

# FARM BILL PRIMER



## What is the Farm Bill?

The Farm Bill is a comprehensive piece of legislation that authorizes most federal policies governing food and agriculture programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as Food Stamps.

Approximately every five years, Congress reauthorizes the Farm Bill. Reauthorization offers policy makers an opportunity to review the programs included in the legislation, consider programmatic changes, and address implementation barriers that may have come up since the previous reauthorization. With the 2014 Farm Bill set to expire on September 30, 2018, discussions about the Farm Bill are beginning already.

The Farm Bill is broken down into 12 different titles, each title encompassing broad categories that address different programs. Title IV, the “nutrition title,” authorizes several federal

nutrition programs, including SNAP.

SNAP is our nation’s first line of defense against hunger. It is structured to respond quickly when a person or family experiences a change in need from an economic downturn, natural disaster, or other causes. SNAP reduces hunger and poverty, improves health and learning, elevates productivity, creates jobs, and strengthens our communities. The federal nutrition programs help people in our country of all ages, races, ethnicities, and life circumstances. They also support veterans, people with disabilities, currently serving military families, low-paid workers, and those who are unemployed or underemployed.

## What is at Stake in the Farm Bill’s Nutrition Title?

Millions of low-income families gain access to healthy food through the Farm Bill nutrition programs each year. The Farm Bill also assists organizations to

administer programs like The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP).

- In September 2016, SNAP served 43.5 million individual participants from 21.3 million households.
- The Supplemental Poverty Measure indicated that in 2015, SNAP helped lift 4.6 million people out of poverty, including 2 million children.
- In 2015, TEFAP provided \$298 million in commodity assistance to states and \$73 million in administrative funds.
- In 2015, the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) provided food for 88,000 individuals living on Indian reservations.
- In 2015, the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) provided 570,000 low-income seniors with U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) foods.

## Farm Bill Basics

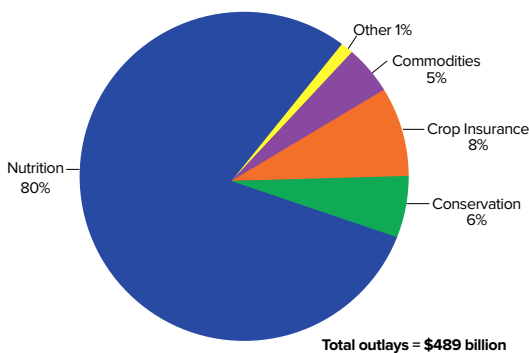
The Agricultural Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-79), more commonly called the “2014 Farm Bill,” reauthorized four nutrition programs, including SNAP, TEFAP, FDPIR, and CSFP.

## Scope of the Farm Bill

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) annually re-estimates the baseline cost expectation for programs that are covered in the Farm Bill.

The graph below shows the breakdown of the 2014 Farm Bill funding allocations separated by the different titles. While the Farm Bill does consist of programs that are appropriated annually (authorized using discretionary funding), the majority of the Farm Bill, including SNAP, is authorized through mandatory spending.

Projected outlays under the 2014 Farm Act, 2014–2018



Sources: USDA Economic Research Service. (2016). *Projected Spending Under the 2014 Farm Bill*. Congressional Budget Office. (2014). *Cost Estimates for the Agricultural Act of 2014*.

## What Food Programs are up for Review?

**SNAP** works to improve the nutrition, the economic security, and health of its beneficiaries by providing millions of low-income individuals and families with the economic ability to purchase food. Money is transferred electronically to SNAP participants on a monthly basis and then used via a debit Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card.

**TEFAP** purchases USDA foods and makes them available to low-income Americans through distribution agencies. These distribution agencies are typically food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, and other community-based agencies. TEFAP also provides administrative funds for food storage and distribution.

**FDPIR** provides USDA foods to low-income households living on Indian reservations as well as to Native American families residing in designated areas near reservations.

**CSFP** distributes USDA foods and administrative funds to the 47 participating states, two Indian Tribal Organizations, and the District of Columbia. The program is targeted to meet the nutritional needs of low-income seniors who are at least 60 years old.

## In Congress, who has Responsibility for the Farm Bill?

In the House of Representatives, the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Nutrition, <http://agriculture.house.gov>, has jurisdiction over the Farm Bill. The Senate Agriculture Subcommittee on Nutrition, Specialty Crops, and Agricultural Research, <http://www.agriculture.senate.gov>, has jurisdiction over the bill in the Senate.

Visit FRAC's Legislative Action Center, [www.frac.org](http://www.frac.org), for the latest on the current Farm Bill.