

Farm Bill 2023: Priorities from the Western Region Anti-Hunger Consortium

Updated August 2, 2023

The Farm Bill authorizes the federal food and agriculture programs that determine the health and resiliency of our food systems: how food is grown, what kinds of food we produce, and how accessible will that food be to low-income families. Here in the western region of the United States, home to the top producers of the nutritious food that everyone seeks to put on their tables, the Farm Bill has the potential to impact the livelihood of our struggling family farms and our struggling families. Because even in the midst of agricultural abundance, hunger and food insecurity stubbornly persist: **1 in 11 households in the western states struggled with food insecurity in 2020.**¹

Food insecurity and hunger is higher among Black, Latine, and Native American households as COVID-19 has exacerbated long-standing racial disparities in hunger. According to data from the Census Household Pulse Survey reported in October 2021, Black and Latine adults were still more than twice as likely to report that their households do not get enough to eat when compared to white adult peers: 17 percent of Black adults and 16 percent of Latine adults compared to just 6% of white adults.² A recent study from the Native American Agriculture Fund found that between March 2020-April 2021, half of all respondents that identified as American Indian and Alaska Native experienced food insecurity and 25 percent experienced very low food security or hunger.³

Millions of low-income people throughout the Western Region and the United States are able to access more nutritious food thanks to the suite of programs in Title IV, or the Nutrition Title of the Farm Bill. This includes the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), our nation's first line of defense against hunger, which helps low-income people including veterans, children, seniors, people with disabilities, and low-wage workers, to buy food from local retailers, grocers, and farmers markets. The Nutrition Title also includes programs that provide commodities and funding that facilitates our charitable network to distribute food to families in need, including The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), and the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR). Furthermore, Washington State is home to the broadest statewide investment made by USDA through the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program to support SNAP match programs that incentivizes the purchase of fruits and vegetables by increasing the purchasing power of SNAP.

Food and nutrition are essential for our economic recovery: nutritious food helps adults who are able to work maintain employment, helps students focus on learning, and helps our seniors be active and independent. The 2023 Farm Bill is our opportunity to think foremost of the needs of people experiencing hunger—especially those with greatest needs—in order to build a more equitable recovery, and as a result, a stronger, healthier food system for all.

Who We Are:

We are the Western Region Anti-Hunger Consortium (WRAHC). Together, we are eighteen member organizations representing eleven states⁴. Our organizations are anti-hunger leaders in our communities, providing direct emergency food relief, advocating for strong nutrition policies, and connecting communities to invaluable state and federal programs and resources. Together, we offer these priorities for Title IV in the 2023 Farm Bill, built collectively through our partnerships with one another and with key stakeholder groups, including those with first person experience of hunger and representatives of critical populations that must be prioritized.

We envision a Farm Bill built on the following principles:

- Prioritization of food for all, targeting improvements to nutrition assistance programs to close accessibility and benefits adequacy gaps for populations struggling with hunger.
- Centered on the needs of individuals with lived experience of hunger, intergenerational poverty, and systemic racism.
- Provides adequate resources for states and counties to administer nutrition assistance programs with built in flexibility to address access issues unique to the state.

Our priorities:

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

- **Modernize SNAP benefits adequacy** to make basic nutrition more affordable: [S. 1336/H.R. 3077](#), Closing the Meal Gap Act.
- **Increase accessibility to SNAP for critical populations:**
 - Repeal the three-month time limit on SNAP for certain **working age adults who struggle with deep set barriers with finding consistent employment**: [S. 2435/H.R. 1510](#), Improve Access to Nutrition Act.
 - Make SNAP more accessible for **low-income college students**: [S. 1488/H.R. 3183](#), Enhanced Access to SNAP Act (EATS Act).
 - Reverse the racially discriminatory policy of prohibiting SNAP to **eligible green card holders** by repealing the five year bar for SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid: [S. 2038/ H.R. 4170](#), LIFT the BAR Act.
 - End the ban on SNAP & TANF for individuals with prior felony convictions: [S. 1753/H.R. 3479](#) RESTORE Act.
 - Eliminate the asset limits test on SNAP, TANF, and LIHEAP, making nutrition assistance more accessible to more **eligible families with children, low-wage workers, seniors, and people with disabilities on fixed incomes**: [S. 1809/H.R. 3822](#)(117th), ASSET Act.
 - Ensure more **working poor households** can enroll in SNAP by setting broad-based categorical eligibility at 200% FPL (as 19 states currently do).
 - Support **single parents** by eliminating state options to tie SNAP to child support compliance.

- Support **people paying high housing costs** and eliminate/raise the cap on shelter deduction.
- **Maintain efficiencies provided by temporary waivers during the pandemic that streamline the administration of SNAP:** reductions in client reporting requirements, elimination of mid-certification period reports, allowance for telephonic signatures without requiring state request, standardization of same-day card issuance, and streamlined verification all have helped state agencies process increased numbers of applications for SNAP despite reductions in staff labor and resources while maintaining program integrity.
- **Improve Disaster SNAP** so that the program can be more responsive to ensure SNAP benefits despite increased frequency of natural disasters caused by climate change (e.g. droughts and wildfires) as well as prolonged crises such as pandemics.
- **Limit overpayment claims** to look-back period of only one year and raise the threshold for which states can pursue claims.
- **Authorize USDA to scale up and improve affordability of online SNAP purchasing.** Goals should include authorization of more retailer approvals including smaller, independent grocery retailers, keep shopping options free (waive minimum order requirements), and improve access to broadband and mobile devices to extend accessibility to more rural communities.
- **Expand the accessibility of using SNAP to purchase hot and prepared food and meals** [S. 2258/H.R. 3519](#), including full implementation of the Restaurant Meals Program. This will increase accessibility to nutritious meals for low-income seniors, people with disabilities, people who are unhoused, and low-income college students who have limited food preparation space or physical ability. Expansion of food purchasing options should also be taken into consideration for increasing certifiable online retailers.
- **Reduce the federal match requirement for SNAP Outreach.** If SNAP outreach activities were 75% federally funded (instead of 50%) the required funding match that can be a barrier for organizations would be greatly reduced, allowing more community-based and grassroots groups to help connect households to assistance. These community-based organizations that struggle to provide the current 50% funding match requirement to participate in SNAP outreach are often the most trusted messengers to enhance SNAP participation, especially for FNS identified priority populations, including BIPOC, immigrants, veterans, and college students.
- **Expand permissible SNAP Outreach activities to include outreach on other programs and services.** Permitting SNAP application assistance to address a broader array of services could help connect SNAP clients to essential services for housing, employment, and other basic needs supports.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

- **Improve TEFAP** so that food bank shoppers can access **more nutritious, culturally responsive food with dignity**:
 - **Expand the local purchasing, flexible funds to states** to provide food bank commodities purchased from local and disadvantaged, including BIPOC,

producers to secure food items that meet local needs and invests in local food economies.

- Enhance centralized purchasing of commodities by incorporating USDA **AMS plans for local and regional food systems and building pathways for communities to provide input and feedback on commodities purchased for distribution.**
- **Make all TEFAP flexibilities permanent:** flexibilities permitted during the pandemic increase accessibility and efficiency for clients and reduce administrative barriers for providers. These include waiving the requirement to collect personal information and use other food distribution models like drive throughs and home delivery by proxies.
- **Raise the minimum income eligibility threshold to 250%** in order to maximize participation by low-income populations with regards to local needs and costs of living.

Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)

- Increase access and enhance CSFP so seniors can access more nutritious, culturally responsive food with dignity and expand to disabled persons:
 - Increase the income guidelines. CSFP is at 130% of the federal poverty guidelines, yet programs like TEFAP and WIC are substantially higher. Enrollment has also decreased during COVID, so increasing eligibility would allow the program to be more fully utilized.
 - Other strategies that lead to a similar outcome – in the FDIPR program, there is an automatic medical deduction. Applying an automatic across-the-board medical deduction to the income of all CSFP applicants would also make the program more accessible.
 - Pilot Project serving persons with a disability through CSFP – persons with a disability under 60 years of age are not presently eligible for CSFP. They are a food insecure population in America that could benefit from CSFP. SSI payments are very low, so they would greatly benefit from the program.
 - Expand food bank commodities and product selection – include additional food options such as fresh or frozen alternatives. Establish a pilot program to try this out.

Hunger for Native Americans/Alaska Natives/Native Hawaiians

- **End the prohibition on dual enrollment in FDPIR & SNAP.**
- **Dedicate a 20% USDA set-aside within each of USDA's existing program authorities to support Tribal organizations, Tribal governments, Native non-profits, and Native producers.** This will ensure proper access to federal programs with increased access in adequacy of support to help close gaps in Native food security through a variety of programs that support Native food production and nutrition assistance programs.
- **Give Tribal governments the full authority to function as government agencies in administering federal nutrition programs,** including TEFAP, CSFP, SNAP

GusNIP/SNAP Match

- Restore clear guidance to USDA that nutrition incentive programs designed to give benefits earned with the purchase of fruits and vegetables may be spent on other SNAP-eligible food products. This will make it easier for more states to implement EBT integration of nutrition incentive benefits to increase accessibility and use by SNAP shoppers.
- Eliminate the non-federal match requirement for GusNIP funds.
- Support efforts to provide expanded resources to support state efforts for EBT integration of nutrition incentive benefits.

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