



**National WIC Association Testimony  
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry  
Hearing: Agricultural Research and 2018 Farm Bill Implementation  
July 18, 2019**

The National WIC Association (NWA) is the non-profit education arm and advocacy voice of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the nearly 7 million mothers and young children served by WIC, and the approximately 10,000 service provider agencies who are the frontlines of WIC's public health nutrition services. WIC's nutritious food package, nutrition education, and breastfeeding support improve birth outcomes and early child development, leading to healthier communities. For nearly four decades, NWA has worked to build bipartisan and broad-based support for WIC's programmatic goals and public health mission. NWA appreciates this opportunity to provide the Committee with information about USDA research activities related to WIC.

From its inception, WIC has relied on a strong body of evidence – including research and data analysis produced by the Economic Research Service (ERS) – to inform programmatic decisions and maximize positive health outcomes. WIC is a proven investment, improving short- and long-term health outcomes and reducing healthcare costs. WIC most notably leads to positive health outcomes by reducing preterm births, low birthweight, and infant or perinatal deaths. **The Committee should make every effort to support continued ERS capacity to conduct research into nutrition and food insecurity and program evaluation for WIC and other nutrition assistance programs.**

ERS research informs federal policymakers, state WIC agencies, and other stakeholders in improving efficiency within WIC. Critically, ERS research supports efforts to reduce the cost of delivering WIC services, by analyzing state cost containment efforts, evaluating infant formula rebates, and utilizing behavioral economics to study participant shopping experiences. In addition, ERS research provides invaluable insights into the economic impact of WIC. Specifically, a recent study considered the long-term healthcare cost savings associated with the full participation of breastfeeding women in WIC. Research that demonstrates the cost-savings associated with WIC participation are important additions to the literature on the economic value of WIC.

Recent USDA actions to relocate ERS outside of the National Capital Region have disrupted ongoing projects, affected staff retention, and jeopardized the integrity of ERS work products. As of today, there are seven pending ERS studies into WIC – including studies into food costs, federal savings through infant formula rebates, and access to fruits and vegetables.



ERS research also plays a vital role in strengthening the nutritional quality of available WIC foods and highlighting the health and economic benefits of breastfeeding. ERS research is considered expert evidence when the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) conducts its review of the WIC food package every ten years. Continued ERS research into nutrition will play a crucial role as USDA reviews the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, especially as USDA issues – for the first time ever – dietary recommendations for pregnant women and children up to age two.

More broadly, ERS research studies food insecurity and evaluates how all consumers make food purchasing choices. This research serves public health stakeholders, federal and state agencies, and industry in streamlining the shopping experience, promoting access to healthier foods, and supporting WIC’s public health mission.

As the Committee continues to consider the ramifications of the ERS relocation, it is imperative that the current research focuses are preserved and ERS is afforded adequate resources and support to continue nutrition research and program evaluation for WIC and other nutrition assistance programs.

Thank you for your attention to this issue. If you have any further questions, please reach out to Rev. Douglas Greenaway, President & CEO, at [douglasg@nwica.org](mailto:douglasg@nwica.org) or Brian Dittmeier, Senior Public Policy Counsel, at [bdittmeier@nwica.org](mailto:bdittmeier@nwica.org).

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