

St. Louis Area Foodbank
Response to House Agriculture Committee Passage of 2018 Farm Bill
April 27, 2018



The House Agriculture Committee voted to send its draft of the 2018 Farm Bill to the House floor on April 18 – one in a series of steps propelling this important piece of legislation toward passage into law. While the bill includes some encouraging provisions, like reauthorization of The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and extended funding for the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program, proposed changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP – formerly food stamps) make this a bill the St. Louis Area Foodbank cannot support.

Current law requires all physically and mentally fit adults applying for SNAP benefits to be working or registered for work. It also further limits able-bodied, childless adults between the ages of 18 and 49 to three months of SNAP benefits within a 36-month period unless these individuals work or enroll in an approved employment and training program for at least 20 hours per week. Despite these pre-existing requirements, the House Farm Bill expands those accountable to this more stringent requirement to include parents of children over the age of 6 and adults up to the age of 59. The bill also reduces the compliance period from three months to one.

Provisions like these are intended to encourage unemployed individuals to move into the workforce and achieve self-sufficiency. Yet many people participating in SNAP that can work already do work. The reality is that many low-wage workers face challenges these provisions fail to consider including unpredictable hours, periods of unemployment, and an absence of benefits like sick leave. Ultimately, limiting a struggling family's access to food puts our most vulnerable neighbors – children among them – at an even higher risk of food insecurity and makes overcoming the barriers that keep people in poverty that much more difficult.

And while the bill would require states to provide employment and training services to all eligible individuals, it remains unclear how states could develop and implement successful programming on such a large scale (to serve both urban and rural populations) in the mandated two-year transition period. Ultimately, as a result of the high bar set by work requirements, the strict time limits against people experiencing unemployment, and administrative challenges, this bill would increase hunger overall and put enormous pressure on the non-profit sector to feed our region's hungry.

With nearly 1 million Missourians and 1.5 million Illinoisans facing hunger, including hundreds of thousands of children, we cannot afford a Farm Bill that jeopardizes people's access to food. For every meal a Feeding America food bank, like the St. Louis Area Foodbank, provides, SNAP provides twelve. It is our combined efforts that make achieving a significant impact on hunger in our region possible, and SNAP remains an essential piece of that effort. It feeds children and the elderly, effectively reducing hunger among high-risk populations while also lifting families out of poverty and helping low-wage workers achieve stability. SNAP works, and it should be protected, not weakened.

As the bill moves to the House floor, we encourage our members of Congress to carefully consider its potential impact on the millions of children, seniors, veterans, and low-wage workers who rely on SNAP for food every day and to look to improvements and solutions that keep basic yet vital resources within reach. We remain eager and committed to working with our community partners and elected officials to fight against hunger for a brighter, healthier future for all.