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ERS INFORMING POLICY AND RESEARCH

Eileen Kennedy



ERS INFORMING POLICY AND RESEARCH

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ERS – AREAS OF EMPHASIS

- Animal Products
- Countries & Regions
- Crops
- Diet, Health, & Safety
- Farm Economy
- Farm Practices & Management
- Food & Nutrition Assistance
- Food Sector
- Natural Resources & Environment
- Policy Topics
- Research & Productivity
- Rural Economy
- Trade & International Markets



RANGE OF IMPACTS

- Methodology
- Applied Research Linked to Policy
- Cutting Edge Research



FOOD SECURITY AND HUNGER

- 2000 National Nutrition Summit:
 - Food Security is the foundation of good health
 - Yet issues related to food insecurity and hunger in the USA have had a very volatile history
 - 1984 Presidential Task Force could not agree whether and to what extent there was hunger in United States.



NEWER METHODS

- Historically food insecurity and hunger in the U.S. were linked to clinical signs of malnutrition.
- 1984 Task Force recognized that clinical definition did not provide a sensitive indicator of food insufficiency.



NEW FACE OF FOOD INSECURITY

- Task Force noted:
 - “To many people hunger means not just symptoms that can be diagnosed by a physician, it bespeaks the existence of a social, not a medical problem: a situation in which someone cannot obtain an adequate amount of food, even if the shortage is not prolonged enough to cause health problems.”



NEW METHODS

- ERS involved in development of newer methods to measure food security.
- Qualitative but not subjective
- Food Security Module developed and administered in April 1995 as a supplement to the Current Population Survey.
- Questions in the module developed into a food security scale. Used to rank severity.



IMPACT

- Food Security Module administered every year since 1995.
- Important monitoring device for the U.S.
- Food Security Module spurred more research
- Links between:
 - food insecurity and dietary inadequacy (Tarasuk and Beaton, 1998) just one example



IMPACT

- Equally Important: Spurred interest globally in modifying food security module
 - Bangladesh – Webb et al- Tufts University with World Vision
 - Burkina Faso – Nanama and Frongillo – Cornell
 - Most recently CRSP at Tufts University and Partners – develop simple qualitative measures of food insecurity
 - Nepal – develop and test qualitative measure.



IMPACT

- FAO – Revisit newer methods to document food insecurity
- Keynote Paper: Qualitative Measures of Food Insecurity and Hunger, Eileen Kennedy
- Influenced the discussion and debate in the US.
- Scaling Up Nutrition –SUN – simple methods.



APPLIED RESEARCH LINKED TO POLICY

- National Governor's Association – 2006
- Creating Healthy States: Building Healthier Nutrition Programs – Kennedy, Wilde, Rogers.



OVERARCHING QUESTION

- How can the federal nutrition programs (particularly Food Stamps and WIC) be part of the solution to promoting healthier lifestyles?
- Answer to this question based heavily on ERS research.



CHANGING EXPECTATIONS

- Foods Stamps- large body of ERS and ERS funded research; food stamps
 - Increased food spending
 - Improved diet quality
- WIC – associated with:
 - Improved diet; decreased rates of anemia
 - Decreased rates of LBW and increased BW
 - Reduced neonatal deaths
 - Improved growth in infants and children



NEW EXPECTATIONS

- Food Stamps (now SNAP) and WIC have achieved many of their initial objectives.
- But – are these nutrition programs making us overweight and obese????
- Volatile issue



ERS RESEARCH

- Combined body of research – access to nutritious foods alone will not resolve complex issues related to obesity.
- “Participation in (Food Stamps) and weight is neither uniform across sex, race and ethnicity, nor consistent over time. Weight status is a result of eating and physical activity behaviors that interplay with individual and household economic, social, cultural and genetic factors.”
- Source: Ploeg et al, 2006



OBESITY

- Multi causal
- Puzzle with a 1000 pieces
- No Magic Bullet



NEW DIRECTIONS

- Pilot test changes in Food Stamps
 - Green Stamps – pilot launched in 2010 USDA
 - WIC – Partnerships – WIC, Head Start and health care providers



CUTTING EDGE RESEARCH

- Behavioral Economics – Sept 2010
- Facilitating new and innovative research on the application of behavioral economic theory to child nutrition programs.
- “Delivery Science” – we know a lot about what to do, but less about “how” to do it.



WHAT NEXT

- Newer Nutrition Profile of US population; problems of food insecurity side-by-side with problems of overweight and obesity.
- ERS important “actor” in conducting and sponsoring research.
- Longitudinal data sets – address many of the limitations of existing data.



ERS LOOKING FORWARD

- Rigorous, science base to answer the question:
 - What combinations of policies and programs most effective do address the changing nutritional needs of the U.S. population?



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