



**Washington, D.C. – February 26, 2007. America's Second Harvest--The Nation's Food Bank Network, the Food Research and Action Center, the leading national anti-hunger advocacy organization, and the American Public Human Services Association, the nation's principal association of state and local government human services professionals, join together in urging the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress to make substantial improvements in the Food Stamp Program in the reauthorization of the Farm Bill.**

**The changes we recommend would expand program access, simplify program administration, and move benefit levels closer to adequacy for a healthy diet. Our three organizations believe that these changes are necessary to help the program better meet the needs of hungry people in the United States.**

The Farm Bill passed by the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress in 2002 made progress in simplifying the program for both recipients and caseworkers, in granting access and increasing benefits to certain needy households, and in reforming the system of measuring state performance. However, hunger and under nutrition in America remain serious problems, and more steps forward are needed in 2007.

We continue to be deeply concerned about the many people in our communities who are not consistently able to put food on their tables for themselves or their families. Indeed, the recent report "Food Security in the United States, 2005," published in November 2006 by USDA using data gathered by the U.S. Census Bureau, documents that more than 35 million people in the United States live in households that face a constant struggle against hunger.

The Food Stamp Program is the cornerstone of the nation's domestic food assistance programs and the largest non-categorical federal low-income support program. The Food Stamp Program serves an average of more than 26 million needy people in our country a month, yet fails to reach 40 percent of those eligible for the program, and also fails to reach other very needy people who are not even eligible in theory. The nation's first defense against hunger must be strengthened to reach all those who lack the resources to purchase an adequate diet.

The Food Stamp Program's rules can be further simplified and made more understandable for recipients and caseworkers. Such rule changes could foster participation and reduce administrative burdens that impose undue administrative costs and undermine the program's effectiveness. It is also essential that benefits be more adequate for a healthy diet. It is therefore a top priority of our three organizations that the 2007 Farm Bill makes significant progress in improving the program in the following ways:

- **Expand Access to the Program.** Too many people in our communities are in need of food stamps but cannot get them. The study “Hunger in America 2006,” published early last year by America’s Second Harvest, found that over 78 percent of people coming to pantries and other emergency food providers have income indicating food stamp eligibility, yet only 35 percent receive those benefits. Moreover, certain groups are excluded despite their need: poor working families with resources slightly in excess of terribly outdated program limits, many legal immigrants, and indigent jobless people seeking employment. Others, particularly the elderly, are discouraged by low benefit levels and resource limits. The elderly and disabled should also be granted nationwide access to “one-stop” programs, now available only in certain states, which automatically attach SSI recipients to food stamp benefits.
- **Continue to Simplify and Streamline the Program for Caseworkers and Clients.** While food stamp outreach and nutrition education are making important inroads, these efforts need more resources. Too many eligible people – especially working poor, elderly and disabled people – are missing out on benefits. Efforts to increase the proportion of eligible people who actually participate are hampered by shortfalls in federal supports to states for technology and administrative upgrades. The program’s rules should facilitate food stamp access to low-income people at nontraditional contact points in their communities, and additional funding should be available for states to develop the necessary technology. The program should provide positive support for state administrative efforts and should not impose new burdens that will make it more difficult for those in need to access benefits they are entitled to receive.
- **Improve Adequacy of Benefits.** Food stamp benefits are supposed to supplement families’ earnings, Social Security and other income so they can have a diet adequate for health and well-being. The government’s own studies of the inadequacies of the “Thrifty Food Plan” which is the basis of the food stamp allotment show its inadequacies. But millions of families also can testify personally to the inadequacies on a monthly basis when their resources for food run out. Everyone receiving food stamps must have adequate benefits to allow them to purchase a nutritionally adequate diet. Neither the average benefit level of \$1 per person per meal, nor the \$10 monthly minimum benefit, is sufficient. This dietary shortfall impairs recipients’ nutrition and health, and impedes the ability of children to learn and adults to work.

In addition, the transition from paper coupons to benefit delivery via Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards has modernized the Food Stamp Program, eliminated the use of “food stamp” coupons, and provides an important opportunity to rename the program to reflect its modernization.

Our three groups will continue to work closely with each other and with Congress and the Administration as this year’s farm bill legislation progresses. We will issue more detailed statements about specific legislative proposals as they are developed.

It is essential that the 2007 Farm Bill address the pressing problem of hunger and the need for an adequate diet in a nation of plenty. It can best do so by ensuring a strong and accessible Food

Stamp Program. Thanks to its basic entitlement structure and non-categorical character, the program has been an extremely important support for tens of millions of Americans over the years and has been quickly responsive to increases in need when natural disasters or national economic trends have left more people in America vulnerable. Congress now has the opportunity to maintain its strength while making improvements that will bring further progress toward elimination of hunger in the United States.

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