



Farm Bill Primer

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What is the Farm Bill?

The Farm Bill is a comprehensive piece of legislation that authorizes most federal policies governing food and agriculture programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as Food Stamps.

Approximately every five years, Congress reauthorizes the Farm Bill. Reauthorization offers policy makers an opportunity to review the programs included in the legislation, consider programmatic changes, and address implementation barriers that may have come up since the previous reauthorization. With the 2018 Farm Bill set to expire on September 30, 2023, discussions about the Farm Bill are beginning already.

The Farm Bill is broken down into 12 different titles, each title encompassing broad categories that address different programs. Title IV, the “nutrition title,” authorizes several federal nutrition programs, including SNAP, but not Child Nutrition Programs, which are authorized under a separate process. The federal nutrition programs operated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) help people in our country of all ages, races, ethnicities, and life circumstances.

What is at Stake in the Farm Bill’s Nutrition Title?

Millions of low-income families gain access to healthy food through the Farm Bill nutrition programs each year. The Farm Bill also assists organizations to administer programs like The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP).

- In November 2021, SNAP served 41.3 million individual participants from 21.7 million households.

- The Supplemental Poverty Measure indicated that in 2020, SNAP helped lift 2.9 million people out of poverty, including 1.1 million children.
- In FY2020, TEFAP provided \$311 million in funds for entitlement food purchases, although some of those funds were carried over into FY2021. Total funds expended by USDA in FY2020 in support of TEFAP were \$105 million in entitlement food purchases, \$701 million in Section 32 bonus commodity food purchases, \$1.129 billion in Food Purchase and Distribution program purchases (commonly referred to as trade mitigation), and \$375 million in COVID-19 TEFAP funds provided by Congress. \$85 million in TEFAP administrative funds for storage and distribution of TEFAP foods were provided.
- In 2021, the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) provided food for 48,000 individuals in households living on Indian reservations and to Native American households residing in designated areas near reservations or in Oklahoma.
- In 2021, the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) provided nutritious food packages to 760,634 low-income older adults in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, and 5 Indian Tribal Organizations.

Farm Bill Basics

The Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 (Public Law 115-334), more commonly called the “2018 Farm Bill,” reauthorized four nutrition programs: SNAP, TEFAP, FDPIR, and CSFP. While the Farm Bill does consist of some programs that are appropriated annually (authorized using discretionary funding), the majority of the Farm Bill, including SNAP, is authorized through mandatory spending.

What Food Programs are up for Review?

SNAP is our nation's first line of defense against hunger. It is structured to respond quickly when a person or family experiences a change in need from an economic downturn, natural disaster, or other causes. SNAP improves the nutrition, economic security, and health of its beneficiaries by providing millions of individuals and families with low incomes with the economic ability to purchase food. Money is transferred electronically to SNAP participants on a monthly basis and then used via a debit Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card. Because SNAP has a permanent authorization, it continues even if a new Farm Bill is not enacted by the deadline.

Under current law, SNAP is not available to residents of Puerto Rico, American Samoa, or the Northern Mariana Islands. Instead, funding for those residents is provided through block granted programs, which, unlike SNAP, are more limited and do not respond to changes in need.

USDA purchases food for several federal nutrition programs authorized by the Farm Bill: TEFAP, CSFP, and FDPIR. Through TEFAP, USDA solicits input from and purchases foods with entitlements funds for states based on a formula of need, determined by the percentage of the population that is unemployed and below the federal poverty level. States and emergency food providers distribute USDA foods to low-income individuals through distribution agencies. These distribution agencies are typically food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, and other community-based agencies. TEFAP also provides food banks and others with administrative funds for food storage and distribution.

FDPIR is administered by 276 Tribal governments that provide USDA commodity foods to households with low income living on Indian reservations and to Native American

households residing in designated areas near reservations or in Oklahoma. Under current law, tribal members are limited to participating in FDPIR or SNAP but cannot access both.

CSFP provides monthly USDA commodity food packages that are targeted to meet the nutritional needs and combat the poor health conditions often found among low-income adults who are at least 60 years old and are experiencing food insecurity.

In Congress, who has Responsibility for the Farm Bill?

In the House of Representatives, the House Agriculture Committee and its Subcommittee on Nutrition, <http://agriculture.house.gov>, have jurisdiction over the Farm Bill.

The Senate Agriculture Committee and its Subcommittee on Nutrition, Specialty Crops, and Agricultural Research, <http://www.agriculture.senate.gov>, have jurisdiction over the bill in the Senate.

What happened in the 2018 Farm Bill?

The Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 was signed into law on December 20, 2018, after passing with historic, bipartisan votes in the House and Senate. Critically, the legislation protected and strengthened SNAP, including by requiring every five years that USDA re-evaluate the Thrifty Food Plan that is the basis for SNAP allotments. The Act reauthorized TEFAP and CSFP and strengthened FDPIR by reducing administrative burdens and initiating projects to support self-determination in food purchasing by tribal organizations.

Visit [Feeding America](#) and [FRAC](#) websites for developments on the 2023 Farm Bill cycle.