



ACCESS TO FOOD TALKING POINTS

WHAT WE ASK: Recognizing that further cuts to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) would be devastating to millions of Americans, **we urge you to vote against any and all cuts to the program in the farm bill** and ensure eligibility requirements for the program do not become needlessly more stringent.

WHAT WE SEE:

Poverty and hunger: In 2012, 49 million Americans (more than 1 in 7 Americans) struggled to put food on their tables. This figure includes 15.9 million children (Feeding America, US Census Bureau).

Continued effects of recession: Long-term unemployment reached its highest levels in 2010 and has only slightly declined since. Today, 40% of all unemployed workers have been out of work for more than half a year. People experiencing long-term unemployment are more likely to deplete their assets and turn to social safety net programs like SNAP for help.

Low-income families hit hardest by the recession: Low-income communities have suffered higher foreclosure rates (Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University), experienced higher unemployment rates (Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University), and have had their incomes decline at a faster rate (Economic Policy Institute) than their higher income neighbors. This has increased the vulnerability of these at-risk community members and our need for a strong social safety net.

Public opinion supports SNAP: 71% of Americans said that cutting SNAP would be the wrong way for Congress to reduce spending next year. Support was high across party lines, age, race, gender, income, and geographical areas (Food Resource Action Center).

WHY SNAP WORKS:

SNAP effectively provides food assistance in times of need: SNAP — formerly the Food Stamp Program — provides over 47 million participants in about 23 million low-income households with debit cards they can use to purchase food each month (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities). While poverty and unemployment have increased and remain high, the number of families struggling to put food on the table has not increased since 2008 (USDA).

SNAP targets the most vulnerable: SNAP eligibility is limited to households with gross income of no more than 130% of the federal poverty guideline, but the majority of households fall far below this point

- 83% of SNAP households have gross income at or below 100% of the poverty guideline (\$19,530 for a family of 3 in 2013)
- The average SNAP household has a gross monthly income of \$744 (USDA)

The [Ignatian Solidarity Network \(ISN\)](http://www.ignatiansolidarity.net) is a national social justice education and advocacy network inspired by the spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola. ISN was founded in 2004 and is a lay-led 501(c)3 organization working in partnership with Jesuit universities, high schools, and parishes, along with many other Catholic institutions and social justice partners. ISN's website: www.ignatiansolidarity.net

- 76% of SNAP households included a child, an elderly person, or a disabled person

SNAP is a long term investment: The impact of our nation's hunger problem is estimated at over \$167 billion per year (Center for American Progress). By improving access to food, federal nutrition programs protect families from hunger and improve their health and educational outcomes, making these programs a critical investment in people and communities for both the short and long-term (Feeding America).

WHY CUTTING SNAP HURTS:

The need for food assistance is already greater than SNAP can fill: For most participants, SNAP benefits run out before the end of the month. 90% of SNAP benefits are redeemed by the third week of the month, and 58% of food bank clients currently receiving SNAP benefits turn to food banks for assistance at least 6 months out of the year (USDA Food and Nutrition Service).

- Prior to November 1, 2013 the average monthly SNAP benefit per person was less than \$1.50 per meal (USDA Food and Nutrition Service).
- Only 57% of food insecure individuals are income-eligible for SNAP, and 26% are not income-eligible for any federal food assistance (Feeding America).

SNAP has already received devastating cuts this year: On November 1, 2013 the 2009 Recovery Act's temporary SNAP boost ended, which will equate to an \$11 billion cut in benefits between the 2014-2016 fiscal years. For a family of three, this cut equals about 16 meals a month based on the cost of the U.S. Agriculture Department's "Thrifty Food Plan." (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and USDA)

Cuts to SNAP will increase hunger: If enacted, the House farm bill (with \$40 billion in proposed cuts) would kick 2 million people off the program, cut benefits for approximately 800,000 families, and lead to more than 200,000 children losing access to free school meals. The Senate farm bill (with \$4 billion in proposed cuts) would mean more than 400,000 families losing \$90 a month in benefits (Bread for the World).

Cuts to SNAP will increase pressure on already overwhelmed food resource providers: In 2011, private churches and charities provided approximately \$4 billion in food assistance (Feeding America). If this proposal is enacted, churches and charities would have to nearly double their current food assistance to make up the difference.

WHAT OUR FAITH TELLS US:

Our nation's budget is a moral document: Bishop Stephen E. Blaire, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development called SNAP "one of the most effective and important federal programs to combat hunger in the nation" in a letter dated September 11, 2013. He wrote, "The faith community and the private sector are vital in the fight to combat hunger. But government has an indispensable role in safeguarding and promoting the common good of all. This includes ensuring that poor and hungry people have access to adequate and nutritious food."

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