United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 28th, 2013

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Agriculture Committee
328 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Senate Agriculture Committee
328 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Frank D. Lucas
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Collin C. Peterson
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Farm Bill Conferees,

We are writing to express our support for preventing harmful cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in the Farm Bill. SNAP is our nation's first line of defense against hunger. SNAP provides essential nutrition benefits to working families, children, senior citizens, and disabled individuals in every state and town in our country. Every dollar in new SNAP benefits generates up to $1.79 in economic activity, of which approximately 16 cents goes back to the farmers.

While we support efforts to improve the integrity of the SNAP program, we encourage conferees to reject all SNAP eligibility changes designed to erect new barriers to participation, preventing millions of seniors, children and families from accessing food assistance. The eligibility changes also will mean an additional 280,000 children would lose free school meals because children in SNAP households are automatically eligible for school meals. Changes would also increase administrative costs by requiring states to re-determine eligibility for SNAP, even if a household was deemed eligible for other state and/or federal assistance programs.

SNAP plays a critical role at a stressful time in the life of families. It allows struggling families to put groceries on their tables when they face financial troubles. Benefits average less than $1.50 per individual, per meal, and within this limited budget they struggle to provide healthy, nutritious meals for themselves and their family. In fact half of SNAP participants entering the program are enrolled for 10 months or less.

Researchers estimate that half of all American children will receive SNAP at some point during childhood, and half of all adults will do so at some point between the ages of 20 and 65 years. Furthermore, SNAP recipients are diverse with regards to race-ethnicity, many have earned income, and the vast majority of SNAP households do not receive cash welfare benefits.

SNAP is a safety net program in the truest sense of the world; there is no other more fundamental human need than food. Please consider the needs of these struggling families, children, and senior citizens as you negotiate the final Farm Bill and the future of the SNAP program.

Sincerely,

Kirsten E. Gillibrand
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

Robert Menendez
United States Senator

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Jack Reed
United States Senator

Tom Udall
United States Senator

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

Martin Heinrich
United States Senator

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator

Al Franken
United States Senator

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

John D. Rockefeller IV
United States Senator

Christopher Murphy
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator

Brian Schatz
United States Senator

Mark Begich
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Barbara Boxer
United States Senator

Bill Nelson
United States Senator

Jeff Merkley
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

Tim Kaine
United States Senator

Patty Murray
United States Senator

Mary L. Landrieu
United States Senator

Mark Udall
United States Senator

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

Carl Levin
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

Barbara A. Mikulski
United States Senator

Jon Tester
United States Senator

Heidi Heitkamp
United States Senator

Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator

Tim Johnson
United States Senator