

A Statement from Second Harvest Food Bank CEO Eric Aft

Jenny Hudson answers the door using a cane. After two years of emergency room visits, doctors discovered that she had cancer. It was so far advanced that she moved in with her parents, leaving behind a home and a job. A year later, Jenny is gratefully cancer free and working again to provide for herself and her sons. However, chemo has left its mark, causing such intense swelling in her legs that some days she cannot walk. "That's when SNAP is most helpful," she says. "Even if I can't make my hours at work, my boys can still eat."

At Second Harvest Food Bank, we meet families like Jenny's daily. The truth is, there are many, many Jenny Hudson's in Northwest North Carolina: parents, seniors, and others who are working hard but struggling to make ends meet.

We and our over 460 local program partners are here to help. Collectively, we are providing essential nutritional assistance to hundreds of thousands of people every year throughout the 18 counties we serve. But even as Second Harvest moves 37 tons of food everyday out of our warehouse doors, we recognize that our efforts alone cannot meet the entirety of the community need. For every 12 meals provided through the SNAP program, food banks can provide 1. That is why we believe strongly that a public-private partnership is necessary to address the public health crisis of food insecurity: When 1 in 7 people in our communities don't always know where their next meal is coming from, everyone has a role to play.

Jenny Hudson has plenty of her own concerns, but she's also aware that lots of families like hers are caught in the crosshairs of a national political and cultural debate. When first conceived in the early 1960s, programs like SNAP (formerly known as food stamps) and TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program) had strong bipartisan support. Our nation understood that providing for the most basic needs of its people is the right and smart thing to do. Today, however, as Congress debates the Farm Bill, partisan lines have been drawn that feed off entrenched stereotypes and misinformation.

The truth is, Jenny is highly representative of people who receive assistance in Northwest North Carolina. While nearly 62% of SNAP recipients are children, seniors, or disabled, most of the people who can work, do work while receiving SNAP. The program already has strong work requirements. With few exceptions, working or being enrolled in a training program is required in order to receive assistance. Currently, adults without children must be in work or training programs within three months of applying or they will lose access to SNAP. However, the reality is that in 87 of North Carolina's 100 counties, there are more jobless workers than there are job opportunities. The additional work requirements and restrictions being considered in the 2018 Farm Bill are not a response to reality—they are a harsh, uninformed reaction to disproven stereotypes.

Getting caught up in debate over who receives benefits causes us to overlook another important variable of the Farm Bill: North Carolina economically benefits from its components. For every \$5 of SNAP spent, \$9.20 in economic activity is generated, creating local jobs and stabilizing

markets. In places like Wilkes, Surry, and Alexander Counties, grocery stores and small town businesses are struggling to stay afloat, and the spending of SNAP dollars helps stabilize their businesses. SNAP has a positive ripple effect in our local economies: Nationally \$65 billion was distributed in total benefits in 2017, with an estimated net economic impact of \$114 billion.

Similarly, TEFAP purchases and distributes American-grown food to families through food banks such as Second Harvest. Like SNAP, TEFAP is incredibly efficient and has an exponential economic impact as it supports local North Carolina farmers. From Watauga to Alamance, proposed changes in the bill could seriously threaten the economic vitality of our region.

The impact of SNAP doesn't end in the grocery checkout line, just as TEFAP's impact doesn't end at a food pantry. These programs help families like Jenny's to augment their household budgets so that they can shift their money to cover medicine and other necessities. This includes being able to cover expenses that help them acquire and retain good jobs, such as reliable transportation and childcare. This proliferating effect of nutritional assistance is important for families and for communities. Not only does it help Jenny—it helps her whole town.

North Carolina is the country's 10th hungriest state. We want to see improvements to SNAP, TEFAP and the Farm Bill that are based on facts, evidence, and economic realities. This Hunger Action Month, as congress debates the Farm Bill, we are calling on our representatives to dismiss the misguided stereotypes and look at the facts.

Eric A. Aft

CEO

Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest NC

Serving 460+ Local Food Assistance Organizations Throughout 18 Northwest North Carolina Counties - From Boone to Burlington