

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

SNAP/Food Stamps

SNAP is the cornerstone of the nation's nutrition safety net, helping to put food on the table for more than 47 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 must protect and strengthen SNAP by opposing any proposals to cap or reduce funding, restrict eligibility, reduce benefits, or make harmful structural changes. In addition, Congress should implement recommendations based on the Institute of Medicine's report on SNAP benefit adequacy to ensure that benefit levels are sufficient for households to purchase a nutritionally adequate diet.

For 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, 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 families with a stable source of food.
- Because SNAP benefits are so urgently needed by families, they are spent quickly—97 percent of benefits are redeemed by the end of the month of issuance—thereby bolstering local economies. Moody's Analytics and USDA estimate that the economic growth impact of SNAP ranges from \$1.73 to \$1.79 per \$1 of SNAP benefits.
- SNAP benefits average less than \$1.50 per person per meal, making it difficult for recipients to afford an adequate and nutritious diet. Benefits are scheduled to be reduced on November 1, 2013 when a boost in benefits made by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act expires, a cut of about \$20 to \$25 per month for a household of three.
- SNAP is targeted to reach the neediest and most vulnerable people in our country. The average household has an income of only 58.5% of the federal poverty guideline, and 83% of all benefits go to households with a child, senior, or disabled person.
- SNAP lifted 3.9 million Americans above the poverty line in 2011, including 1.7 million children and 280,000 seniors. SNAP is as effective as the Earned Income Tax Credit in lifting families above the poverty line.
- 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 of the more recent studies on this topic finds that early exposure to SNAP in childhood has favorable impacts on metabolic and economic outcomes in adulthood. And 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.
- SNAP's payment accuracy rate of over 96% is at an all-time high and is considerably higher than most other federal benefit programs. SNAP error rates declined by three-fifths from FY 1999 to FY 2011.
- SNAP relieves pressure on overwhelmed food banks, pantries, religious congregations and other emergency food providers across the country who could not begin to meet the need for food assistance if SNAP eligibility or benefits were reduced.
- The Disaster SNAP/Food Stamp Program (D-SNAP) provides replacement benefits for regular food stamp recipients who lose food in a disaster and extends benefits to many households which 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 Americans in need of short-term hunger relief through organizations like 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. Clarify the Secretary of Agriculture's 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 both to excess supply and excess demand. Reauthorize funding for TEFAP Storage and Distribution Funds at \$100 million per year and TEFAP Infrastructure Grants at \$15 million per year.

- TEFAP commodities accounted for approximately 18% of the food moving through Feeding America food banks in FY2012, down from 28% in FY2011. 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 public-private partnership.
- TEFAP has a strong impact on the farm economy. According to USDA's Economic Research Service, producers of commodities provided as bonus TEFAP (those purchased by USDA to intervene in weak agricultural markets) receive an estimated 85 cents per dollar of Federal expenditure. Producers of other commodities provided through TEFAP receive about 27 cents per dollar. By contrast, only about 16 cents of every retail food dollar goes back to the farmer.
- Declines in Section 32 funding and strong agriculture markets resulted in over half of food banks seeing a decline of over 40% in TEFAP deliveries in 2012. Volatility and declines in bonus commodity purchases are expected to continue in 2013 as food banks continue struggling to meet increased need.

Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)

CSFP leverages government buying power to provide nutritious food packages to approximately 595,137 low income people each month. Nearly 97 percent of program participants are seniors with incomes of less than 130% of the poverty line (less than \$15,000 for a senior living alone). Currently, 39 states and the District of Columbia participate in CSFP. Another 6 states (CT, HI, ID, MD, MA, & RI) have USDA-approved plans, but have not yet received appropriations to begin service.

CSFP Action Needed: Transition CSFP to a seniors-only program by phasing out eligibility of women, infants, and children while grandfathering in current non-senior participants.

- 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 foods in the package is \$50.
- CSFP helps to combat the poor health conditions often found in seniors who are experiencing food insecurity and at risk of hunger. CSFP food packages, specifically designed to supplement nutrients typically lacking in participants' diets like protein, calcium, vitamins A and C, and several B vitamins can play an important role in addressing the nutrition needs of low-income seniors.
- Many seniors participating in CSFP are able to have their food boxes delivered directly to their homes or to seniors' centers nearby, an important benefit for those who are homebound, have limited mobility or do not have convenient access to a grocery store.