



## Farm Bill: Congress Must Protect and Strengthen SNAP and Other Anti-Hunger Programs

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### **SNAP/Food Stamps:**

SNAP is the cornerstone of the nation's nutrition and food security safety net, helping to put food on the table for 43 million low-income participants each month. When the number of families struggling to make ends meet increases, SNAP responds quickly and effectively to meet that need.

**SNAP Action Needed:** Congress should protect SNAP from harmful policy proposals to alter its structure or cut its funding, which would undermine its efficacy. Instead, Congress should strengthen SNAP, including basing SNAP benefit allotments on the low-cost food plan and ameliorating the harsh time limits on benefits for certain jobless adults who are willing to work, but are unable to find sufficient hours.

For more than four decades, SNAP has enjoyed strong bipartisan support and has helped ensure vulnerable low-income people in our nation can put food on the table. The program serves as the nation's first line of defense against hunger. If it is weakened, many millions of older Americans, people with disabilities, children, veterans, struggling parents — working and unemployed — and others will be harmed, and the nation will see more hunger and food insecurity, worse health and educational outcomes, and higher health costs.

SNAP has extraordinary strengths:

- When the national economy or a regional, state, or local economy is in trouble, SNAP is there to help. SNAP's responsiveness to unemployment proved it to be one of the most effective safety net programs during the recent recession, providing struggling families with a stable source of food. As conditions improve, SNAP caseloads fall. In November 2016, SNAP helped put food on the table for 43 million people, over 2 million fewer people than the prior November.
- Because SNAP benefits are so urgently needed by families, they are spent quickly — 80 percent of benefits are redeemed within the first half of the month of issuance, bolstering local economies. A 2011 study from the Economic Research Service found that every \$5 in SNAP benefits generates as much as \$9 in economic activity.
- SNAP is targeted to reach the neediest and most vulnerable people in our country. Eighty-two percent of all benefits go to households with a child, senior, or person with disabilities and the average household has an income of only 59 percent of the federal poverty line.
- SNAP lifted 4.6 million Americans above the poverty line in 2015, including 2 million children and 366,000 seniors. SNAP is as effective as the Earned Income Tax Credit in lifting families above the poverty line.
- More than half of SNAP households with at least one working-age, non-disabled adult work while on SNAP; more than 80 percent work in the year before or after receiving SNAP. For many of these families, SNAP is an important support while they are between jobs and looking for work.
- Extensive research shows that SNAP plays a critical role, not just in alleviating poverty and food insecurity, but also in improving dietary intake and health, especially among children. One more recent study found that receipt of SNAP in early childhood improved high school graduation rates, adult earnings, and adult health. National food consumption data (as measured by USDA's Healthy Eating Index) show that each additional SNAP dollar increased a household's score for overall dietary quality.
- Still, benefits are less than optimal. SNAP benefits average less than \$1.39 per person per meal, making it difficult for recipients to afford an adequate and nutritious diet.

- SNAP relieves pressure on overwhelmed food banks, pantries, religious congregations, and other emergency food providers across the country that could not begin to meet the need for food assistance if SNAP eligibility or benefits were reduced. SNAP provides roughly 10 times the meals provided by the Feeding America network.
- Disaster SNAP (D-SNAP) provides replacement benefits for regular SNAP recipients who lose food in a disaster and extends benefits to many households that would not ordinarily be eligible but suddenly need food assistance. The benefits are delivered via Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards, which can expedite and mainstream the relief process for victims.

### **The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP):**

TEFAP is a means-tested federal program that provides food commodities at no cost to individuals and families in need of short-term hunger relief through organizations, such as food banks, pantries, soup kitchens, and emergency shelters. Nutritious TEFAP food commodities are an essential resource for food banks. As the demand for food remains high at food banks across the country, a reliable and continuous stream of TEFAP is necessary for the provision of a steady emergency food supply.

**TEFAP Action Needed:** Include additional mandatory funding for TEFAP food in recognition of the sustained high need for food assistance at food banks nationwide. TEFAP mandatory funds should be authorized at \$350 million per year in the next farm bill. TEFAP Storage and Distribution Funds should continue at \$100 million per year and TEFAP Infrastructure Grants should remain at \$15 million per year.

- TEFAP commodities accounted for approximately 18 percent of the food moving through Feeding America's food banks in 2016. Food banks combine TEFAP with private donations to maximize TEFAP benefits far beyond the budgeted amount for the program. In this way, food banks exemplify an optimum model of a public-private partnership.
- TEFAP bonus commodity purchases provide support for agricultural markets when market support is needed and provides the nation's food banks with access to additional healthy food. Congress should ensure that USDA retains the authority to purchase bonus commodities in times of high need for emergency food relief in addition to times of low commodity prices so the program is responsive to excess supply and excess demand.
- TEFAP has a strong impact on the farm economy. TEFAP purchases give commodity producers an average of 27 cents per dollar and that rises to 85 cents on the dollar for bonus commodity purchases made when agricultural markets need support, according to USDA's Economic Research Service. By contrast, only about 16 cents of every retail food dollar goes back to the farmer.

### **Support Policies to Enable Easier Food Donation:**

Food waste is a staggering issue with over 70 billion pounds of food wasted each year. The Farm Bill should support nonprofits that are trying to work closer with agricultural and food industry partners in order to connect nutritious food to people in need through streamlined federal policies and exploring innovative ways to further this work.

### **Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP):**

CSFP leverages government buying power to provide nutritious food boxes to 697,865 low-income people each month. Virtually all program participants are seniors with incomes of less than 130 percent of the poverty line (about \$15,444 for a senior living alone). Forty-eight states and the District of Columbia are scheduled to participate in CSFP in 2017.

- CSFP is an efficient and effective program. While the cost to USDA to purchase commodities for this package of food is about \$20 per month, the average retail value of the package is \$50. Many seniors participating in CSFP are able to have their food boxes delivered directly to their homes or to senior centers nearby, an important benefit for those who are homebound, have limited mobility, or do not have convenient access to a grocery store.
- CSFP helps to combat the poor health conditions often found in seniors who are experiencing food insecurity and are at risk for hunger. CSFP food packages, specifically designed to supplement nutrients typically lacking in participants' diets, such as protein, calcium, vitamins A and C, and several B, vitamins can play an important role in addressing the nutrition needs of low-income seniors.