

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Dave Swartz. I serve as a member of the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank's board of directors. I am employed with Penn State Extension in the Capitol Region. As you may know, Penn State Extension is a part of Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences, and its focus is to see that all people in the Commonwealth have access to research based information to improve their lives, businesses and communities.

Although Extension is known for its production agriculture programs and 4-H programs, we also provide nutrition education to families in resource-stressed areas of the Commonwealth, through a program called the Penn State Extension Nutrition Links. The program is federally funded and supported by local resources and dollars. Funds come from the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (a program through the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed).

The Nutrition Links program offers free nutrition education programs to low-income Pennsylvanians to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to stretch food dollars, plan and prepare healthy meals, handle food in a safe manner, use food stamp benefits and other food assistance programs wisely, and read nutrition labels. All of this is taught by trained nutrition education advisors to working parents, single homemakers, pregnant teens, and youth from both rural and urban communities. The advisors are hired from within the community and trained and supervised by extension agents and by university faculty and staff.

Our nutrition educators report socioeconomic benefits to families because of this program, including increased awareness of other services for which they are eligible, return of children to their families from foster care, enrollment of family members in high school, GED classes, or job training programs, and return to the work force.

While our nutrition education work occurs in many community locations, I would like to highlight one such effort that involves a partnership between Penn State Extension, the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank and the Hershey Medical Center.

Starting in 2015, Extension and Penn State Hershey Medical Center's Community Health partnered at the Prince of Peace Food Pantry in Steelton, Dauphin County, to provide participants with a tomato plant which they planted in a 5-gallon bucket and then took home. Each time these participants returned, staff from Hershey Medical Center's Community Health were screening for a health parameter, the Food Bank was a partner in providing fresh produce, and Extension was providing nutrition information and teaching food preparation skills to those attending the food pantry. This was truly a community partnership with businesses donating potting soil, buckets and supplies. This year, the effort got a boost from Milton Hershey Schools which provided the tomato plants, grown in the school greenhouses by students in their horticulture program.

This program has been successful in having over 350 individuals growing their own food for the first time and taking an interest in adding fresh produce to their diets. The program has now grown to 7 pantries.

The Central Pennsylvania Food Bank also partners with Extension educators for their expertise in agriculture. The food bank staff does an incredible job sourcing the high volume of food needed for distribution in their 27-county service area, but Extension assists them in understanding not just national, but international trends in food production and markets that could affect their food sourcing. For example, a little over a year ago, incredible amounts of frozen chicken thighs and legs were suddenly being made available to the Food Bank. Extension assisted the food bank in understanding that the chicken was available because Russia barred poultry markets from American and E.U. food products due to disagreements over the military conflict in Ukraine, and that this supply of chicken would probably be available for some time into the future. Extension's expertise in this area allowed the Food Bank to plan and anticipate large amounts of chicken in their warehouse facilities.

Penn State Extension has enjoyed this partnership with the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank and the synergy of the partnership is important in accomplishing our mission.

Thank you.