

November 12, 2013

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
Chairwoman  
Senate Committee on Agriculture  
328A Russell Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Frank Lucas  
Chairman  
House Committee on Agriculture  
1301 Longworth Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Agriculture  
328A Russell Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Agriculture  
1301 Longworth Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Chairman Lucas, and Ranking Members Cochran and Peterson:

With millions of seniors struggling with hunger, we strongly urge you to protect SNAP and other nutrition programs in the farm bill. Proposed deep funding cuts and harmful policy changes to SNAP would take food assistance from our most vulnerable seniors. Instead we ask you to protect and strengthen SNAP, SNAP-Ed CSFP, and TEFAP in the final farm bill conference report.

Over the next ten years, the number of Americans aged 65 and older will increase by one-third. These changing demographics will have a profound impact on the demand for nutrition assistance among older Americans. Nearly half of older Americans between the ages of 60 and 90 will encounter at least one year of poverty or near poverty in their lifetime, placing them at greater risk of food insecurity.

The prevalence of hunger among older Americans has serious health and economic consequences. Food insecure seniors are more likely to have lower intakes of major vitamins, significantly more likely to be in poor or fair health, and more likely to have limitations in activities of daily living. In addition to protecting seniors against hunger, federal nutrition programs also help to combat the poor health conditions often found in seniors who are experiencing food insecurity.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides a monthly grocery benefit to low-income participants, about 9 percent of whom are elderly. About 80 percent of elderly SNAP participants live alone, meaning they do not have other household members they can rely on to provide food. While seniors make up only a minority of SNAP participants, the seniors that do participate are among our most vulnerable. Elderly SNAP participants living alone have an average \$743 in gross monthly income, about 65 percent of the poverty level for a senior living alone.

Proposed SNAP eligibility changes would erect new participation barriers that would prevent millions of seniors, children and families from accessing food assistance. The Nutrition Reform and Work Opportunity Act (H.R. 3102) approved by the House of Representatives would cut nearly \$40 billion from SNAP, causing 4 million participants to lose benefits entirely and causing 850,000 households to have their benefits cut by an average \$90 per month. A typical senior receives about \$122 per month – or \$4 a day – in SNAP benefits. Only a third of eligible older adults currently participate in SNAP, yet proposals to eliminate outreach resources and limit states' flexibility to streamline asset and income eligibility through categorical eligibility will impose greater barriers to their access to assistance.

At the same time, the House farm bill would cut also SNAP nutrition education (SNAP-Ed) funding that helps families maximize nutrition on a limited food budget. SNAP-Ed helps older adults understand the nutritional changes necessary to maintain health, for example by teaching older adults what foods are important to reduce chronic disease. Especially as older adults prefer to remain independent and stay in their homes, SNAP-Ed provides important information about the changes needed to have a healthy, safe diet to both access adequate nutrition and reduce chronic disease.

Many of our most vulnerable seniors would be impacted by proposed SNAP and SNAP-Ed cuts, losing vital nutrition assistance and placing them at greater risk of poor health; thus we oppose cuts to SNAP and SNAP-Ed in the farm bill.

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) provides a nutritious monthly food package to about 595,000 low-income participants, nearly 97 percent of whom are seniors with incomes below 130 percent of the federal poverty guideline (\$14,937 for a senior living alone). While the cost to USDA to provide this package of food is, on average, \$20 per month, the average retail value of the foods in the package is \$50. Although the \$20 monthly CSFP food package may not seem like much, to a low-income senior, it can mean the difference between three square meals a day and not having enough to eat. We support the change in the House and Senate farm bills to update CSFP eligibility rules to make it a seniors-only program, reflecting the fact that the program has evolved to serve primarily seniors.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) provides food commodities at no cost to Americans in need of short-term hunger relief through emergency food providers like food banks and pantries. A report by Feeding America found that seniors rely on food banks for food assistance more often than other demographic groups. Over half of seniors accessing food pantries have used a pantry every month for at least a year. Among Feeding America food bank client households with seniors, 29.6 percent reported choosing between paying for food and paying for medical care and 34.9 percent reported choosing between food and utilities. We support the House farm bill funding increase of \$300 million for TEFAP.

Critical nutrition programs like SNAP, SNAP-Ed, CSFP, and TEFAP are vital to sustaining the well-being of our nation's millions of low-income seniors. As advocates for our nation's seniors, we strongly urge you to reject cuts to nutrition assistance programs in the farm bill and to safeguard the programs' current levels of benefits, eligibility, and essential services.

Sincerely,

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics  
Alliance for Retired Americans  
Alzheimer's Foundation of America (AFA)  
American Commodity Distribution Association  
American Society on Aging (ASA)  
Association for Gerontology and Human Development in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (AGHDHBCU)  
Association of Jewish Family & Children's Agencies  
B'nai B'rith International  
Center for Medicare Advocacy, Inc.  
Easter Seals  
Fair Food Network  
Generations United  
The Jewish Federations of North America

LeadingAge

Lutheran Services in America (LSA)

MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

Meals On Wheels Association of America (MOWAA)

Medicare Rights Center

National Alliance for Caregiving

National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a)

National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs (NANASP)

National Association of Social Workers (NASW)

National Association of States United for Aging and Disabilities (NASUAD)

National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare

National Commodity Supplemental Food Program Association

National Council on Aging (NCOA)

National Senior Citizens Law Center (NSCLC)

National Senior Corps Association (NSCA)

NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

OWL-The Voice of Midlife and Older Women

Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities Coalition

Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders (SAGE)

Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW)

Women's Institute for a Secure Retirement (WISER)

Cc: Members of Farm Bill Conference Committee