

Feeding America Farm Bill Letter

Dear Members of Congress:

January 2018

As the nation's frontline assistance for millions of families, children, and seniors facing hunger, we know firsthand the impact a helping hand can have for those who are facing food insecurity. **One in eight Americans receives food assistance** each year through the Feeding America network of 200 food banks and the 60,000 local food pantries, kitchens, shelters, and meal programs with whom we partner, 55 percent of which are faith-based. Together we serve 46 million Americans, including 12 million children and 7 million seniors. This direct work with communities supports the crucial assistance that federal nutrition programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) provide for individuals and families in need.

Despite an improving economy, 41 million of our neighbors and friends live in households without consistent access to adequate food, and the need among those who are food insecure continues to rise. According to the annual *Map the Meal Gap* report from Feeding America, the average food budget shortfall of food insecure families is \$900 a year – a 13 percent increase since 2008. In fact, the aggregate annual food budget shortfall for all food insecure individuals in the United States now stands at more than \$22.25 billion.

Federal nutrition programs like SNAP, TEFAP, and Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) are not only a lifeline for millions of families struggling to make ends meet, they are also a key part of how we as a society honor our shared commitment to take care of our most vulnerable neighbors. The Farm Bill represents an opportunity to strengthen and improve these programs, which are also critical to the health and well-being of America's farmers and the agricultural industry, by taking the following steps:

- **Provide adequate funding and preserve access to federal nutrition programs**
The Farm Bill should support vital nutrition programs, agriculture support programs, rural development efforts, and sound policies that enable food banks and the agriculture and food industry to strengthen partnerships that connect excess food with people in need. Doing so will maximize the impact of public and private efforts to address food insecurity, and ensure that food is delivered in the most cost-efficient manner possible.
- **Protect the structure and funding of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program**
SNAP, which is the cornerstone of the federal nutrition programs, provides around 42 million low-income participants with monthly benefits via a grocery debit card. Program eligibility is based on household income and assets, and participants are subject to work and citizenship requirements. SNAP serves the most vulnerable members of our communities, with 75 percent of SNAP households including a child, an elderly individual, or an individual with a disability; these households received 82 percent of all benefits. Congress should oppose structural changes to SNAP and reject efforts to cap or cut funding, or otherwise restrict participation.
- **Provide sufficient resources for the Emergency Food Assistance Program**
The last Farm Bill provided a temporary increase in TEFAP food funding to boost food banks' and pantries' efforts to address hunger throughout the country. Given that the aggregate food budget shortfall for American families continues to rise, Congress should provide \$350 million annually in TEFAP food assistance funding to support food banks and agencies as they work to meet the growing demand among food insecure families.

- **Support policies and programs that help connect excess nutritious food with those in need**

America's growers and producers are extremely generous, donating millions of pounds of foods to those in need. Yet it often can cost farmers more to harvest and donate food than to leave it in the field. Congress can help ensure that produce, meat, dairy, eggs, and other nutritious foods grown in the U.S. are connected with communities in need by providing the resources for food banks and others to cover the cost of harvesting and transporting donated excess food.

Farm Bill nutrition programs have a real impact on your constituents, many of whom rely on one of our food banks or federal nutrition programs to meet their basic food needs. Please protect and strengthen TEFAP, SNAP, and CSFP in the Farm Bill. In the meantime, we invite you to visit a food bank serving your district so you can meet families supported by our collective efforts and see for yourself the importance of nutrition programs and how well they are working.