Cuts in Nutrition Programs:
It’s About the Budget

Federal nutrition programs continue to be targeted for cuts this Congress. Federal nutrition programs not only feed hungry people and support family well being, they also act as “economic stabilizers,” kicking in to serve more people during economic downturns such as the current one. The federal nutrition programs are important supports for those seeking work, as well as for those working at low wages in regular jobs or self-employment. The federal nutrition benefits available to growing numbers of needy people in a downturn not only cushion the blow for hard-hit families but also stimulate national and local economies.

In March, the House of Representatives voted on a budget resolution that cut the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps) by $133.5 billion – nearly 20% over 10 years – and recommended turning the program into a block grant. Today, SNAP automatically covers all eligible families, responding, as need rises and falls. Under a block grant, SNAP would give a set amount of money to states every year, which would limit the state’s ability to respond quickly to increases in need.

In addition to the House passed budget cuts, the House Agriculture Committee was instructed to find $33.2 billion in savings from agriculture programs by April 27. They found $36 billion in cuts solely from SNAP. If enacted, this proposal would kick approximately 2 million people off the program, reduce monthly benefits for all participants, and most certainly increase hunger and poverty.

On the Senate side, the Senate Agriculture Committee continued efforts to renew the farm bill. The farm bill, which governs federal farm and food policy – including SNAP – presents an opportunity to continue, alter, or discontinue federal farm and nutrition programs. As the largest share of agricultural spending, SNAP has been targeted for cuts in this process. The Senate version of the Farm Bill – the Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act of 2012 – was passed out of committee by a bipartisan vote of 16-5 on April 26. It included $4.3 billion in cuts to nutrition programs. This cut would lead to a drop in SNAP benefits for at least 500,000 SNAP households in 14 states and the District of Columbia.

The House Agriculture Committee continues with
farm bill hearings in preparation for releasing their own bill this year. SNAP is expected to continue being targeted for cuts.

Furthermore, the House and Senate Appropriations Committee have begun work on their annual spending bills. The Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is funded through this process. While the Senate Appropriations Committee has provided WIC with $7.041 billion – enough to cover current and projected caseload – this is only the first step in the funding process. As Congress continues searching for savings, WIC remains at risk.

As the 2013 budget cycle draws near Congress is under pressure to approve a budget that it believes will best serve the needs of the country and reduce spending. The Ryan Budget, written by Congressman Paul Ryan (R-WI), includes cuts in federal nutrition programs that are essential for the health and well being of tens of millions of Americans. Despite unprecedented levels of need, cuts in the proposed budget would have a devastating impact on programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps), the Special Supplemental Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), the Child Tax Credit (CTC), poverty-focused foreign assistance, and international food aid. In fact, 62% of the cuts in this budget are to low-income programs. According to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, the cuts proposed in the Ryan Budget are so severe that most of the government—aside from health care, Social Security, and defense—would cease to exist by 2050.

Following is President Obama’s FY2013 proposed budget for federal nutrition programs as reported by the Food & Research Action Center (FRAC). The President’s budget protects and proposes to strengthen the nation’s nutrition safety net for the many Americans who continue to struggle with hunger, lost jobs, and reduced wages. Chief among his proposals are: restoration of cuts to SNAP (food stamps) benefits made in the 2010 child nutrition bill and scheduled to take place in FY2013; and the suspension for a fiscal year of time limits on benefits for certain unemployed, working-age, low-income adults without dependents.

Summary of President’s FY2013 Budget Proposals for the Nutrition Programs:

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

SNAP (Food Stamps)

◆ Set Budget Authority for SNAP (food stamps) in FY 2013 at $87.37 billion, of which $5 billion shall be reserve funds for use only if needed to carry out program operations.

◆ Restore cuts to SNAP (food stamps) benefits made in the 2010 child nutrition bill and scheduled to take place after October 31, 2013.
Proposes a state option to suspend for a fiscal year the time limits on SNAP benefits for certain unemployed, working-age, low-income adults without dependents (cost $376 million).

Assumes a continued SNAP “focus on increasing program access and encouraging all eligible people to take advantage of SNAP benefits, with particular emphasis on reaching underserved populations such as the elderly and Hispanics.”

Assumes that continued gradual improvement in the economy will lead to SNAP participation declines to 46.9 million people in 2013, down from 47.1 million people in 2012, even as the proportion of eligible people who participate is increased.

Requests $12.4 million to improve SNAP retailer integrity and reduce trafficking.

Increases funding targeted to improving SNAP payment accuracy (with a goal of 96.21% payment accuracy to a total of $11 million (a $2.8 million increase above FY 2012).

Child Nutrition Programs

Funding to support anticipated growth in participation and meals served in the child nutrition programs. It anticipates that 32.4 million children will participate in the National School Lunch Program and 13.1 million children in the School Breakfast Program in FY 2013.

Includes $441 million for the Summer Food Service Program, an increase of $29 million.

$35 million for competitive grants to fund school meal equipment needed for the implementation of the new school meal standards and expansion of the school breakfast program.

$172 million for the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, which provides schools in low-income areas with fresh fruits and vegetables, and $2.1 million for the Farm to School Tactical Team, which assist schools in purchasing more locally grown foods.

Maintains Team Nutrition at $15 million and provides $1.5 million for the Healthier US Schools Challenge. Team Nutrition supports the child nutrition programs through training and technical assistance, nutrition education, and school and community support. The Healthier US Schools Challenge recognizes schools that are creating healthier school environments.

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

$7.04 billion for the WIC program, an increase of approximately $423 million.

Supports the participation of 9.1 million women, infants, and children in WIC (an increase from an estimated 8.96 million in FY2012.)

Supports an increase in the cash value vouchers for fruits and vegetables for children from $6 a month to $8 month, consistent with the Institute of Medicine recommendation.

$60 million for Breastfeeding Peer Counseling, $30 million for MIS/EBT systems, $14 million for infrastructure and technical
assistance, and $15 million for program initiatives and evaluation.

Commodity Programs
◆ Funds the Commodity Supplemental Food Program at $187 million and is expected to maintain existing caseload. This funding level, however, would not be sufficient to allow the six new states with CSFP-approved state plans to commence operations (Connecticut, Hawaii, Idaho, Maryland, Massachusetts and Rhode Island). In FY2012, the program received $176.8 million. CSFP provides commodities to low-income elderly and pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women, infants and children up to age six.
◆ Funds The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) commodities at $270 million, an increase of $10 million.
◆ $49 million for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) Storage and Transportation Grants, a $1 million increase.

Farmers’ Market Nutrition Programs
◆ Maintain funding for the Seniors Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program at $21 million.
◆ Maintain funding for WIC Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program at $17 million.

Other Nutrition Programs
◆ Funds the Congressional Hunger Center fellowship program at $2 million, same as FY2012 funding.
◆ Provides $25 million to the Department of Treasury for the Healthy Food Financing Initiative, to increase the availability of affordable, healthy foods in underserved communities, an increase of $3 million. In addition, The Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) Fund anticipates allocating $250 million of the $7 billion requested for the New Markets Tax Credit Program for healthy food financing.
◆ Provides $2 million for Hunger Free Community Grants. In FY2012, the program was zeroed out.
◆ Maintain funding for the McGovern/Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition at $184 million.
◆ Provides the Department of Health and Human Services with $1.25 billion to fund the Prevention and Public Health Fund which works to improve health outcomes and reduce health care costs.
◆ Provides the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative with $325 million (23% increase from FY2012) and targets increases for USDA research in a number of selected areas, including human nutrition and obesity reduction.
◆ Funds USDA’s Economic Research Service (ERS) at $77 million, a decrease of $1 million.
◆ The Nutrition Programs Administration (NPA) funds for USDA are increased to $142 million (a $5 million increase from FY2012) to support continued program growth and nutrition policy development and promotion activities.
Refundable Tax Credits
◆ Make permanent the recent improvements in the refundable Child Tax Credit and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). These tax provisions will provide crucial income support to millions of moderate income and working poor families with children. One of the many positive outcomes will be increased food security.

Other Safety Net Programs
◆ Funds the Emergency Food and Shelter Program at $100 million, $20 million less than FY2012.
◆ Provides $350 million for the Community Service Block Grant (CSBG). In FY2012, CSBG received $678 million.
◆ Funds the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) at $3.02 billion, $45 million less than FY2012.

TAKE ACTION
Over the next few months Congress will be debating the budget and appropriating funds for federal programs. Urge your member of Congress not to lose sight of our collective responsibility to keep a “Circle of Protection” around programs that are essential for the health and well being of the human family.

In this tough fiscal and economic environment, Congress must make difficult choices. But protecting hungry and poor people shouldn’t even be a question. Unfortunately, the FY 2013 budget proposed by Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan fails to form a “Circle of Protection” around programs for hungry and poor people, and actually dismantles protections previously in place.

URGE YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS TO SAY NO TO THE RYAN BUDGET.

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