



Farm Bill Threatens School Meals for Low-Income Children

The Republican Farm Bill proposes to cut benefits for many Americans who are struggling to put food on the table. Because Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is tied to eligibility for federal school meal programs, the proposed changes to SNAP will result in fewer children accessing free school meals that support their health and development. According to the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office, in an average year, about [265,000 kids](#) will lose access to free school meals.

School meal programs are important for children’s health, development, and learning.

- According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, [over 16 percent](#) of American households with children experience food insecurity.
- [Healthy students are better on several levels of academic achievement](#), including academic performance, behavior, and cognitive skills.
- Ensuring access to healthy foods in schools is a [powerful way to improve the health and well-being of children](#).

The SNAP changes included in the proposed Farm Bill will result in fewer low-income children getting school meals.

- Currently, school districts are required to directly certify, or automatically verify eligibility for, free school meals for students who are living in households receiving SNAP benefits. This allows low-income children to qualify for free meals at school without the use of an application.
- [Nearly 14 million school-age SNAP participants](#) were directly certified for free school meals during the 2014-2015 school year.*
- Simply put, fewer families receiving SNAP means that fewer children will be directly certified for free meals at school.

Cuts to SNAP will make it harder for high-poverty communities to provide free school meals to students.

- Enacted through the 2010 reauthorization, the widely popular community eligibility provision (CEP) benefits schools, families, and students by providing an easier process to allow all children in high-poverty schools and communities to receive free meals.
- During the 2016–2017 school year, more than [9.7 million children in close to 21,000 schools and over 3,500 school districts](#) took advantage of CEP, serving nutritious meals without the need for burdensome applications.
- CEP eligibility and feasibility is intrinsically tied to SNAP eligibility – fewer SNAP households will make it harder for schools to use the CEP option.

* Includes those in schools participating in CEP and those in other special provision schools.