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636 Words

As someone with decades of experience working in anti-poverty programs, I have witnessed firsthand the important role government can play in helping families living from paycheck to paycheck. I have seen how the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, helps millions of responsible, hardworking Americans put food on the table for their families.

SNAP helps support jobs and provides a boost to the economy. SNAP has a good story to tell when it comes to using taxpayer funds responsibly and wisely, one that does not get told enough.

This is why it is so disappointing when sporadic abuses of the program by a few are used as a political football in the media. You would think that lottery winners and criminals are the only Americans receiving SNAP benefits. This couldn't be further from the truth.

Abuses are the exception, not the norm. They overshadow record achievements in SNAP for payment accuracy and program integrity, and do a disservice to the overwhelming majority that truly need the program and are playing by the rules.

People should understand that the record 44 million Americans – more than half of whom are children, elderly and the disabled – participating in SNAP is due primarily to the fact that we are still recovering from the worst economic collapse since the Great Depression. We know it is right, and in the interest of all of us, to help them get back on their feet.

SNAP provides an economic stimulus that strengthens communities. Research shows that every \$5 in new SNAP benefits generates as much as \$9 in economic activity. Benefits move quickly into local economies, supporting and creating jobs for the Americans who grow, process, pack, ship, shelve and sell us food.

At the same time, rooting out waste, fraud and abuse is a top priority for this administration. We do not tolerate fraud in SNAP at USDA, and prosecute those who attempt to game the system. USDA works in partnership with State agencies to ensure responsible steward of taxpayer resources.

Due to increased oversight and improvements to management, the prevalence of selling SNAP benefits for cash or “trafficking” – has fallen significantly over the last two decades to roughly 1

cent on the dollar. Additionally, payment accuracy in SNAP is at an all-time high – over the last decade participation among - payment errors have gone from 8.91% to 3.81%. Simply put, participation is up, and errors are down. While these are positive trends, any trafficking or error is too much. So USDA continues to aggressively improve integrity in SNAP. We use state-of-the-art technology to help target criminals. We receive ongoing risk assessments of all stores that accept SNAP benefits based to identify program violations.

Our fraud detection system has newer, more advanced data mining technology and analytical tools available in the private sector. These efforts make us even better at getting rid of those who break the law and abuse the program.

Beyond pursuing fraud, USDA is also deeply committed to ensuring benefits are targeted to those Americans who need them most. This is why we proactively urge states to use their current authority to change state policies so that millionaires – or those receiving substantial windfalls – do not receive SNAP benefits.

These are just a few of the things we are doing every day to perform the job America's taxpayers have entrusted to us. And we are committed to doing even more. As our nation continues down its path of economic recovery we know our work is cut out for us. But our sense of dignity and morality tells us we must support hard-working Americans who are still struggling to meet their most basic nutritional needs. SNAP is an integral part of those efforts, which will stimulate the economy and help us grow a stronger nation for all Americans.