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Testimony before the Senate Agriculture Committee
On Perspectives for the 2018 Farm Bill
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Dear Senator Roberts, Senator Stabenow, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for inviting me to testify today. I am Bryan W. Parker. I am 51 years old and a native of Tulsa, Oklahoma. I am a recipient of SNAP benefits.

Just like anyone else, I've been through many ups and downs in my life. I served in the Navy on the USS Midway from 1985-1988. I then lived in Japan for 20 years as the owner of a small chain of English cram schools and as a physical fitness trainer of fighters in Japan. In 2010 I moved back to Tulsa to be with my family. I have two daughters that are both grown and very successful in life. I worked in the restaurant industry and held every position from dishwasher to general manager. I felt accomplished, successful, and never worried about paying my bills, buying food or wondering where I would get my next meal. That was never a thought that went through my head.

Like many people do, I lost my job about 3 years ago. I felt down on my luck and was battling depression and anxiety because I couldn't find a job. I could no longer afford to own my car or home. With each interview, the struggles seemed to just keep coming. No one was willing to give me an opportunity. It is tough being a 51-year-old man living in a hotel and searching for work.

During this hard time, SNAP has been a life saver to me. Not only has it given me the nutrition to stay alive, but it has given me hope. You can endure a lot of pain and suffering in life, but one thing you can't withstand is having no food and being hungry. I am very thankful for the SNAP benefits I'm receiving while trying to get back on my feet.

I am happy to say that someone has finally decided to give this 51 year old a chance. I am currently enrolled in the Community Food Bank of Eastern Oklahoma's Culinary Trade Program, and am more than half-way finished with this 16-week course. The Culinary Trade Program is free to participants and helps people needing a second chance on life, like me. I'm currently working 5 days a week for 7 hours a day for the program. The program not only teaches professional cooking skills, but also life skills. The executive chef's motto "A.A.&E." is my favorite. "A.A.&E" stands for Attitude, Attendance, & Effort. He always says these are the key to life.

When I graduate from the Culinary Trade Program I will have a Manager's License in Food Safety that will transfer anywhere in the country. The program will also help place me in a job in the restaurant industry. I ultimately want to work in a professional kitchen, and with hard work, one day own my own restaurant, because cooking is my passion.

None of this would be possible without the help of SNAP and the Culinary Trade Program. I see every day how important SNAP is to many lives in my community. Everyone needs to eat. Not just employed people or rich people need to eat, everyone does. Food is fuel and without it, you have no strength to motivate you to move forward. SNAP helps to take away just one more daily worry that most people don't even consider - hunger. I would be in a different situation than I am now if it weren't for SNAP. I would probably be homeless.

You really don't know what it's like to be hungry until you haven't eaten for days. All you can focus on is when you might eat again. This is why SNAP is so important to me and the people that need it. I honestly believe any working middle class individual or family is one life changing event away from being in the same situation that I'm in. One day I want to be able to pay it forward and hopefully I am doing that right now. Thank you for allowing me to speak and tell my story, I'm very blessed and fortunate to be given this opportunity.

Bryan W. Parker