



MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

2018 Farm Bill Priorities

In Jewish tradition—and across all faith traditions—there is a fundamental value of taking care of the most vulnerable among us. In Leviticus, we are commanded to leave the corners of our fields and the gleanings of our harvest and vineyards for the poor and the stranger. This commandment is a clear expression of our collective responsibility for each other. Its wisdom respects the dignity of those who are poor and gives them a role in taking care of their needs by harvesting the corners of the fields themselves. We are not to judge those who are poor, nor should we assume to know the circumstances of their lives.

In our country today, we are blessed to have a national program that manifests these traditional values and works effectively to provide assistance to the millions of people who struggle with food insecurity. This program respects the dignity of those who experience hunger and poverty, responds when the needs increase, supports work, promotes long-term health and well-being, contributes to our economy, and provides vital assistance to the most vulnerable in our society. Of course, this program is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—SNAP. SNAP is not the only assistance that is available, but it is the most essential.

The 2018 Farm Bill must protect against hunger by strengthening SNAP and other essential federal nutrition assistance programs; increase access to affordable, nutritious food for vulnerable populations; and support good nutrition and health. Each of these priorities supports and strengthens the others, and none of them should be supported at the expense of the others. At the most basic level, the Farm Bill should do no harm and make an even greater contribution toward the goal of ending hunger, not add to the problem.

For generations, the Farm Bill has served as a shining example of bipartisanship and a holistic approach to a broad range of issues for our nation's food and land systems. It was conceived and enacted as a comprehensive legislative measure that balances the priorities and needs of those who produce food with those who consume it. That balance has served as a hallmark of the Farm Bill and remains a tribute to the understanding and mutual support that farmers and consumers have shown for one another. It is critical that the 2018 Farm Bill continue to manifest these principles and be comprehensive in its scope, with bipartisan support for provisions and adequate funding to meet its diverse priorities, including the essential needs of the most vulnerable.

The 2018 Farm Bill should:

1. Promote food security, nutrition, and health through committed support for effective federal nutrition assistance programs

- As the cornerstone of our nation's nutrition safety net, SNAP works effectively to assist tens of millions of Americans who struggle with food insecurity. The basic structure and funding of SNAP should be protected.
- As our economy changes, it's clear that SNAP benefits must be increased to ensure that low-income individuals and families have the resources necessary to prevent hunger and afford a nutritious diet.
- Ensure adequate funding for and supply of commodities provided through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) for low-income seniors nationwide, and the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR).

2. Remove barriers to assistance for specific vulnerable populations

- **Currently Serving Military Families** – remove the unintended barrier to federal assistance programs for struggling military families by consistently excluding the Basic Allowance for Housing as counted income when determining eligibility
- **Seniors** – better connect low-income seniors, particularly those living in rural or remote parts of America and from marginalized communities, with needed nutrition assistance benefits:
 - Expand outreach efforts and simplify the enrollment process to help increase senior SNAP participation
 - Set a minimum CSFP certification period of one year and provide states flexibility to extend certification period beyond the set minimum
 - Raise the minimum monthly SNAP benefit from \$16 to \$25
 - Provide a standard medical expense deduction under SNAP for households with an elderly or disabled member
 - Expand and authorize additional funding for the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program
 - Interconnect enrollment for SNAP and other safety net programs for seniors
- **Native Americans** – provide consistent and comprehensive support of food security and food sovereignty goals in Indian Country with a tribal-led approach that is tailored to specific needs:

- Give USDA 638 self-governance contract and compact authority to enable Tribes to engage more simply and efficiently with USDA leadership and programs
- Enhance capacity of Tribes and facilitate greater tribal control and administration of nutrition programs
- Provide FNS the authority to purchase more traditional foods as part of the basic FDPIR food package and authorize regional procurement and distribution of traditional and locally-grown foods for FDPIR recipients
- Allocate more annual funding for FDPIR to address rising demands on the program and make improvements to program operations following suggestions from tribal partners
- **College students** – address the surprisingly high rates of food insecurity among college students by expanding access to SNAP for vulnerable students
 - Make SNAP available to vulnerable college students enrolled half-time or more who are an unaccompanied homeless youth, an orphan, in foster care, a ward of the court, an emancipated minor, a veteran, or have legal dependents other than a spouse
 - Allow college students to qualify for SNAP if they are eligible for the maximum Pell Grant awarded
 - Link SNAP eligibility to eligibility for federal work study, not just for actual participation in federal work study program, which has limited funding and availability
 - Facilitate access to SNAP for students enrolled half-time or more who are also family caregivers
 - Enable SNAP participation for part-time students by combining hours for coursework with the hours of part-time work in order to fulfill the work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents
- **Veterans** – increase veteran participation in SNAP and enhance access to nutritious foods for food insecure veterans
 - Establish cooperative agreement between the VA and USDA to empower VA personnel to determine SNAP eligibility and assist with application and enrollment for veterans who are food insecure
 - Ensure access to SNAP for disabled veterans while they are waiting on a pending VA disability claim
 - Expand and authorize additional funding for the Veterans Farmers' Market Nutrition Program

3. Make robust investments in SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) initiatives that make proper supports to help more unemployed individuals find and sustain meaningful employment success

- Support E&T programs that recognize the diversity in client backgrounds, barriers to employment, and employment history and utilize innovative and individualized approaches to improve participant outcomes
- Make adequate investments in effective E&T case management to help individuals successfully overcome barriers to employment, transition into sustainable employment, and reduce the likelihood of future reliance on SNAP
- Increase funding to expand access to state E&T programs to reach a significantly greater number of unemployed individuals, particularly for underserved populations in rural areas, near Indian reservations, and in economically-distressed communities

4. Improve nutrition and health outcomes for vulnerable populations by increasing consumption of fresh fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods

- Increase funding for successful and innovative SNAP incentive programs that increase consumption of fruits and vegetables
- Protect funding and support continued innovation in SNAP Nutrition Education programs that empower low-income households to make healthy choices on a limited budget and reduce the risk of diet-related chronic health conditions
- Reauthorize the Healthy Food Financing Initiative, which supports access to healthy, affordable food in underserved communities
- Increase access to and increased funding to support SNAP EBT technology at farmers' markets, farm stands, online grocery delivery services, and other non-traditional retailers to improve access and increase consumption of fruits and vegetables
- Maintain current funding for the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program and ensure that low-income students continue to have fresh fruit or vegetable snacks at school