

Eric Bost Does Lunch

Eric Bost, the UnderSecretary for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services was the luncheon speaker. The Undersecretary began his address by mentioning the tragic events of September 11, 2001 and paying homage to the New York staff as well as his own for providing emergency response to the disaster victims. He went on to describe the dramatic increase we have seen in program participation over the last few months and the need for agencies to work effectively together to ensure that services are provided for the Food Stamp Program.

UnderSecretary Bost outlined his desire for an improved relationship between the States and USDA and committed to responding to State needs in as timely a manner as possible. He also stated that he would make a conscious effort to make sure things get better.

In his discussion about current reauthorization proposals that are in the House or Senate, UnderSecretary Bost stated that this is only the first or second inning of a 9-inning game. He is certain there will be more developments before it is all over. He also reminded the audience that the Nutrition title is only one of several titles that are on the table. The UnderSecretary shared his concerns about the Legislation. His stated concerns relate to the potential increase in the error rate and expenditures which could arise.

The UnderSecretary also discussed the need for not only improving the error rate but maintaining a high level of integrity to our program as well. He shared his vision of the Food Stamp Program continuing to facilitate a high level of effort aimed at eliminating waste, fraud and abuse of our program. He clarified that his position is for the USDA to work in concert with the States to increase outreach efforts. He stated that he is not interested in putting up obstacles for participants and stressed the importance of all those that are eligible receiving food stamps.

Undersecretary Eric Bost certainly presented a face of partnership by informing the States that "if there are things we can do to assist you in the administration of this program, just let us know. It is why we are here."

The session concluded with questions, answers, and the award ceremony.