

# The Food Policy Working Group

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October 25, 2005

Dear House Agriculture Committee Member:

As members of the Food Policy Working Group, **we strongly urge you to oppose any cuts or structural changes to the Food Stamp Program and other national nutrition assistance programs.** We commend the recent Senate Agriculture Committee action to remove food stamps from consideration under reconciliation, and encourage you and your colleagues on the House Agriculture Committee to make a similar effort to safeguard this vital safety net program.

While we are blessed to live in a nation of plenty, there are still millions of our neighbors who rely on the Food Stamp Program as the first line of defense against hunger. More than fifty percent of food stamp beneficiaries are children. Virtually all of the rest are seniors, people with disabilities, or those making the transition from welfare to work. Further, over ninety percent of benefits go to households with incomes below the poverty level.

Based on a national U.S. Census Bureau survey, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has reported that in 2003, 36.3 million persons lived in U.S. households experiencing food insecurity. And, as the U.S. Census Bureau reported in September, an additional 1.1 million Americans fell below the poverty line in 2004. The devastating hurricanes disproportionately harmed low-income people living in the Gulf region, and the prospect of a long winter with increased fuel and heating costs will leave many more low-income families throughout America with less money to buy food.

Congress must address the hunger problem, not eliminate the food stamp benefits of those who struggle daily to put food on the table. The American people agree. Even before Hurricane Katrina, a national poll conducted by Jim McLaughlin & Associates for the Alliance to End Hunger found that 75 percent of American voters say the Food Stamp Program should be protected from cuts by the administration or Congress, even in a tight budget year. And a recent poll conducted by Hart Research reported that 67 percent of respondents believe that cutting spending from food stamps, Medicaid, and other social programs reflects the wrong priorities for America at this time.

Houses of worship and community groups are doing their part, through food banks and soup kitchens, to feed those in need. These activities complement but cannot replace the Food Stamp Program. Government must be a full partner in the effort to eradicate hunger in America. We are grateful to the Bush Administration and Congress for restoring food stamp eligibility to many lawfully present immigrants in the last farm bill. We urge you to continue to support the improvements that have been made to the Food Stamp Program to serve all communities in need.

We believe that budget constraints do not release us from our obligation to care for poor and vulnerable people. We ask you to vote against any cuts or structural changes that would threaten the nutritional safety net for millions in the United States.

Sincerely,

American Baptist Churches USA  
America's Second Harvest - The Nation's Food Bank Network  
Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs  
Bread for the World  
Call to Renewal  
Church of the Brethren Witness/Washington Office  
Congressional Hunger Center  
The Episcopal Church  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
Food Research and Action Center  
Lutheran Services in America  
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office  
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd  
National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA  
National Council of La Raza  
The National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness  
NETWORK: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office  
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations  
United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries  
United Methodist Church – General Board of Church & Society  
Union for Reform Judaism

*For further information, please contact one of the Food Policy Working Group co-chairs: Amy Costello, [acostello@bread.org](mailto:acostello@bread.org), 202-639-9400 ext. 183, Kathy Curran, [kcurran@uscpcb.org](mailto:kcurran@uscpcb.org), 202-541-3188, or Carolynn Race, [crace@ctr.pcusa.org](mailto:crace@ctr.pcusa.org), 202-543-1126.*