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Farm Bill 2013: 2 Million To Lose Food Stamps, And Other Measures In The Bill

By: Laura Matthews – May 16, 2013

The House Agriculture Committee approved on Wednesday a 2013 farm bill that slashes \$20 billion from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), commonly known as food stamps, eliminating the benefits to two million people. It is the first reform of the program since the Welfare Reform Act of 1996.

The \$940 billion bill cleared committee with a bipartisan vote, 36 to 10. Congress can now move forward and hammer out a new bill. A farm bill didn't make it to the House floor last year, though the Senate passed one. Lawmakers had to extend the 2008 bill until Sept. 30.

The farm bill is an omnibus, multi-year appropriations bill that governs a variety of agriculture and food policies. It is reviewed and renewed every five years. Approximately 80 percent of the funding in the bill helps low-income families afford food. The food stamp program has been a part of the bill for decades, as a means to get lawmakers from urban districts to support rural programs.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture calls the SNAP program the largest in the domestic hunger-safety net. And according to the Cato Institute, approximately 47 million people benefit from the \$80 billion a year program that expanded under both the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations.

Under the bill proposed by the House, there will be nearly \$40 billion in savings over the next decade, with the SNAP cuts contributing to more than half. The food stamp cut will affect mainly senior citizens and working families with children, according to the non-partisan think tank Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

It is bad news for low-income families of four who will see a \$25 reduction in benefits beginning Nov. 1 when the benefits under the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act, or ARRA, ends.

A huge chunk of the proposed cut, \$11.6 billion, will result from eliminating the categorical eligibility option that has been adopted by more than 40 states. Categorical eligibility for SNAP will go only to those households that get cash assistance through other low-income assistance programs, according to the bill.

Here's a summary of other news items inside the 2013 farm bill:

Direct Payments To Farmers Repealed

Possibly the most significant change to the bill is that the \$5 billion a year program that gives direct payments to farmers is gone next crop year. Farmers would have received this money regardless of market conditions. Instead, crop insurance will reap the benefits. More than 60 percent of the premium farmers pay for crop insurance is subsidized by the federal government.

Fresh Fruit, Vegetable Pilot Program For School Lunches

Up to five states would receive grants to buy fresh fruit and vegetables that will be distributed to school and service institutions that take part in the school lunch programs. The amount of the grant will be equal to the value of the commodities the participating states would have received through 2014 to 2018.

The farm bill consolidates more than 23 conservation programs into 13. In all more than 100 programs have been repealed or consolidated more than 100 programs.

Cotton growers would get a revenue insurance that serves to replace the subsidies the World Trade Organization has said were violations of trade rules.
Read the 2013 farm bill in full.