

Farm Bill Draft Brings Deep Food Stamp Cuts

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by *Triada Stampas*

Last week saw major developments in the Farm Bill, the federal legislation that sets funding and policy for safety net nutrition programs as well as agriculture and conservation programs for a five-year period. The Senate Agriculture Committee voted to approve a draft Farm Bill that would **cut \$4.5 billion from food stamp (SNAP) benefits.**

In New York City, this cut would reduce the monthly SNAP allotments of 190,000 low-income households living in public housing or receiving federal Section 8 housing vouchers. (The average income of a household living in public housing in New York City is less than \$23,000.)

New York's only member on the Senate Agriculture Committee, Kirsten Gillibrand, voted against this bill on the grounds that it would harm some of the most vulnerable New Yorkers, and will be bringing an amendment to the Senate floor to protect children in SNAP households from cuts that may remain in the final bill.

The Senate Agriculture Committee's Farm Bill draft does make improvements to the federal Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), which provides the main source of food to our city's soup kitchens and food pantries. The improvements appear significant on first glance – adding \$150 million in mandatory funding and giving the federal government explicit authority to purchase additional TEFAP food in response to increases in need. However, TEFAP has already lost \$175 million this year. It is clear that, on balance, emergency food providers will be coping with even fewer resources to confront the increased need created by cuts to SNAP.

What happens next? The bill will be brought to the floor of the Senate, where our legislators will have the opportunity to offer additional amendments before they vote on it. The House of Representatives must also develop and approve its version of the Farm Bill; the difference between each chamber's version must then be reconciled and a consensus proposal adopted.

What can you do?

1. Call your Senators and Representatives and let them know cuts to SNAP are not acceptable!
2. Join Mario Batali and take the Food Stamp Challenge to raise awareness about this critical lifeline.
3. Spread the word to your family, friends and coworkers through Facebook and Twitter.



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.