



CALIFORNIA HUNGER ACTION COALITION

Farm Bill Comments Submitted to the House Agriculture Committee

September 5th, 2017

Dear Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Stabenow, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Peterson:

In 2018, Congress will reauthorize the Farm Bill—the nation’s most critical piece of food and farming legislation. The Farm Bill represents the primary federal investment in the country’s largest anti-hunger programs including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, known as CalFresh in California) and other core programs that provide vital nutrition for our nation’s children, working families, seniors and other vulnerable populations. The reauthorization of the 2018 Farm Bill presents an opportunity to reaffirm our nation’s bi-partisan commitment to addressing hunger by strengthening, not cutting our continued investment in SNAP and other vital anti-hunger programs.

SNAP plays an important role in preventing hunger while supporting California’s economic viability.

Over 6 million Californians live in poverty and struggle to afford basic needs like food, housing and healthcare. California has the nation’s highest poverty rate at 20.6%, outpacing both the official poverty measure and the national average of 15.1% according to the Census Bureau’s 2015 Supplemental Poverty Measure. Poverty and hunger exist in every corner of our state and anti-hunger programs like SNAP serve as our state’s first line of defense—lifting over 4 million Californians out of poverty including two million children.

Federal anti-hunger programs like SNAP, TEFAP and CSFP are essential, not only to prevent hunger and some of the worst outcomes of poverty, but also for communities and retailers who depend on shoppers paying with SNAP when their income falls short. Whatever the fine print, slashing our anti-hunger safety net would be devastating for California.

- Since [every \\$1 billion in SNAP benefits creates at least 10,000 jobs](#), benefit erosion and loss of entitlement from restructuring SNAP would significantly impact jobs in the farming and food retail industries in the California. **In 2016, SNAP generated \$12.7 billion dollars in total economic activity statewide and supported more than 70,000 jobs all while feeding more than 4 million low-income Californians.**
- Nutrition and health safety net programs protect millions of Californians from the long-lasting harm of poverty. These programs largely serve children, seniors, people with disabilities, and working families and are the most effective tools at preventing deep poverty. Undercutting federal protections against the long arm of deep poverty is dangerous.
- Federal anti-hunger programs are most important during economic downturns, [a lesson we learned during the Great Recession](#). Undermining the federal right to anti-hunger benefits weakens the ability of the programs to respond to recessionary times.

The California Hunger Action Coalition is a broad-based membership organization of volunteers united in our belief that access to adequate, nutritious and safe food is a fundamental human right.

Our coalition respectfully urges the committee to reject any proposals that would reduce SNAP's reach and responsiveness during changing economic conditions.

We are deeply troubled by the proposals we have seen in the House budget resolution to drastically slash SNAP benefits, restrict eligibility and alter SNAP's program structure through block grants or other structural changes. Block granting, or any change to SNAP's entitlement status, would increase hunger and harm statewide—shifting costs to state and local governments and reducing the program's reach and responsiveness to the needs of low-income Californians during changing economic conditions as well as natural disasters.

Our coalition urges the committee to reject any proposals to alter SNAP's program structure or convert the program into a block grant

2016 marks the 20th anniversary of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 (PROWA), which infamously 'ended welfare as we knew it' and Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) protections against deep poverty for America's children. Instead, PROWA established block grants through the Temporary Aid to Needy Family (TANF) program, known as CalWORKs in California. In our state and throughout the country, this structural change has had devastating long-term consequences for children growing up in families with little or no cash income to meet basic needs. Even those who played a central role in crafting PROWA have recently suggested that its impact on children and families has been too harsh.

For these reasons, we strongly oppose these harmful proposals, which would worsen poverty and hunger among children, seniors, people with disabilities, veterans, and hard-working families struggling to put enough food on the table.

Our coalition strongly encourages the committee to look for smart ways to invest more in SNAP, our nation's most efficient and effective anti-hunger program.

SNAP is working as intended—to reduce hunger and provide modest income support for those who have fallen on hard times. With over 93 percent of total program costs paying for actual nutrition benefits, SNAP is one of the most efficient and effective federal programs. Rather than trying to fix what's not broken, Congress should be looking for smart ways to invest more in proven programs like SNAP. [HR 1276](#), (Adams, NC-12) proposes policy changes which would reduce hunger and improve health and economic outcomes among recipients. Our coalition strongly supports the following program improvements, which would further SNAP's success in reducing hunger and poverty among the most vulnerable and would help low-wage workers and families move up the economic ladder:

- Incorporate the Low-Cost Food Plan into the SNAP benefit formula to more realistically account for how much working people, especially families with teenagers and people with dietary restrictions, spend on food.
- Eliminate the cap on the Excess Shelter Deduction in the SNAP formula to take into account the high cost of living for SNAP recipients in areas like California with extremely high housing costs.
- Raise the minimum SNAP benefit from \$16 to \$25 per month to provide a meaningful benefit to working families with earned income and seniors living on fixed incomes near the poverty line.

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- Repeal the harsh three-month time limit on SNAP benefits for Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs), or allow childless adults to be exempt from time limits if their state cannot provide adequate Employment and Training support.

As you deliberate the 2018 Farm Bill, we urge the committee to work together to craft a unified Farm Bill that strengthens and protects federal nutrition programs and ensures a healthy, hunger-free California.

We appreciate your consideration of these concerns, and please contact us with any questions.

Sincerely,

Steering Committee Members

The California Hunger Action Coalition

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