



# FACT SHEET

## Why SNAP and the Farm Bill matter to Alabama

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### **The Farm Bill is a federal law that funds and governs many food and agricultural programs.**

It must be renewed about every five years and is up for reauthorization now. The largest program in it is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP provides vital food assistance to people with very low incomes. It also plays an important role in supporting farmers, which is why it is included in the Farm Bill.

**The latest proposed Farm Bill includes harmful SNAP cuts.** On April 12, U.S. Rep. Mike Conaway, R-Texas, chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, released his proposed 2018 Farm Bill. It would increase hunger by taking food assistance away from many struggling Americans, including children in working families.

**Arise believes we have a shared responsibility to keep our neighbors from going hungry.** SNAP should support families and help create jobs and increase wages, not punish people who already have very low incomes. Efforts to cut SNAP when the Farm Bill is reauthorized will put hungry families and rural communities at risk.

### **Alabama congressmen have an important role to play in reauthorization of the Farm Bill.**

U.S. Rep. Mike Rogers is a member of the House Agriculture Committee that approved Conaway's proposal on April 18 and will continue to play a role as the Farm Bill moves through Congress. U.S. Sen. Doug Jones is an important member of a bipartisan group of Senate moderates. And U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby is the new chairman of the powerful Senate Appropriations Committee. As our members of Congress consider the 2018 Farm Bill, they should ensure SNAP stays robust to help small farmers, boost the retail economy and keep food on the tables of struggling Alabama families.

## How SNAP works

**SNAP is a federal nutrition program that helps people stretch their food budget and buy healthy food.** It was previously known as food stamps. More than 40 million Americans use SNAP to help make ends meet. In 2016, SNAP kept more than 8 million people out of poverty, making it the most effective anti-poverty program in the United States. In Alabama, nearly 900,000 people used SNAP to help feed their families at some point during the year. And SNAP has lifted 195,000 Alabamians out of poverty.

**More than 40 percent of SNAP participants in Alabama are in working families.** More than 70 percent of Alabama's SNAP participants live in families with children, and 32 percent are in families with a senior or a person with a disability. SNAP benefits are modest – \$1.40 per person per meal on average – and can be spent only on food. Benefits can't be spent in restaurants or fast food chains or on other hot foods, except for a small number of participants with special needs. SNAP has one of the lowest "error rates" among federal programs, meaning the vast majority of benefits are issued on time and in the correct amounts.

## SNAP participants work and contribute to the economy

**Half of all adult SNAP participants without a disability are working, as are 60 percent of participants with children.** And 81 percent of SNAP households that include an adult without a disability worked in the year before or after getting SNAP assistance. These adults also were more likely than other participants to receive benefits only when they were jobless. Many working

participants are in low-wage jobs with irregular salaries and few benefits. SNAP is an important bridge to help working families get over the hump of irregular hours or a temporary loss of work.

**SNAP benefits are spent at more than 250,000 local stores across the country.** Closer to home, SNAP contributes \$1.3 billion a year to Alabama's economy in more than 5,000 stores. Without SNAP, many stores that serve low-income communities could not stay in business.

## How proposed new SNAP limits would hurt Alabama

**Conaway's draft Farm Bill proposes three major SNAP changes** that would cut benefits for more than 1 million low-income people.

**1. Making time limits and work requirements more punitive.** SNAP participants between ages 18 and 50 who don't have a disability and don't have children in the home must work a certain number of hours per month to keep their benefits for more than three months in a three-year period. States can request a waiver from this requirement during times of economic distress. The proposed Farm Bill would make this limit more punitive by limiting state access to waivers, increasing the age of participants to whom the limit applies, applying strict work requirements to families with children ages 6 and over, and creating harsher penalties for noncompliance. The proposal would create an underfunded employment and training system that will do little to help people actually find jobs.

**Taking food assistance away from people in their 50s does little to help them find a job.** Most people in this age group remain unemployed longer than younger people do, no matter how hard they try to find work. When parents can't find a job or see their work hours drop below an arbitrary minimum, taking food assistance away doesn't help them work more hours or find a job. It just deprives children of the food they need to grow, thrive and succeed in school.

**Congress should not limit states' ability to suspend time limits during economic crises.** Alabama and other states need flexibility to

respond to high unemployment, an economic downturn, or natural or manmade disasters. It's important to help people who can work obtain good-paying jobs to support their families. But taking away a family's food assistance will not help people find and keep good jobs.

**2. Mandating lower income and asset limits, which would punish working families.** Most states, including Alabama, use a federal option called "categorical eligibility" that allows the state to adjust SNAP income thresholds and asset limits so families don't abruptly lose benefits when their financial situation slightly improves. This abrupt loss of benefits is often called the "benefit cliff."

**The ability to save a little money without losing SNAP helps working families handle unexpected emergencies.** Allowing struggling families with multiple workers or students to get SNAP without having to sell reliable cars makes it easier for them to get to work and school and better their situation. And allowing small savings accounts helps seniors and people with disabilities save money for medical expenses.

**Restricting categorical eligibility would hurt children and increase state costs.** Because child nutrition eligibility can be based on receipt of SNAP, this change may mean fewer children receive free school meals. Leaving children hungry causes them more difficulty in school – and it's cruel. Categorical eligibility also helps states reduce paperwork, streamline administration and avoid administrative mistakes. Because states pay a share of SNAP's administrative costs, saving on them can help protect Alabama's General Fund budget.

**3. Requiring parents to "cooperate" with child support agencies.** The proposed Farm Bill would link the level of food assistance for single parents to cooperation with child support collection. Sudden unemployment can cause a family to get behind on child support and other debts. Denying help with buying food for the family does nothing to help a parent pay child support. It only hurts the rest of the family. This proposal could cost Alabama millions of dollars for additional child support administration, and it could put applicants who are victims of domestic violence or child abuse at greater risk.