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I would like to provide the following comments on the Food Stamp Program.

(See attached file: Farm Bill Comments.doc)

2007 Farm Bill Comments  
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I have worked in the Food Stamp program for four years, assisting applicants and promoting a greater awareness of the program. I will try to keep my suggestions short and concrete.

1. Increase the asset limits to a realistic amount.

The current asset limit for seniors is \$3,000. Where did that amount come

from? Most seniors who have been able to save want to ensure they have enough to at least cover their funeral costs. The average funeral costs \$6,000. Even taking into consideration the \$1,500 allowed in pre-paid burial insurance, the current limit does not seem to take into account a very basic need. The limit should be raised to at least \$10,000.

2. Eliminate the Excess Housing Cap.

The Food Stamp calculation is supposed to determine how much a family has available to buy food by deducting a family's expenses from their income.

How can the agency get an accurate idea of what they have available if their actual spending on housing is not reflected in the calculation. Massachusetts has a very high cost of living and many people have excess shelter expenses well in excess of the maximum allowable deduction of \$400.

To then tell these families that they are not eligible for food stamps because they are paying more than the government feels they should pay for housing, when in fact they have no choice in the matter, seems terribly unfair.

3. Eliminate pensions and IRA's as assets.

In the past most companies provided for their workers by funding pensions that would provide income for their retirement. Fewer and fewer companies

do that now and people are forced to plan for their own retirement by making contributions to IRA's and other pension programs. These programs are intentionally established to discourage withdrawals, imposing penalties

for early withdrawals. Why then should people be required to spend down the only security they have? (Potential changes to the Social Security system could make this situation even more grave.) A distinction should be made between retirement pensions and other assets.

4. Increase the maximum Food Stamp allotment to reflect the true cost of a healthy diet. The thrifty food basket is outdated.

5. Increase the minimum benefit to a level that would make it worth applying for. Many people who are eligible for \$10 will not apply feeling the benefit is not worth the effort. The minimum benefit should be increased to at least \$25.

6. Allow medical deductions for everyone with out-of-pocket medical expenses. Why is this deduction limited only to the elderly or disabled? With cuts in many of the medical programs for adults, many people have significant expenses that are not even considered as part of the calculation.

7. Give everyone who pays unsubsidized rent the heating/cooling Standard Utility Allowance. Doesn't everyone in one way or another pay for heat or cooling. A family that pays \$1,000 for a heated apartment has the same (perhaps even more) expense as one that pays \$900 for rent and \$100 on average for heat but the first family would get a lower SUA and thus lower benefits. That does not seem equitable.

8. Allow for more flexibility in order to reflect the intent of the Food Stamp Program. Here is an example of a person who clearly needed Food Stamps but fell between the cracks. A single gentleman was unable to work due to a non-permanent injury. His workman's compensation however was far less than his usual salary and did not cover his living expenses. After paying his mortgage he had just a few dollars left. He called to see if he could receive Food Stamps for the next few months, until he was able to go back to work. Since he was not permanently disabled however he needed to meet the 130% of poverty guideline to even be considered and his workman's compensation exceeded that. If the intention of the Food Stamp Program is to make sure everyone is able to afford a nutritious diet, the program fell far short of its goal in this case.

9. Issue Farmers Market coupons to Food Stamp recipients, in addition to their general monthly benefit. WIC coupons are used regularly at Farmers Markets and provide an excellent model. They are easy to distribute and use, and both the farmers and the recipients benefit. Accepting Food Stamps on the other hand requires the markets to purchase wireless EBT machines at a cost of over \$1,000, an expense it would take most markets several years to recoup because food

stamp sales have been fairly modest.

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This holiday season low-income households are struggling to put food on the table due to skyrocketing heating costs and the high cost of living in Massachusetts. To help feed our hungry neighbors this winter, purchase the new Project Bread holiday cards or donate online at [www.projectbread.org/holidays](http://www.projectbread.org/holidays).