

June 12, 2024

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chair
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and
Forestry
U.S. Senate

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and
Forestry
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Glenn “GT” Thompson
Chair
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable David Scott
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Chair Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman, Chair Thompson, and Ranking Member Scott:

In 2022, there were 44 million people living in food insecure households in the U.S. and nearly 17 million of those experienced very low food security, including more than 7 million children. Tens of millions of workers, veterans, seniors, and people with disabilities are also struggling against hunger. Despite this grim reality, yesterday, the Republican members of the Senate Agriculture Committee joined their party’s colleagues in the House of Representatives in pursuing a deeply partisan Farm Bill. If enacted, the Senate Republicans’ framework would increase U.S. residents’ food insecurity and harm public health by raising the cost of access to nutritious food.

Hunger Free America and the Center for Science in the Public Interest stand together in calling for Senate Republicans to abandon their partisan tactics and attack on vulnerable Americans. By preventing the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) from accounting for the true costs of living, the Senate GOP framework stands to cut \$30 billion dollars in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits over the next ten years. Partisan politics is not the answer when existing benefits are already too meager to address hunger in America today. Instead, we urge leaders from both political parties to embrace the traditional bipartisan approach that has historically shaped this important legislation to reduce hunger and boost public health.

With millions of U.S. residents unable to adequately feed their families and chronic disease rates on the rise, Congress should be working to increase access to a healthy and affordable diet for everyone in the U.S. It can do so by protecting SNAP benefit levels, prioritizing food and nutrition security, bolstering fruit and vegetable incentive programs, and increasing access to healthy food in the charitable food system in the 2024 Farm Bill.

Hunger is a present and painful reality for too many Americans today. One in five U.S. children lives in households that struggle against hunger. The 2022 household food insecurity rate in rural areas, 14.7%, was even higher than the national rate of 12.8%. Even in suburbs – traditionally some of the wealthiest communities in the nation – an astounding 6.2 million households were

food insecure. Hunger has become a serious problem in virtually every rural, suburban, and urban community in the country.

In the U.S., rates of chronic diseases related to poor nutrition, such as diabetes, heart disease, and some cancers, continue to increase and remain among the top causes of death and disability. Hunger and chronic disease devastate the health and educational performance of children, reduce worker productivity, harm America's economic competitiveness, drive up health care spending, hamper the readiness of military recruits, and make it more difficult for older Americans to stay independent in their homes.

Preventing hunger and chronic disease ought to be a top priority for lawmakers not only because it is the right thing to do, but also because it brings significant reductions in health care costs and improved quality of life.

By mirroring the policy proposals of their counterparts in the House, the Senate Republican framework prioritizes industry wealth over U.S. residents' health. The partisan Senate Farm Bill would circumvent the evidence-based process behind the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs) by disallowing the DGA committee to look at broader connections between food, nutrition, and health outcomes. Likewise, the framework includes attacks on SNAP benefits, cuts key programs to mitigate climate change, and includes measures to weaken the nutritional content of school meals.

There are three key areas where we hope that a more bipartisan Farm Bill could make a huge difference in the lives of Americans in every state. These areas include defending SNAP against unnecessary funding cuts, investing in GusNIP fruit and vegetable incentives, protecting The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), and investing in the Farm to Food Bank (FTFB) projects. We discuss each in turn.

At a time when grocery prices are still high, SNAP has already been cut back, and families are struggling to put food on the table, the Farm Bill should not be a legislative vehicle for cutting SNAP. Given that the bill would cut \$30 billion from SNAP, while increasing subsidies (which mostly go to wealthy agribusiness), it would add an estimated \$20 billion to the Federal deficit. Therefore, we don't think it is accurate to label these changes to SNAP as "cost neutral."

Less than 1% of SNAP shoppers are able to benefit from GusNIP and by increasing funding we can ensure that lower-resourced and food insecure communities can participate. A stronger GusNIP would also create new opportunities for statewide program expansion, eliminate or lower the match requirement, and encourage the use of innovative technologies.

Protecting TEFAP funding is crucial for ensuring reliable access to nutritious food for millions of low-income families. A stronger TEFAP, including funding for FTFB projects, is key to fighting hunger and supporting local agriculture.

Nearly everyone in this country is impacted by the Farm Bill and we stand ready to fight for one that supports the wellbeing of families, farmers and ranchers, and our planet. We look forward to

working with Republican and Democratic policymakers to deliver a bipartisan Farm Bill that bolsters a healthy and sustainable food system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joel Berg". The letters are cursive and connected.

Joel Berg
CEO
Hunger Free America

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Peter Lurie". The signature is cursive and includes a horizontal line underneath the name.

Peter Lurie, MD, MPH
President and Executive Director
Center for Science in the Public Interest