for your testimony. [LR453]

MARY BALLUFF: Thank you. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Next testifier. Welcome. [LR453]

WANDA-MARIE KOSZEWSKI: (Exhibit 3) Good afternoon and thank you for letting me come today and talk to you. My name is Wanda-Marie Koszewski. That's W-a-n-d-a-M-a-r-i-e, it's hyphenated. And I'll spell the last name, K-o, s as in Sam, z as in zebra, e as in elephant, w as in walrus, s as in Sam, k as in kangaroo, i as in igloo. (Laughter) [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: I think you've had to do that before. (Laugh) [LR453]

WANDA-MARIE KOSZEWSKI: When I was in 5th grade I got to spell...learn all the hard letters. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: I think the first questions to you should come from Karpisek. (Laughter) [LR453]

WANDA-MARIE KOSZEWSKI: I'm a registered dietitian and extension nutrition

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specialist at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. My job responsibilities is to direct the Nutrition Education Program for Nebraska, also known as NEP. NEP is an umbrella term that includes both the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education project, SNAP-Ed, and the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program, also known as EFNEP. NEP is the largest Nutrition Education Program in the state and is only available for limited resource families. Before I get started though, I want to answer some of your questions that have come up. Senator Council, it is \$1.7 billion if we continue on this path in regards to type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis and coronary heart disease. I will get into the other... [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: What's the \$1.7 billion? [LR453]

WANDA-MARIE KOSZEWSKI: In the healthcare costs. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: The healthcare costs. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Annual? [LR453]

WANDA-MARIE KOSZEWSKI: That's projected and it's projected within the next ten years. So it's very costly. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Thank you. [LR453]

WANDA-MARIE KOSZEWSKI: The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP, which was formerly known as the food stamp program, is designed to supplement an individual or family food budget. The benefits an individual or family receives is supposed to supplement a food budget but not be the food budget. However, in most of the families we work with the benefits are the only resources they have for food during a month. This also impacts food purchasing power. As of September 2010, approximately 10 percent of Nebraskans were receiving SNAP benefits with the largest increase being

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in our rural areas. I also wanted to point out one thing, too, that I got an e-mail this morning that's not part of my testimony, but the food banks in western, central and western Nebraska right now are in desperate need for food. They've been hard hit again. We're going into the holiday season and a lot of rural families will hit the food pantries first, but we find out now that they're so desperate, that's why we're seeing the increase mostly in SNAP benefits in the rural areas is because these are families that normally would not accept what they would call a government handout, but those families are in such crisis right now that they are now finally registering for SNAP benefits. And the other reason is because our food pantries are so overstretched. One thing to remember about this statistic is that our state SNAP participation rate is approximately 65 percent, meaning that about 35 percent of families in Nebraska would qualify for SNAP, do not accept SNAP benefits. To qualify for SNAP, a family must live at less than 130 percent of the federal poverty level. To bring that home a little bit, a family of four must have a monthly income of less than \$2,389. I'm here today to provide testimony on how food deserts affect limited resource families and children in Nebraska to maybe add a more of a personal face to this problem. Food insecurity is defined as limited or uncertain access to nutritious, and the key word there is nutritious, safe foods necessary to live a healthy lifestyle. Current statistics estimate that 10 percent of Nebraskans are food insecure and another 3 percent are food insecure with hunger. I want to point out that we do have family and children in this state that go hungry on a daily basis. In addition, another 20 percent of Nebraska families are borderline food insecure and they lack nutrient-dense foods in their diets. According to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, nutrient-dense foods are those foods that provide substantial amounts of vitamins and minerals relative to few calories. In our urban and rural areas we have two, I feel, two food desert issues that need to be addressed. One is the physical limitation. That is the limited choice of places to purchase food, such as grocery stores, food markets, etcetera, but the second one is the lack of nutrient-dense foods at stores. There's also a financial limitation. Lack of nutrient dense foods at reasonable costs, and I think Senator Price was getting about this, about south Omaha and that area. Yes, they do have the grocery stores in that area, but again, you also

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have some of the poorest families living in pockets of south Omaha and Bellevue, especially the base personnel that are more at the enlisted level, not at the officer level. We see that a lot of those families are struggling right now, and I think that's...and when you don't have enough resources for that food and you're living a very stressful lifestyle, that increases your risk for certain type of diseases. So you have to remember, there's an economic component to that. So I wanted to answer your question that you were getting at on the food deserts in south Omaha. And we do have the SNAP-Ed program in that area. Unfortunately, we're understaffed in south Omaha. But also the lack of resources to travel to stores. Again, you kind of alluded like, well, you know, they could walk to the store. I also lived part of my time in Switzerland, so yes, they...people do walk to stores in Europe. But I think we have to remember that even though we have transportation, a bus or something that they could get on or walk to the store, we have to keep in mind the food safety issue as well. Do they have the ability to transport milk, fresh meats, cheeses, and other high perishable foods home and keep those foods safe and make sure they're being transported in a cool bag or etcetera. And also think about the weight of those grocery bags as well. Even if you might be healthy and strong, if you're carrying four or five bags of food home to your family, that also affects how much you can buy but also how much you can carry. The Nutrition Education Program does try to address these issues for our families, especially the financial limitations. We work with them on improving their diet quality and food resource management skills. We do this by focusing on such topics as meal planning and shopping. We talk to them about shopping from a list, planning meals, and comparison pricing. Food Resource Management, we work with the families to create a food budget and try to look at other ways that they can move money around to make...help feed their family better through the month by having more food resources, using leftovers, stretching food dollars such as using coupons, and unit price lists, how to look at the unit price and really, truly get the best buy for your dollar. We go through the MyPyramid Basics. Unfortunately, a lot of Americans still do not understand the MyPyramid or how to use that to make healthy food choices. We really emphasize moderation, variety, proportionality, and physical activity. We go through the food groups so families understand how to get each of the

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food groups that Mary had identified in the NEMS study. So we go through the grains, fruits, vegetables, milk, and meats and beans. And we talk about food safety. In addition, we have to address issues such as fats, sugars, and salts. Unfortunately, the cheap foods, the more reasonable cost foods are higher in those components such as fats, sugars, and salts. And so even though, again, you have limited resource families, even if they have fruits and vegetables available to them, they're going to buy what is going to stretch that dollar the most. So unfortunately they might not buy a bag of carrots but they might go buy a bag of chips because they can feed their kids more time on that bag of chips. They don't want to do it that way, they want to offer them more nutritional value, but the cost sometimes inhibits them. Eligible individuals and families complete the lessons and then they do get a graduate certificate and cookbook. And we're also available to provide them additional education after they graduate from the program. Families enrolled in NEP have shared several barriers in being successful. One of the barriers is the lack of healthy food choices in their area. By improving the food deserts in Nebraska we can help families be more successful in adopting good dietary behaviors, and therefore decrease the incidents of chronic diseases. Although NEP cannot solve the physical limitations, we can provide participants the tool necessary to make healthy food choices despite these limitations. We work with them on the food safety issue of transporting food. This food safety is particularly important, both in our rural and urban areas, if someone has to travel a significant distance to a grocery store. Food safety is another barrier in families purchasing such perishable food items such as milk, meats, dairy, eggs, cheese, fruits, and vegetables. As Senator Schilz said, in his district sometimes they have to travel over 120 miles to a grocery store. A lot of them will go to Ogallala, North Platte to Walmart and try and buy in bulk but then they have...again, those perishable foods have to be transported back that 120 miles. We really want to work with the families and I think it's important to understand that we can only provide so much education to them. The other factors, the physical limitations are a lot harder for them to overcome. I want to close giving you a success story from one of our clients that participated last year in the NEP program. "After taking the classes I am saving \$50.00 to \$60.00 each month on groceries. I am able to do this

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by comparing prices and only buying what I need. I accomplish this by making a weekly menu with the food that I have in the house and buy the rest from the sale ads and then write a shopping list from the foods I don't have, and only buy what is on it. I have to travel 70 miles to Walmart so I try to make sure I get everything that I need and the list helps me accomplish that." Thank you. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Thank you for your testimony. Questions? Well, I have one. You're in the process of education. [LR453]

WANDA-MARIE KOSZEWSKI: Yes. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Then wouldn't it be a whole lot better if by the time somebody graduated from high school they knew all this? [LR453]

WANDA-MARIE KOSZEWSKI: That would be in the ideal world, but as you know...am I on record? (Laughter) [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Yes, yes, you are. So am I. (Laughter) [LR453]

WANDA-MARIE KOSZEWSKI: Okay. No Child Left Behind Act made schools make some tough decisions and areas that got cut were nutrition, food preparation, healthy lifestyles, and physical education. Those were the programs that were cut, so we are now...and I am not joking about this, but we've done research looking at food preparation and shopping skills of youth and young adults and they're deplorable. And it's not...you know, their parents don't cook so we now have two to three generations of young Americans that do not have life skills needed when it comes to food and healthy choices. So until that turns around, we'll continue to have an issue with that. And that's why they choose. People say, well, I see these people that are low income and they're at McDonald's or they're here. Well, they look at it...they have to make a choice about feeding their families and they're saying that I can buy more food by taking my kids out

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to McDonald's than I could going to somewhere more healthy, and I don't have the skills to make healthy foods at home. And I think the things that we see when we follow up with these individuals is, the food prep skills that they learn in our program, reading the nutrition facts label, and the food resource management skills, six months after they graduate from our program, are continuing. And I think part of that is, is that they really...finally somebody has sat down and taught them these basic life skills. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Yes, Senator Dubas. [LR453]

SENATOR DUBAS: Thank you, Senator Carlson. If you said this, I missed it and I apologize, but what are the requirements to enroll in this NEP program? [LR453]

WANDA-MARIE KOSZEWSKI: You have to be 185 percent or less of poverty. So you have to be...you have to either be automatically enrolled if you're on Medicaid, Medicare, SNAP, WIC, school lunch--free or reduced, or live in a certain geographical location, like Senator Schilz mentioned those counties, and they all automatically qualify because they're on the top 20 poorest counties in the United States. So there are some geographical locations that automatically qualify any family in that county or area. [LR453]

SENATOR DUBAS: So how do the families actually find out about this program? Is it through...? [LR453]

WANDA-MARIE KOSZEWSKI: When they receive their SNAP benefits, they actually get a brochure about the nutrition education program. It is not a requirement. SNAP will not make it a requirement like nutrition is a requirement with WIC. But we also have a 1-800 number. We have a Web site through the University of Nebraska. The University of Nebraska helps promote our program. We do a lot of school health fairs to let schools and parents know about the program and we also are...WIC is one of our major partners. Like Mary talked about, there's a lot of partnerships that make the...that we

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work on. And so WIC is one of our biggest partners. And then we do...the University of Nebraska Extension Program sponsors the Community Nutrition Partnership Council and that council meets twice a year, and it includes both local and state representatives from a lot of these programs I just mentioned. And we work on promoting all of the programs together. [LR453]

SENATOR DUBAS: How much time does it take to go through the program? [LR453]

WANDA-MARIE KOSZEWSKI: It depends on the individual. If they're in some of the job training programs, like Arbor, we have to have them enter and graduate within a month. If they're in WIC, it takes us about 18 months because we only see them every three months. But they must complete seven lessons. We have seven lessons they must complete to graduate, because we feel the research has been tied to those lessons in saying that this is the information families need to know to be successful and change behavior. We don't...unfortunately, with the job training programs, when they've been in with the month, we don't see the greatest behavior change. So that's why we really try and follow up with them through mail lessons, telephone calls, so that we can reinforce some of the things so we can continue to support that behavior change. [LR453]

SENATOR DUBAS: Do you have any kind of numbers or documentation for success? And I don't know how you measure success by the example you just gave us, but what are your results? [LR453]

WANDA-MARIE KOSZEWSKI: We look at entry and exit 24-hour recalls and then we kind of go through the food pyramid to see how they're eating towards the food pyramid, especially we emphasize the base of the pyramid, the healthier foods. And then we have a 15-question behavior checklist that they do exit and entry and then six months after they graduate from the program. And we really look at that data. We tweak the program to make it as effective as we can. We have on-line lessons now and mail lessons, too, because one of our biggest audience is the working poor. So we've got to

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figure out a way of working with those parents and children in nontraditional hours. Also we reach about 20,000 kids through our school enrichment projects. [LR453]

SENATOR DUBAS: Great. Thank you. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Any other...yes, Senator Price. [LR453]

SENATOR PRICE: Thank you, Senator Carlson. Just real quick, to piggyback on what Senator Dubas brought up and was on my mind, do you work with NETV or public access TV on any of this training? [LR453]

WANDA-MARIE KOSZEWSKI: No, and the problem is...and let me explain how the money comes. We get some money from the National Institute of Food in Agriculture, NIFA, that's for the NEP program. We are only funded at about 55 percent of what our actual need is for Nebraska because EFNEP has not received any additional funding for the past five years. The SNAP-Ed program, we have to raise a dollar in-state to get a dollar from the feds. We have a higher need than we can raise and match in Nebraska. And most of that money, the University of Nebraska was very gracious, they don't take the indirect cost rate. They've waived it and that is our biggest match. If we didn't have that we would just be an Omaha-Lincoln-Grand Island program. That's how...it's the largest nutrition education program in rural areas and if it wasn't for the University we would not be able to do that. [LR453]

SENATOR PRICE: I just think that moving forward that might be an asset or a resource that could be used, looking at NET and using those, because they have a lot of public access programming that would be nontraditional in nature. [LR453]

WANDA-MARIE KOSZEWSKI: Right. Yeah, but we'd have to have the money to pay them to do it. That's our problem--the money. (Laugh) [LR453]

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SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Any other questions? One last one from me. I think I know the answer but SNAP cards, they could be used at any convenience store? [LR453]

WANDA-MARIE KOSZEWSKI: Any store that has the EBT capabilities they can use their SNAP cards at, their EBT cards. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. All right. [LR453]

WANDA-MARIE KOSZEWSKI: Yeah. Thank you. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Thank you. Next testifier. [LR453]

SUSAN WHITFIELD: Good afternoon. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Good afternoon. Welcome. [LR453]

SUSAN WHITFIELD: My name is Susan Whitfield. Hi, my name is Susan Whitfield, S-u-s-a-n W-h-i-t-f-i-e-l-d. I'd like to thank the Ag Committee for convening the food access hearing. This is a very important subject matter, as you have already heard. And I am with No More Empty Pots. I'm the project manager and wanted to share some information about our organization. And we have other partners here that will share more detailed information about statistical data. No More Empty Pots is recognized as a nonprofit in the state of Nebraska and has submitted a Form 1023 to the IRS for approval as a 501(3)(c) organization. We serve the Omaha metropolitan statistical area and its estimated population of approximately 820,000 individuals in eastern Nebraska and western Iowa. We manage a coalition of partners, including public and private organizations, business, entrepreneurs, and volunteers. Our coalition partners will collaborate in the creation of both traditional and innovative high-quality food products and services using environmental and financially sustainable practices. Priorities include

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support fair wage, food-related businesses, improve regional self-sufficiencies, food security, production, and distribution for local and regional citizens. Our vision is to base on the belief that the community and its needs are the foundation upon which our agenda must be constructed and managed. In addition, we recognize that financial sustainability must be assured by identifying, implementing, and measuring effectiveness of innovative, cooperative business models that would generate fair-wage jobs, revenue efficient, consumer access to local foods, goods and services. At this time I would like to turn it over to one of our partners. Her name is Annette Artherton. She's with the Omaha Economic Development Corporation. She will share with you some of the statistical data in one of the highest concentration of poverty in Omaha. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Thank you. [LR453]

SUSAN WHITFIELD: Thank you. [LR453]

ANNETTE ARTHON: Good afternoon. My name is Annette Artherton, A-n-n-e-t-t-e, last name is A-r-t-h-e-r-t-o-n. I would like to express my deep appreciation for being able to come and present some statistical information to this committee. While the information is very specific to an inner city urban community, I think and we've heard this afternoon various incidences of rural communities that are in the same circumstances that this community is. I am employed as the planning research and special projects coordinator for a nonprofit, inner city CDC. I also lend support to No More Empty Pots in terms of statistical research and advisement in analysis from that perspective. I'd like to share with you, first of all, some information about the Omaha MSA area and then give you a presentation on what specifically certain census tracks within the Omaha MSA truly look like. Demographic and economic indicators reflect a very strong trend for growth in Douglas County, in particular for the Omaha area. The 2006 population for the Omaha MSA is, as Susan said, over 800,000 persons. That's a 24 percent increase since 1990. According to the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, the city of Omaha itself has had a significant population increase of about

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up to 396,000 persons. The racial distribution within the MSA is 85 percent white, 6.2 percent black, and 5.4 percent other races. The median household income in the MSA in 2009 was \$51,752. That's about a 73 percent increase since 1990. Ninety-one percent of the MSA population lives above the poverty level. Only 8.4 percent within the county at large lived below the poverty level. U.S. census data in 2000 indicated that within the central core area of the city, 41.6 percent of the total population lives below the poverty level. A broader analysis of these statistics reveals that a disparate percentage of children, within the census tracts that my organization and No More Empty Pots services, grow up impoverished and continue to live impoverished for generations. More than 44.8 percent of those living below the poverty level in this community are children. Eighty-seven percent of all households are single-parent households, 41.5 percent of all the households in the community receive some type of food assistance. More than 30 percent...actually more than 85 percent of all households live below 30 percent poverty level. They're very densely concentrated past North 52nd Street. For children raised in poverty, the challenges are enormous. I'm sure we're all aware of that. According to the Center on Hunger and Poverty, there are numerous health effects that children who experience hunger may suffer, including stunted physical growth, illness, anemia, hospitalizations, and more frequent visits to the doctors. Hungry children also suffer considerable psychological and emotional stress. They exhibit this through problem behaviors, such as hyperactivity, anxiety, impaired cognitive functioning, impaired cognitive ability, low educational performance and achievement, inability to concentrate. They have a limited attention span and they have a difficulty performing complex tasks. Recently the organization I work for collaborated with several other entities to apply for Promise Neighborhood Grants. When we analyze the elementary schools that are located within the targeted area, more than 90 percent of the children there receive free or reduced lunches. So you're talking about 90 percent of the child population goes to school pretty much hungry every day and, as a result, we also see the delayed effects in terms of their educational attainments. We have very low achievement for high school graduation. We have low performance on the particularly reading scores for children who live in that area and also in the math and science areas.

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Information gathered from the Douglas County Health Status Indicators Report in 2007 revealed some additional startling facts. As I said at the beginning of my testimony, Douglas County is home to or its population breakout is about 6.2 percent African-American. More than 75 percent of African-American's live east of 72nd Street. Among African-Americans, cancer deaths are consistently higher than any other race in Douglas County with 202 African-Americans to 179 at a rate per 100,000. Disparity exists in lung cancer death rates. For the black race it's 30 percent higher than the white race. Overall infant mortality in Douglas County has continued to decline. However, the rate for black infants is more than two times as high as that for whites. The death rate due to sudden infant death syndrome has been declining nationally, but the disparity between black and white races in Douglas County in 2005 was 11 times higher for African-Americans than it was for whites. Low birth weights in Douglas County among blacks is twice the rate of that of whites and Hispanics. Disparity also exists between the heart disease rates in Douglas County. While Nebraska and Douglas County rates have been slightly lower than the U.S. rates, the death rate for black residents in the county has followed somewhat of a pattern of decline but it is still 25 percent higher than that of whites. In Douglas County the death rate due to stroke has closely followed the rates of the U.S. and Nebraska. However, among African-Americans it is 53 percent higher among African-Americans living in Douglas County compared to the white race. Diabetes is considered the third leading cause of death among African-Americans. Within the geographic area that we focused on primarily for No More Empty Pots, children are scaled at being 14.7 percent of all children in the area are considered obese, more than 29 percent of all adults are considered obese. When you add these factors into the environmental degradation that exists within the community that we are trying to work in, it really escalates the problem and it puts more individuals at risk for continuous need for extensive healthcare services. Currently, community members in general access foods, and we've heard this testified to, through a series of either convenience stores, corner stores, or gas station outlets. Within the targeted area, again, there are six convenience stores, and there is one pseudo grocery store that exists within the area, none of which provide the five food groups to individuals, none of

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which provide lean meats, low-fat or sugar-free food products, any type of grain products that are whole grains. In addition to that, for an individual to be able to travel out of the community poses another problem. While we do have access to a bus system, the bus routes present problems in terms of transporting foods, particularly perishable items. Most of the households in the community have a vehicle that they own and typically they do share those vehicles with all persons who do live in the household. Recently the organization that I work for did approach someone to develop a grocery store within one of the deepest pockets of poverty where it's at 50 percent and more of the individuals who lived there. We reached a point at which the potential operator came and said that his pro forma indicated that his profit share would not be great enough and so he backed out of the deal. These are the barriers, particularly as you talk about per capita income and the low fluidity of cash, that appears in the typical way that retailers look at locating their stores, present additional barriers to bringing in a healthy, nonconvenience type market into the community. With those things in mind, I really would like to encourage you to consider the legislation in the resolution that's before you. We're looking to present or build into the community an environmentally sustainable food production system that includes the distribution and equitable access for all individuals within the community. It would also produce a number of jobs that are in high need within this particular community. It increases the equity also, the food equity, and addresses some of the numerous health barriers that individuals, particularly children, that live in this impoverished community experience. Thank you. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Thank you for your testimony. Do we have questions of the committee? [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: I just have one. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Senator Council. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Annette, can we get a copy of your...? [LR453]

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ANNETTE ARTHERTON: Susan was going to go make it. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Okay. Thank you. [LR453]

ANNETTE ARTHERTON: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Any other questions? Okay. Thank you for your testimony. [LR453]

ANNETTE ARTHERTON: Thank you. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Next testifier. Welcome. [LR453]

EDGAR HICKS: (Exhibit 4) Thank you. Edgar Hicks, E-d-g-a-r H-i-c-k-s. I'm here as a member of...representing the Nebraska State Grange but I'm also one of the founding members, board members of No More Empty Pots. I sit on Governor Heineman's Rural Development Commission. I'm founder of the Kansas Black Farmers Association in Nicodemus, Kansas, and I also have lived in Senator Council's district and my children were born and raised in Senator Dubas' district. I spent 40 years in the grain business. The subject of food deserts has been one of the acronyms that I've used for years, specifically as it relates to educating youth about food issues. I've always felt that if you had a knowledge of agriculture you could always get a job. That was one of the reasons why I went to college in New York City. I wanted to be a stockbroker and got involved in commodity trading and recognized that agriculture was basically the foundation of our country. I also remember confronting Senator Council, asking her, you know, how did she get appointed to the Ag Committee. And I always remember her answer, and she castigated me and said she wasn't asked to be on the food council. She wanted to be on it because she understand that Nebraska was...the foundation of our economic impact on our state was agriculture. My interest in this is that I believe that agriculture

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and this issue of food desert is a national security issue. It's an issue that relates to educating our kids and specifically, if you heard what Annette was saying, it is really...some of those statistics I did not know. But I really do believe that we need to do a better job of educating our youth. That's my interest. When I hear food desert, I think about food but I also think about the education piece. I pushed for the Omaha Public School system to reactivate our FFA chapter and I have been struggling with that. I think it's because you think of FFA and you think of corn and soybeans. You do not think about high blood pressure, the nutritional issues. And my focus has been on the issue of water. I thought we all needed water so if I could educate...or just about the subject of water, you know, I would accomplish a great deal. The challenge, I think, is, also within the Unicameral itself. One of the first things I ever remembered getting interested in what the Unicameral was about was in either 2003 or 2004 when I lived in Senator Lathrop's district, but Pam Redfield sent a letter to all of her constituents saying the concern was that we needed more business...we needed less farmers and we needed more business people in the Unicameral. I can't remember, but I wanted to bring that handout. I've always wanted to share that letter with somebody and I thought this was the greatest opportunity I would have to share it with you guys on what Senator Redfield was saying about farmers, because if you're a farmer you have to be knowledgeable on so many subjects, and I think some of the best businessmen that I know are farmers. And so I think if you sit on the Unicameral and you're a farmer, you've really got something going for you. And I felt so strong about that I wanted...you know, I tried to do everything I could to push my kids into agriculture. My son did...has as an ag economics degree but he went in a different direction. As close as I could get my daughter involved was when she was born I named her Rye, (laughter) and she points that out in every...she's a teacher in the Millard school district but she points out to everybody that, you know, she knows something about agriculture and her reason her name is Rye is because her father did not get "Corn" by her mother as a name for her. (Laughter) So I just want you to know that there is some really strategic issue that you need to be addressing in this subject. And one of the challenges is right in the Unicameral, because I really think you would not...surely you can't have any opposition

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to really pushing this through. This covers every aspect of what we want to get accomplished in our state. And as I look at, as a member of the Rural Development Commission, the economic impact of not knowing about agriculture is really significant, you know, the example, being Senator Redfield's letter. You know, who are going to be our future leaders that are going to be addressing the issues of health, you know, employment? You know, I point out and Senator Council and I had the opportunity to go to Milwaukee to see Will Allen, a fantastic operation. We went there not knowing that Council Bluffs was going to have some corn and soybean farmers there. And they spoke about the income that they get off an acre of land. Now you know, corn prices have been pretty fantastic. We get 200 bushels to the acre so you get \$5, that's probably...you can make \$1,000 an acre. He was generating \$200,000 income off an acre of land in the inner city, documented, and believe me, those farmers there were...I mean if there was anything...I just want to share this with you because I remember how it went. Those farmers said...I was trying to think of how he said that. He was talking about he got \$30 a square foot, I think, of income or something off of his land in the inner city, in the city of Milwaukee. And I remember that corn and soybean guy instantaneously said, that's \$200,000 an acre, because they can relate to those type of things. I think if we could somehow find a way to incorporate, you know, the rural community in looking at sustainable issues and seeing that it isn't a Hatfield and McCoy type of relationship, you know, we will be accomplishing a great deal. You know, and I struggle with this because I spent so much time going to meetings at OPS trying to get our FFA activated and we still haven't got it done yet. So I don't know where this all leads but I know it can be, you know, that you can be our sources. I've given you some information on our RC&Ds in our state. Every state has an RC&D. In our area...Senator Dubas, is Polk part of your district? So we have from Polk to Douglas County in our Rural Development Commission. It's based in David City. You know, they could be a real source of getting education out developing projects. They are 501(c)(3)s, they're part of the USDA under the NRCS. I think, in my mind, if we could get them to recognize how important this issue of food desert is and recognize that it isn't just an urban issue. You know, and correct me if I'm wrong, Senator Dubas, but in my own community

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where my kids went to school in Clarks, Nebraska, you know, I look at Clarks, I mean, we had this huge amount of corn, soybeans. We got cattle. But in one way it's a food desert also. And when I look at the history of Nicodemus, Kansas, the National Park Service, an all-black settlement in western Kansas, and the National Park Service has done a study going back to when the town was founded in 1877, and even though they may have been on the low end of...you know, these former slaves, but the history says they had food. They could have sustained themselves if something happened. They had chicken...you know I don't think you would have called them free-range chickens in those days, (laughter) but they had chickens, they had berries. I mean, they had a food system. And I think about the same thing when I think about my own church, Salem Baptist Church, the largest institution, I think, black institution we probably have in the state. I remember we had to clean up, a cleanup duty. I remember, you know, trying to get out of doing this one day. And they got me on a Saturday morning at 7:00 to clean up. And I remember going through in the bushes and going back and picking up papers. Every other paper was a Little Debbie, you know. And I think about we talk about the nutrition, the comment I think you made was, convenience stores are convenient and expensive. And I thought about you thinking, maybe, speaking about the cost, but I was thinking about all those kids. You know, where did all those Little Debbie pieces of paper come from? I mean not hundreds, it looked like there were thousands. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Walgreens. [LR453]

EDGAR HICKS: They came...well, on that corner where the church is was a...used to be a convenience store. It's something else now, but this was like five years ago when it was a convenience store. Think about if those kids are buying the most convenient thing to eat, you know, what about the education piece that...you know, what could we do from an educational standpoint to help them be more knowledgeable about...and how do we do a thing like Frito-Lay? There's got to be a way to solve this. And I just think addressing this issue of food desert and coming together like organizations like No More Empty Pots, and what you want to do, Brenda, on these issues, I just think surely

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you can't have any opposition because I would think the Corn Growers, the Cattlemen's Association, we all should be involved in that process. Our farm groups, we all should be pushing to get this...because we'll benefit from it. And so that's one of the issues why I think organizations like getting the RC&D involved, or trying to get our school system to be more engaged in the education of...if you just understood what water was. How do we use water? You know, how important is water? I think those things are mechanisms that you can use to address these issues as you try to come together with... [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Thank you for your testimony. Any questions, committee? Appreciate your enthusiasm. Thank you for testifying. Do we have any other testifiers? Okay, we have two more, four more. Welcome. [LR453]

STEPH LARSEN: (Exhibits 5 and 6) Thank you. My name is Steph Larsen. I take it I'm supposed to spell it, S-t-e-p-h L-a-r-s-e-n. I live in Alliance, Nebraska. I am the assistant director of organizing at the Center for Rural Affairs and food deserts are a concern for us because when people think about the term "food desert" they often think about urban areas, and as Senator Carlson talked about earlier, it's a big issue in rural communities as well. Where in urban areas you tend to think of food deserts as being a radius of a mile outside of which you can't get food, in rural communities we tend to say ten times that, so ten miles to the nearest grocery store. Grocery stores in communities are sources of economic activity and tax revenue and they're also places where residents can buy food they need for an active lifestyle. They also...rural residents also understand how important grocery stores are for the community cohesion and interaction, as well as one of the resources that people look for when they're looking to move to your community. Without a grocery store, young families aren't likely to move to your area because, you know, they need...that's one of the resources that they need. Center for Rural Affairs has been active not only in the Arthur community store many years ago, but also right now in the community of Cody which is about 30 miles west of Valentine. It's a town of, I believe, about 500 people and they don't have a grocery store. Most folks go to Valentine but not everyone can make that trip and as often as

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they need to. And previous testimony was talking about food safety and when you're going 50, 60, 70 miles, it's hard to keep the cool things cool and the warm things warm. So students in Cody have actually been the catalyst for this store, similar to the store in Arthur. When the community kind of put up some roadblocks, the students gave a presentation to the city council that convinced the community that they actually needed to move forward with this project. They have been able to...they've applied for and received, with the help of the Center for Rural Affairs, two federal grants, the Rural Business Enterprise Grants, RBEG, to support this project, and when they're done they're going to have a new, 1,200-square-foot, straw-bale storefront that the students will help run and that will generate economic activity as well as be a really important educational opportunity to teach entrepreneurship to kids who will, hopefully, then stay in rural communities and know...have the skills needed to start their own businesses, make their own jobs and support their families instead of having to have a job created for them. It's also a...you know, it's a real sense of pride that the community is able to look into themselves for the solutions to their problems as opposed to having to have someone come in from outside and save the day. So there are a lot of challenges that rural grocery stores face. And I, too, was surprised to hear that 10,000 people are required to support a grocery store, because in Lyons we have 963 people, at least until the census comes out. (Laughter) And we have a grocery store too. So what we're really looking for is the community's support. Are the people in your community willing to shop at that store and not, you know, run off to the big box store and, in our case, South Sioux City or Omaha or Norfolk. But there are other challenges that rural communities face in keeping a grocery store. And a lot of them are detailed in some of the research that has come out of the Kansas State Center for Engagement and Community Development. We work quite closely with them. They've identified six. They...and those are outlined in one of the papers that I gave you by our research director, Jon Bailey. Competition with big box stores is one, energy costs. There are lots of coolers and freezers that...and electricity is expensive. And luckily there are some federal grants to help grocery stores upgrade their equipment and become more energy efficient. Minimum buyer requirements from distributors. In small towns it's really hard to meet

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that \$10,000 requirement per week. The truck won't...or you get penalized if you're below that and if you're way below that, the truck won't stop. So trying to figure out how to overcome that challenge, oftentimes you're stacking businesses on top of one another or figuring out how to cooperate with several grocery stores and then someone has an entrepreneurship opportunity in delivering that food to various communities. A lot of...surprisingly to me at least, a lot of grocery stores talk about quality labor as a major issue, that they can't find people who have business skills to be able to hire. And so again, we need more entrepreneurship in our schools. Dealing with community support, as I've mentioned, and then having the ownership model that's going to fit properly for the community and the type of store that you want to have. It doesn't have to necessarily be a sole proprietorship. It can be community owned, it can be school run, you could have churches doing a bulk of the labor, but exploring different...you know, what the options are so that communities can choose. Many of these challenges can be addressed, at least in part, by a combination of existing federal and state resources and thinking creatively about how to reword or change regulations within local communities or states in order to make it easier for people to keep grocery stores going. Lastly, I want to talk about a number of federal resources that Nebraska can make more use of in terms of food deserts. Previous testimonies have highlighted federal dollars that Nebraska loses out on, specifically like SNAP. If we don't have places to buy food, people can't use those SNAP dollars and so we're losing on that revenue. On the other handout I've distributed describes the administration, it's on the kind of tan sheet, the administration's Healthy Food Financing Initiative. This is based on a model in Pennsylvania called the Fresh Food Financing Initiative where both in urban or rural areas you're taking existing businesses and trying to figure out how to motivate those business owners to have more healthy foods in their stores. So President Obama has put additional money into some existing programs, which I've outlined, and are directing...he's directing administrators to funnel funding towards businesses selling healthy foods in underserved areas. So with that, I'll be happy to answer any questions you have. [LR453]

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SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Thank you for your testimony. Are there questions of the committee? Senator Council. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: And not so much a question. Steph, I want to thank you for providing, and I'm pleased to see that the Center for Rural Affairs is communicating these federal initiatives. And I was aware of the inclusion of the Healthy Food Financing Initiative, but I was particularly interested in what the Pennsylvania legislature did, which serves as the model for the federal program, and looking at opportunities because I don't want it to be misunderstood. Both under the Healthy Food Financing...the federal program and the state program in Pennsylvania, it's not just to enable existing stores to expand their healthy foods selection but to actually develop... [LR453]

STEPH LARSEN: That's correct, yes. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: ...in areas where they don't exist. [LR453]

STEPH LARSEN: Yes. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: So that model...and they also based one of the reasons the Healthy Food Financing Initiative was embraced in the budget is because...one of the questions I asked earlier that offset the benefits of these dollars going into developing healthy food options in underserved areas reduces the cost associated with diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and obesity. And that's kind of where the trade-off is. And that's what I'm...I'm glad that that information came out through this hearing, because if we begin to consider some initiatives to address the food desert and to increase access to healthy, fresh produce to assist local producers...I mean, we have local producers that if provided the opportunity...I mean, they can't afford to package their product, they can't afford to ship their product or distribute their product. If we have mechanisms that provide them some assistance or assist collaborative...one of the individuals who wanted to be here today and couldn't is associated with Massena Farms and he

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indicated...he works with No More Empty Pots of Omaha. And one of the things that they're looking to do is assisting the local producers, who are locally growing vegetables, provide a packaging and processing facility, and that's what they don't have. They don't have a packaging and processing facility. And if they had the packaging and processing facility, then they would be in a position to provide this fresh produce to at least three local school districts who would be interested in it. But they don't have the processing facility. So under either the federal Healthy Food Financing Initiative or if Nebraska was to develop something comparable to Pennsylvania, we'd be able to assist in the development of such a facility and it would address a number of the issues that were raised by Ms. K, as in kangaroo, O, as in...(laughter) I can't pronounce her last name, but she addressed the physical limitations and the financial limitation issue. If we could develop some legislative initiative around the Healthy Food Financing Initiative with the Pennsylvania model, we'd address the limited choice of places to purchase, we'd address the lack of nutrient-dense foods, we'd address the lack of those nutrient-dense foods at reasonable cost, and we'd address the lack of resources to travel these great distances whether you're in an urban setting or a rural setting.

[LR453]

STEPH LARSEN: If I can address... [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Yes. [LR453]

STEPH LARSEN: ...a couple of other things, one, in the tan sheet, I have Web sites that we've established for each of the programs, and there are a lot more resources. I had limited space so I cut a bunch, but there are links and more resources on those Web pages if you want to check them out. Secondly, you're absolutely right that diet-related diseases, if you don't have access to healthy foods...and, in fact, rural communities actually have higher rates than average of most diet-related diseases. Third, you talked about local food as a way to avoid food deserts. And, Senator Carlson, you were asking earlier about electronic benefits transfer at farmers' markets. There are a lot of creative

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ways to make use of EBT cards at farmers' markets. A lot of markets, for example, have made use of tokens where you have...because those machines are really expensive, you swipe it in one spot and everybody, whether it's credit card, debit card, or EBT, gets tokens that they can then spend at farmers' markets. But that's just one creative solution that they can use. And lastly, Senator Council, in addition to the resources I've given you, there's a program called the Healthy Urban Food Enterprise Development program, HUFED (laugh). And it actually doesn't have to be an urban area but it's a federal program that came forward in the last farm bill and the money has since been released, and it's to try and develop businesses that will take local and regional foods and get it to underserved areas, be it urban or rural. So that's something that I'm happy to supply more information on if that would be good. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Great. Thank you so much. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Thank you. Any other questions? Okay. Thank you for your testimony. [LR453]

STEPH LARSEN: Thank you. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Next testifier. [LR453]

LAURIE HODGES: (Exhibit 7) Good afternoon. My name is Laurie Hodges, L-a-u-r-i-e H-o-d-g-e-s. And I understand I am testifying as myself as opposed to my professional role and yet the two are really one. I have been working with commercial vegetable growers for almost 40 years now, which is scary. I worked with large-scale wholesale shippers in the southeast for a number of years, and I moved to Nebraska about 20 years ago and worked with small growers. Basically, people that are growing food for human consumption, fruits and...well, particularly vegetables. But that's sort of some of the background that I speak from. And I'm here because I have a passion over the last ten years for rural foods, rural food systems. Having...knowing and working with a large

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number of small farmers, I can spout data, a little bit of data here. Horticulture in the state of Nebraska since...I can supply the data to your research analyst because I've crunched the numbers through the 2007 ag census, horticulture crop production has increased with a, adjusted for inflation, dollar increase of 47 percent since 1992. Food sold direct to consumers, which does include meat products and I've included in the category of horticulture, was not part of the ag census prior to 1992. Agronomic crop value to the state has not increased anywhere near at that rate either before or after adjusting for inflation. And I don't know about you, but I would love it if my salary had increased 47 percent since 1992. Those are real dollars after you adjust for inflation. So there is some substantial economic value to the state in fresh fruit and vegetable production. My interest has arisen and part of my...because there's a general lack of knowledge about how the food systems work, how food gets from point A to point B, why California grows...is the major player and that sort of thing, and I'm not going to talk about that. I thought what I would do, in light of what other people have spoken about, for a number of years in my professional life I've been trying to get some grant funding to look at food systems in the...what I used to call the significantly rural counties of Nebraska. The first one which I'll read from was prepared in 2004, so some of the numbers will be from the 2002 census. And I've since learned that these counties that I call significantly rural as opposed to what East Coast people think of as rural or even rural around Lancaster County, as those of you from further west understand, there's a lot of space out there. This is not East Coast rural, and that's some of the fallacy that comes up in numbers. When you look at rural poverty, includes rural counties that are adjacent to metropolitan areas and food systems. Now I only have one copy here, but I don't know if you've seen the map of the counties with low access or food desert counties. Nebraska is in there and it's basically a very large number of counties, almost the whole state, except right along basically I-80 but all the northern areas. What I'm reading from, I have prepared for the 54 counties that are north of I-80 and west of 283, basically the line from Grand Island west. And it has to do with I think you need to understand in terms of talking about food systems and providing local foods to people that there are several factors involved in this. For a producer that's going to be growing

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vegetables, they're doing it for money. This is a lot of work, it's hand labor. Everything is hand harvested just like in California. Tomatoes are picked one by one. Pumpkins are picked up one by one. Zucchini are picked one by one. There's labor issues. That's one of the limitations in the state. Although there are a number of off-shift meat packers that do work mornings harvesting vegetables in areas where those are available, the growers do have problems finding people to help harvest and do the fieldwork. I'll just read what I have here. Seventy-three percent of farm operators in Nebraska list farming as their principle occupation, yet 32 percent of these principle "occupators," by self-definition, work more...32 percent work more than 200 days off the farm. Many farm families have both spouses working off the farm at least part of the year. Farm families may have as much in common with the dual career urban family in terms of time available for a home garden. Anecdotal conversations have indicated that in rural areas of Nebraska, most farmers' market vendors are retired people living in town, selling surplus from large home gardens, not farmer/ranchers who get their produce, quote, in town just like city people, unquote. I've run into that numerous times. The farmers' markets in the rural areas are dominated by townspeople, not farmers. A 1992 study in Kansas also found that the majority of vendors at farmers' markets were retired people, followed by professional working people, then farmers. Although the economic return to vendors was low in small markets, the Kansas study also showed that vendors benefited socially as well as economically, indicating that the markets serve an important and versatile community function. This study that was done in Kansas, I think, is a key component when we talk about local foods in Nebraska, because reality is it's very difficult to make a lot of money when there isn't a big market, which is the situation in much of Nebraska. The markets are small. We have people coming into the Lincoln farmers' market from close to North Platte; they've been coming in for at least 21 years. And why do they leave at 2:00 a.m. on a Saturday in case there's something going on, on the interstate? Because the money is in Lincoln. And they can justify that because the money is in Lincoln. The money is not...they tried the butter-and-egg route around to the small towns. They tried selling to grocery stores. They tried all these other things. It's the money. How do you make it cost effective? That's part of the issue. But that

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doesn't negate the fact that there's a great social connection, and that's part of what I'm interested in, in trying to learn more about because it's that social glue that happens when you exchange food or you're supplying your local grocery store or you're having a delivery service or a pick up service or a you-pick operation on your rural area. And I'm negating the importance of the food desert issues in the urban areas. It's just my focus has been on the rural areas. And most of the research up until about 1990...well, really until about 2000 has focused on the urban food deserts and not rural. Studies conducted in states more populated than Nebraska have characterized aspects of farmers' markets, including the typical customer, consumption, transfer of fresh fruit and vegetables, availability or preference for organic produce, vendor characteristics, distances travels, and amounts spent per visit. There's a classic one from New Jersey. I hold that a lot of these findings or these studies may not hold true in significantly rural states such as Nebraska. For example, the average distance vendors traveled to market in New Jersey was 27 miles, and the miles to the most distant market averaged 42 miles with a maximum of 75 miles. Rural Nebraska, you know, you can...I suspect it's not going to be the same. The typical customer being Caucasian, the upper income levels with a college degree, living within ten miles of the market. Where farmers' markets serve those with lower income levels, the focus has been on serving urban rather than rural residents or on establishing farmers' markets to serve low-income urban areas, not low-income rural areas. Although within the 54 rural Nebraska counties, our counties with the highest net cash income from agriculture, 10 counties have an average...10/54 have an average net cash farm income of less than \$15,000. The range was from \$3,133 to \$81,610 of net cash. That's poverty, \$15,000 cash. That's part of the constraints on buying fresh produce for rural people. That's the county average. There were 35 farmers' markets serving this area in 2006, including 7 markets and counties with very low population densities of less than four persons per square mile. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Could I ask you to wind it up? [LR453]

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LAURIE HODGES: Yeah, I will. The food security in Nebraska is likely to be as dependent on transportation as in urban areas with farmers and ranchers sharing a lot of the characteristics of the urban people in terms of transportation issues. And I've become increasingly aware of that as I spend more and more time in the Sandhills area. There was a study in 1987 to evaluate the potential to supply the counties in Nebraska Panhandle with fresh vegetables from local production. The report indicated the number of pounds of various fresh vegetables that were consumed per week, as indicated by sales volumes of selected vegetables and ornamental vegetables, such as pumpkins and Indian corn. These were reported by grocery stores, so these were wholesale numbers. However, no attempt was made to relate the sales volume to dietary assessment information or the net return gross value to a farm and how many acres would be required to do that during the growing season. I played a numbers game and did that. Basically, one farm would gross about a little bit over \$100,000 and could serve the entire Panhandle counties with food during the growing season in that area. So what the...my bottom line is that there are models and there are some very successful examples. I'm thinking of a couple in Sheridan County. They sell at four farmers' markets. They have a subscription produce community-supported ag program going. They're very effective marketers. And they are serving a very real need there and there are models out there that will work and could work elsewhere in rural Nebraska to address the food deserts that are out there. Thank you. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. All right. [LR453]

LAURIE HODGES: Questions? [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Any questions? Okay. Thank you for your testimony. And I think we have one more testifier. [LR453]

TARIK ABDEL-MONEM: (Exhibit 8) Good afternoon, members of this committee. My name is Tarik Abdel-Monem, first name, Tarik, T-a-r-i-k, last name, Abdel-Monem, that's

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A-b-d-e-l-M-o-n-e-m. I'm a seven-year resident of Lincoln and Nebraska, and I am representing the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center based here in Lincoln. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to this committee. Just to provide the committee with some brief background information, the Public Policy Center focuses on five areas of public policy: behavioral health services and systems; access to governmental services; information technology in health and human services; public participation in policy; and water resource policy. We are primarily a grant-funded, applied research center and have worked with local, state, and federal government entities on a wide variety of public policy issues of interest. In May of 2010, we began a dialogue with Rick Leonard of this committee, who informed us about LR453. Coincidentally, the Policy Center had also been exploring the possibility of conducting grant-funded research on the topic of childhood obesity, so it was very timely to connect with this committee at the time that we did. In subsequent conversations we have had, the Policy Center drafted an outline of a study plan proposal, and I have submitted copies of that outline to the committee. We structured the study plan to have four separate but complementary components, the first component being a literature and policy review about food deserts and methods for defining and measuring food deserts. The second component focuses on the use of using GIS mapping technology to help map out dynamics relevant to identifying food deserts and formulate strategies to address food deserts. The third component focuses on the use of public participation, and the fourth and final component being a capstone conference to develop and recommend policy responses. I should emphasize that the outline is what it is. It is just an outline, and we are and would be happy to work with other partners--including, obviously, members of this committee, a number of the organizations that are represented here today--to make changes to this proposed study design. The Policy Center is fundamentally an entity which values and strives to involve partners and stakeholders from across the policy community to develop initiatives. Let me update you briefly on what we have done after drafting the study outline. We went ahead, we contacted two foundations here in Lincoln to see if there would be any interest in funding this study. One foundation was interested but declined because the project is

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focused on the state, whereas this particular foundation had a local focus. The second foundation showed some preliminary interest but they have not yet responded to us formally. We'll continue to make contacts with foundations to try and obtain grant funding for this project and would be more than happy to continue working with Mr. Leonard and others as well to do so. Briefly, let me also state that regardless of whether or not the Public Policy Center is able to obtain funding for this particular study proposal, I should mention in order to be responsive to the committee's interests in the topic of food deserts, one thing that we can offer to do with a degree of certainty is convene a small forum on the topic of food deserts and policy responses this coming spring. And I happen to be the coordinator of an annual speaking series at the University of Nebraska on various issues of public policy and I'd be more than happy to work with this committee, with Mr. Leonard, with other representatives in this room to try and craft a small forum that would be responsive to some of the interests that you all have shown this afternoon. I think it would be a good way to keep the initiative going and just be responsive to your interest. So, for example, I noticed earlier today there's a lot of...one of the themes that's really resonated has been education, involving schools. So, Senator Schilz, you mentioned that the school in your district had been active and been very creative. There were also some very good comments about the need for education when it comes to just how do you make a healthy meal, how do you prepare that, I mean, very basic things of that nature. So one of the things we could do is work with you to craft a forum about identifying innovative responses targeting children and youth. You know, Senator Council, you made reference to legislation coming out of the state of Pennsylvania. We'd be more than happy to work with you to try and bring in legislators from other jurisdictions to learn more about what their experiences have been. So, you know, we just want to be very responsive to the interests of this committee. Again, I want to thank you for the invitation to appear this afternoon. And I, and we at the Public Policy Center, hope to continue to work with this committee and other interested parties in this area. Thank you very much. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Thank you for your testimony. Questions? Senator

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Council. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: One quick question. [LR453]

TARIK ABDEL-MONEM: Yes. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Tarik, how much would it cost to conduct this study? [LR453]

TARIK ABDEL-MONEM: We costed out option one, which was the literature review, and I believe...I'll get back to you with certainty, Senator, but I believe it was about \$5,000. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Okay. [LR453]

TARIK ABDEL-MONEM: We did not cost out the remaining three options. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: I would appreciate it if you could cost out the remaining three options so that it could be something that the Legislature could consider. I mean, this was more of an investigative type of interim study as opposed to one where we actually contract with someone to conduct the study and report back to the committee. I'd be curious to know what it would cost to perform a study that says in depth, as you have outlined here, and which quite frankly crosses all of the areas that have been raised by all of the people who have testified this afternoon as an opportunity that I think exists whether we go with this or not for the university and No More Empty Pots to work together on developing that forum, if nothing else. [LR453]

TARIK ABDEL-MONEM: Right. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: But if you could provide that to Mr. Leonard so that it could come back to the committee, we'd get a feel for what such a study would cost us. [LR453]

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TARIK ABDEL-MONEM: Absolutely. [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Thank you. [LR453]

TARIK ABDEL-MONEM: Absolutely, Senator. I'll be happy to work with Mr. Leonard on that. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Other questions? Well, we will have a discussion in the committee and you understand that we're in a position...we're not in the position, financially, in the state we'd like to be in. But if there could be a statement that would come from the Agriculture Committee to encourage consideration in these attempts at grants, if the committee would feel that that's important, could that be helpful? [LR453]

TARIK ABDEL-MONEM: It would absolutely be very helpful, I think,... [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Okay. [LR453]

TARIK ABDEL-MONEM: ...so I would also want to work with Mr. Leonard and continue to pursue that avenue. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Thank you for your testimony. [LR453]

TARIK ABDEL-MONEM: Thank you. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: And, Senator Council, do you want to close on... [LR453]

SENATOR COUNCIL: (See also Exhibit 9) In fact, with Tarik's testimony, I would just want to thank everyone for coming and providing the depth of the testimony that's been provided, and I'd waive the remainder of closing. [LR453]

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EDGAR HICKS: I sit on an administrative council. This would be the type...I sit on a USDA panel, administrative council. This would be the type of grant that we would like to fund within that USDA (inaudible). We could come up with...I can assure you this would be funded. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Okay. Thank you for that. [LR453]

SENATOR SCHILZ: There we go. [LR453]

SENATOR CARLSON: Thanks to each one of you for coming and testifying today. With that, we'll close the hearing on LR453. [LR453]