

From: "mannagr@comcast.net%inter2" <mannagr@comcast.net>
Subject: Farm Bill Forums
Date Sent: 12/30/2005 07:28:39 CST
Date Received: 12/30/2005 07:30:38 CST

The following are comments about the Food Stamp Program as part of the re-authorization of the Farm Bill. These suggestions are based on the experience of MANNA, a Nashville, TN grassroots anti-hunger organization. We have experience with the Food Stamp Program on several levels: we deal daily with people who are in need of food assistance, we have a Food Stamp Outreach project, and we assist people who need help in accessing the program through both individual and policy advocacy.

1. We think it is vital to maintain the entitlement structure of the program: this has enabled the FSP to be flexible to immediately meet the needs of hungry people in times of economic stress and natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina. It truly is our nation's "first line of defense against hunger."
2. We think it is important to increase the minimum benefit and the allotment levels to keep pace with the actual needs of people. We very frequently hear from people who need emergency food even though they receive food stamps.
3. It is important to support outreach to make sure that people who need and are eligible for food stamps actually receive them. Our experience has shown us that often people who apply, based on outreach information, encounter barriers in the application process because of lack of staff, inadequate phone system, etc., at the local office. Our suggestion is that outreach funding be able to cover the expenses to do follow up to ensure that people not only are informed about food stamps but are actually able to receive them.
4. We support expanding eligibility, based on the idea that getting food to people who need it is a benefit to the whole community. Specifically, we would favor eliminating time limits for people who meet all the other requirements for eligibility and making otherwise eligible legal immigrants able to receive food stamps.
5. We would propose a medical deduction that is not limited to seniors and people with disabilities. We have seen repeatedly that medical expenses make families not have enough money for food even though their income puts them over FSP income guidelines. With many people not having access to health insurance and with cuts in Medicaid, this is increasingly a problem.

Thank you for your consideration of our suggestions.

Dale Gray
Executive Director
MANNA
1808 West End Ave., Suite 817
Nashville, TN 37203
(615) 329-0022