



# *Saint Paul – Ramsey County Food and Nutrition Commission*

December 3, 2012

Dear Minnesota Congressional Delegation,

*The Saint Paul-Ramsey County Food and Nutrition Commission is very concerned by the inaction of Congress to extend several key provisions in the Farm bill and is also troubled by the cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). As you know, the House proposed a \$16 billion cut to SNAP and the Senate proposed a \$6 billion cut. It had been our hope that both bodies could arrive at a more humane solution to this valuable program that serves more than 81,000 people in Ramsey county.*

*The maximum SNAP benefit for a family of four in fiscal year 2012 is \$668, or less than \$1.90 per meal. (Building a Healthy America: A profile of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, USDA, April 2012). Even with this small amount of assistance per household, programs like SNAP have helped more than 500,000 Minnesotans maintain incomes above the poverty line. (Minnesota Partners to End Hunger, 2011-12).*

*“Food Hardship in America 2011” published by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) in February 2012, compiled Gallup-researched food hardship rates for 2011 by State and Congressional Districts providing the following statistics for Minnesota:*

- *nearly 1 in 12 households in Ramsey County are suffering food hardship;*
- *Minnesota Congressional District 4 had a 11.9% hardship rate and ranked 391 of the 436 congressional districts;*
- *Minnesota had a 12.6% food hardship rate.*

*This same report stated that:*

- *When asked by the Gallup organization, “Have there been times in the last twelve months when you did not have enough money to buy food that you or your family needed?” more people answered “Yes” in the third and fourth quarters of 2011 (19.2% and 19.4%) than in any period since the fourth quarter of 2008. **Polls demonstrate that Americans in every community want the federal government to attack hunger aggressively, not slash anti-hunger efforts.***
- *In a poll conducted for FRAC in January 2012, **seven in ten (69%) of voters said the federal government should have a major role to ensure that low-income families and children have the food and nutrition they need.***
- ***Only 12% of voters thought the federal government is spending too much money on hunger while 78% of voters say the federal government should be spending more money on solving hunger or should continue to spend the same amount.** When voters are told that Congress is considering cutting billions of dollars to reduce government spending, they say cutting food assistance programs like the SNAP program is the wrong way to reduce government spending. And these attitudes cross party lines.*

As FRAC report titled "A Tightening Squeeze, The Declining Expenditures on Food by American Households" details, reduced spending on food by families is not an abstract problem. When families don't have enough resources to purchase an adequate diet, they suffer both hunger and

deterioration in the nutritional quality of the diet. The results include damage to health, mental health, family cohesion, early child development, learning, and productivity at work. The FRAC report reviews the rapidly declining food spending by a large proportion of the population, thus foreshadowing widespread harm to the nation's residents, its schools and its workplaces, and its public finances unless the trend is rapidly and decisively reversed.

Also to be considered is that 83% of benefits are redeemed at supermarkets or superstores (*Building a Healthy America: A profile of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, USDA, April 2012*). Cutting SNAP benefits will cut customer spending at Ramsey county stores, which may translate to job losses or store closures in stores with a large percentage of sales to SNAP participants. SNAP-authorized stores in Ramsey County received an average of \$269,805 each in redemptions in 2011 (*USDA Economic Research Service*), but for some stores in low income areas the redemption is a more than half of sales (*Food and Commercial Workers Union*).

We are also concerned that a number of programs which we feel are critical to building a safer, more sustainable, and secure food system, are being wiped out because of partisan politics. The programs include Farmer's Market Promotion Program, Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development programs, Outreach Assistance to Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers, and Value Added Producer Grants. The USDA defines beginning farmers and ranchers as those who have operated a farm or ranch for 10 years or fewer. Beginning farmers tend to be younger than established farmers and to operate smaller farms or ranches. Beginning farmers often face obstacles getting started, including high start up costs and limited availability of land. There is an increasing interest by residents to start urban farms in Saint Paul and Ramsey County and in nearby counties. The Beginning Farmer and Rancher program could aid many citizens interested in getting into commercial production. We need action to extend these beneficial programs and move forward on a Farm bill. Not only do the programs assist in making our food system more sustainable, but they strengthen and promote local economic growth. A good Farm bill promotes jobs, justice, and a safety net for those in need. It is now time to act and end the gridlock.

We urge you to improve upon and take action on the Farm bill.

Respectfully submitted,

Saint Paul – Ramsey County Food and Nutrition Commission

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