



# Nourishing the Nation — The 2023 Farm Bill

Center Forward Basics

September 2023

## Overview

The 2023 Farm Bill presents Congress with a unique opportunity to enhance food and nutritional security through federal nutrition assistance programs, ensuring all Americans have equitable access to affordable, nutritious foods. This effort is foundational to our nation's health, education, national security, and economic priorities. This can be achieved by broadening access, reducing costs through improved operational efficiency and program integrity, and encouraging greater workforce participation. Additionally, this legislation offers a platform for promoting the consumption of foods in alignment with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) and improving the benefits to ensure eligible households can not only access, but also afford and possess adequate knowledge to purchase and prepare a nutritious and well-balanced diet. To address food insecurity, reduce processing errors, and clear the SNAP backlog, Congress could consider including provisions that provide staffing flexibility to support the government workforce, which has been shrinking.

The Farm Bill, an extensive, multiyear law that governs a wide range of food and agricultural initiatives, has evolved significantly over time. Originally centered on providing revenue support for farm commodities, these programs have progressively expanded in scope, especially with the inclusion of the nutrition title in 1973. Reauthorized approximately every five years, the most recent Farm Bill, the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 was enacted into law in December 2018 and is set to expire in September of 2023.

## Recent Legislation

The Farm Bill authorizes federal assistance programs such as the ones listed below:

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
- Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations
- Healthy Food Financing Initiative
- The Emergency Food Assistance Program
- Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program
- Commodity Supplemental Food Program
- Community Food Projects
- Seniors Farmers' Market Nutrition Program

According to some estimates, up to 35 percent of the food produced in the United States is discarded, either unsold or unconsumed by the public. This statistic is disheartening, especially when we consider the USDA has projected as many as 13 million households experienced food insecurity at some point in 2021. Remarkably, more than 60 percent of this food

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Center Forward brings together members of Congress, not-for-profits, academic experts, trade associations, corporations and unions to find common ground. Our mission: to give centrist allies the information they need to craft common sense solutions, and provide those allies the support they need to turn those ideas into results.

In order to meet our challenges we need to put aside the partisan bickering that has gridlocked Washington and come together to find common sense solutions.

For more information, please visit [www.center-forward.org](http://www.center-forward.org)

waste occurs at various stages within the supply chain, spanning from farms and ranches to manufacturing facilities and consumer-facing establishments such as restaurants and grocery stores. Efforts to combat food waste within the supply chain offer substantial advantages, including better provisions for Americans, the creation of fresh economic prospects for businesses, and the optimal utilization of environmental resources dedicated to food production.

Notably, the 2018 Farm Bill marked a significant milestone by explicitly addressing food waste for the first time. This inclusion entailed the establishment of a food waste liaison within the USDA. The FACA (Federal Advisory Committee on Agriculture) recommends that Congress continue building upon this progress by incorporating food waste reduction as an integral component of the broader reauthorization of U.S. agriculture and food programs. Additionally, they propose exploring opportunities to integrate this objective into existing USDA structures.

## SNAP - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

The Farm Bill authorizes SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), which helps eligible families afford nutritious food by providing monthly funds through a debit-style Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card to purchase groceries. It determines how the program is operated, giving lawmakers an opportunity to make changes to it. The amount Congress spends on the Farm Bill fluctuates and it is important to remember that an investment in one program does not explicitly take funding away from another.

The nutrition title composed 76 percent of total 2018 Farm Bill spending, making it the costliest title by far, with most of the funds going to SNAP. Although food stamps are funded through the regular budget process, the Farm Bill helps make the rules for how the programs will work and who qualifies. More than 40 million Americans currently receive SNAP benefits, however, significant barriers to accessing the program exist for college students, those in the military, those in U.S. territories and formerly incarcerated individuals. Up for consideration is repealing the ban on those with prior felony drug convictions from being able to access not just SNAP but the employment and training side of the food program.

According to the Congressional Budget Office's May 2022 baseline for the legislation's major programs, the 2023 Farm Bill is estimated to cost \$1.295 trillion over the course of 10 years, making it the first ever Farm Bill to exceed \$1 trillion. The nutrition title is projected to make up 84% of total 2023 Farm Bill spending. This increase reflects COVID-19 pandemic assistance, growth in participation, and adjustments to SNAP benefit calculations. As the percentage of U.S. households with adults over 60 has increased, so has the number of households that receive benefits from Social Security. Many older adults turn to SNAP to help ensure they can afford food and other necessities while living on fixed Social Security budgets. Once the government opens the door to the restrictions, it will be easier for those rules to change from administration to administration. Since its inception as a program, proponents of restrictions on foods that are convenient for American families and meet their nutritional needs have voiced their concerns. The current measure expires on September 30, meaning it is likely lawmakers will ask for an extension while they work on final compromises.

## Staffing Flexibility

The widespread workforce problem encountered by state and local governments is extensively documented. On a national scale, more job openings exist in both the private and public sectors than individuals actively seeking employment. According to several organizations, state and local governments have lost 362,000 jobs over the three-year pandemic. Younger workers are opting for private and gig economy jobs which tend to offer flexible work schedules and locations. Some are even forgoing full-time jobs to take multiple part-time jobs to fit their lifestyle choices. The "job for life" standard of sixty years ago has been replaced by a generation who are projected to hold 15-20 jobs in their career.

Government health and human services agencies are being hit particularly hard. Many state and local governments are being simultaneously challenged by SNAP processing backlogs, error and fraud reports in multiple programs, growing turnover and vacancy factors for line staff, and understaffed call centers. Workers often handle multiple public assistance programs, as well

as process disaster applications for assistance and administer eligibility for seasonal programs and other state-based programs. Increasing worries about job burnout could exacerbate the departure of more employees unless relief is offered.

Many argue Congress and the federal government can play a role in assisting by granting states more leeway in how they administer programs during the Farm Bill reauthorization. Ultimately, ensuring that benefits reach the intended recipients in a timely manner necessitates sufficient adaptability and should prioritize the well-being of SNAP recipients.

## A Bipartisan Effort

When people have access to essential nourishment and resources for their welfare, they gain the ability to actively participate in the progress of their communities and the general prosperity of our nation. It will take a bipartisan effort to make sure needy families are served as America navigates the post-pandemic world. Beyond helping struggling families put food on the table, SNAP stimulates local economies during downturns, feeds people during natural disasters, and offers nutrition education to many. Overall, the Farm Bill's twelve sections contribute to enhancing local infrastructure, endorsing rural economic growth projects, safeguarding our country's food security, enhancing the availability of nutritious food for disadvantaged communities, and advocating for environmental care and preservation.

## Links to Other Resources

- American Cancer Society - <https://www.fightcancer.org/policy-resources/prevention-and-early-detection/healthy-eating-and-active-living>
- Bipartisan Policy Center - <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/report/the-2023-farm-bill/#:~:text=The%202023%20Farm%20Bill%20gives,integrity%2C%20and%20promoting%20workforce%20participation.>
- Farm Bill Conservation Programs - [https://www.trcp.org/farm-bill/?gad=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjwi7GnBhDXARIsAFLvH4lkoGKoXXjyhPe3UyIFLj9BDSxJT9uxTp4MCjNaWx8MinzMJ0vqRroaAmGSEALw\\_wcB](https://www.trcp.org/farm-bill/?gad=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjwi7GnBhDXARIsAFLvH4lkoGKoXXjyhPe3UyIFLj9BDSxJT9uxTp4MCjNaWx8MinzMJ0vqRroaAmGSEALw_wcB)
- Feeding America - <https://feedingamericaaction.org/learn/legislation-watch/farm-bill/>
- Fighting Hunger - <https://www.nokidhungry.org/blog/5-things-know-about-farm-bill-and-how-it-fights-hunger>
- Food and Agriculture Climate Alliance - <https://agclimatealliance.com/wp-content/blogs.dir/98/files/2023/02/farm-bill-recommendations.pdf>
- NPR - <https://www.npr.org/2023/07/11/1185499996/congress-tackles-food-stamp-changes-in-the-farm-bill>
- United States Senate - <https://www.agriculture.senate.gov/hearings/farm-bill-2023-nutrition-programs>