Safeguarding Food Programs for Those in Need

As Congress works to reauthorize the next Farm Bill, Feeding America urges legislators to strengthen anti-hunger programs. These programs work in tandem with food banks across the country to provide food assistance to low-income individuals and families. Food banks are pressed to meet the needs in their communities and the need for food assistance remains high.

The Farm Bill must strengthen the national commitment to reducing hunger. Feeding America urges Congress to invest in programs such as TEFAP and SNAP, and policies to strengthen food donation to connect surplus food with families in need.

SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP)

SNAP is the cornerstone of federal nutrition programs, providing over 41 million low-income participants with monthly benefits via a grocery debit card. For millions of families, there is a significant gap between SNAP benefits and other family resources to purchase food, contributing to food insecurity rates and increasing food budget shortfalls, which are up 13% for food insecure Americans since 2008. To provide increased access to food benefits, Congress should:

- **Strengthen the connection between availability of job training programs and work waivers to increase workforce participation.**
  
  For many seeking employment, SNAP can be one of the few resources to provide sustenance during a job search. By strengthening and better aligning state employment and training activities with program requirements and ameliorating the time limit for able-bodied adults without dependents, we can help additional SNAP participants find employment.

- **Simplify state certification requirements for seniors and the disabled and increase state agency efficiency by streamlining enrollment across programs.**
  
  Current state options for certifying households with seniors or people with disabilities vary widely in implementation and do not reflect mobility and transportation challenges. By simplifying certification, such as 24 month or longer certification periods and standardizing medical deductions, and standardizing enrollment across programs, such as allowing social security offices to enroll participants, more seniors and people with disabilities can receive needed nutrition assistance.

- **Maintain the state option to lift the gross income limit, providing state flexibility and reducing the benefit cliff.**
  
  Broad Based Categorical Eligibility is efficient, streamlines the application process, and allows states to cater to their local needs. Raising the gross income limit is also a way to nearly eliminate any type of cliff that may exist if a household’s income goes just above the program’s limit, strengthening SNAP’s design to incentivize workforce participation. Allowing states to adjust the income level to meet their needs through broad based categorical eligibility ensures state flexibility, efficiency, and paperwork reduction, and most importantly, it ensures that SNAP works for individuals where they are.
USDA FOOD DISTRIBUTION PROGRAMS: The Emergency Food Assistance Program & the Commodity Supplemental Food Program

Our nation’s food banks, and the programs like The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) that support them, are lifelines for the one in eight people in America who struggle to put food on the table. Charitable donations alone can’t ensure that families in America get enough to eat and we need the government to do its part to fill the empty shelves at food pantries. To ensure the charitable sector has food on its shelves, Congress should:

Provide $350 million per year for TEFAP food purchases and $100 million per year for TEFAP Storage and Distribution. This funding will ensure that TEFAP food levels remain steady throughout the food assistance network and continue to help Americans facing hunger.

Reauthorize the CSFP program, which provides food to almost 700,000 low income seniors each year.

Farm to Food Bank: Strengthening Partnerships with Growers and Producers to Increase Food Donations

Around 70 billion pounds of food does not make it from farm to plate in the United States each year. Feeding America and our food banks partner with growers, producers, food companies, retailers, and restaurants to lead the way in programs, innovations, and partnerships to ensure this nutritious food is connected to those in need. To increase food donations to communities in need, Congress should:

Provide support for growers & producers to connect excess food with food banks & communities in need. Expand resources to invest in Farm to Food Bank and ag surplus programs to help food banks work with growers and producers to connect excess wholesome food with people in need.

Reduce regulatory barriers to food donation. Simplify food donation guidelines by allowing donation of food if it is past the quality date (best if used by); 21 states do not allow donation of perfectly wholesome food if it is past the best by date right now.

Strengthen rural development resources for communities in need. Ensure that resources for rural development are available to help strengthen food bank work in rural communities, including increasing access to food, and flexibility to ensure funds can go to nonprofits serving rural communities located in adjacent, more populous areas.