



House Farm Bill: Frequently Asked Questions

Last Updated April 17, 2018

The summary below provides topline information on changes proposed in Farm Bill released on Wednesday, April 12, 2018 by Chairman Conaway of the House Agriculture Committee. For full bill text [click here](#); for section by section summary provided by the majority [click here](#); for CBO cost estimates [click here](#). If you have any questions, contact policy@feedingamerica.org.

TEFAP/CSFP

Background

- Through TEFAP, USDA purchases a variety of nutritious, high-quality USDA Foods, and makes those foods available to State Distributing Agencies for distribution through emergency feeding organizations, most often food banks. CSFP works to improve the health of low-income elderly persons at least 60 years of age by supplementing their diets with USDA Foods, which provide a monthly food distribution through food banks and other nonprofits.

Potential Questions

- Couldn't more money to the charitable sector through programs like TEFAP make up for cuts to SNAP?
- What differentiates TEFAP from CSFP?

Overarching Answer/Theme

- Cutting SNAP and redirecting funds to TEFAP is not a workable proposal. SNAP provides 12 meals for every 1 meal provided through Feeding America food banks. Simply put, charity cannot make up the difference if SNAP is cut. It takes a public-private partnership with federal nutrition programs like SNAP and TEFAP working together with food banks and others to ensure families are able to put nutritious food on the table.
- CSFP provides monthly food assistance to specifically address seniors' needs, designed to meet the unique nutritional requirements of participants while allowing for flexible delivery options to meet the needs of both the delivering agency and senior recipients. TEFAP is a general commodity program that serves as the cornerstone of the food supply that allows the national network of food banks to serve individuals of all ages.
- SNAP, TEFAP and CSFP also serve distinct populations in need; in fact, a USDA report on duplication found little to no overlap or duplication of services between the three programs.

SNAP Work Requirements, Time Limits, ABAWDS

Background

- Under current law, SNAP participants between the ages of 18 to 49 who are not raising minor children (often referred to as ABAWDS) are time-limited to receive benefits for only three months in a 36-month period unless they are working or in a work training program for at least 20 hours per week. States can request waivers to exempt people from the time limit, such as those in areas with high unemployment or those who lack a high school diploma or face other high barriers to employment.

Potential Questions

- Requiring individuals to work 20 hours a week in order to receive benefits doesn't seem like a lot - why should able-bodied adults be allowed to receive SNAP benefits without working?
- Shouldn't parents work if they want to receive SNAP?
- The retirement age keeps going up, why isn't it reasonable that people work until they are 65?

Overarching Answer/Theme

- We can all agree that helping people who can work get good-paying jobs and succeed should be a priority, but more rigid and restrictive SNAP work requirements won't help us get there.
- SNAP is a nutrition program, not a jobs program. While work is an important factor in moving SNAP recipients off the program, punishing workers for being unemployed by taking away their food assistance won't help them find a better job or find work faster.
- Proposals to expand time limits will result in cutting food benefits for individuals, not providing them with effective job training and works supports to help them be successful.
- These proposals make a bad policy even worse.
- Most working age adults on SNAP who can work, do so. Unfortunately, low paying jobs with unreliable hours and limited benefits are all too common. Workers in the low wage market can't rely on consistent full-employment in a job that pays a living wage. Being sick or having unreliable transportation can result in workers being fired. SNAP is there to help people when they are in between jobs and searching for work.
- SNAP helps parents working in low paying jobs with unreliable hours put healthy food on the table and keep their families out poverty. In fact, SNAP keeps more than 8 million people out of poverty – including nearly 4 million children.
- Taking food assistance away from older adults 50-65 makes little sense. As the workforce changes, research shows that older workers face longer bouts of unemployment after losing a job, and the older an individual gets, the harder it is for them to find a job. Since states do not provide jobs or training for most of the people subject to the time limit, older unemployed workers will find it even harder to find a job on their own and will lose food assistance if they fail to do so.

SNAP Categorical Eligibility

Background:

- More than 40 states use a state option known as “categorical eligibility,” which allows them to adjust income cutoffs and asset limits so that working families don’t abruptly lose much of their SNAP benefits when they earn slightly more. Allowing states to adjust the asset limit also helps seniors and people with disabilities by removing the savings disincentive in SNAP.

Potential Questions

- What are the benefits of categorical eligibility?
- Doesn’t categorical eligibility let people on the program who don’t qualify?

Overarching Answer/Theme

- Categorical eligibility allows states to address SNAP’s modest “benefit cliff” by allowing workers to keep SNAP eligibility as their income rises above the federal income cut off; restricting categorical eligibility would provide a disincentive to work, punishing people who are trying to do the right thing by working more hours, getting a better-paying job, or saving money so unexpected bills don’t push them under water.
- Categorical eligibility simplifies operations and reduces administrative costs by allowing states align SNAP rules with other programs.
- Categorical eligibility also does not result in automatic enrollment of families, as some claim. Every household must still apply through the rigorous, regular application process, including meeting the SNAP net income limit of no more than 100% of the federal poverty guidelines.

SNAP and LIHEAP (“Heat and Eat”)

Background

- SNAP households that participate in the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) may claim a Standard Utility Allowance (SUA) in lieu of showing their heating and cooling bills. Recognizing that many low-income households are eligible for both SNAP and LIHEAP, states have the option of aligning program administration and thereby streamlining the enrollment process. This is often referred to as “Heat and Eat” and is a policy option taken by only a handful of states.

Potential Questions

- Why would severing the connection between SNAP and LIHEAP be bad?

Overarching Answer/Theme

- Heat and Eat protects low-income households from having to choose between keeping the heat on and putting food on the table.
- The impact of the Heat and Eat cut would be born disproportionately by households with seniors and disabled members in a handful of states.
- The LIHEAP-SNAP relationship streamlines program administration, making it easier for states and for recipients.

SNAP Nutrition Education (SNAP-Ed)

Policy Background:

- SNAP-Ed is an evidence-based program that teaches people using or eligible for SNAP about good nutrition and how to make their food dollars stretch further. SNAP-Ed is a federally funded and allocated to states, who in turn partner with community-based organizations.

Potential Questions

- How is SNAP ed measuring success? How does this work throughout the states?
- There seems to be a lot of different federal nutrition education programs, how are they all different?

Overarching Answer/Theme:

- SNAP-Ed can be tailored to meet the needs of the people it is serving in specific communities. It uses models that work towards creating long-term behavioral change by looking at the environmental impacts of an individual working to eat healthier.

SNAP Choice

Policy Background:

- SNAP rules currently do not allow benefits to be used for purchasing alcohol, tobacco products, hot food, or non-food items. Otherwise, SNAP benefits may be used to purchase any food items with EBT cards through normal channels of commerce at the more than 200,000 SNAP retailers across the country. An ongoing debate within SNAP is discussion is whether or not to restrict the purchases of certain foods, such as sugar sweetened beverages.

Potential Questions

- Why couldn't it look like WIC, that program is able to limit what people purchase?
- Doesn't the government already determine what is and isn't healthy through the Dietary Guidelines? Couldn't they use this or the MyPlate?
- In my district, I have a lot of constituents who talk about what they see people on SNAP purchasing in grocery stores buying and it is just a lot of junk food. Wouldn't restrictions at least help people on SNAP eat healthier?

Overarching Answer/Theme:

- SNAP improves short and long-term health of recipients. Nutrition-related health problems are a problem across all segments of society. SNAP has not been identified as a factor in contributing to obesity. Similarly, there is no research that shows restrictions assist in improving diets.

- USDA's own research shows that SNAP recipients' diets are virtually identical to non-SNAP recipients.
- Positive incentives to improve SNAP participants' diets show great promise.
- Restricting what individuals can purchase with their SNAP dollars creates a government nanny state and creates stigma for individuals on SNAP. While these proposals are intended to prohibit the use of SNAP for "junk food," it inadequately addresses the difficult job of coming up with a workable list of allowable foods and monitoring compliance. Defining foods as "in" or "out" means government bureaucrats pick winners and losers on grocery shelves and in grocery carts.
- Restrictions would add stigma to the program, which research shows could lead to lower SNAP participation, removing SNAP's many benefits.

Farm to Food Bank

Background

- Several states have ag surplus or "Farm to Food Bank" programs where excess fruits and vegetables, dairy, meat, and eggs are donated or sold at cost to food banks – it's a win-win for growers and producers as well as communities in need. However, there is much more that could be donated or sold communities in need if additional funding was provided.

Potential Questions

- Why should farm to food bank be scaled to a national level?

Overarching Answer/Theme

- By strengthening these efforts with a federal pilot or funding, food banks would be able to make sure we are not leaving healthy food off the table and get it to communities that are underserved and struggle with limited food access, particularly in rural areas where transportation costs much more.
- Food banks would also be able to maximize food production in areas of our country that produce more food than can be distributed by local food banks at one time. No one wants to see food go to waste, and a nationwide program or pilot would strengthen existing food donation programs.