

April 2, 2012

Re: Strengthen and Protect SNAP/Food Stamps in the 2012 Farm Bill

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow:

As constituent groups representing the 1.84 million SNAP recipients in Michigan and the many other low-income and food insecure people in our state, we urge you to protect SNAP and to strengthen the program. In particular, we urge you to support proposals in the Farm Bill to ensure that Michigan households have the resources to purchase a nutritionally adequate diet by increasing benefit adequacy; and we urge you to oppose proposals to cap or reduce funding, restrict eligibility or reduce benefits in SNAP, including the proposal to alter the “heat and eat” state option. Proposed changes to that option would take meals away from tens of thousands of Michigan households.

Households are facing impossible choices among food, home heating, gasoline, rent, medicine and other basic needs. Millions continue to struggle with hunger, as documented by food hardship data collected by Gallup and analyzed by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC). Nearly one in five Americans said there were times they didn’t have enough money to buy food that they or their families needed in 2011. No state was immune from this challenge: in Michigan, 18.1 percent of households told Gallup in 2011 that they struggled in this way. Rates for families with children are higher.

We appreciate your longstanding commitment to meeting the needs of vulnerable Americans. You have been a voice for compassion and for recognizing the many ways in which targeted and adequate public supports—in nutrition programs and otherwise—make families, communities and the nation stronger. We are asking for you to continue this work in the Farm Bill process.

For decades, SNAP has enjoyed strong bipartisan support and has helped ensure the poorest and hungriest people in our nation can put food on the table. If it is weakened, many millions of older Americans, people with disabilities, children, struggling parents – working and unemployed – and others will suffer, and the nation will see more hunger and food insecurity, worse health and educational outcomes, and higher health costs. SNAP’s responsiveness to unemployment proved it to be one of the most effective safety net programs during the recent recession, providing families with a stable source of food.

SNAP is targeted to the most vulnerable people in our communities. The average beneficiary household has an income of only 57 percent of the federal poverty guideline; and 84 percent of all benefits go to households with a child, senior, or disabled person. SNAP lifted 3.9 million Americans above the poverty line in 2010, including 1.7 million children and 280,000 seniors.

The strengths of the SNAP program led every bipartisan deficit group in 2010-2011 to insulate it from cuts. The Simpson-Bowles and Domenici-Rivlin commissions recommended no cuts in SNAP. The same is true of the Gang of Six. And the August 2011 deficit agreement protected the program from sequestration. In his FY2012 and FY2013 budgets the President has included proposals to strengthen the program.

This is the time to strengthen, not weaken, our nation’s nutrition safety net. Americans want the government to attack hunger aggressively, and they reject attempts to cut anti-hunger efforts. A January poll conducted by Hart Research for FRAC demonstrated broad support among Americans for the federal nutrition programs and opposition to cuts. Seven in 10 voters said the federal government should have a major role in ensuring that low-income families and children have the food and nutrition they need. Seventy-seven percent of voters said that cutting SNAP would be the wrong way to reduce government spending.

As the Chairwoman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, you are in a key leadership role on these issues. We urge you to work with your colleagues in the Senate to strengthen and support SNAP - our nation’s first line of defense against hunger.

A New Day, Inc., Battle Creek
Access of West Michigan, Grand Rapids
ACOTAO, Central Lake
AFL-CIO
Agrarian Adventure, Ann Arbor
Aid in Milan Inc., Milan
Alma Family, Career and Community Leaders of America, Alma
Alternatives for Girls, Ann Arbor
American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
Andy T's Farm Market, St. Johns
ARA Farm Market, Barton City
Area Agency on Aging, 3A, Kalamazoo
Blaszak Greenhouse, Willis
Boyne City Farmers Market, Boyne City
Bridgewater Barns Farm, Saline
Cabrini Clinic of Most Holy Trinity, Detroit
Care Group & Associates, Inc., Ann Arbor
Center for Civil Justice, Saginaw
Chelsea Farmers Market, Chelsea
Chelsea Wellness Coalition, Chelsea
City of Springfield Farmers Market, Springfield
Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO
Detroit Urban League, Detroit
Dominican Sisters-Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids
Downtown Saginaw Farmers' Market, Saginaw
Dundee Farmers Market, Dundee
Elder Law of Michigan, Lansing
Ennis Center for Children, Detroit
Fair Farm Bill, Lansing
Fair Food Network, Ann Arbor
Family Futures, Grand Rapids
Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank, Grand Rapids
Finally United Corp., Detroit
Flint Farmers' Market, Flint
Focus: HOPE, Detroit
Food Bank Council of Michigan, Lansing
Food Bank of South Central Michigan, Battle Creek
Food Committee, United Way of the Lakeshore, Muskegon
Food Dance, Richland
Food System Economic Partnership, Ann Arbor
Food System Workgroup - The Lansing Area's Food Council, Lansing
Food Systems Workgroup of Mid-Michigan, Lansing
Forgotten Harvest, Oak Park
Frankenmuth Farmers Market, Frankenmuth
Friendship Housing Center, Gaylord
Friendship Shelter Inc., Gaylord
Full Circle Community Center, Ypsilanti
Fulton Street Farmers Market, Grand Rapids
Garden City Farmers Market, Ann Arbor
GenesisHOPE Community Development Corporation, Detroit
Gleaners Community Food Bank, Detroit
Growing Hope, Ypsilanti
Gryphon Place, Kalamazoo
Harvest Kitchen, Ypsilanti
Hawks Hollow Builders, Delton
Heirloom Peace Gardens, Flint

Hope Network, Grand Rapids
International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers
Israel Baptist Church, Washington Township
International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace & Agricultural Implement Workers of America
Jewish Community Relations Council, Bloomfield Hills
Kalamazoo Collective Housing, Kalamazoo
Kalamazoo Loaves & Fishes, Kalamazoo
Kalamazoo People's Food Co-Op, Kalamazoo
Lapeer Farmers' Market, Lapeer
Lansing Urban Farm Project, Lansing
Lawrence Farmers' Market, Lawrence
League of Women Voters-Flint Area, Flint
Lighthouse Ministries, Bridgman
Marquette Farmers and Artists Market, Munising
Marquette Food Co-op, Marquette
Mercy Education Project, Detroit
Metro Community Development, Flint
Michigan Community Action Agency Association, Okemos
Michigan County Social Services Association, Lansing
Michigan Dietetic Association, Novi
MI Disability Rights Coalition, East Lansing
Michigan Farmers Market Association, East Lansing
Michigan League for Human Services, Lansing
Michigan Legal Services, Detroit
Michigan Primary Care Association, Lansing
Michigan Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Network, Royal Oak
Michigan's Children, Lansing
MichUHCAN, Farmington
Mid Michigan Community Action Agency, Farwell
Muskegon County Cooperating Churches, Muskegon
National Association of Social Workers-Michigan, Lansing
National Council of Jewish Women-Michigan, Waterford
New Baltimore Farmers Market, New Baltimore
Northern Michigan Culinary Arts Community, Frankfort
Northwest Detroit Farmers' Market, Detroit
NorthWest Initiative, Lansing
Oakland Avenue Farmers Market, Detroit
Oakland County Welfare Rights Organization, Farmington
Otsego County United Way, Gaylord
Our Kitchen Table, Allendale
Our Lifeline, Inc., Portage
Owosso Main Street, Owosso
Packard Health, Ann Arbor
Pax Christi USA-MI, Grand Rapids
People's Food Co-op of Kalamazoo, Kalamazoo
Poverty Reduction Initiative, Kalamazoo
Public Health Institute-Michigan, Lansing
Riverfront East Congregational Initiative, Detroit
Shelter of Flint, Inc., Flint
Sisters of Mercy West Midwest Justice Team, Omaha
Society of St. Vincent de Paul
South End Community Outreach Ministries, Grand Rapids
Sowing Seeds Growing Futures Farmers Market, Detroit
Springfield Farmers Market, Constantine
St. Louis Center, Chelsea
United Food and Commercial Workers International Union

Village Baker Farmer's Market, Spring Lake
Washtenaw County, Michigan, Human Services Board, Ann Arbor
Wayne Farmers Market, Wayne
Western Upper Peninsula Food Bank, Houghton
Wyandotte Downtown Development Authority, Wyandotte
Wyandotte Farmers Market, Wyandotte
Yad Ezra, Royal Oak
Ypsilanti Farmer's Market, Ypsilanti
Ypsilanti Food Co-op, Ypsilanti