



2023 Vermont Farm Bill Nutrition Coalition Priority Recommendations

The federal nutrition programs within the Farm Bill provide a critical safety net for the 2 in 5 people in Vermont who experience hunger. The reauthorization of these programs by Congress every five years provides an opportunity to improve and strengthen the way they work in Vermont, and ensure all who are in need have equitable access to strong and responsive programs.

However, the Farm Bill is limited in its ability to address broader systemic issues which contribute to the experience of hunger, including inadequate and inequitable access to public transportation which greatly impacts every corner of our state. We also acknowledge the challenges faced by citizens of the four Abenaki Tribes on whose unceded lands everyone in Vermont resides, yet who do not have federally recognized land of their own; further, due to lack of federal recognition Abenaki citizens are barred from access to federal nutrition programs for Indigenous citizens, such as the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations. We urge Senator Sanders, Senator Welch, and Congresswoman Balint to consider other policy measures beyond the Farm Bill to address these and other systemic inequities which perpetuate hunger in our state.

The following recommendations were informed by hundreds of testimonies from people across Vermont who have experience with hunger, navigating federal nutrition programs, and supporting our communities' food needs. Members of the Vermont Farm Bill Nutrition Coalition unanimously support these recommendations and invite everyone in Vermont to join us by signing on at: www.hungerfreevt.org/farm-bill-2023.

1. PROTECT FARM BILL NUTRITION PROGRAM FUNDING



Maintain or increase funding for all programs and protect them from changes to their funding structure—do not take funding from one nutrition program to fund another; do not make any cuts or harmful structural changes to the funding of Title IV nutrition programs.

2. IMPROVE ACCESS TO FRESH, LOCAL FOODS FOR PEOPLE IN VERMONT WHILE SUPPORTING LOCAL FARMERS, GROWERS, AND THE AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY



- **Expand SNAP incentive programs**, like GusNIP (Crop Cash), to include other locally produced items that are essential for a nourishing and complete diet such as eggs, dairy, bread and grains, and meat.
- **Authorize permanent funding** to support wireless equipment costs related to accepting SNAP benefits at farmers markets, farm stands, and other direct markets.
- **Increase funding for the Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Program**, which provides funds to schools with higher numbers of low income students to serve fresh fruits and vegetables for snacks during the school day, to reflect the true cost of nourishing produce.
- **Strengthen Farm to Food Bank programs** to provide resources to cover the cost to growers and food banks to harvest, pack, ship, and distribute or process excess food grown in the state or surrounding states to help connect excess produce, dairy, and meat with food banks to put healthy food on the table for community members. This would allow food banks to provide economic help to growers and producers that would otherwise receive no reimbursement for the excess food.

Sign on to these recommendations, and learn more about the Vermont Farm Bill Nutrition Coalition at www.hungerfreevt.org/farm-bill-2023.

3. EXPAND SNAP ACCESS AND PROGRAM INTEGRITY



SNAP, known in Vermont as 3SquaresVT, is the most effective and dignified nutrition program which supports the grocery budgets of an average of 70,000 people in Vermont. For many, 3SquaresVT is the only way to afford groceries from the store; but for others who just barely miss income limits, this vital assistance is out of reach.

- **Ensure SNAP truly meets the needs of lower income people** by basing SNAP monthly allotments on the more adequate Low-Cost Food Plan.
- **Close the gap in access for individuals and families in Vermont** by revising allowable deductions—used to calculate the monthly benefit amount—to eliminate the cap on excess shelter expenses, and allow more households to claim the medical expense deduction.
- **Eliminate SNAP's arbitrary three-month time limit** ("ABAWD rules") to ensure that all eligible people have access to nutrition assistance when they need it.
- **Level SNAP access for low-income college students** by eliminating the work-for-food requirements.
- **Expand SNAP access to immigrants** by eliminating the five year bar, and expand funding to increase language accessibility in application and benefit maintenance processes.
- **Eliminate the prohibition on the purchase of hot prepared foods.**
- **Address and mitigate the negative impact the annual Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA)** has on SNAP participants living on a fixed income who often see a decrease in vital SNAP benefits when annual COLA adjustments increase.
- **Expand eligibility for the Restaurant Meal Program (RMP)** to ensure SNAP household members receiving benefits with an older adult, unhoused person, or person living with disabilities are eligible for RMP benefits.

4. SUPPORT OLDER ADULTS' FOOD SECURITY



The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) provides boxes of food to people 60+ who meet income guidelines.

- **Allow states flexibility in greater choice in food items available to older adults**, especially for those on medically tailored diets; and flexibility for distribution sites to tailor food quantities to participants' needs.
- **Reauthorize CSFP** to ensure there is not a lapse in administration of the program.
- **Align the income eligibility for CSFP to that of The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)** to better meet the needs of older adults; and to streamline program administration of both programs.
- **Streamline reporting requirements for CSFP** to remove burdens for agencies and recipients.

The Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) provides older adults who meet income guidelines with access to fresh and locally grown produce through coupon booklets or community supported agriculture shares distributed annually. This is a vital program which helps older adults afford nourishing foods.

- **Expand income requirements and align with TEFAP income eligibility requirements** to reach more older adults and adults with disabilities for whom fresh fruits and vegetables are too often financially unavailable.
- **Increase funding** to provide higher values of coupons or shares for participants to reflect the increased cost of food and support local farms.

5. PROTECT AND STRENGTHEN COMMODITY FOODS



The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) provides food to organizations that distribute it at no charge to community members in need through food banks and pantries. These food commodities are essential to the operations of food banks, and vital to their visitors. A strong and reliable TEFAP is necessary for the provision of a steady emergency food supply.

- **Authorize and appropriate mandatory funding for TEFAP** to respond to the staggering increase in need for emergency food assistance. Mandatory funds should be in the amount of \$450 million per year for TEFAP food purchases, and \$200 million per year for administrative funding for storage and distribution, and \$15 million for infrastructure grants.
- **Increase flexibility in TEFAP foods** so that small farms can participate as producers.