



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

May 23, 2007

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members:

I am pleased to share with you legislative language that would implement the nutrition provisions of the Administration's proposal for the 2007 farm bill. We have been asked by Members and staff to provide a draft for their consideration.

I believe that our comprehensive proposals can be the building blocks for a farm bill that is more equitable, predictable, and better able to withstand challenge. The nutrition proposals can be grouped into four categories. First, the Food Stamp Program would be strengthened and given a new name. Second, the Emergency Food Assistance Program would be reformed and funding levels for other nutrition assistance programs would be increased. Third, nutrition education would be enhanced and obesity grants would be funded to test innovative approaches to improving the diet of low-income Americans. Finally, our proposals would increase Federal purchases of fruits and vegetables, which would largely go to school lunch and other nutrition programs.

Food Stamp Program

Proposed improvements to the Food Stamp Program would support savings for retirement and education by excluding current and future retirement savings accounts and education savings plans from eligibility tests. We would make permanent the exclusion of combat-related military pay that Congress has adopted in recent appropriations. We would support work for low-income families by eliminating the cap on the dependent care deduction.

Several measures would further program integrity. For example, categorical eligibility for food stamps would be limited to persons who receive temporary assistance for needy families (TANF) or supplemental security income (SSI) cash benefits, the name of the Food Stamp Program would be changed to the Food and Nutrition Program, and paper coupons would be de-obligated after one year to reflect the completed transition to electronic benefit transfer cards.

Nutrition Assistance Programs

We propose to increase funding for the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations to support a more equitable allocation of administrative funds. Reforms to the Emergency Food Assistance Program would reduce administrative burden by making State plans permanent and would hold local operators accountable by requiring competition that will open the door to participation by more organizations at the local level, including faith-based organizations. The value of benefits received through the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program would be excluded when determining eligibility for Federal or State means tested programs, thereby increasing access for low-income individuals seeking critical health and social services.

Nutrition Education

Our nutrition education proposals recognize the importance of this component of the Food Stamp Program to promote more healthful diets. A new initiative to address obesity among low-income Americans would receive \$20 million per year.

School Lunch and Breakfast Programs

To promote better nutrition in our schools, we propose an investment of \$50 million annually over the next 10 years for the purchase of additional fruits and vegetables for use in the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs.

I have consulted with the Office of Management and Budget, and they advise that enactment of this legislation would be in accord with the President's program.

I appreciate your consideration of the legislative language that correlates with our 2007 farm bill nutrition proposals. I would be happy to further discuss these proposals with you, or any member of Congress, and to answer any questions you might have.

Sincerely,



Mike Johanns
Secretary

Enclosures