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FOOD STAMP REAUTHORIZATION ON FAST TRACK

Congress to Renew Program as Part of Proposed Farm Bill

Many readers are aware that Congressional renewal of the Food Stamp Program is due in 2002. However, both the Senate and House Agriculture Committees have decided to take up Food Stamp reauthorization as part of the 2001 Farm Bill, legislation that could pass Congress before the end of the year. Along with renewal of the program, the Farm Bill will contain changes and increases in funding for the Food Stamp Program. This Policy Page discusses possible improvements to Food Stamps that could be made as part of the Farm Bill and lists IMMEDIATE steps anti-hunger advocates should take to weigh in with members of the Texas Congressional delegation in charge of these decisions.

****URGENT ACTION NEEDED BY JULY 24TH****

BACKGROUND

Like many federal programs, the Food Stamp Program is subject to a periodic review and renewal by Congress to ensure it is serving its purpose and merits further expenditure of taxpayer money. This year's Food Stamp reauthorization will make critical decisions regarding who is eligible for benefits, benefit levels, and how easy or difficult it is to enroll in these benefits. These decisions will have serious implications in Texas, where only 1.3 million of the 4 million persons potentially eligible for Food Stamps actually receive these benefits—one of the worst participation rates in the country.

Currently, only \$2 billion of the over \$70 billion in new money (over 10 years) that the Agriculture Committee has received to pay for other funding increases in the Farm Bill is allocated for Food Stamps. This amount is not enough to pay for the most important changes needed in the program, such as a full restoration of benefits to all legal immigrants or simplifications that make it easier for working families to access benefits.

THE DECISION MAKERS

The House and Senate Agriculture Committees, which have jurisdiction over the Food Stamp Program, have both held recent hearings on Food Stamp reauthorization and have announced their intention to reauthorize the program as part of the 2001 Farm Bill. The House Agriculture Committee plans to begin

“marking up” a farm bill **this Thursday, July 26th**. On the Senate side, Farm Bill deliberations will most likely take place in the Fall.

The chair and ranking member of the House Agriculture Committee are both from Texas: Rep. Larry Combest and Rep. Charles Stenholm, respectively. Therefore it is extremely important for anti-hunger advocates in Texas to weigh in with them and other members of Texas' Congressional delegation in support of additional Food Stamp funding in the Farm Bill. Important targets (see list below) include House moderate Republicans and Hispanic and Black Caucus members. These members need to be called immediately and urged to contact their leadership and House Agriculture Committee members to restate their support for additional Food Stamp funding.

PROPOSALS FOR FOOD STAMP PROGRAM REAUTHORIZATION

Anti-hunger groups at the state and national level agree that the following general principles should guide Food Stamp reauthorization:

- Restoring benefits for legal immigrants,
- Making benefits more accessible to working families,
- Ensuring that benefits are adequate to meet the nutritional needs of low-income families; and

- Simplifying the enrollment process and reforming the Quality Control system to reward states for serving eligible families.

A bi-partisan bill, HR 2142 (Senate version is S. 583), has already been introduced by Reps. Walsh and Clayton. This legislation would improve access to the program for seniors and working families and restore benefits for legal immigrants (see <http://www.frac.org/html/news/nawfasa.html> for details about this bill, the "Nutrition Assistance for Working Families and Seniors Act"). Another existing bill, HR 1990, contains Food Stamp provisions to improve the adequacy of benefits and establish state incentives to serve working families (see www.cdfactioncouncil.org/ for background on the "Leave No Child Behind Act").

MESSAGES FOR MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE

- The level of funding (\$2 billion) allocated for Food Stamps over ten years in the draft Farm Bill is insufficient to meet the needs of recipients and to

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you live in either Chairman Combest's or Ranking Member Stenholm's districts, contact them with the messages above. If not, please have your Members of Congress contact the House leadership and House Agriculture Committee members to restate their support for additional food stamp funding. If you do not know who your representative is, or how to contact them, go to http://www.house.gov/house/MemberWWW_by_State.htm#tx or call (202) 224-3121. Key member contact information follows:

Name of Representative	District (Texas offices)	Phone Number
Charlie Stenholm (D)	17 (Stamford, Abilene, San Angelo)	(202) 225-6605
Dick Armey (R)	26 (Irving)	(202) 225-7772
Larry Combest (R)	(Lubbock, Amarillo, Odessa-Midland)	(202) 225-4005
Martin Frost (D)	24 (Ft.Worth, Dallas, Corsicana)	(202) 225-3605
Max Sandlin (D)	1 (Marshall, New Boston, Sulphur Springs)	(202) 225-3035
Ralph Hall (D)	4 (Sherman, Rockwall, Tyler)	(202)-225-6673
Jim Turner (D)	2 (Lufkin, Orange)	(202) 225-2401
Chet Edwards (D)	11 (Waco, Belton)	(202)-225-6105
Joe Barton (R)	6 (Arlington, Ennis, Ft. Worth)	(202) 225-2002

simplify the program to make it easier for working families to access benefits.

- More resources are needed out of the more than \$70 billion (over 10 years) provided to the Committee for the Farm Bill if we are to 1) meet the urgent need of hungry people (see <http://www.cppp.org/products/fastfacts/food.html> for facts about hunger in Texas, 2) fund essential provisions of H.R. 2142, "The Nutrition Assistance for Working Families and Seniors Act," or 3) begin to make up for huge cuts made to the Food Stamp Program as part of the 1996 welfare act.
- In addition, urge Members to support only those changes in the Food Stamp Program that are constructive in helping recipients, removing barriers to participation, and making it easier for states to help eligible families get Food Stamps.

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