

VIEWPOINTS

Farm bill will take food from needy California families

Farmers in the Central Valley have been waiting for a federal farm bill that makes the investments that will ensure California's agricultural industry continues to lead the nation, and the world.

Unfortunately, the proposed bill moving through the U.S. House leaves behind the people who harvest, sort, sell, prepare and serve the Valley's agricultural bounty. It would make it more difficult for millions of Californians, including working parents and many low-wage workers, to put food on the table by cutting their assistance through CalFresh.

CalFresh, the state's version of the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assis-



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ance Program, keeps more than 800,000 Californians out of poverty, including more than 400,000 children. It helps those who are looking for

work, caring for family members or managing illnesses or disabilities to get back on their feet.

CalFresh is particularly important in the Central Valley, where poverty is rife. In some congressional districts, as many as one in four residents rely on the program.

But the current version of the farm bill cuts benefits by billions and diverts much of that money to an untested new scheme of work programs and unforgiving penalties against those who don't prove every month that they work enough hours or qualify for an exemption.

Consider the case of a grocery cashier or restaurant server with two children. She is likely earning minimum wage, has no

control over her work schedule and relies on CalFresh to supplement her income. Under the proposed bill, if her hours were cut under 20 a week, she would be banned from CalFresh for one year. That's not encouraging work, that's kicking someone when they're down.

This new scheme would be woefully underfunded and unworkable. It will fall to administrators in Sacramento to somehow try to run this new state bureaucracy without anything close to the level of support needed to be effective. The bill also adds new paperwork requirements, taking a huge step backward.

Congressmen (and they are all men) representing the Central Valley and their colleagues need to reject this version of the farm bill. They need to focus on passing a bill that addresses the needs of all struggling Californians and reaffirms the bipartisan commitment to preventing hunger.

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