



May 14, 2018

Dear Members of the Washington State Congressional Delegation:

I write today to urge you to oppose H.R. 2, the House GOP Farm Bill. It is nothing more than a mean-spirited attack on our most vulnerable families, and it holds our agricultural industry hostage in an ill-conceived, ideological war on low-income assistance programs.

Farmers and working families are both counting on Congress to successfully reauthorize the Farm Bill before it expires later this year. As you know, the development of long-term Farm Bill reauthorizations has historically been a bipartisan process, designed to carefully balance the needs of agricultural producers with the needs of working families who depend on nutrition programs the most. It's important we continue that bipartisan tradition and get this right. Our state is the second most agriculturally diverse in the nation, growing more than 300 different commodities on nearly 40,000 farms. From world-class apples and cherries to hops and potatoes, agricultural production in Washington is valued at more than \$10 billion annually, employing approximately 160,000 workers and contributing over 13 percent to our state's economy.

Rather than working with Democrats to improve the security of our food supply, enhance the competitiveness of our agricultural industry and support nutritious meals for all Americans, House Republicans have taken a go-it-alone approach with a clear goal of taking away food assistance from millions of individuals, including thousands of Washingtonians.

I am gravely concerned by the Nutrition Title of the House GOP Farm Bill, which severely limits access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) through restricted eligibility, benefit cuts, and harmful program changes. More than 42 million people across the country rely on SNAP for their basic food, including more than 920,000 in Washington alone — or 1 in 8 of all Washingtonians.<sup>1</sup> According to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO), this legislation would cut SNAP by more than \$17 billion over the next decade, taking away food assistance from an estimated 2 million Americans. Evidence shows that SNAP is one of the most important safety-net programs for families and communities facing economic hardship, helping lift millions of working families out of poverty and food insecurity every year. It is a particularly significant lifeline for our most vulnerable, as 75 percent of SNAP households include a child, an elderly person, or a person with disabilities.<sup>2</sup> The program is also a key economic driver that supports food producers, farmers markets, and retailers. Every dollar spent on nutrition assistance generates approximately \$1.70 in economic activity, boosting local economies and supporting 260,000 individual retailers nationwide.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), March 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA), Letter to the Washington State Congressional Delegation, January 2018.

<sup>3</sup> CBPP, April 2018.



I am also dismayed by the House GOP Farm Bill's implications for Washington state's incredibly successful workforce training program. Washington proudly operates a voluntary job-training program for SNAP recipients, known as Basic Food Education and Training (BFET), which has already helped thousands of Washingtonians get the skills they need to find and keep good-paying jobs. Since BFET began in 2005, more than 50,000 individuals receiving food benefits have received education and training services, and outcomes data show that 64 percent of participants in BFET obtain employment through this nationally recognized model.<sup>4</sup>

The program's record of success led Congress to establish a pilot program in the 2014 Farm Bill, spearheaded by many of you, expanding voluntary E&T programs in Washington and nine other states. The lessons learned from that pilot will be critical to informing the best path forward in expanding this Washington success story nationwide. I implore you not to cut short that learning process by undertaking a radical, untested expansion of mandatory work programs that threaten to destabilize millions of working families, including many with dependent children.

This bill puts our program at direct risk by removing state flexibility and applying harsh work requirements to 7 million individuals, while forcing states to undertake a radical expansion of education and training (E&T) programs with wholly inadequate time and resources to meet the demand.

According to estimates, establishing mandatory job-training programs for all adults subject to the bill's new work requirements would take 10 years to implement and cost upward of \$1.2 billion to operate — while H.R. 2 funds these programs at just \$1 billion overall and imposes harmful work requirements in just two years.<sup>5</sup> Contrary to the rhetoric of the bill's supporters, it is clear the legislation would not serve to help individuals become self-sufficient, but rather to place a massive unfunded mandate on states and rip away food assistance from those who need it most.

Washington's agricultural sector is a driving force in our economy, and we need Congress to enact a real Farm Bill before September — not one that plays politics with our most vulnerable children and families. I urge you to reject this partisan legislation, abandon its attack on working families, and stop holding farmers hostage. Instead, work together in a bipartisan manner on meaningful solutions to shore up our food supply, strengthen our agricultural sector and meet the needs of all Washingtonians. Our state deserves no less.

Very truly yours,



Jay Inslee  
Governor

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<sup>4</sup> Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS).

<sup>5</sup> CBO Cost Estimate, April 2018; CBPP analysis, May 2018.