

FNS Strategic Plan 2000-2005 Analysis of Stakeholder Input

January 3, 2000

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) engaged in an extensive process of stakeholder outreach in developing its revised strategic plan. The seven FNS regional offices conducted a series of meetings with key stakeholders, including State agencies, local program providers and managers, and nutrition, health, and education advocates. Agency headquarters officials and staff invited a number of national organizations involved with nutrition assistance programs and policies, including professional organizations, public advocacy groups, other Federal agencies, and representatives of private industry. FNS employees across the country participated in presentations and discussions on the revised plan. In addition, the FNS website published a set of informational materials on the revised plan, and provided an e-mail interface to submit comments and proposed changes.

The meetings and web materials were designed to inform employees and other key stakeholders of our proposed revisions to the FNS strategic plan, offer them an opportunity to share their views on the outline of the proposed revision and to recommend strategies and activities that the Agency and its partners could pursue to achieve the proposed goals and objectives.

As a result of this outreach process, FNS received a large volume of comments on, and proposed revisions to, the revised plan outline, as well as a number of methods and data sources for measuring agency performance. Highlights from these comments and the Agency's responses to the comments are summarized below.

We also received extensive recommendations of policy changes, program actions and initiatives that could be undertaken by FNS and its partners in support of the goals and objectives. While these are laid out more fully in the full revised plan, we have summarized the key proposals and our responses in this document.

General Comments on the Plan

Most commenters were very supportive of the structure of the proposed revised plan, recognizing that it represented significant streamlining and simplification of FNS's current plan. A number of commenters expressed the view that the consolidation of goals and the elimination of "stovepiping" made it easier to see how the programs fit together in fulfilling the Agency's mission. A few commenters cautioned that the simplified plan, lacking program-specific goals, may obscure the benefits of the diverse program strategies and settings that result from the nation's current nutrition assistance structure.

Some respondents argued that stating “improved nutrition” and “improved integrity” as equally weighted, top-level program goals could inappropriately de-emphasize the nutrition goal. They suggested that nutrition was a primary goal, while program integrity was an objective that supported that goal. On the other hand, some were pleased that integrity and nutrition had equal status.

FNS recognizes that integrity is not a goal per se for which the nutrition assistance programs were created. However, effective stewardship of Federal resources is an essential co-requisite to the achievement of our mission. The Agency’s responsibilities in ensuring effective stewardship of Federal resources, as described under the proposed program integrity goal, are of sufficient importance to merit elevation to the goal level. In the full plan, we have reorganized and reworded this goal to better reflect the full range of responsibilities, activities and aspects of program performance that it includes.

Other overall comments recommended that the Agency work to better define the terms used in the plan to make the meaning of goals and objectives clear, to focus on measurable outcomes in evaluating performance, and to make sure that all programs are properly represented under all appropriate parts of the plan.

We have sought to refine our wording, and make clear the roles of all Federal nutrition assistance programs, in the full revised plan.

Mission Statement

A significant proportion of the comments received focused on the mission statement. Many of these comments were positive; respondents felt the mission statement was more comprehensive than the current one. However, many commenters proposed additions and changes to the statement, to better reflect the purpose and values of FNS and its programs.

The most common recommendations were to replace the phrase “children and needy people” with a phrase that better reflects our target population, and to add an explicit emphasis on cultural diversity and sensitivity in program delivery. Some found “needy” a condescending term, and recommended “low-income” as a substitute, while others felt that the term “low-income” was itself too limited in scope.

Several commenters proposed that the mission be stated in more positive terms—i.e., to “increase food security” rather than “reduce hunger and food insecurity.” One suggested that the statement should reflect the imperative to “preserve the dignity of program participants”.

A number of comments noted that the mission statement’s phrase “in a manner that supports American agriculture” is not related explicitly to any of the goals or objectives listed in the draft revision outline; some suggested that the phrase be removed.

Other comments on the mission ranged from the need to identify “improving health” and “economic security” as goals, to changing “nutrition education” to “nutrition services”.

Based on this input, we have amended the mission statement to clarify the breadth of the FNS mission, to avoid potentially confusing or inappropriate characterizations of program participants, and to present the mission in more positive terms. The mission now reads:

Increase food security and reduce hunger in partnership with cooperating organizations by providing children and low-income people access to food, a healthful diet, and nutrition education in a manner that supports American agriculture and inspires public confidence.

FNS feels that the phrase “children and low-income people” captures the vast majority of those served by Federal nutrition assistance programs, and represents well the main mission of the Agency.

The clause referring to agricultural support reflects the fact that Federal nutrition assistance programs are part of the Department of Agriculture, and developed as part of a policy that was originally designed to support agriculture. Today, although the programs have several other important purposes, they continue to operate in ways that support the Nation’s agricultural economy. Food-based benefits are either acquired by participants through normal channels of retail trade, purchased by the government at market value, or distributed as part of the government’s agricultural surplus removal and price support efforts. FNS works closely with other USDA programs and agencies at to administer Federal nutrition assistance benefits consistent with the Department’s vision of “a healthy and productive Nation in harmony with the land.”

The Agency has not changed the mission statement to address cultural sensitivity and participant dignity. While we recognize that these issues are important for their own sake, and contribute to maximizing the effectiveness of nutrition assistance programs, problems related to dignity and cultural sensitivity generally emerge as part of service delivery. The Agency encourages its state and local partners, as part of implementing this strategic plan, to set standards for program delivery that ensure dignity and sensitivity to the diverse cultures and backgrounds of program participants.

We have not expanded the mission statement to refer to health or economic security. While these are clearly worthy objectives, and nutrition assistance contributes to each, the role that Federal nutrition programs play in furthering these objectives is not sufficiently clear or measurable to merit explicit inclusion in the plan. For example, it is particularly hard to determine how brief or episodic participation in FSP relates to health outcomes; obtaining this information would be very costly.

Goal 1: Improved nutrition of children and needy people

As with the mission statement, a number of commenters found the phrase “children and needy people” to be imprecise, as well as patronizing to some parts of the recipient population. Comments suggested a wide range of alternatives, including “people in need of assistance,” “program participants/households,” “participating children and adults,” and “sub-populations at risk”. Some also pointed out the need to add the word “hunger” to the goal.

As in the mission statement, we have changed the phrase “needy people” to “low-income people” in Goal 1 to avoid any to avoid potentially confusing or inappropriate characterizations of program participants. We have not chosen to add the term “hunger” to this goal; the full revised plan uses the term “food security,” and clarifies that hunger is one potential result of the broader problem of food insecurity that the programs seek to address.

One commenter argued that Goal 1 should be divided into two goals, a “food security” goal and a “diet quality” goal, both to more clearly identify the distinction, and to better balance the “program integrity” goal, which they felt had too much prominence as one of two.

While FNS recognizes the importance of both food security and diet quality to meeting its nutrition assistance mission, it chose to keep these two objectives together under a single nutrition goal, to emphasize the close relationship between them in securing an adequate diet. In the full revised plan, Goal 2 has been organized to place program integrity issues in a broader context of proper stewardship of Federal funds.

A number of respondents argued that dietary intake is not a realistic measure for this goal—that dietary intake studies are imperfect at best and infrequently done. A number of “process measures” related to specific program outputs were suggested as alternatives.

While some kinds of program-related measures are useful indicators of program performance, they do not address the fundamental purpose of the programs, as articulated in the mission statement. Our approach is to combine a few “high-level” program-related indicators, such as “percentage of eligible people served,” with outcome indicators such as dietary intake; process-oriented indicators were avoided. It is hoped that, over time, using several measures will provide a basis for assessing the contributions of the programs to achieving the Agency mission.

Objective 1.1: Maximized food security

A large number of comments expressed discomfort with the term “food security,” arguing that the concept is vague and poorly understood. Some proposed that the objective be changed, for example, to “increase food access”.

These comments have called to our attention the term “food security”—access at all times to enough food for a healthy life—is not yet in common usage. In our view, this concept, and the research and assessment tools developed by USDA and others to measure it, provide a more nuanced understanding of the problems of dietary adequacy than can be described using terms such as “hunger” or “food access” alone. For this reason, we have kept the term “food security” in the objective, but have defined it in the text of the full revised plan. We will continue to explain and promote the use of food security as a concept, and the methods that we have developed to measure it, as we move forward in implementing the plan.

Others suggested that the objective be refocused to “maximize participation in (federal) nutrition assistance programs,” or “maximize food delivery”.

The Agency has deliberately avoided defining any objective in terms of increasing program participation or aggregate benefit delivery because such objectives do not reach the ultimate purposes of program participation—the reduction of hunger and food insecurity, and resulting improvements in dietary intake and nutritional status. Program participation is a means, not an end, and therefore has not been included as an ultimate objective. FNS does intend, however, to use participation as a percentage of eligible people as an important indicator of program performance, and to permit an assessment of the relationship between program participation and overall food security.

Some commenters felt that words such as “maximize” suggested an ability to achieve “full,” or 100 percent, food security, and thus should be replaced with “improve” to reflect a more realistic goal.

Our intention in using the term “maximize” (in Goal 1) and “minimize” (in Goal 2) was to suggest that we would strive for the greatest improvements possible, but also to identify “maximum” or “minimum” performance targets. At these performance levels--when improvements were no longer realistically attainable due to resource constraints and other considerations—the Agency would shift from “improvement” to “maintenance” strategies, still consistent with the objective. Because of the confusion that appears to have resulted from the use of “maximize,” we have changed the wording on a number of objectives to eliminate the use of these terms.

Several commenters argued that food safety and sanitation issues should be addressed under this objective, or added as a new objective.

We recognize the importance of food safety issues, particularly with regard to delivery of benefits in the form of food. However, food safety is one of a number of priorities that, while of great importance, are not central to the mission of the programs or FNS. Efforts to promote safe food handling and use are included as a strategy under Objective 1.3; our plans to cooperate with the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) and other partners are an important part of improving program efficiency, included under Objective 2.2.

A number of comments suggested broadening the measures for this objective. Suggestions for items to measure include the availability of community-based agriculture and food production, program participation rates by legal immigrants, prevalence of hunger, malnutrition, eating disorders and food-related health problems, percentage of eligibles served, and food bank/pantry usage, among others.

In our view, it is important to recognize that strategic planning is most effective when it is focused on a small number of the most important desired program outcomes. While some of these ideas above have been incorporated in the plan, many represent interim or “output” measures that do not focus clearly on the ultimate goals that the programs are intended to achieve. Others, such as the measures of community-based agriculture, may be worthy goals, but they are peripheral to the mission of the Federal nutrition assistance programs.

In the full revised plan, we have used both the Food Security Index – which includes a national measure of the prevalence of hunger – and the percentage of eligibles served as two separate criteria with which to measure progress in achieving this objective; for each, we have developed performance targets that would reflect realistic but significant improvements in program performance.

Objective 1.2: FNS program participants make healthy food choices

Several commenters recommended that this objective and Objective 1.3, FNS program meals meet Dietary Guidelines and RDAs, should be combined into a single objective dealing with the overall goal of helping program participants to choose and consume a healthful diet, including both the food provided directly by the programs, food purchased with program benefits, and other food secured outside of the programs.

While combining these two objectives had certain clear conceptual advantages, it obscures the direct role the Agency plays in ensuring that the food benefits provided to recipients contribute effectively to healthful diets. Therefore, we have kept these objectives as separate, including under Objective 1.2 nutrition promotion and education strategies directed at program participants, while focusing Objective 1.3 on setting and implementation of program nutrition

standards, and provision of nutritious commodity foods through program meals and food packages.

A number of commenters felt that Objective 1.2 should include more specific, quantifiable targets in its wording (such as “80% of program participants make healthy food choices 40% of the time”).

The Agency recognizes the need to set specific targets for program performance in this area; the full revised plan includes an explanation of the long-term diet quality targets it has identified to pursue, as well as the specific five-year targets that it will commit to achieve. However, including either the long-term or five-year figures in the wording of the objective means this itself could obscure the more general program purpose embodied in the goal. Therefore, we have deliberately left these figures in the plan’s discussion of indicators of performance.

Another commenter proposed that a specific increase in breast feeding initiation and duration rates, based on Healthy People 2010, be included in the objective.

The Agency agrees that promotion of breastfeeding, particularly through the WIC Program, is an important component of this objective; the full revised plan includes a specific goal and measure for breastfeeding initiation, and a breastfeeding promotion strategy.

Some commenters argued that “improv[ing] client self-sufficiency” should be substituted for this objective; we have not made this change in the full plan.

While Federal nutrition assistance program policy is designed to support self-sufficiency for program participants, it is not a primary program objective. Nutrition assistance programs encourage personal responsibility and provide temporary assistance to meet participants’ nutritional needs as recipients move from welfare to work and up the economic ladder to self-sufficiency. Other programs, such as WIC, provide support to improving health care service. We see these kinds of outcomes as positive by-products of Federal nutrition programs, as opposed to central components of their main mission.

A number of commenters objected to using the SNDA report as a measurement of dietary intake. Some recommended that FNS obtain direct input from participants to measure intake, including targeted client surveys, dietary recalls, self-assessment, and pre/post testing on selected population. Others recommended national obesity rates, Pediatric Nutrition Surveillance System (PNSS CDC) data, and data on eating and purchasing habits of food stamp and other program recipients as potential sources of measures.

FNS recognizes that SNDA, like all data collection and evaluation efforts, has strengths and weaknesses, but to date, SNDA is among our best measures for determining the dietary intake of participants in the school meals program. The information needed to understand and assess the diet quality of particular individuals is extremely complex, involving assessments of dietary intakes of key nutrients and food energy, the variety and amounts of food consumed, and key dietary behaviors. The Agency intends to use a number of different data sources and evaluation methods to measure outcomes under this objective, including the Healthy Eating Index, which provides a nationwide dietary assessment that can be used to analyze the dietary status of specific demographic segments, as well as other national data sources and program-specific evaluations. The methodology we intend to pursue is discussed in the full plan, both under Objective 1.2 and in the general section on evaluation.

Objective 1.3: FNS program meals meet Dietary Guidelines and RDAs

As noted above, several commenters recommended combining Objectives 1.2 and 1.3 into a single objective. A number of comments criticized the use of the word “meals” in this objective, arguing that it appears to refer exclusively to Child Nutrition Programs.

FNS did not intend to limit the scope of the objective; it has been rephrased in the full plan to make clear that our efforts are directed not only to program meals, but also to food purchased through the USDA commodity programs, food packages provided to recipients through WIC and other programs, and to the Thrifty Food Plan—the dietary standard used to determine Food Stamp benefit levels.

A number of comments raised the need to balance “plate waste” against the implementation of nutrition standards for program meals. Palatability and acceptability of food benefits is an important general operational consideration in promoting diet quality by improving the nutritional content of the program foods.

Palatability and acceptability of program foods are reflected in a number of strategies included in the full plan under Objective 1.2, including promotion of healthful food choices through Team Nutrition, training of food service professionals, and improvements in commodity specifications.

The plan does not include a performance indicator dealing with “plate waste”; plate waste is an operational issue that is most appropriately addressed by program providers at the local level. The full revised plan includes FNS’s strategies to support schools and other providers with training and technical assistance in preparing meals that taste good and conform to nutrition standards.

As with Objective 1.2, a number of commenters objected strongly to the use of SNDA report, suggesting instead that the nutritional content of school meals be measured

through nutrient analysis results from State agency reviews. Others recommended using offer vs. serve choices made by students; plate waste studies; trends in food selection by school nutrition programs; fruit and vegetable consumption; data on elderly nutrition; analysis of EBT data for food purchases; and consumer surveys, in evaluating nutrient content of program benefit foods.

Several of these proposed data sources may actually be more relevant for assessing progress in achieving Objective 1.2. As noted above, dietary assessment is a complex task; FNS will use a variety of data sets and evaluation tools to measure progress in improving dietary intake and promoting good dietary practices. For assessing the nutritional quality of program foods, administrative data will be combined with evaluation studies as needed to determine the progress in making these foods contribute to healthful diets for program participants.

Goal 2: Improved integrity in FNS nutrition assistance programs

Many commenters argued that “program integrity” did not adequately encompass or describe the range of objectives and strategies included under this goal. One comment proposed “improved accountability” as an alternative. Others argued that the goal as presented had a negative tone; one commenter proposed “Inspire confidence in FNS nutrition assistance programs” as an alternative.

As a result of the comments above, and a range of additional comments reacting to the objectives under Goal 2, the Agency chose to reorganize this goal to better reflect the program administration priorities that it encompasses. We have reworded Goal 2 as “Improved stewardship of Federal funds,” to better captures the range of responsibilities it includes. We have proposed two objectives under this goal:

- *Objective 2.1: Improved benefit accuracy and reduced fraud*
- *Objective 2.2: Improved efficiency of program administration*

Several commenters proposed that FNS should address the stigma associated with receipt of program benefits.

As noted above, the Agency recognizes the assurance of participant dignity as an essential part of maximizing the effectiveness of nutrition assistance programs; Federal program requirements are designed to permit all program participants to be treated with dignity. The plan itself addresses issues related to stigma and recipient dignity indirectly in a number of different areas.

Many, though not all, comments felt that “public perception” could not be used to define a true measure of improved program integrity. Suggested alternative measures

include measuring “eligibility determinations and benefit assurance actions,” audit findings, and percentage of eligibles being served.

FNS recognizes the importance of using concrete and quantitative indicators of program integrity and administrative effectiveness. The full revised plan eliminates “public perception” as a performance measure, in favor of a series of quantitative indicators tied to specific objectives under this goal. These measures will allow clear targets to be set to improve program performance, and objective assessment of progress in ensuring effective stewardship of program funds.

Objective 2.1: Maximized payment/benefit accuracy

A number of commenters saw this objective as overly focused on the Food Stamp Program.

While the term “payment accuracy” is most frequently associated with the Food Stamp Program, the Agency views accurate determinations of eligibility and benefit levels as a top priority in all nutrition assistance programs. However, in the full revised plan, we have reworded the objective to focus on “benefit accuracy,” and included strategies that pertain to all major FNS programs.

One comment proposed that we change the wording of the objective to “maximized eligibility/benefit accuracy,” and that an eligibility determination accuracy rate and a benefit issuance accuracy rate be defined for use as measures. Another commenter proposed that accurate reporting of meals and participants in the Child Nutrition Programs should be included in this objective, and that management evaluations be used in measuring performance.

The Agency recognizes the merit of clarifying that correct determination of both eligibility criteria and benefit levels should be subsumed under this objective. For this reason, we have reworded the objective, included in the full plan as Objective 2.1, to read “Improved benefit accuracy and reduced fraud”.

A number of commenters reacted negatively to the emphasis on Food Stamp Quality Control in the proposed objectives. Several argued that FSP’s effectiveness derives from more than just accuracy (error) rates, and that the Agency’s promotion of FSP as a nutrition-based program along with a continued emphasis on error rates presents a confusing dichotomy for State agencies administering the program. They suggested considering program simplification, errors resulting from client fraud, nutrition education opportunities, etc., as worthwhile alternatives. Another commenter proposed that payment accuracy itself be made a strategy under Objective 2.2, “increased efficiency and effectiveness”.

FNS recognizes both that there are flaws and difficulties in the use of the current Quality Control system, and that effective program performance must be

measured in terms other than eligibility and benefit accuracy alone. The revised strategic plan is intended to explicate performance expectations for the FSP and other programs in the full range of areas relevant to the Agency's mission, including those described under Goal 1. Furthermore, FNS is exploring and evaluating concepts to inform a broader FSP performance measurement system that could be used to augment or alter the quality control system over the long term. However, the imperative to issue benefits in the right amounts and to eligible people is a critical part of responsible stewardship of Federal funds. Therefore, we have kept the Quality Control system in the plan as an important measure of responsible Food Stamp Program administration.

Objective 2.2: Maximized program efficiency and effectiveness

The majority of the comments we received concerning this objective were strategies or activities the agency could pursue to accomplish the objective. Commenters felt that improving program access, addressing participant dignity, cultural sensitivity, and food safety would promote program effectiveness.

While FNS agrees that pursuing the above strategies or activities would lead to more effective programs, we feel that they are better suited for accomplishing other objectives and strategies in our plan. Program access is addressed in Objective 1.1; food safety issues are covered under Objective 1.3. As explained previously, participant dignity and cultural sensitivity tend to be operational issues that can be addressed most effectively at the local level; Federal program regulations are intended to provide program operators with the flexibility necessary to fulfill their requirements consistent with preserving the dignity and addressing the special needs of all participants. FNS encourages its state and local partners, in implementing this plan, to work to ensure that the programs offer dignity and cultural sensitivity to all program participants.

Several commenters suggested that we emphasize collaboration with partners and other stakeholders including government, private, and non-profit organizations. Some commenters felt strongly enough about this issue that they suggested it be a third goal.

While FNS agrees that collaboration with FNS partners and other interested parties is a critical part of improving program administration, it views such collaborative activities as integral components of almost every aspect of program implementation. Therefore, it has not created a separate goal or objective for such activities, but has integrated them into the strategies under each Objective. The Annual Performance Plans derived from this plan will make this collaborative work even more explicit.

Commenters suggested a wide range of additional measures and measurement tools, including administrative expenses per case; customer satisfaction surveys of clients,

vendors/retailers and state/local staff; public opinion polls; percentage of eligibles being served, as well as payment accuracy.

FNS believes that many of these are useful ideas and will pursue the development of a combination of measures to determine progress in achieving this objective.

Objective 2.3: Minimized fraud in FNS programs

Several stakeholders suggested language changes to this objective, including the phrases “fraud and errors”, “fraud and mismanagement”, “fraud, waste, and abuse”, “program waste and abuse”, and “monitor and minimize fraud.” Others argued that fraud was an imprecise term. Still others noted that the word “minimize” leads one to wonder how much fraud is acceptable and suggested that we change “minimize” to “eliminate”.

As noted above, the confusion that appears to have resulted from the use of terms such as “maximize” and “minimize” has led the Agency to change the wording on a number of objectives to eliminate the use of these terms. In this case, FNS changed the objective to use the term “reduced fraud”. Despite FNS’s interest in reducing fraud and abuse to the lowest possible level, the Agency recognizes that it would be impossible to completely “eliminate” fraud and abuse, and has therefore left this term out of the objective.

Several commenters felt that claims and sanctions were not ideal measures for this objective, for two reasons. First, claims do not always result from fraudulent actions. Second, only measuring sanctioned retailers and providers devalues those efforts designed to prevent fraud, and other monitoring and compliance work that does not result in sanctions. A number of alternatives were suggested: compliance with various meal, administrative and financial requirements; number of vendor/participant disqualifications; number of retailers/vendors investigated, monitored on site, trained and disqualified; and the ratio between the number of established claims and the number of potential claims based on the State’s error rate.

While the measures summarized above provide important additional indicators of anti-fraud efforts, they do not measure the ultimate outcome sought under this objective: reduced incidence of fraud, and reduced losses of benefit dollars to fraud. Ultimately, FNS hopes to measure this objective by tracking the prevalence of trafficking and other fraud, as well as the proportion of program dollars lost to fraud and abuse. In the meantime, the Agency has proposed in the full revised plan a number of “proxy measures,” including some of those proposed above, to estimate progress in achieving this objective.

Strategies

We received several suggestions for strategies the Agency could pursue to help accomplish its strategic objectives. Strategies are courses of actions that will guide

Agency activities for an extended time period. A majority of the comments and recommendations we received in this regard were activities that could serve as components of strategies. The Agency has sought to take full advantage of these ideas in developing the full revised plan. In addition, all stakeholder comments have been shared with program staff. FNS hopes to continue to make of this valuable input to improve program operations, and to develop its annual performance, and operational plans.

It is also important to note, however, that many of the proposed strategies could not be used in the strategic plan. While each proposal cannot be addressed individually, FNS did not consider strategies and activities which:

- **would significantly increase program costs.** One commenter proposed, for example, that all those whose income reached 185% or less of the poverty level or less should be made eligible for Food Stamps. Such a change would radically expand the scope and expense of the program.
- **are inconsistent with Federal law, Administration policy and other current strategies.** For example, providing States with additional flexibility to simplify the Food Stamp Program was proposed as a way to improve efficiency. FNS believes that its current policy strikes the right balance between flexibility for States and uniform program standards that ensure nutrition assistance to those in need, no matter where they live. It does not propose to change this policy as part of pursuing either its food security or program integrity goal. Others recommended that the Agency expand its nutrition education efforts to serve all Americans—a proposal that is outside the scope of the programs’ authorizing legislation.
- **are not directly germane to our proposed strategic goals and objectives.** One commenter, for example, proposed that the programs should promote the use of non-animal protein sources. Others recommended the promotion of a livable wage, the elimination of crop restrictions or incentives for farmers, and the use of dental check-ups as a performance measure. Whatever the merits of these proposals, they were not used in the plan because they would not contribute directly to the achievement of FNS’s mission, goals, and objectives.

In closing, FNS wishes to thank all those who responded to our request for input and assistance in revising our strategic plan. The experience and expertise shared by those who offered thoughts and comments for consideration have been invaluable to the revision process, and the depth and thoughtfulness of the input we received have greatly strengthened the plan. We look forward to working together with all those who contributed to the revised plan in implementing its goals and objectives, and thus strengthening the nutrition assistance safety net, now and for the future.