

November 13, 2013

The Honorable Michael Conaway
U.S. Representative

The Honorable Samuel Johnson
U.S. Representative

The Honorable Randy Neugebauer
U.S. Representative

The Honorable Filemon Vela
U.S. Representative

Dear Texas Congressmen and members of the Farm Bill conference committee,

At the beginning of the month, millions of low-income Texas families saw their monthly budgets shrink and their financial situations get a little tougher when an across-the-board cut in benefits to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) took effect. All four million Texas SNAP participants are now grocery shopping with less; the amount varying with the size of their household. For a family of four the cut means \$36 less in benefits per month. That is roughly equivalent to one gallon of milk, one dozen eggs, and one pound of ground beef per week.

And it isn't just families who are affected by the \$11 billion cut to SNAP. Emergency food sites will have to stretch their holiday meals and weekly distributions thinner to cover the increased need in their communities. Texas students and workers will be less productive as a result of poorer nutrition and overall health.

Now, as you participate in negotiations about the future of SNAP, you have the power to limit additional harm to struggling families in Texas. Some of your fellow Representatives have justified their proposed SNAP cuts with the argument that recipients need to work harder to support themselves and their families. Others argue that benefits are frequently going to households that are not truly needy. However, when you look at recently released demographic and economic data related to SNAP participants in Texas, you'll notice a different picture.

The 2012 American Community Survey shows that of the 1.3 million households in Texas receiving SNAP benefits, 82 percent included at least one working family member. One third of those households included two or more working family members. Still, the median household income for SNAP households was only \$20,556. For some of these working poor families, the average \$10 per day that they receive from SNAP is just enough to pull them over the federal poverty line.

In fact, using the newly-released Supplemental Poverty Measure data, which includes federal benefits received as part of total household income, the U.S. Census Bureau showed that 338,000 fewer Texans were living in poverty as a result of the safety net programs, including SNAP. Clearly, SNAP works, and if you accept the proposed cuts, you agree to reduce the small buffer that keeps thousands of Texans from falling into extreme hardship.

SNAP also helps individuals and families in Texas that can't work or have trouble finding work. To start, more than half of SNAP recipients in Texas are children and another eight percent are senior citizens. SNAP also helps thousands of active military and veterans who can't quite earn enough to make ends meet. Data from the Defense Commissary Agency indicate that more than \$100 million in SNAP benefits will be redeemed on U.S. military bases in 2013.

Texas already has one of the highest rates of food insecurity in the nation. Millions of Texas children don't have steady access to nutritious foods throughout the year. Cuts to the SNAP program will inevitably make it harder for them to eat. We hope you will protect SNAP during the Farm Bill negotiations. Communities in Texas already have far too many families that are just barely getting by and they have already had to absorb the cuts to SNAP that left them hungrier and poorer.

We anticipate you will hear from many of those families and organizations that serve them in the weeks to come. We hope that you will listen to their stories and keep them in mind during your work on the Farm Bill and vote to protect SNAP, and the struggling Texans who depend on it, from further cuts.

Sincerely,

Ann Beeson
Executive Director

Rachel Cooper
Senior Food and Nutrition Policy Analyst