
House Agriculture Committee Farm Bill's \$30 Billion Cut to Future SNAP Benefits and Other Harmful Changes Overshadow Modest Improvements

Statement of Ty Jones Cox, CBPP Vice President for Food Assistance

Last week, House Agriculture Committee Chair Glenn “GT” Thompson released the text of his farm bill proposal. In a country where millions of people struggle with food insecurity and significant racial inequities in food hardship persist, the farm bill’s top priority should be protecting and strengthening the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), our nation’s most important anti-hunger program. This proposal fails to do so and should be rejected.

Instead, the farm bill that Chair Thompson plans to mark up in the Agriculture Committee this Thursday would prevent SNAP benefits from keeping pace with the cost of a healthy, realistic diet over time, weakening SNAP’s effectiveness in reducing food insecurity and poverty. It would ignore scientific evidence and arbitrarily restrict future updates to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Thrifty Food Plan, the basis for SNAP benefit levels. While the proposal would retain basic annual inflation adjustments, if the cost of a healthy diet rose over time for other reasons, such as changes in scientific nutrition standards, SNAP benefits would not be adjusted accordingly.

That change would take away approximately \$30 billion in food assistance from households receiving SNAP over the next decade, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates. If enacted, the bill would make the largest cuts to SNAP benefits since those in the 1996 welfare law almost 30 years ago. And the cuts from this change would grow deeper, and SNAP benefits more inadequate, over time. Every SNAP participant would receive less to buy groceries in future years under this proposal, CBO projects, putting a healthy diet out of reach for millions of individuals and families with low incomes.

Chair Thompson’s proposed House farm bill includes other harmful provisions. It would let states outsource SNAP’s process for determining SNAP eligibility to private corporations, putting profits ahead of families’ needs and jeopardizing their ability to put food on the table. Previous efforts to privatize these elements of SNAP administration failed to deliver promised efficiencies. Instead, they hurt individuals and families whose food assistance benefits were delayed, increased costs, and worsened error rates.

The bill would make sweeping changes to SNAP’s statutory purpose, shifting the program’s focus away from reducing food insecurity and opening the door to unworkable and stigmatizing policing

of SNAP participants' food purchases. It would put the sensitive personal information of more than 40 million people in low-income households at risk by directing USDA to re-issue rules for interstate data matching to prevent duplicate enrollment without the key data privacy protections that exist in current law.

It's worth noting what this bill would *not* do. While the bill acknowledges the inadequacy of food assistance in Puerto Rico, it would not take steps to put the Puerto Rico nutrition assistance block grant on a path to the regular SNAP program available in states, District of Columbia, Guam, and the Virgin Islands. Nor would it protect low-income households who have their SNAP benefits stolen through no fault of their own, letting the authority to replace benefits stolen through EBT card skimming and other forms of electronic benefit theft expire later this year.

The bill does include some modest improvements to SNAP and new investments in other nutrition programs. But these improvements would not outweigh the harm of cutting future benefits for all participants. In fact, these limited investments would add up to only about half of the roughly \$30 billion SNAP cut. This means that the House farm bill would cut billions of dollars from vital food assistance for low-income people in the future to fund unrelated initiatives that do nothing to help those people put food on the table. This is unacceptable.

Farm bills require strong bipartisan support to become law, and there are ways to strengthen SNAP that have bipartisan and bicameral support. For example, both the House Agriculture Committee's farm bill and the framework proposed by Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Debbie Stabenow earlier this month would restore SNAP eligibility to people returning to their communities after incarceration for a drug-related felony conviction, ending a punitive and racist policy that has wrongly denied food assistance to people for decades. But, as Chair Stabenow's framework makes clear, expanding access to SNAP for some does not need to come at the expense of undermining SNAP's ability in the future to ensure that all SNAP households can afford a healthy diet. Members of the House Agriculture Committee should reject Chair Thompson's damaging cuts and policy changes, and instead work toward a farm bill that truly protects and strengthens SNAP.

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