



Farm Bill Priorities

On behalf of the community members we serve, Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County shares our Farm Bill priorities to improve federal food programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and systemically tackle hunger in the United States.

The Farm Bill provides a key vehicle to strengthen SNAP and make it an even more effective food safety net for consumers that struggle with lower incomes. We urge Congress to pass a bipartisan Farm Bill that protects and strengthens SNAP and other federal nutrition programs.

Despite highly successful federal and state interventions to prevent even greater hunger during the COVID-19 crisis, overall food insecurity in California remains nearly double¹ the pre-pandemic levels² (18.2% vs. 9.9%) with deep inequities for communities of color. As of October 2023, a shocking and unacceptable 24.2% of Black, 32.1% of Latinx, and 17.6% of Asian families with children reported food insecurity,³ all much higher than the 13.8% for White households with children.

This means that nearly **one in five Californians**, with significant inequities for low-income communities of color, are living with the toxic stress and trauma of not knowing where their next meal is coming from, even if they eventually manage to eat. Within this population, a staggering number of Californians report food insufficiency, the worst and most extreme form of hunger. The most recent estimates from December 2022 are that 2,750,000 adults, and approximately 768,000 children, actively lack enough food to eat right now.⁴

And in 2024, California is facing an even deeper hunger crisis. With the signing of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 and ending of the federal Public Health Emergency on May 11, 2023, two critical programs that helped to mitigate hunger over the last three years come to an end: Emergency Allotments and Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT).

¹ Diane Schanzenbach, Northwestern University, Institute for Policy Research. Visualizing Food Insecurity: <https://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/state-food-insecurity.html>

² USDA, Household Food Security in the United States in 2019. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/99282/err-275.pdf?v=1730.7>

³ Diane Schanzenbach, Northwestern University, Institute for Policy Research. Visualizing Food Insecurity: <https://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/state-food-insecurity.html>

⁴ Stanford University, California Data Lab. California Pulse Survey: <https://stanford-datalab.github.io/covid-19-ca/>

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SNAP recipients received their last Emergency Allotments on March 26, 2023.⁵ These allotments had been boosting SNAP benefits since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The highly effective Pandemic-EBT program that has been providing food benefits to children also ended after the 2022–23 school year. These two changes together will intensify widespread hardship throughout California. In 2021, these two programs accounted for one-third of the food safety net in California, or three billion meals.⁶

With the skyrocketing cost of groceries and an uncertain economy, reducing people’s ability to purchase food will not only cause hunger but it is placing enormous pressure on California’s food banks — which have already been stretched thin since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We must be clear that the Fiscal Responsibility Act will worsen hunger and poverty as it includes an historic expansion of the SNAP time limit to older adults. The bill includes a provision to expand the already punitive and ineffective Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) time-limit rule to include people aged 50-54⁷, in addition to limiting the ability of states to protect hungry people from the time-limit via waivers and individual exemptions. Putting a time-limit on food is proven to hurt people’s ability to find and keep work, and perpetuates structural racism.⁸

SNAP is a symptom of poor economic conditions – not a cause. The new Farm Bill should prioritize Rep. Barbara Lee’s H.R. 1510 Improving Access to Nutrition Act and end the cruel ‘work for food’ time limit once and for all. In addition, the Farm Bill should:

- Ensure that the definition of Veterans that are eligible for an ABAWD exemption does not exclude veterans with dishonorable discharges - a category that includes survivors of sexual assault, those discharged under the “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” policy, and others who served and should not be denied food aid. [This should include exemptions for those who have filed and not been denied a discharge upgrade.](#)
- Maximize the other exemptions for former foster youth and those experiencing homelessness, populations that will be hard to reach and serve through SNAP but are in critical need of food assistance and face significant labor market challenges.
- Restore federal funding for competitive SNAP outreach grants, which will be critical for implementing the new ABAWD waivers for people who are experiencing homelessness, Veterans, and young adults transitioning out of foster care.

⁵ California Department of Social Services, All County Welfare Directors Letter, February 2, 2023:

https://cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/Additional-Resources/Letters-and-Notices/ACWDL/2023/CL_02-02-23.pdf?ver=2023-02-13-095208-110

⁶ California Association of Food Banks, CalFresh Emergency Allotments & Pandemic-EBT Are Ending:

https://www.cafoodbanks.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/2023_Emergency-Allotments-PEBT_Factsheet.pdf

⁷ *The Impact of SNAP Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) Time Limit Reinstatement in Nine States.* (2021, June 22). Urban Institute. <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/impact-snap-able-bodied-adults-without-dependents-abawd-time-limit-reinstatement-nine-states>

⁸ Cespedes, A. (2023). Work requirements don’t work. *UnidosUS.* <https://unidosus.org/blog/2023/05/23/work-requirements-dont-work/>

Food Insecurity and the Impact of SNAP Benefits

SNAP is an effective program that promotes food security, generates economic activity, and fosters well-being. SNAP, as a program, responds quickly to increases in need, whether due to recessions, natural disasters, or pandemics. Significant gaps in SNAP benefit adequacy and equitable access, however, undermine its positive impacts.

SNAP remains the most effective anti-hunger program we have in the United States. During the pandemic, SNAP has responded efficiently and effectively to the food needs for many low-income households. SNAP serves people of all ages and all types of communities—rural, urban, and suburban. Four in five SNAP households (81%) have a child, a person aged 60 or older or a person with disabilities.⁹ SNAP also has positive economic impacts. Each \$1 in SNAP during an economic downturn generates between \$1.50 and \$1.80 in economic activity that is felt throughout the food chain—from farmers and ranchers, food manufacturers and truckers, to grocers and store employees.¹⁰ Most SNAP participants who can work do so; SNAP is an important support for both workers who are paid low wages and for those looking for work.

The detrimental and lifelong consequences of childhood poverty and resulting hunger are well documented. The toxic stress of living in poverty has negative, life-long impacts on a child's brain development. When children live in poverty, they endure hardships that impair their ability to thrive,¹¹ and it impacts their capacity to learn, develop, and grow as children and throughout their lives.¹² Children are less likely to succeed in school and at home, and poverty increases the likelihood that childhood impairments will result in adult dependency on safety net services.¹³ Ultimately, poverty damages a child's chance for economic security as an adult and fuels an intergenerational cycle of poverty: children who are born in poverty are three times as likely to be poor at age 40 than children not born in poverty.¹⁴

⁹ See "Characteristics of U.S. Department of Agriculture's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2020," USDA, November 2022, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/Characteristics2020-Summary.pdf>

¹⁰ See Patrick Canning and Brian Stacy, "The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Economy: New Estimates of the SNAP Multiplier," USDA Economic Research Service, July 2019, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/93529/err-265.pdf?v=2789.4> (relevant research summarized at Table 1, p.7)

¹¹ "Family Poverty, Welfare Reform, and Child Development." Greg J. Duncan and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn Source: Child Development, Vol. 71, No. 1 (Jan. - Feb. 2000), pp. 188-196. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1132232>.

¹² Duncan, G and Magnuson, K. 2011. The Long Reach of Childhood Poverty. http://www.stanford.edu/group/scspi/_media/pdf/pathways/winter_2011/PathwaysWinter11_Duncan.pdf.

¹³ Barton, Paul E, and Richard J Coley. The Family: America's Smallest School. Policy Information Report, Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 2007, and Berliner, David C. Poverty and Potential: Out-of-School Factors and School Success. Boulder and Tempe: Education and the Public Interest Center & Education Policy Research Unit, 2009.

¹⁴ Cuddy, E., Venator, J. and Reeves, R. 2015. In a land of dollars: Deep poverty and its consequences. Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/in-a-land-of-dollars-deep-poverty-and-its-consequences/>.

Thanks to USDA’s evidence-based review and revision of the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) – based on a directive in the bi-partisan 2018 Farm Bill – SNAP experienced one of the most meaningful increases in benefit amounts in decades. In October 2021, the SNAP benefit increased by 21 percent due to USDA’s long overdue and evidence-based revision to the Thrifty Food Plan.¹⁵ This is a significant improvement; yet, SNAP benefits average a mere *\$6 a person per day*.

We must build on the success of the Thrifty Food Plan revision by ensuring the SNAP benefit amount is further increased to mirror current food costs, the true cost of living in the U.S., and the reality of food preparation for low-income families.¹⁶ The current average SNAP benefit per meal does not meet the average cost of a meal, particularly in these times when inflation is high making the affordability of basic food inaccessible. In addition to building on the improved Thrifty Food Plan, the calculation of the SNAP benefit amounts desperately needs to be revised in an equitable way that meets the real needs of working families.

Hunger continues to affect too many people in the U.S. In 2021, more than 33.8 million Americans lived in households that struggled with food insecurity¹⁷ and more than one in six Americans turned to the charitable food sector for help.¹⁸ In early February 2023, the U.S. Census Bureau PULSE survey found that 11.4% of respondent households reported they “sometimes” or “often” do not have enough to eat in the past seven days.¹⁹

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

TEFAP helps food banks distribute food to people experiencing food insecurity, and especially helps reach those people who do not qualify for SNAP benefits. Simultaneously, TEFAP foods help support the California agricultural economy.

¹⁵ USDA, SNAP, and the Thrifty Food Plan. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/thriftyfoodplan>

¹⁶ Inflation has hit low-income households particularly hard. Food prices in the US are up 7.9% over last year in February 2022. Forbes, “Food Inflation Will Hit Millions Hard” <https://www.forbes.com/sites/eriksherman/2022/03/29/food-inflation-will-hit-millions-hard/?sh=708d13aa32d6>

¹⁷ Alisha Coleman-Jensen, Matthew P. Rabbitt, Christian A. Gregory, and Anita Singh, USDA Economic Research Service, September 2022, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/104656/err-309.pdf?v=5832.6>

¹⁸ Poonam Gupta, Julio Salas, and Elaine Waxman, “Two Years into the Pandemic, Charitable Food Remains a Key Resource for One in Six Adults,” Urban Institute, May 2022, <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/Two%20Years%20into%20the%20Pandemic%2C%20Charitable%20Food%20Remains%20a%20Key%20Resource%20for%20One%20in%20Six%20Adults.pdf>

¹⁹ See “Week 54 Household Pulse Survey: February 1 - February 13,” U.S. Census Bureau, February 22, 2023, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2023/demo/hhp/hhp54.html> (based on data reported at Food Sufficiency and Food Security Table 1)

Specifically, we urge Congress to:

1. Calibrate SNAP benefit amounts to a more realistic food plan proposed in the Closing the Meal Gap Act ([H.R. 3037 Adams](#) / [S. 1336 Gillibrand](#)) which would substitute the USDA Low-Cost Food Plan for the Thrifty Food Plan as the basis for SNAP benefits.

In addition, increase the minimum SNAP monthly benefit amount, which currently is only \$23; take into account all of a household's excess shelter costs in determining their SNAP benefits; and streamline states' use of a Standard Medical Expense Deduction. These changes can ease the untenable choices too many families with children have to make between paying for food or paying for shelter and that too many older adults and people with disabilities have to make between paying for food or paying for medicine.

2. End SNAP time limits as proposed in the Improving Access to Nutrition Act ([H.R. 1510 Lee](#) / [S. 2435 Welch](#)) which would eliminate three-month time limits on SNAP eligibility for certain working-age adults who cannot document sufficient hours of work. The current law provision takes food off the table of unemployed and underemployed people. The proposal is a long overdue and permanent law change that will promote food security and equity for Americans with low incomes.

3. Improve SNAP access for low-income college students in the Enhance Access to SNAP Act ([EATS Act H.R. 3183 Gomez](#) / [S. 1488 Gillibrand](#)) which would drop the extra work requirements that full-time college students face in qualifying. The regular SNAP student rules are difficult for state agencies to administer, confusing for students to understand and increase access barriers. The Government Accountability Office estimated in 2018 – well before the pandemic -- that 57 percent of college student who were likely food insecure and potentially income-eligible for SNAP (representing more than 1.8 million students) do not receive benefits.²⁰

4. Eliminate SNAP policies that disproportionately harm immigrant communities. This includes, as proposed in the **Lift the Bar Act ([H.R. 4170 Jayapal](#) / [S. 2038 Hirono](#))**, removing the 5-year residency waiting period in SNAP that most documented immigrant adults face.

Additional improvements would extend equitable SNAP access for tribal members and residents of Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands as well as remove the bar to use of SNAP benefits for purchase of hot prepared foods.

²⁰ Food Insecurity: Better Information Could Help Eligible College Students Access Federal Food Assistance Benefits, Government Accounting Office, GAO-19-95 December 2018 <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-19-95>

5. Permanently end the prohibition on use of SNAP benefits to purchase hot prepared foods from food retailers through the Hot Foods Act ([H.R. 3519 Meng, Fitzpatrick / S. 2258 Bennet](#)).

This would afford SNAP customers broader choices available to other food shoppers.

6. Ensure end-to-end remote access to Disaster SNAP (D-SNAP). California continues to face the ongoing threat from disasters, which disproportionately impact low-income households who often need to flee to safety with no warning due to fires, earthquakes, or power outages. [End-to-end access has been a long-time priority](#), and is now even more important with the USDA thankfully making permanent remote access via telephonic signature to regular SNAP, but [requiring a case-by-case review of remote access during D-SNAP operations](#) - precisely the moment when traumatized households need that flexibility the most.

7. Repeal the lifetime ban on individuals with a past felony drug conviction from receiving SNAP in the Re-Entry Support through Opportunities for Resources & Essentials ([RESTORE Act H.R. 3479 Cohen / S. 1753 Booker](#)). Access to nutrition can make a difference in successful transition for formerly incarcerated people reentering communities and making new starts.

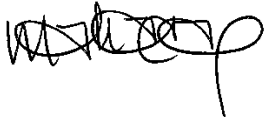
8. Improve The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) so that food bank shoppers can access more nutritious, culturally responsive food with dignity, and make all TEFAP flexibilities permitted during the pandemic permanent. Our specific policy asks are the following:

- Reauthorize and double annual mandatory funding for TEFAP food purchases - Farmers Feeding America Act ([S. 2713 Casey / H.R. 6203 Salinas](#))
- Reauthorize and increase to \$200 million annual discretionary funding for TEFAP storage and distribution.
- Reauthorize \$15 million in annual discretionary funding for TEFAP infrastructure grants.
- Raise the minimum income eligibility threshold for TEFAP to 250% in order to maximize participation by low-income populations.

9. Increase access and enhance the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) so seniors can access more nutritious, culturally responsive food with dignity and expand to persons with a disability by increasing the income guidelines. Apply an automatic across-the-board medical deduction to the income of all CSFP applicants and create a pilot project to serve people with disabilities through CSFP. Expand food bank commodities and product selection by including additional food options such as fresh or frozen alternatives.

It is imperative that the Farm Bill protects and strengthens SNAP, TEFAP, and other federal nutrition programs. We are not alone in calling for these to be priorities; you can find out more at the following links:

- [California Association of Food Banks](#)
- [Feeding America](#)
- [Food Research and Action Center](#)



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