[[1]](#footnote-15412)

**Farm Bill Comment Template**
**Please Email to** **FarmBill2023@ag.senate.gov**

Date

United States Senate Committee
on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: **Ideas and proposals for the 2023 Farm Bill**

Dear Senate Agriculture Committee Members:

On behalf of [your organization] and the community members we serve, we appreciate the opportunity to share 2023 Farm Bill recommendations to improve the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and systemically tackle hunger in the United States. The 2023 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.

[Provide a description of your organization, the mission, and the impact it has in your community. Also feel free here or elsewhere in the letter to insert information about hunger in your community, data about SNAP in your state and/or county, and any input/stories from people with lived experience with hunger and poverty. We have included SNAP talking points at the end of the letter for your reference.]

SNAP is an effective program that promotes food security, generates economic activity, and fosters well-being. SNAP 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. Indeed, SNAP benefits average a mere $6 a person a day.

[Feel free to insert any examples of SNAP households struggling with tough choices between food and other basic needs.]

It is urgent that the 2023 Farm Bill protects and strengthens SNAP. [You can find FRAC priorities at this link: <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/Priority-SNAP-Legislation_R3.pdf.> Feel free to include the link in your letter and/or to cite particular provisions that your organization supports.]

Specifically, we urge Congress to:

**Calibrate SNAP benefit amounts to a more realistic food plan.** As previously proposed in the Close the Meal Gap Act by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand and Representative Alma Adams, substitute the Thrifty Food Plan for the USDA Low-Cost 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.

[Feel free to include any local examples on any of the priorities.]

**End SNAP time limits as previously proposed in the Improving Access to Nutrition Act** by Representative Barbara Lee. It 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.

**Repeal the lifetime ban on individuals with a past felony drug conviction from receiving SNAP.** Access to nutrition is a basic human right. Moreover, access to nutrition can make a difference in the successful transition for formerly incarcerated people making new starts.

**Improve SNAP access for low-income college students** by dropping the extra work requirements that full-time college students face in qualifying. This was previously proposed in The Enhance Access to SNAP Act (EATS Act) by Senator Kristen Gillibrand and Representative Jimmy Gomez. The regular SNAP student rules increase access barriers, are difficult for state agencies to administer, and are confusing for students. The Government Accountability Office estimated in 2018 – well before the pandemic -- that 57 percent of college students who were likely food insecure and potentially income-eligible for SNAP (representing more than 1.8 million students) do not receive benefits.

**Eliminate SNAP policies that disproportionately harm immigrant communities.** This includes, as proposed in the Lift the Bar Act previously offered by Representative Pramila Jayapal, removing the 5-year residency waiting period in SBAP 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 the use of SNAP benefits for the purchase of hot prepared foods.

Thank you again for seeking input on 2023 Farm Bill priorities.

Sincerely,

[your organization]

**Sample Talking Points on Food Insecurity**

**Food Insecurity and the Impact of SNAP Benefits:**

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.[[2]](#endnote-25966) SNAP also has positive economic impacts. Each $1 In SNAP during a 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.[[3]](#endnote-27126)And SNAP is an important support for workers who are paid low wages and for those looking for work. Most SNAP participants who can work do so.

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,[[4]](#endnote-11842) and it impacts their capacity to learn, develop, and thrive as children and throughout their lives.[[5]](#endnote-9535) 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.[[6]](#endnote-4488) 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.[[7]](#endnote-17562)

SNAP has a critical role in improving the health of people across the nation, especially among the most vulnerable Americans. SNAP makes a positive difference over the life course of individuals, decreasing negative health outcomes in children and increasing economic self-sufficiency in women,

Hunger persists in America. In 2021, more than 33.8 million Americans lived in households that struggled against food insecurity[[8]](#endnote-24035) and more than one in six Americans turned to the charitable food sector for help.[[9]](#endnote-22557) In early February 2023, 11.4% of respondent households reported that they “sometimes” or “often” do not have enough to eat in the past seven days.[[10]](#endnote-186)

In October 2021, the regular SNAP benefit increased by 21 percent due to USDA’s fulfillment of the 2018 Farm Bill mandate to update the Thrifty Food Plan.[[11]](#endnote-18287) The evidence-based update resulted in a meaningful but modest adjustment on SNAP benefits. Nonetheless, the adjustment to the most meager of the federal government’s food plans leaves it far short of the amount needed for families to keep food on the table throughout the month. Substituting the more adequate Low-Cost Food Plan as the basis for calculating SNAP benefits is warranted and long overdue.

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-15412)
2. 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 [↑](#endnote-ref-25966)
3. 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) [↑](#endnote-ref-27126)
4. “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. [↑](#endnote-ref-11842)
5. 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>. [↑](#endnote-ref-9535)
6. 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. [↑](#endnote-ref-4488)
7. Cuddy, E., Venator, J. and Reeves, R. 2015. In a land of dollars: Deep poverty and its consequences. Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/in-a-land-of-dollars-deep-poverty-and-itsconsequences/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-17562)
8. 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> [↑](#endnote-ref-24035)
9. 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> [↑](#endnote-ref-22557)
10. 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) [↑](#endnote-ref-186)
11. USDA, SNAP, and the Thrifty Food Plan. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/thriftyfoodplan> [↑](#endnote-ref-18287)