

A Chance to Save Food Stamps

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by *Triada Stampas*

This week, the Senate starts debate on the **Farm Bill**, the legislation that sets policy and funding for the key programs – food stamps (SNAP) and emergency food (TEFAP) – that make up much of our nation's safety net against hunger. The Senate bill currently under consideration will cut \$4.5 billion in SNAP benefits – making it even harder for vulnerable children, seniors and families to keep food on the table – unless **an amendment** by New York's own **Senator Kirsten Gillibrand** is passed.

SNAP is our nation's first line of defense against hunger. More than 46 million Americans struggling to get by – including 1.8 million New York City residents – rely on SNAP to keep food on the table. The Congressional Budget Office **calculates** that the \$4.5 billion cut to SNAP will result in a loss, on average, of \$90 in monthly benefits for every affected household – a significant drop in any family's food budget. Approximately 190,000 households in New York City would see a reduction in SNAP benefits as a result of this cut. Cutting SNAP doesn't just hurt the families who lose benefits – it hurts businesses and communities. The Center for American Progress estimates that more than 13,000 jobs are lost for every \$1 billion cut from SNAP – meaning this \$4.5 billion cut will cost more than 60,000 jobs.

Emergency food is our last line of defense against hunger. The Farm Bill the Senate is currently considering does increase funding for TEFAP by \$150 million over ten years, and empowers the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to make additional purchases of food at times of high need. However, TEFAP has lost \$173 million in the past year alone, and at a time when food pantries and soup kitchens are already struggling to meet unprecedented need in this city, our emergency food network is ill equipped to address the additional demand that drastically reducing SNAP benefits for 190,000 low-income families will create.

The Farm Bill, which is renewed every five years, represents our nation's most significant investment to prevent hunger. It is our opportunity to protect and strengthen the safety net that keeps food on the table for millions of Americans. New York's Senators are doing their part – Senator Gillibrand's amendment would eliminate the \$4.5 billion SNAP cut, and **Senator Charles Schumer** has given his support as a co-sponsor. The Gillibrand amendment provides a critical opportunity for Senators to protect this safety net and show their commitment to anti-hunger priorities – a strong show of support will send the message that taking vital food resources from the most vulnerable among us is not an acceptable or responsible way to achieve budget cuts.

If you live outside of New York State, please contact your Senators today to ask them to support Senator Gillibrand's amendment – and stay tuned here for developments as the Farm Bill makes its way through negotiations.

Triada Stampas works to inform government officials, policy makers and the general public about the needs of the city's network of emergency food organizations and the more than 1.3 million people who rely on them; and to advance public policy that meets those needs.

