

From: "tracy@wafoodcoalition.org%inter2" <tracy@wafoodcoalition.org>
Subject: Comments from Washington State
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(Word document is also attached, includes text which follows below.)

December 28, 2005

Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns

Farm Bill

United States Department of Agriculture

1400 Independence Avenue, SW

Washington, DC 20250-3355

Dear Secretary Johanns,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the reauthorization of the 2007 Farm Bill. We greatly appreciate the forums you and Under Secretary Bost have held around the country. We're sorry we did not have the chance to speak to you personally to relay the importance of the federal nutrition programs in our great state.

The Washington Food Coalition represents over 300 emergency food providers, including meal programs, food banks, and food pantries as well as individual hunger fighters. We'd like to take just a few minutes to share with you our hopes for the Food Stamp program and the federal commodities' programs.

In Washington State, the Food Stamp program continues to help families survive. As you look toward reauthorization, please:

- Continue the entitlement structure of the program

- Increase both the minimum benefit and other allotment levels
- Expand eligibility to those who continually struggle to make ends meet, including legal immigrants and former drug felons who are making new starts
- Liberalize resource rules
- Streamline enrollment operations
- Increase reimbursement rates for state administrative options
- Increase support for food stamp outreach
- Continue to allow recipients to make their own choices when it comes to food purchases
- Continue Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) delivery
- Rename the program nationally to reflect changes in our culture

While the Food Stamp Program is considered the first line of defense against hunger we do not wish to see reductions in other vital USDA food programs. We are finding that clients are relying more and more on their local food pantries and food assistance providers. Specifically, The Emergency Food Program (TEFAP) and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) foods are another important "safety net" for our state's citizens that are low-income and in need of food. We are seeing an increase in clients yet a decrease in the amount of USDA commodities received through the programs. In FFY 2005, our State's TEFAP program received one million pounds less of USDA food yet served 5 % more households.

We appreciate USDA's willingness to consider and hopefully support the following items when reauthorizing the Farm Bill:

- Increase the level of TEFAP food made available in entitlement and bonus by targeting Section 32 funds/food to TEFAP

- Expand CSFP funding for increased caseload without sacrificing other USDA Food Distribution Programs (TEFAP)
- Consider targeting CSFP clients to elderly only.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on this very important legislation. We look forward to working with you in this process. If you have any questions about circumstances or need in Washington State, please do not hesitate to contact us at (206) 729-0501.

Sincerely,

Tracy Wilking

Executive Director

Washington Food Coalition

(206) 729-0501 or 1-877-729-0501 phone

(206) 300-3214 mobile

(206) 729-0504 fax

(509) 235-8795 phone for Bonnie Eccles, Admin. Ast.

PO Box 95752 Seattle WA 98145-2752