



# MAZON'S HUNGER ACTION MONTH

## Farm Bill Overview and Talking Points

Roughly every 5 years, the Farm Bill authorizes programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) and other federal nutrition programs that serve tens of millions of Americans each year, and it's expiring this Fall. The Farm Bill can advance long-overdue policy solutions to the most critical food security challenges. It can also be a battleground for creating harmful barriers to support for already struggling individuals and families.

The two overarching priorities for the Farm Bill are:

1. Protect SNAP from harmful rhetoric, restrictions, and cuts.
2. Strengthen SNAP to ensure equity and access for overlooked populations.

See below for more detail on these priorities. Review these ahead of your meeting and determine what topics you would like to highlight based on your own experiences, what you know of your region, and what you know of your Congressperson. We recommend focusing on no more than two or three of these topics.



## Priority One: Protect SNAP from harmful rhetoric, restrictions, and cuts

### Rhetoric

Every person should be able to feed themselves and their families with dignity and choice. Our policy makers must act with compassion and humanity toward those in need of assistance. When there are mischaracterizations about who utilizes SNAP and why, it adds stigma and shame about being judged. This makes it more difficult for our neighbors to take the first step to seek out the help they need to feed themselves and their families. Veterans are a population who under-participate in SNAP in large part due to this stigma and shame. A recent study showed that only 1 out of 3 eligible veterans participate in SNAP.

**Ask:** When you talk about SNAP, underscore the value of the program to individuals experiencing hardship and to our community at large. This support is something people deserve as members of our community, not something that is earned.

### Restrictions

Congress must reject any proposals to expand SNAP's already harsh time limits and so-called "work requirements." **SNAP is not a work program** — it's an anti-hunger program. It is essential that no additional barriers are placed in the way of qualifying for SNAP. We should be working to close the SNAP participation gaps to ensure that all who need the help are able to qualify, not placing unjust barriers that limit and restrict participation and worsen the problem of hunger in this country.

**Ask:** Reject further harmful and ineffective work requirements for "Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents" (ABAWDs). Harmful changes to federal nutrition programs intended to limit participation and make spending cuts are morally questionable and reflect the wrong priorities. Support eliminating work requirements (H.R.1510)



## Priority Two: Strengthen SNAP to ensure equity and access for overlooked populations

### Indigenous Communities

For centuries, the destructive impacts of colonization, erasure and disinvestment have left many American Indian and Alaska Native communities with some of the highest rates of food insecurity in the U.S. Today, Tribal governments work across Indian Country to repair what colonization intended to destroy and support their citizens in reclaiming their foodways and food systems. In the upcoming Farm Bill, the Native Farm Bill Coalition, of which MAZON is a Founding Partner tribes will seek to build on gains from the 2018 Farm Bill by prioritizing tribal sovereignty and self-determination to address food insecurity on their own terms. While about one in four Indigenous individuals participate in SNAP, and many others participate in a commodity program called the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), a significant part of this population struggles without equitable access to programs and resources because Tribal Nations are prevented from administering critical nutrition programs like SNAP and school meals.

**Ask: Provide Tribal Nations the option to self-administer all federal nutrition programs including SNAP through 638 authority, expand authority for the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) which tribes already administer, allow dual use of SNAP and FDPIR, and add Tribal Nations to the list of entities eligible for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP).**

### Puerto Rico

In recent years, Puerto Ricans have weathered multiple overlapping crises, exacerbating already high rates of food insecurity caused by policies of territorial exceptionalism and unfair treatment by the federal government. Congress should transition Puerto Rico from the Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP), a block-granted program with capped funding that fails to serve all Puerto Ricans in need, to SNAP, giving more people on the island access to life-saving nutrition assistance. Doing this would expand the number of people in Puerto Rico receiving food assistance between 9 and 12% — roughly 100,000 additional people — and monthly benefit amounts would increase, in some cases doubling. Puerto Ricans are American citizens, they deserve parity in the federal supports available to them.



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Ask: Authorize a plan and provide support for the transition of Puerto Rico from the block-granted and inadequate NAP to SNAP (S.949/H.R.253)

## Compact of Free Association Migrants

Citizens from Palau, Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands have been able to live and work in the United States for decades through special international treaties called Compacts of Free Association (COFA). In exchange, the US can use these countries' land and resources for strategic military purposes. Like millions of immigrants before them, COFA citizens enrich our neighborhoods, culture, and economy. Unlike other documented non-citizens residing in the United States, COFA migrants are barred from accessing federal safety net programs when they fall on hard times. In 1996, Congress unintentionally stripped COFA citizens of eligibility for most federal benefits including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). 27 years later and Congress has yet to fix their mistake. Our COFA neighbors make meaningful contributions wherever they reside in the United States through workforce participation, payroll taxes, economic activity, art, culture, and community. We must fix this injustice.

Ask: Support the "Compact Impact Fairness Act" (S.792/H.R. 1571) to restore access to SNAP, SSI, TANF, and other safety net programs for otherwise eligible COFA citizens.



## Five ways your lawmaker can be an anti-hunger champion

We have created actionable opportunities that your lawmaker can engage with for any or all of the above topics. You can pick one or more of these actions and ask your lawmaker if they will commit to it.

1. Give a floor speech on the importance of SNAP and any of the above topics. They can use MAZON's one-pagers or personal stories from the This Is Hunger exhibition that you leave behind and reach out to Andrea Orozco, Legislative Assistant at MAZON at [aorozco@mazon.org](mailto:aorozco@mazon.org) if they would like to discuss;
2. Host a Farm Bill town hall virtually or the next time they are home;
3. Work with MAZON to author an op-ed to highlight hunger and the farm bill in the local paper;
4. Cosponsor the legislation discussed above; and/or
5. Host a virtual Hunger Museum tour for staff or constituents.



## Helpful information to review before your meeting

The following information will be helpful to review ahead of your meeting but won't directly work its way into the agenda.

### Background about MAZON

Since 1985, [MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger](#) has been fighting to end hunger among people of all faiths and backgrounds in the U.S. and Israel. Today, we advance policy solutions that confront hunger's root causes, including public policy work at the federal and state levels. We collaborate with diverse partners and stakeholders around the country.

#### Overview of The Hunger Museum

Earlier this year, MAZON launched The Hunger Museum, which tells the fascinating story of the last 100+ years of hunger and anti-hunger public policy in the United States. Because it's completely virtual, you can engage with our immersive and interactive exhibits anytime, from anywhere. Visit [hungermuseum.org](http://hungermuseum.org) to explore or join us for an upcoming tour. Contact us at [museum@mazon.org](mailto:museum@mazon.org) to bring this experience to your community via a private tour.



## How Does the Farm Bill Become Law? Our 10-Step Guide

The reauthorization process for the Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2023 commonly known as the Farm Bill, is underway. This massive piece of legislation sets U.S. policy for agriculture, conservation, and many other sectors, and provides structure and funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the cornerstone of our nation's nutrition safety net. The Farm Bill is typically reauthorized every five years, and the current Farm Bill law is set to expire at the end of September 2023.

This legislation has major implications for our national food system, balancing the priorities and needs of those who produce food with those who consume it. The process can get a bit confusing, so here's a quick refresher to explain the process for the Farm Bill to become law.

1

The House and Senate Agriculture Committees hold hearings, then draft and introduce Farm Bill legislation. At this point in the process, Members of Congress typically take into account the "score" or cost estimates for various policy proposals calculated by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office.

2

The House and Senate Agriculture Committees debate and "mark up" by editing or removing language from their respective Farm Bill drafts prior to committee vote. Once passed, each bill is referred to the House or Senate floor for debate and consideration.

3

The House and Senate Rules Committees set parameters for whether/how Members can offer amendments to the legislation. The Rules Committees are the mechanisms to maintain control and procedures for conducting business in the House and Senate. Each chamber's Rules Committee decides which amendments will be allowed and the terms of legislative debate before the legislation can be debated and called for a vote.

4

House or Senate Leadership schedule a full chamber vote. In most cases, a bill must receive the majority of votes in order to pass.

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5

Once both bills receive a majority vote in their respective chambers, select members of the House and Senate will be appointed to a “Conference Committee” to negotiate and work out any differences between the two pieces of legislation. If they are able to reach a compromise, a written report is submitted to each chamber.

6

The full House and Senate consider and vote on the legislation agreed on by the Conference Committee. If a majority is reached in both chambers, the Farm Bill heads to the President’s desk for final approval.

7

The bill is sent to the President for approval. If signed, the bill becomes law, and if vetoed, it is returned to Congress.

8

Once the bill is signed into law, Congress must appropriate funding to federal agencies to implement the programs. While SNAP is a mandatory program—with funding guaranteed to all those who are eligible to receive benefits—several Farm Bill programs are discretionary and must be appropriated each year by Congress. This process begins with the Agricultural Appropriations Subcommittees in the House and Senate, which will eventually go to the two chambers’ full Appropriations Committees for final changes, then on to the full House and Senate.

9

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)—which administers farm, agriculture, and nutrition programs—establishes rules and guidelines to implement Farm Bill programs. In the case of SNAP, state governments administer the program following USDA guidelines and criteria set by Congress.

10

The process starts all over again for the Farm Bill to be reauthorized (about every 5 years).





## Farm Bill Defensive Messaging: Responding to Tough Questions

*1. If people aren't working and lose their SNAP benefits, that's because they "self-select" out of the program by choosing to not work.*

- This misguided narrative is rooted in racist, sexist and ableist stereotypes, that SNAP is something lazy Americans need to be coaxed off of. It threatens what we know — SNAP is the most effective way to reduce hunger and lift people out of poverty.
- Frankly, the majority of people receiving SNAP who can work do work. But even those who DO work could still have their SNAP benefits taken away. For example, a single mom of two kids over six who works as a cashier at a big-box store may be required to be available for work 40 hours each week. But, in reality, her employer may schedule her for 25 hours one week, 18 hours the next. She could end up losing SNAP because she can't get enough hours to meet the requirement, even though she works.
- People could lose SNAP because of errors or glitches in the massive paperwork-and-tracking system that has to track millions of SNAP recipients hours of employment and work program participation each week.

*2. Won't exemptions protect people who shouldn't have to work?*

- No, many people with physical or mental health conditions, who are caring for family members who are elderly or have disabilities, or who should qualify for an exemption for some other reason, could have their food assistance taken away because they can't meet the expanded work requirement and struggle to prove they should be exempt. Under this proposal, they may end up with neither earnings nor food assistance.
- Unfortunately, there is a long history – in SNAP and in TANF – of exemptions being ineffective at protecting many who qualify for them. Studies that evaluated similar work



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requirements in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program found that participants frequently lost benefits for various reasons not pertaining to their desire to work. Paperwork glitches and difficulty navigating the requirements were common reasons for sanctions.

*3. What do you say to some Republicans who claim that this proposal will help people find work, so that they can support their households and improve their futures?*

- Finding effective ways to help people get stable and decent-paying jobs is a priority, but that's not what work requirements do. We need meaningful investments in job training and education programs that would provide low-wage workers with the opportunity to move up the economic ladder.