

Status of Farm Bill 3.28.18 to NDESPA

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The Farm Bill is the primary legislation that authorizes agriculture and food policy in the U.S. It is reauthorized every five years and due to be reauthorized by Sept. 30, 2018. Nutrition programs including SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program formerly known as Food Stamps, account for 80 percent of Farm Bill expenditures.

The House Agriculture Committee was set to release their text of the farm bill mid-March. However, House Agriculture Committee Ranking Member Collin Peterson (D-MN) shut down the talks after facing pressure from fellow Democratic Ag Committee members who made a formal request that the negotiations come to a stop until the text of the legislation is shared with them. There are concerns that there will be deep cuts to SNAP benefits under the misleading banner of “work requirements.” The letter expressed deep concern over the partisan legislative drafting process and the potential cuts and changes to SNAP.

House Agriculture Committee Chairman Conaway has stated that he intends to move the bill to the House floor with or without Democrats when they return from spring recess. The House needs at least 218 votes to pass the bill. This means that the farm bill could pass the chamber with Republican-only support. However, in the past, a bipartisan group of moderate members of Congress has been needed to cross the finish line. On a positive note, Conaway has been reported to say that the House farm bill won't include the Administration's *Harvest Box* proposal.

There are opportunities for taking action as individuals and/or organizations in the coming weeks around SNAP:

- Individuals and organizations are encouraged to speak out when any Farm Bill drafts are introduced from the House that contain significant cuts to SNAP in the next couple of weeks.
- **By April 9, 2018**, share comments on the USDA's current request for comments around whether it should reconsider certain rules that govern SNAP's 3-month time-limit on childless adults. Under federal law, SNAP imposes a 3-month time limit (over a 36-month period) on most childless unemployed and on underemployed adults unless they are working 20 hours a week. There are 2 ways:
 - A simplified “click to submit” comment form from Feeding America – this is a good and simple way to take action. PLEASE increase your chances that your comments will be read and counted in a significant way by adding your own comments to the text:
https://secure.feedingamerica.org/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=386&s_src=foodbank&s_subsrc=foodbank
 - A more detailed and thorough process as shared by FRAC, the Food Research and Action Center, which is copied and included on the next page of text.

Documents were shared with additional information:

SNAP by the numbers specific to North Dakota from the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities:

https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/snap_factsheet_north_dakota.pdf

Bread for the World, North-Dakota specific information faith-based messaging about poverty and hunger programs: <http://files.bread.org/state-fact-sheets/North-Dakota.pdf>

In-depth (17-page) document about childless adults without disabilities, or Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs), as they are referred to in federal regulations, who may face stricter “work” requirements under SNAP: <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/who-are-the-low-income-childless-adults-facing-the-loss-of-snap-in-2016>

Request to submit comments on proposal to make SNAP's 3-Month Time Limit Even Worse, from FRAC & Feeding America

“USDA has requested public comments on whether it should reconsider certain rules that govern SNAP's 3-month time-limit on childless adults. Under federal law, SNAP imposes a 3-month time limit on most childless unemployed and underemployed adults unless they are working 20 hours a week. Like many others, childless adults often turn to SNAP for assistance when they are no longer able to make ends meet, especially as jobs are lost, hours are cut, or wages hover at the federal minimum. As a result of this rule, unemployed or underemployed individuals are cut off food assistance, causing hardship and increasing food insecurity. The group impacted by this rule is extremely poor and often not eligible for other help while unemployed. You can learn more about them [here](#).

While most of the time-limit rule is set in federal law, USDA did establish some important state flexibilities when it wrote the regulations that govern the time limit back in 2001. These flexibilities help mitigate the unfair rule and limit its harsh impact. Most importantly, states can temporarily waive the time limit in areas with elevated unemployment. Currently the rules are very clear which areas qualify for waivers and states have a straightforward and transparent process by which they demonstrate the areas of the state that qualify for temporary waivers. It appears that USDA wants to reconsider this process and to make it harder for states to get waivers from the time limit for areas with elevated unemployment. Every state except Delaware has used waivers at some point since the time limit was enacted in 1996. We all have a stake in keeping this option available to states. More information about waivers and their impact can be found [here](#).

Before embarking on rewriting the regulation, USDA is asking the public to tell them if reworking these rules is a good idea. We need to generate lots of comments that make clear any changes that would expose more people to the harsh 3-month time limit would be harmful, increase food insecurity, and are unwelcome. Believe it or not, over 300 comments have already been submitted as of March 13 and many were supportive of making the time limit harsher. It's important that we demonstrate strong support for the current flexibility states have to waive this rule in order to try to stop USDA from pursuing a change via the regulatory process. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), Feeding America, and the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) are working together to try to generate as many comments as possible.

Comments must be submitted by Monday April 9 -- Here's how to take action:

- 1. Your organization can submit comments.** We've developed a template for organizations that can be easily customized. The template is [here](#). You can cut and paste your comments into the online submission tool [here](#). Or, if you prefer, there's always USPS: Mail comments to SNAP Program Development Division, Food and Nutrition, Services, USDA, [3101 Park Center Drive, Room 812, Alexandria, Virginia 22302](#).
- 2. You can ask your networks to generate comments.** In some cases, you might want to use the organizational template that we provided. Feeding America has also created a template that's more appropriate to individuals. They welcome you using and sharing their [template and online tool](#). It's a terrific simple message that may work for a broader audience.
- 3. You can encourage other organizations in your state to submit comments and ask their networks to weigh in as well.** Remember, comments are counted individually. So, please don't do a sign-on. And please ask everyone in your networks to submit individual comments. If you have any questions, please contact Ellen Vollinger (evollinger@frac.org); Ed Bolen (bolen@cbpp.org) or Ana Hicks (ahicks@cbpp.org); or Robert Campbell (rcampbell@feedingamerica.org). We want to work with you.