

Farm Bill Proposal Raises Concerns, All Along the Food Chain

Local News

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - The [Farm Bill](#) isn't just for farmers, and other groups are weighing in with their concerns as the House version of the bill is taken up today by the House Agriculture Committee.

Some of the biggest names on the food scene are using their celebrity clout to support the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps. The House bill cuts SNAP funding by more than \$16 billion.

Rachael Ray, Sandra Lee and at least 20 Northwest food professionals have signed [a letter to Congress](#) organized by the anti-hunger group Share Our Strength, about the importance of ending childhood hunger. The group's chief executive, Billy Shore, explains.

Without the food and nutrition that they need, kids face increased health, education, employment challenges. So, it's hard to imagine a stronger America with weaker kids. - Billy Shore
Half of the 46 million Americans using SNAP are children, Shore says. Of more than 1 million Washingtonians using SNAP, two-thirds are families with children.

Shore calls ending childhood hunger a responsibility to be shared by the public and private sectors. He says SNAP is the public contribution to the partnership.

"The SNAP program was designed to be sensitive to the economy. It was designed to correlate with fluctuations in the economy. So, it's doing really exactly what it's supposed to be doing by protecting more Americans, and especially kids who are the most vulnerable."

Another concern is that the bill limits investment in rural development. It cuts funding for the beginning farmer and rancher development program in half, and eliminates funding altogether for rural micro-enterprise assistance, a program that helps rural businesses with 10 workers or less.

These programs don't cost much, says Chuck Hassebrook, executive director, on Fellowship at the Center for Rural Affairs, adding that there are simple ways to fund them.

"There was an amendment passed in the Senate that simply reduced the crop insurance subsidies by 15 percent for people that make more than \$750,000 a year, and that alone would save several times what these rural-development and beginning farmer cuts save."

The U.S. Senate passed its version of the Farm Bill last month.

The letter is online at strength.org. More information on the Farm Bill is at agriculture.house.gov.