

Why is Government Cutting Nutrition Education?

For nutritionists and nutrition educators these times feel like something out of Alice-in-Wonderland. In the media they see a steady stream of articles and features about the importance of healthful nutrition and the threat posed by too much fat, sugar and salt in the diet. But when they go to their jobs, it's all about cuts in funding for nutrition education. Something is badly out of sync.

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the USDA struck the most recent blow against nutrition education when it decided that Pennsylvania's Nutrition Education Program (PANEP) must stop treating food distributed at pantries and cupboards as part of nutrition education. This decision, which will take effect in October, is expected to cause Fayette County Community Action Agency, the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank, the SHARE Food Program (Philadelphia), Philabundance, the

Commission on Economic Opportunity of Luzerne County and the Community Action Program of Lancaster County to discontinue their PANEP projects.

Nutritionists Robin Rifkin (SHARE) and Elise Gurgevich (Cooperative Extension) visited FNS Under Secretary Eric Bost at his office in Washington on March 22nd to explain how food distribution in selected pantries and cupboards has been transformed into a tool to reinforce nutrition lessons. Speaking as part of a delegation led by Kathy Yorkievit, Deputy Secretary for Income Maintenance at the Department of Public Welfare, they proposed alternatives that would permit pantry-based education to continue and appealed to FNS to reconsider.

Bost acknowledged that his agency

has for six years authorized Pennsylvania to treat some food as part of its nutrition education program. He expressed support for Pennsylvania's effort to provide nutrition lessons in pantries and cupboards and said he had no criticism of the quality of Pennsylvania's program. But he asserted that under newly clarified standards adopted by his own staff, he lacked the authority to continue funding nutrition education projects that included food in the cost that is matched by the USDA. He promised to ask his staff to review the alternatives the delegation had presented.

That review has apparently come to naught. In an April 6th telephone call to officials at the PA Department of Public Welfare, senior FNS officials indicated they would not implement

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www.pahunger.org

No Tax on Food

"Don't take Pennsylvania down the road to more food insecurity. Oppose a sales tax on food." That was the message Hunger Action sent the Pennsylvania House of Representatives in a March 23rd letter to all members.

A tax on food would be especially harmful to low-income renters who currently pay property taxes through their monthly rent checks. The House Commonwealth Caucus, which has been calling for a tax on food as part of a plan to eliminate the school-based property tax, claims renters would benefit by seeing a reduction in rent. Hunger Action called that claim "baseless". Pennsylvania has 677,000 households that rent their residences and earn less than \$25,000 a year. That's 12 percent of the population.

The letter identified eight states that currently tax food in the manner proposed by the House Commonwealth Caucus. Those states rank among the very worst in food security. Utah is 50th in the latest USDA study, Mississippi 48th, Arkansas 47th, New Mexico 45th, Alabama 38th, South Carolina 35th and Hawaii 34th. Despite its own financial difficulties, New Mexico recently voted to stop the practice of taxing food.

U.S. House Passes Summer Food Demo

Thanks to the determined work of Congressman Todd Platts (R-York/Adams), the U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation in late March to create a summer food demonstration project in Pennsylvania. The project is designed to increase participation in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) by children in the Commonwealth's rural counties.

"Only one in three needy children in Pennsylvania has access to the nutritional help that they need during the summer months," said Platts in a March 29th news release. "Those numbers drop to less than one in seven when the metropolitan Philadelphia and Pittsburgh areas are removed from consideration. We can, and must, do better."

The demonstration project would allow SFSP sponsors to operate "open enrollment sites" and qualify for federal reimbursement of all meals served in areas where at least 40 percent of the children qualify for free or reduced price school lunches. Current law sets the required level at 50 percent. Rural areas with many needy children often do not meet the 50 percent standard because low-income families reside across a wide area rather than in neighborhood clusters.

Sue Mitchem, who has been doing outreach to recruit new summer meal sponsors, applauded the House vote. "When school lunches cease in June, many families struggle to fill the gap. Lowering area eligibility to 40 percent will mean less red tape for schools and local organizations that choose to sponsor the SFSP. As a result, we expect more needy children will receive a nutritional supplement over the summer and return to school ready to learn."

According to Hunger Action's analysis of the October 2003 school data, currently 134 school buildings in rural counties meet the 50 percent criterion and thereby qualify for the open enrollment option. If dropped to 40 percent, another 208 school buildings would qualify. For example, currently no school attendance zone in Tioga, Somerset, Forest and Wayne counties qualifies for an open enrollment site, even though these counties have among the highest poverty rates in the State. If the demo becomes law, seven school zones would qualify in Tioga, eleven in Somerset, two in Forest and six in Wayne.

Hunger Action has asked senators Arlen Specter and Rick Santorum to champion the demonstration project in the Senate. If enacted by both chambers, the demo would be in effect through the summer of 2008. The PA Department of Education would be responsible for monitoring the impact on sponsor recruitment and child participation.

Summer Food Sponsors Desperately Needed



Know where poor children are gathering in your area in the summer? There's a federally funded program that can provide breakfast and/or lunch to these kids. The poor children in the counties below need the Summer Food Service Program:

Wayne
Crawford
Wyoming
Warren
Susquehanna
Butler
Somerset
Forest
Bedford
Jefferson
Fulton
Elk
Huntingdon
Cameron
Juniata
Clinton
Mifflin
Bradford
Snyder
Sullivan
Carbon
Tioga

To learn where summer food sites might be located and to learn how the program operates, call Sue Still at the Pennsylvania Department of Education at 1-800-331-0129. You can do it....don't wait. The last training session for this summer is fast approaching!!!!

Funding for Farmers' Markets and Supermarkets

The \$1.1 billion Economic Stimulus Program signed by Gov. Rendell on April 1st includes \$100 million to support the strengthening of Pennsylvania agriculture. Farmers' markets and supermarkets that will sell farm commodities in underserved areas are among the activities that may be funded with this money.

Representative Dwight Evans, Democratic Chair of the House Appropriations Committee, pushed hard for inclusion of farmers' markets and supermarkets in the final legislation. Earlier hearings hosted by Rep. Frank Oliver (D-Phila.) and Rep. Jake Wheatley (D-Pitts.) prepared the way. As a result of those hearings, the House Health and Human Services Committee developed recommendations highlighting the need "to examine the issue of food retailing in urban and underserved areas of the Commonwealth as a priority for comprehensive neighborhood development." It called for the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) to "establish and fund a dedicated state grant pool to fund local supermarket development projects."

According to Duane Perry, executive director of The Food Trust, the final legislation does not contain a dedicated fund but for the first time makes access to healthy food a part of the State's economic development agenda. The Food Trust worked closely with House legislators to explain the need for this change.

Funding for the Program will come from the sale of bonds. Administrative guidelines will be developed by a 7-member oversight board and a newly created Commonwealth Financing Authority. Funding is expected to be available sometime next fall. The guidelines will further define the areas that are "underserved" by existing supermarkets. "The intent is to reach urban and rural communities where people lack access to farm produce," said Craig Lehman, Budget Analyst for House Appropriations Committee.

Readers may go to www.legis.state.pa.us and Senate Bill 1026 for the full text of the legislation.

PA Legislative Session Calendar



June 7-9, 10-11*, 14-16, 17-18*, 21-23, 24-25*, 28-30

July - Not in Session

House only *

Senate only **

Director's Column



What can you do to help end hunger in Pennsylvania?

During this season of the year, the Pennsylvania's General Assembly is in the process of making a budget for the new fiscal year, which begins in July. The key decisions in that budget will be made by a handful of leaders who meet behind closed doors. What they decide depends on what they hear from the rank and file members.

That's where you come in. One of the most effective things you can do is to make two telephone calls – one to the office of your state senator and one to the office of your state representative. Tell them that Gov. Rendell did not request enough money for Pennsylvania's food programs. Unless the General Assembly fixes this, the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program will not have enough money to serve even the limited number of seniors who participated last year. And the State Food Purchase Program, which has not had an increase since 2001-02, will not be able to fulfill its mission of stocking food pantries that prevent hunger. Ask your senator and representative to contact the leadership of his/her caucus and request more funding for these food programs.

When you call, you most likely will be talking to staff. That's okay. In your conversation, describe why you are concerned about hunger and mention that you vote. Before ending the conversation, give your address and ask that someone contact you with a response to your request.

Here are the details. The Farmers' Market Nutrition Program needs \$2 million just to serve the number of seniors who participated last summer. So the Assembly needs to add at least \$603,000. The State Food Purchase Program needs \$17.5 million to fulfill its mission. Here the Assembly needs to add \$1,050,000.

To find the name of your local representatives, go to www.pahunger.org and click on "Who are your legislators?"

Schools to Focus on Nutrition and Activity: Keystone Healthy Zones

Is your school district paying attention to improving nutrition and physical activity for its students? To date over 474 school buildings in Pennsylvania have committed to doing so. Here's how these schools got involved.

The **Keystone Healthy Zone (KHZ) School Recognition Program** provides the opportunity for schools (grades K-12) to demonstrate their commitments to improving the health, well-being and academic performance of their students. Schools interested in becoming part of the KHZ campaign complete a simple online assessment of their schools' policies and practices. Questions focus on whether school nutrition, nutrition education and physical activity are part of the total learning environment. This self-assessment process was completed on April 23rd.

Every school that completed the self-assessment will be recognized as a KHZ school. In addition to this status, KHZ schools will receive individualized feedback in the form of a school report card; the opportunity to apply for a grant to make improvements in the school environment; a tool-kit with recommendations for technical assistance, model programs, and funding sources; and a Keystone Healthy Zone banner. The 100 schools that submit the best grant proposals will qualify for a \$2,000 grant. KHZ schools that wish to apply must submit the grant application by June 18th. Awards will be given out in August.

KHZ schools also will be recognized by local and regional media sources for their commitments to improving healthy eating and increasing

physical activity among our youth. Additionally, these schools will be encouraged to participate in the statewide KHZ Event Day on May 5th (also National Children's Exercising Day and the Great PA Workout).

The KHZ School Recognition Program is a project of Pennsylvania Advocates for Nutrition and Activity (PANA), a private statewide coalition formed with funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Health. In addition to the departments of Health and Education, PANA's membership includes Pennsylvania Action for Healthy Kids (AFHK), another nutrition and exercise promotion group formed in 2002 with funding from the National Dairy Council and The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. AFHK brought the idea of a school-based campaign to Pennsylvania.

Allison Topper, executive director of PANA, described the goals of the multi-year KHZ campaign. "The KHZ Program builds relationships with schools. The schools demonstrate a commitment to implement changes in the following three areas: 1) implementing healthy food and beverage policies; 2) maintaining both quality and quantity in physical education opportunities and; 3) establishing opportunities for physical activity, such as safe walk routes to the schools."

According to Topper, the KHZ campaign has reached 500 school buildings in this first year and plans to increase that number to 1000. In addition to work in schools, PANA seeks to promote active lifestyles and healthy food choices in health care settings and throughout the broader community. For more information on the KHZ Campaign, go to www.panaonline.org.

TANF Reauthorization Stalls in Senate

Action to reauthorize TANF stalled in late March as leadership failed to reach agreement with Senate Democrats about the number of amendments to be debated. Faced with more than 50 amendment and short on time, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-TN) pulled TANF off the Senate calendar.

The first and only amendment to be voted on proposed to increase child care funding by \$6 billion over five years. With Senator Specter voting "yes" and Senator Santorum voting "no", the amendment passed 78-20. Child care subsidies are a critical support for families on TANF and for families trying to work their way toward self-sufficiency at minimum-wage jobs. Currently only one in seven children eligible for child care assistance receives it.

Frist's decision to stop debate meant that amendments to raise the minimum wage and extend unemployment insurance to the long-term unemployed were not considered.

TANF is presently operating on a three month extension that runs through June 30. If not reauthorized by then, another extension will be necessary. As a way to pressure Senate Democrats, House Republicans have threatened to add harsh conditions to the next extension.

When the Senate again takes up TANF, debate will focus on how many hours parents are expected to work each week, whether rehab services and education may count toward the work requirement and whether states should be required to impose full-family sanctions when a parent fails to meet a work requirement.

Twilight Meals Pilot Brings Food for Thought to Potential Sponsors/Sites

Providing after school meals to at-risk children through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) was authorized several years ago as a demonstration project in a handful of states including Pennsylvania. Developing a high quality federally-funded after school meals program can be almost an art form as demonstrated by Nutritional Development Services (NDS) of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

Beginning in January and led by director Pat Temple-West, NDS began a pilot program that would bring after school meals to children in selected areas of southeastern PA.

Temple-West articulates the reason why there is demand for the twilight meals. "Children of the poor often have mothers on shift work, not the usual 9 to 5 type job. The parents of poor children feel reassurance with these meals in place. So while they are not there, the children are getting something of substance, a good meal."

He went on to say that the twilight meals in conjunction with school breakfast and lunch do not meet all of a child's daily requirements. That additional nutrition has to be provided in the home.

NDS is no stranger to providing meals to children. It is already involved in School Breakfast, School Lunch, summer meals, and meals in child care settings. These experiences have guided them in the establishment of the twilight meals, a hybrid of the school lunch and summer programs. Right now the meals are offered in twelve areas, and the plan is to add a few sites more each week, keeping the program small in this pilot year.

Starting small will enable NDS to evaluate logistics, refine menus, and provide for the effective coordination of this program into their food service operation. For instance, hot meals are easiest for NDS to provide; however, cold meals are easiest for sites with limited equipment to handle. Temple-West indicated the most interest for the twilight meals is coming from non-school sites. The plan is to also survey parents to get feedback on the program.

Working at the program in this holistic way will enable NDS to do the best possible job in offering meals to hungry children and possibly expand to 50 sites in the second year. Temple-West states, "The key to this whole thing is that the meals have got to be very easy for the site to handle, and the sites have to be well-trained". Food for thought...who else out there might provide this service to children in need?

For others who might be interested, please telephone Sue Still at the PA Department of Education at 1-800-331-0129.

Commodity Program Could Face Cutbacks

Amid rising food insecurity and the state flat-funding of charitable food efforts, more than 2000 low-income seniors in Pennsylvania may lose the federal Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP). CSFP provides a 40 pound box of nutritious food monthly to eligible seniors and 5-year old children at or below 185% of poverty.

CSFP, administered by the PA Association of Regional Food Banks (PARF), is available on a limited basis in the following counties: Greene, Fayette, Cambria, Berks, Schuylkill, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, Philadelphia, Beaver, Allegheny, Butler, Lawrence, Indiana, Carbon, Lehigh, Monroe, Northampton, Pike, Wayne, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Susquehanna, Wyoming, Westmoreland, and York. Ninety-five percent of the people served through CSFP are seniors.

For 2003, \$114 million was appropriated nationally. The '03 budget was approved so late in the year that some of the funds were rolled over into 2004. Considering these holdover funds and food from the previous year, only \$98 million was appropriated for 2004. As a result, the number of people served by the Program this year cannot increase.

Looming on the horizon is the proposed budget for fiscal year 2005. At \$98 million, 2000 PA seniors would be cut from the Program as there are no holdover funds from 2004 to maintain the current caseload.

Sheila Christopher, president of PARF and member of the national CSFP Board and Legislative Affairs Committee, states: "Currently, there are 40 PA counties waiting for the program, with over 10,000 seniors on a waiting list. That means 10,000 additional seniors need this monthly food box, but can't have it because the program hasn't been adequately funded."

Christopher recommends calls to Senator Arlen Specter. "'There just isn't enough funding' is not an acceptable answer for our seniors who were instrumental in making this county great!"

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either of the alternatives proposed by the Pennsylvania delegation at the March 22nd meeting.

Senators Arlen Specter and Rick Santorum have expressed concern about the FNS funding cut. In a February 20th letter to USDA Secretary Ann Veneman, Specter wrote, "Pennsylvania's current capacity to provide nutrition education in food cupboards and pantries is a valuable asset that must be saved. I request that FNS revise its recent policy interpretation so that Pennsylvania may continue to obtain federal reimbursement of a portion of costs when state-funded food is used in combination with appropriate nutrition education." In his letter to Veneman, Santorum also asked for reconsideration of the FNS change in policy. To date, Veneman has not responded to either Senator.

Other Nutrition Cuts

Federal budget cuts also are causing severe damage to Pennsylvania's other nutrition education program for low-income families. The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), which is administered by Penn State Cooperative Extension, provides 6-session nutrition classes to families with children. It reaches parents, school youth, pregnant teens and summer day campers with a message of healthy eating. According to Dr. Elise Gurgevich, State Coordinator for Penn State Nutrition Links, EFNEP has been forced to reduce its program repeatedly over recent years. "In the late '80s we had 136 Nutrition Education Advisors working in the community to teach healthy nutrition. Due to a lack of funding we cut that to 95 positions in 1996 and then to 70 positions in 1999. For the current fiscal year USDA cut our budget by another \$250,000 (10 percent). Unless Congress provides additional money, we'll be forced to reduce our staff by approximately 12 positions before next October."

At a time when obesity and nutrition-related disease have reached epidemic proportions, why is the USDA making severe cuts in nutrition education? "I don't think Congress is fully aware of the number of people that won't be reached with these successful programs," says Gurgevich. "When this issue appears on their radar screens, I expect our representatives will want to do something about it. But in the meantime, we'll have lost valuable program capacity and invaluable years of improved health for the people we serve."

EFNEP has proven its worth over the years, at least to those who have been paying attention. According to the promoters of the 5-A-Day campaign, EFNEP has prompted "positive and statistically significant behavioral changes" including an

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Food Stamp Enrollment Up

Reflecting the tough economic times and numerous improvements in state policy, enrollment in the Food Stamp Program reached 932,000 in February, the highest level in six years. This is a 16 percent increase since February 2003 when 801,000 individuals were enrolled.

Enrollment growth has been largest in the more prosperous counties. Cumberland County, often with the lowest unemployment rate in the State, has seen 40 percent growth over 12 months in the number of individuals receiving food stamps. Growth in Adams County was 33 percent; in Lancaster, York and Pike counties it was 31 percent.

For the typical household of 2.2 persons, enrollment means an additional \$182 a month toward grocery costs. For the larger economy of Pennsylvania, the increase in enrollment also adds important dollars - \$12 million more in February 2004 than during February 2003. According to the USDA, each of those dollars spent on groceries is re-circulated throughout the economy, thereby generating an additional \$1.84 in additional activity.

Nationwide, the USDA reports that only 60 percent of eligible households were enrolled in the Program during 2001. Its strategic plan includes a target of 68 percent by 2007. Pennsylvania's enrollment rate in 2001 was 69 percent.

At an April 6th meeting in Pittsburgh, outreach workers and county staff urged DPW Policy Director Ed Zogby to press on with efforts to simplify the Food Stamp Program. Changes under consideration include an exemption for the elderly and disabled from the face-to-face interview, activation of Access card PIN numbers by telephone and automatic enrollment of SSI recipients who live alone.

DPW has also acted to reduce the number of cases in which an applicant for food stamps is referred to the Office of Inspector General (OIG) for a fraud investigation. According to a March 17th policy memo, a referral to the OIG is appropriate only when the applicant has failed to provide acceptable information and the county worker suspects fraud. To prevent further abuse of the OIG process, DPW now also requires that a supervisor be involved in making the referral.

Food Police or Common Sense?

In February this newsletter reported on the decision of the Philadelphia School District to remove sodas and high-sugar juices from school buildings. In early March, another public body took a stand for healthy nutrition when Minnesota's Department of Human Services requested permission from the Food and Nutrition Service to prohibit the purchase of "junk foods" with food stamps.

Anti-hunger advocates who applauded Philadelphia's decision have mixed feelings about Minnesota's request. On the one hand, it seems to be an invasion into the right of low-income households to make their own choices about what they eat and drink. On the other hand, it seems to be a genuine attempt to slow the nation's epidemic of obesity and promote healthy eating. Some find their thoughts going to the WIC Program, which is held in high regard for its contributions to the food needs of young families. From its beginning 30 years ago, the supplemental food available through WIC has been restricted to a short list of high-nutrition items. Perhaps it is logical to use a similar concept in the Food Stamp Program.

Karen Wilson, nutritionist and executive director of the Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger, isn't convinced. "WIC has found it difficult to serve our culturally diverse populations. And the program finds it difficult to take individual preferences into account. I'm concerned that limiting food stamp purchases would lead to the same problem."

Margaret Woods, the manager of the Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank's Healthy Harvest Initiative, sees obesity and poor nutrition as the result of major

societal trends. She points to the aggressive advertising of high sugar foods to children, the reduction of physical education programs in schools and the cuts in nutrition education funding as examples. In her mind, the Minnesota approach "addresses a symptom rather than the cause." She suggests a more holistic approach to fighting obesity, especially among children. This wouldn't label any category of food as "bad" but would make a place for appropriately sized portions for each type of food.

Both Wilson and Woods conclude that while Minnesota's purpose is good, its method is misguided. People from all economic groups need good nutrition education that empowers them to make good choices on their own without restricting what they can buy.

The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), which opposes Minnesota's waiver request, fears that Minnesota's approach will reinforce an old and inaccurate stereotype that low-income families don't use their food-buying dollars wisely. In fact, the evidence shows just the opposite. According to research by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., households enrolled in the Food Stamp Program consume 35 percent less beverages (not counting milk and juices) and consume less fats, oils, sugars, sweets and snack foods. FRAC also foresees problems at the grocery check-out line as cashiers and consumers struggle to learn what products can and can not be purchased. This could elicit hostility toward food stamps enrollees from cashiers and other customers.

FRAC also sees lots of problems when Minnesota begins to specify which products fit the definition of "junk food." Minnesota currently taxes certain food products under its "Sweet

Tooth" tax law, and it would prohibit using food stamps to buy those products. Soda is on that list. Beyond that, what would be deemed eligible is not very predictable. Potato chips, cookies and Kit-Kats would be permitted, but Hershey bars, Gatorade, and gum would not. The distinctions are obscure and often reflect who has political muscle rather than meaningful nutritional differences. If Minnesota's waiver is requested, FRAC will work with a local organization (Hunger Solutions) to ensure that a more nutrition-based list of ineligible items is created.

In light of all this, perhaps the Minnesota plan should not be taken seriously. But then, that's what people said 10 years ago when activists in Philadelphia started talking about banning sodas in the schools.

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increase in vegetable consumption of "almost one serving and almost a doubling in the percent of graduates consuming three or more servings of vegetables per day."

Led by Senator Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), the Senate recently passed a Sense of the Senate resolution calling for partial restoration of funding for EFNEP. Senator Arlen Specter, who sits on the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, is in a position to see that the Senate follows through on that statement of intent.

Meanwhile, nutritionists serving low-income households struggle with the prospect of closing down effective programs by October 1st. "I'm very disappointed," said Rifkin. "At our meeting with FNS officials I thought I sensed a willingness to work something out. Closing down these programs will be such a huge mistake."



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Fructose Consumption May Contribute to Obesity

The increased use of high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) over the past 30 years may be a key factor in the nation's obesity epidemic, according to recent findings from academic researchers. HFCS is used to sweeten all non-diet soft drinks in the U.S. and its increased usage closely tracks America's collective weight gain. HFCS is cheaper to produce than sugar from cane or beets and is sweeter than natural sugars.

"We can't show causally a direct linkage" between HFCS consumption and obesity, said Barry Popkin, a nutrition professor at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, "but there's a lot of evidence to suggest it." Americans now ingest an average of 132 calories a day from HFCS, mostly in soft drinks.

Unlike glucose, a major component of table sugar, fructose does not affect appetite. "So if you drink a soft drink, you don't get filled up like you would if you drank milk," said Popkin. Additional calories from some other food or beverage would be needed to feel full.

CFNP Report – April 7, 2004

It's Not Too Late

4th Annual Conference
Strengthening the Food Resource Safety Net
May 4 - 5, 2004
Harrisburg-Hershey Wyndham

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(814) 865-8301 or (877) 778-2937

Register Online at <http://conferences.cas.psu.edu>

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