

Reauthorizing the Farm Bill to Promote Healthy Communities



As Congress moves forward to reauthorize the Farm Bill, we urge lawmakers to protect and strengthen our nation’s largest anti-hunger program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). We also ask Congress to secure food resources and fortify the supply chain by investing in workers.

Protect and Strengthen SNAP

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program provides crucial nutrition to families with children, promotes health and wellness, and prepares students to learn. Seventy-eight percent of SNAP recipients include families with children (who become eligible for free school meals if their households receive SNAP benefits), an elderly person, or a person with disabilities. In 2016, SNAP lifted 3.6 million Americans from poverty, according to the Census Bureau’s Supplemental Poverty Measure.

We can build on SNAP’s success and make it more robust by:

- ▶ Ensuring benefits reflect the economic hardships families and individuals face. The Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) is based on premises that do not hold true for all families and individuals, including the assumption that all have access to full-service grocery stores that carry fresh produce and whole-grain products. The TFP further assumes healthier foods are affordable and similarly priced across the country—but they are often more costly than foods that are higher in sodium and sugar, and therefore less healthy. By comparison, the Low-Cost Food Plan aligns better with household costs, permits greater food variety, and supports healthier diets.
- ▶ Removing the shelter deduction cap. The SNAP shelter expense deduction fails to capture the rising cost of housing and penalizes families and individuals for our current runaway housing market. The current cap of \$623 is a fraction of the actual [\\$2,000 median rent for an individual in the U.S.](#) Removing the arbitrary shelter cap will allow families to spend more on food.
- ▶ Enacting a standard medical-expense deduction. Only 12 percent of households receiving SNAP claim the medical deduction, despite the [high out-of-pocket costs many SNAP families face](#). A standard medical deduction of at least \$140 would increase recipients' monthly benefit amount.
- ▶ Extending SNAP benefits to college students. The rising cost of education, housing, and food is making it increasingly difficult for students to finish college, enter the workforce, and achieve self-sufficiency. Several studies estimate that [as many as 50 percent of college students have experienced food insecurity](#), while [fewer than 40 percent of college students earn a certificate or degree within six years](#). College students should be placed on equal footing with other eligible SNAP participants by removing the overly burdensome work-study and minimum employment requirements.
- ▶ Strengthening food and nutrition security in our most vulnerable communities. [One in four Native Americans experiences food insecurity](#) in comparison to 1 in 9 Americans overall. Currently, individuals who receive benefits from the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) cannot also use SNAP benefits within the same month. This gap in services could be addressed by permitting the use of SNAP and FDPIR simultaneously, allowing tribal nations to administer SNAP by

granting the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) the requisite 638 authority, and increasing funding to expand FDPIR's self-determination projects.

- ▶ Aligning SNAP's eligibility standards with the Affordable Care Act. Lawfully present immigrants and permanent residents are either ineligible for nutrition assistance or [must wait five years before they can obtain SNAP benefits](#). We can support mixed-immigration families and keep children healthy and focused on learning by removing waiting periods and other bars to participating in SNAP.
- ▶ Granting SNAP assistance to parents with prior felony convictions. One study estimates that [upwards of 36.5 million children have at least one parent with a criminal record](#). Parents with prior felony convictions have paid their dues, and we must position their children for success by helping to meet their basic needs with SNAP assistance.

Secure Our Food Resources

The USDA reports that 31 percent of food from retail stores, restaurants, and homes goes uneaten and then needlessly goes to waste when it could instead be used to reduce food insecurity.

We can address food waste by:

- ▶ Supporting school efforts to recover surplus foodstuffs before they go to waste. Schools can conduct food waste audits, participate in food waste education, and collaborate with local organizations to recover and donate uneaten foods.
- ▶ Supporting local communities, farm families, and child health by expanding and increasing funding for the Farm to School program. The Farm to School program has been proven to reduce food waste and support the local economy, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. When schools buy fresh local ingredients, not only are they supporting farmers; they are also helping create better jobs for food service professionals, because preparing wholesome meals from scratch requires additional skills and work hours.

Fortify the Food Supply Chain

Recruiting and retaining working people to harvest, process, transport, prepare, and serve food would strengthen the supply chain.

We can retain and expand the workforce by:

- ▶ Including worker-friendly provisions in the Farm Bill. This will ensure food gets from the farm to the family table and the school cafeteria without issue. These would include:
 - Incentivizing self-operated school cafeterias and procurement vendors that value employees and safe workplaces. The food supply chain is stronger when workers are paid a living wage by employers that maintain safe working conditions and support workers' right to organize.