



## **Food Bank For New York City's Priorities for the Farm Bill Reauthorization**

### **Need for Community Food Assistance**

New Yorkers are facing increased and sustained food insecurity. The end of pandemic era assistance such as enhanced tax credits and increases to SNAP allotments comes at a time when New Yorkers are already cutting back at the grocery store and increasingly turning to food assistance organizations. The number of visits to the Food Bank member network has increased 80% since before the pandemic. In New York City, families continue to grapple with the economic impacts of the pandemic and inflation. New York families are experiencing the highest food prices in 40 years. Almost half of New Yorkers (44%) are rent burdened, spending more than 30% of their monthly resources on housing. New York City struggles with an unemployment rate of 5.8%, nearly 2 percentage points higher than its pre-pandemic rate of 3.7%. This is the equivalent of 34,000 New Yorkers who had jobs before the pandemic but remain unemployed.

As Congress works to reauthorize the Farm Bill amidst a fight over budget priorities and deficits, New York City must raise our voices to protect the vital programs in the Nutrition Title, that help New Yorkers and families across the country **put food on the table, supports community resiliency, fights poverty and inequity, and increases sustainability, inclusivity and equity within our food system.**

### **The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)**

#### **Challenges & Recommendations**

- The Farm Bill should support the food assistance network by **strengthening TEFAP with additional funding for food *and* for storage and distribution.**
  - Double the annual baseline funding to \$500 million.
  - Reauthorize and increase to \$200 million discretionary funding for TEFAP Storage and Distribution grants.
  - Reauthorize \$15 million in discretionary funding for TEFAP Infrastructure Grants.
  - Increase funding and streamline state participation in the TEFAP Farm to Food Bank Program.
  - Increase partnerships with growers and producers.
- The Farm Bill must expand the supply and type of **culturally appropriate foods such as kosher and halal** available through TEFAP.
  - Remove the requirement that kosher and halal TEFAP commodities be cost-neutral.
  - If adequate commitments to expanding the available TEFAP commodities cannot be secured, then dedicated allocations to culturally competent providers will better support community needs.
- The Farm Bill should also **remove barriers to participation in TEFAP** for people experiencing food insecurity and food providers.
  - **Eliminate the income attestation regulations** for TEFAP food distribution to expand program accessibility and reduce administrative burdens on sites



- We support a Farm Bill as well as a New York State TEFAP plan that allows verbal attestation to become a permanent qualifier and standard for TEFAP eligibility.
- The requirement for written attestation in NYS is both a barrier to people in need and an administrative burden on food assistance providers. This is the single largest hurdle that our member agencies report to us. The written requirement creates hesitancy for clients seeking food and creates a less dignified experience, while putting undue pressure on volunteer run and often short-staffed food pantries with limited space to meet the record keeping and retention requirements.
- **Remove barriers and expand access for food producers to participate in TEFAP** in order to support and strengthen local farmers and regional food systems as well as expanding choice for clients.
  - Remove the state match within the TEFAP Farm to Food Bank program, easing burdens and making it economically feasible to participate.
  - Congress should also allow payment for donated food to enable smaller growers and producers to participate in the program.
  - Support innovative food rescue programs that help offset the cost to harvest, pack, and transport rescued food.

## **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**

### **Challenges & Recommendations**

- SNAP currently does not reach some of the most vulnerable to food insecurity. The Farm Bill must **expand access to SNAP**.
  - **Remove barriers for eligibility**, including for college students, people with previous felony convictions, new asylum seekers, refugees, undocumented immigrants, and DACA recipients
  - **Lift the poverty threshold** to enable individuals and households with slightly higher incomes and the working poor to become eligible for SNAP
- SNAP benefit calculations are outdated and often do not provide enough to prevent food insecurity. Now that pandemic era assistance is over, SNAP participants receive on average about \$5.45 per person per day in food benefits. The Farm Bill must **increase SNAP's purchasing power**.
  - Match SNAP benefit levels to the **true cost of food** by using the **Low-Cost Food Plan**
  - Permanently authorize the standard medical deduction in every state for seniors and disabled individuals applying for SNAP benefits at a minimum of \$140
  - Eliminate the cap on the Excess Shelter Deduction in the SNAP formula for all households



- To support and incentivize the transition to work and economic self-sufficiency, and eliminate harmful “benefits cliffs,” the Farm Bill must allow for a more **gradual tapering of benefits** as program participants earn more income.
- To cut down on waste and inefficiencies, as well as allowing recipients to access all available benefits, the Farm Bill must **streamline SNAP eligibility and enrollment** and invest in technological support for local administration of benefits.
- The Farm Bill must ensure **parity in food assistance for U.S. Territories such as Puerto Rico**, and **sovereignty for Native communities**.

## **The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)**

### **Challenges & Recommendations**

- The Farm Bill reauthorization should streamline the administrative requirements for households that participate in CSFP and identify opportunities for easing administrative burdens on CSFP providers and clients.
- Provide more flexibility and choice in while foods are provided in food packages and enable agencies and/or seniors to “de-box the box.” Shifting to a *client choice* model would reduce unwanted food waste and disposal costs.
- Increase fresh produce as well as culturally appropriate and religiously required food items in the program to ensure the dietary and religious needs of older adults are met with dignity.

### **Conclusion**

The Farm Bill Reauthorization is an opportunity to strengthen the food assistance network and expand access and participation in nutrition assistance and education programs. This year in Congress, we must also defend these critical programs against misguided threats to benefit levels and eligibility. Robust public policy and support has been proven to reduce poverty and food insecurity, especially in families with children. In the face of rising food prices and dwindling resources, the Nutrition Title programs in the Farm Bill must be protected to ensure New Yorkers have the resources they need to thrive.