

Good morning, my name is Thomas Baseski, co-owner of Thomas' Family Markets. I own and operate four conventional supermarkets all located in Luzerne County. I've been in business since 1997 and employ approximately 250 associates. I am here today to discuss use and misuse of the food stamp program as well as disincentives for people to work.

As far as both these topics are concerned, you could spend a week talking about each one as they are vast in nature. In this time, I will make a few points on each.

As far as food stamp program is concerned, I think it is vital program for underprivileged people who deserve a safety net for difficult times. Over my 35 years in the grocery industry, I've seen how the expectations of the underprivileged have changed. When many of us were younger, we could remember family members who may have stood in line to receive free bulk cheese and peanut butter which were considered staples at the time. Today's food stamp customer seems to use this benefit to purchase everything from potato chips to lobster.

As far as the health aspects of those purchases, I believe that the food stamp program should have to follow the rules and guidelines of the well established WIC program. With today's technology, it can be a very smooth transition to change eating habits of the food stamp customer to a healthier diet. Besides the health implications, which the state should have some control over or say in as they are providing the benefit, the types of food purchased also present opportunities for fraud. In the case of the person buying the premium quality shrimp or lobster, these items can easily be purchased with food stamps, and sold to restaurants, bars or other individuals for cash. This is a well known and common occurrence. The people then take the cash, and use it for whatever purposes they deem appropriate such as cigarettes, drugs, etc. Basically, the food stamp program, in many cases subsidizes peoples vices.

I've also experienced many people who have multiple state food stamp cards. They are receiving benefits from more than one state, and it seems as if it should be easily solved with today's technology. A suggestion might be to place photo ID on the food stamp cards which would help prevent the sale of food stamp cards for cash. People with small children, and the disabled should probably have a right to qualify longer than others, there should however be a maximum enforced limit for people capable of legitimately feeding their families.

On the topic of disincentives to work, it is my view that we must get people on unemployment back into the workforce and on the payrolls. Unemployment is a problem, underemployment is a bigger problem. The question that many people face is should I work and lose all of my benefits or stay home with a good quality of life while keeping them. There needs to be a middle ground. I don't have to tell you how many benefits are available to unemployed and underemployed residents however just to name a few, food stamps, housing assistance, electricity assistance, transportation, medical, daycare, and even cash assistance.

In trying to find a middle ground, one suggestion may be that if a person was employed at a certain salaried level and becomes unemployed, as an incentive for them to take a lowing paying job, the state should encourage them to take the job and meet the difference.

Assistance programs are designed to help underprivileged people. However, many times, they actually hurt the employer. I am unsure if the people who write the laws fully understand the repercussions of what they do. For 20 years, I offered health benefits to qualifying employees. It has been roughly 50-60