

WHAT THE FARM BILL MEANS FOR KIDS!



The Farm Bill is a multi-year law that governs all parts of the nation's food supply with broad but often overlooked consequences for children. The Farm Bill governs access to federal nutrition assistance programs, environmental and pollution standards for agriculture, farming practices that influence climate change and other areas that pose long-term consequences for the health and well-being of the nation's children. Reauthorized every five years, the bill's provisions literally affect the prospects of many generations to come.

Children's Nutrition

The reauthorization of the Farm Bill this year offers an urgent opportunity to strengthen food and nutrition security for children through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). As the nation's largest federal food assistance program, SNAP is the first line of defense against hunger for poor and low-income children. Nearly 90% of SNAP participants are in households that contain a child under age 18, and nearly half of all program participants are children.¹ More than 14 million children rely on SNAP for consistent, healthy meals.² In 2021, SNAP lifted more than 800,000 children out of poverty,³ and studies show that SNAP participation improves food security, health, educational, and long-term economic outcomes for children.⁴ SNAP also acts as an important bridge to other federal programs by making enrolled families automatically eligible for other programs, such as the Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

The Farm Bill's nutrition title ([Title IV](#)) makes up roughly three-quarters of its mandatory spending. Decisions to decrease or increase SNAP spending will have dramatic consequences for children's access to nutritious foods. Furthermore, lawmakers can use the Farm Bill to place onerous administrative burdens on families, which will ultimately affect their access to benefits. Currently, only 82% of eligible Americans use their SNAP benefits, largely as a result of excessive administrative burdens.⁵ Any effort to layer on more restrictions such as new work requirements will further hurt low-income families trying to afford food for their children.⁶

As policymakers debate the future of SNAP, they must keep in mind that 92% of the support goes to families at or below the poverty line and 54% of participants live at half the poverty level, which in 2022 was \$10,900 for a family of three.⁷ The average SNAP recipient receives about \$5.50 per day in food assistance, which can mean the difference between eating or going without any food in a given day.

Beyond SNAP, Title IV funds other programs aimed at expanding food access in communities and grocery stores. The Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), for example, provides food purchased and shipped by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to low-income families in about 276 Indigenous tribes.⁸ With SNAP offices and participating food stores in short supply, FDPIR is critical to helping tribal communities put nutritious food on their children's tables.

The Farm Bill also funds the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP), which offers competitive grants to nonprofit organizations and local governments for projects that incentivize SNAP participants to purchase fruits and vegetables.

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When nearly half of America's children are not eating even one vegetable per day, funding GusNIP provides low-income families with much-needed access to produce.⁹

Environmental Health

Pesticide use and industrial food animal production (IFAP) — in which food-producing animals are raised in highly concentrated environments — pose a serious threat to children's health, especially in communities of color or low-income communities who are disproportionately impacted by pollution. Children exposed to pesticides through poorly regulated agriculture experience higher incidences of asthma, respiratory infections, and decreased lung function.¹⁰ Research also links the presence of IFAP facilities in communities to more absent days from school due to asthma and an increased risk of depression or contracting diseases like MRSA and Q fever.¹¹

Certain environmental provisions within the Farm Bill protect children from both IFAP pollution and pesticides. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), which is funded in the Farm Bill, provides financial and technical assistance to producers looking to improve air, water, and soil quality. Additionally, lawmakers have begun to put forward legislation banning more than 100 toxic pesticides.¹² Strengthening these provisions within the Farm Bill offers policymakers an opportunity to reduce the impact of one of our most polluting industries on children.

Climate Change

The climate crisis is not just tomorrow's problem. Children today, in every corner of America, feel its impacts first-hand. A child's unique physiology makes them more likely to suffer from heat stroke or die due to extreme heat, one of the most prevalent and readily-felt impacts of climate change.¹³ With natural disasters on the rise, children, especially those under the age of eight, are more likely to develop anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Without urgent action, our children's futures are at risk.¹⁴

In 2021, agriculture alone accounted for 10% of the United States' annual greenhouse gas emissions.¹⁵ Policymakers will have the opportunity to greatly reduce our carbon pollution from one of the highest emitting sectors by bolstering regenerative agricultural practices, incentivizing cover crops, and investing in food waste mitigation. In turn, while staving off the climate crisis, these policies protect our communities from natural disasters and capture some of our emissions.¹⁶ Climate-smart policies passed in the Farm Bill will have positive ramifications for decades to come.

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ENDNOTES

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