



# A **STRONG FARM BILL** FOR NORTH CAROLINIANS

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**FALL**

**2023**

food**o**bank<sup>®</sup>  
OF CENTRAL & EASTERN NORTH CAROLINA







In 2021, 11% of North Carolinians (1 in 9 people) utilized the charitable food system for support.

## Ensuring a Strong Farm Bill to Nourish More Neighbors

As supply chain disruptions and rising food costs make it more difficult to afford the basics, millions of people in the U.S. are forced to make impossible choices between food and other necessities. **In 2021, 11% of North Carolinians (1 in 9 people) utilized the charitable food system for support.** Although the nonprofit sector helps many people avoid hunger, it cannot end hunger in our communities without government support. Federal nutrition programs, including The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), works hand in hand with food banks to help families put food on the table. The Farm Bill reauthorization process is an opportunity to improve these nutrition programs, ensuring that everyone who needs food assistance can access it.

This summer, we spoke to people across the North Carolina food system about the vital importance of a strong Farm Bill in their lives, and how this legislation will strengthen our state.

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## Experiences with Hunger in North Carolina

[Each person's experience] varies. It could be total jubilation, or it could be a little kid in high school who writes a note to his teacher that he doesn't want to live anymore because there's not enough food in the house. Took me three days to respond and when I got to the house: freezer- empty, refrigerator- empty, nice house cars parked in the driveway, but no food. Experience varies.

– **Brian, community leader of Adelphia CDC in Craven County**

We end up having schools now that are referring students in because they're hearing about either a behavioral problem or falling behind in class or needing an IAP and they find out that there's no food in the home. And how is a child supposed to be able to learn when their brain isn't even developing right because they're not eating correctly. So, I mean it is literally everywhere I think it is that people are so aware, especially since the pandemic because it was such a headlining thing that people didn't have food.

– **Michael, community leader of Tri-Area Ministries in Wake Forest**

One thing, you know, I know the farm programs are linked to a lot more than just farming- SNAP benefits and what have you. Yes, most definitely I'd love to see them go back and change a couple things. We really need something in place for the elderly, whether they meet the requirements or not. There should be no need for a person to have to go hungry, no matter what the problem is. I mean, the food, the food's there, we're producing it.

– **Bill, grower supporting the Food Bank, Herring Farms in Duplin County**

I think a lot of the apprehension is, "Do I really need it?" And that was my struggle growing up. We were without. In my marriage, we were without. But would it have been better to maybe have a little bit of assistance? Yeah, because now I see in my children what food insecurity can do. We were struggling. We would allow ourselves about \$160, God, it felt like every week at this point, because it just feels like you'd get less and less for your money just to keep up with the cost of living. I just think if people just can say, "You know what? I need help for a little while." It's not a lifestyle. It's because I need help now. As soon as I cannot need this help, I want help other people find the help, but I don't want to be on the help. You know what I mean? This is temporary.

– **Jessica, current SNAP participant**

We spend \$30,000 each month purchasing meat, eggs, milk, bread, fruit and vegetables from wholesalers. An increase in these items through the Food Bank channel (either TEFAP or otherwise) would mean that we have the capacity to serve many more families. It will reach a point later this year where we will need to reduce the amount distributed to each family or turn some families away as our funds will run low for purchasing. It would be a tremendous asset to our organization to put the purchasing power of the Federal government behind the Food Bank's programs. We are fortunate to have money to spend to purchase fresh food for distribution, but we don't have the scale to command best pricing.

– **Michael, community leader of Tri-Area Ministries in Wake Forest**





## SNAP

SNAP improves physical and mental health outcomes, and I wish there were more studies around this; I'm only speaking to personal narratives that have been shared with our team. So many households apply for SNAP – whether a senior living alone, a pregnant teen who has been kicked out of her house, recently separated single parents, a person who quits their job to be a caretaker for their parents. There is no one-size-fits-all look or experience to food insecurity. However, almost every narrative I have heard in 12 years of working with SNAP circles around a bare bones refrigerator prior to receiving SNAP: eating only chicken breasts or cereal or eggs – and no fresh fruits or vegetables and selecting those foods because they are the cheapest. After receiving SNAP, households are always so excited to be able to afford food that truly nourishes their bodies – not just fills their stomachs.

– Emily, Director of Community Outreach & Support Services, Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina



I'm able to actually get healthy food. I'm seeing a nutritionist now, so to switch over from what I was getting to what I am eating now is easier, like getting fresh fruit and vegetables. My school food pantry offers that too, which is really nice. I don't always know what to make with what they offer, so to be able to get it myself is really nice. I made a zucchini lasagna instead of pasta lasagna, and so being able to get the zucchinis and the cottage cheese, all of that stuff was really nice. Baking pies from scratch and making a nut crust. Being able to afford that food has been really nice, to be able to get food that is better for my body. I love that the farmer's market doubles your money and even the Black Farmer's Market too, and so you can go to the other locations even on campus and you can get more bang for your buck. While we're only getting a little bit, we can still get more food, we can get good, delicious [food], and support local farmers. It's so awesome and I love it so much. It's an amazing program, super grateful for that.

– Jessica, SNAP PARTICIPANT

I just came out of the grocery store Sunday, and I was looking at the price of everything that used not to be that high. Just went up, and I was like, "Man." My paycheck was gone, and it really did an impact on paying bills. But when I enrolled into SNAP, I seen a whole big difference and I was like, "Man." It really saved time and money. And then it helped me space out what to get and what not to get at the same time. You can space out what you need then, and then go back later if you miss something or you need something else extra to go on the side with whatever you already have that you didn't get.

– Raymond, SNAP PARTICIPANT

At one point, my mom was eating cereal for dinner, and it just really bothered me. I'm like, "I need to do better." And then I was like, "Mom, we're going to have some help," and we went grocery shopping, and it was just like I wasn't so stressed about every little penny. But we're having the opportunity to

expand our food variety, and I feel it's not just the physical thing. It's like, yes, it's better for your body, but it's a mental health thing. It really is. I just feel so grateful that there was light at the end of the tunnel.

– Jessica, SNAP PARTICIPANT

[SNAP] has helped our budget. It has helped and is very, very appreciated, but also **very challenging now, especially after COVID and now COVID benefits are gone.** That is very, very difficult.

– Kaoru, SNAP PARTICIPANT

SNAP has proven itself to be the largest and most responsive response to food insecurity in our country. For example, when the pandemic began and people were losing their jobs and the traditional food systems were struggling with supply chain issues, SNAP was immediately there to help and support. Economic rebound takes longer for Americans who are living below or around the Federal Poverty Line (FPL). After the great recession in 2008, SNAP participation rates did not drop until 2019, and policy amendments to pre-recessions rules did not happen until 2016; however, we are only three years out of the pandemic, and SNAP policies are becoming more restrictive than they were pre-COVID, even though lower income households are still struggling to find sustainable work with living wages all the cost of housing and food is skyrocketing. What is worse is that proposed, restrictive policies are based on opinions, assumptions, and stereotypes rather than lived experience narrative and data.

– Emily, Director of Community Outreach & Support Services, Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina

There's a huge administrative burden placed on our community members, especially for a program where people often turn to it when they are in crisis or have a high level of need for assistance. With the policy changes that have happened post-Covid, a lot of the things that have been waived in the past, like interviews, that people have to do with their caseworker, that is a huge barrier and burden on our community members. I've already encountered that with people since the start of the month of, especially those that are returning home or individuals who are unsheltered or experiencing homelessness. It disproportionately impacts certain marginalized groups.

– Katy, Benefits Outreach Coordinator, Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina

I was previously in federal prison but have been out for over 6 years now. Due to my charges, I was banned for life from receiving SNAP. I think there should be some type of support still provided to people after they are released, especially when it comes to something as basic as food. We still have families that we have to figure out how to support when we return home. If we aren't allowed to receive benefits anymore there should at least be something in place to help those of us who have children to feed. I sometimes have to go to local food drives to fill in the gaps. Many of us worry about how we are going to pay child support in addition to trying to support our families and readjust to being released. It's not easy trying to find a job after incarceration which makes it hard for those of us trying to get back up on our feet.

– Food Bank Workforce Development Participant





## CSFP

The income threshold is a real barrier for CSFP. It's different than TEFAP, but they are both programs aimed at people experiencing food insecurity, and seniors have more barriers. They must present ID every month which is another barrier – it consistently causes problems, especially with home delivery. One of the more arbitrary rules is that you're not allowed to be served outside of county lines. There are whole cities that are built across county lines. So literally we're put in this position of like, yes, you're next to our food distribution, but I'm sorry, we're going to have to send you an hour away in order to serve you.

– **Christi, Director, Senior Nutrition Programs, Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina**

We've seen our CSFP numbers jump as well, so we added 20 more boxes last month and we keep a little running track of when we run out and then how many people ask. So, we're going to increase them again in the coming month. But yeah, it's from everywhere and we're still getting folks every day who it's their first time and they are coming for all the groceries. I mean it's not supplemental to them any longer.

– **Kristine, community leader of CORA in Chatham County**

Something I hear on a constant basis is how much the CSFP box benefits the seniors we serve. This population that we work with are the matriarchs and patriarchs of their family. So they're the people that are feeding the grandkids on Sunday, they're the people that are helping their children out when they're in a tough spot. These are helpful items they can use to supplement when their budgets won't stretch.

– **Samantha, Coordinator, Senior Nutrition Programs, Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina**

CSFP arrives around the 15th, [so there's] lots of jubilation because there's no food in the house and in some of our areas there, there's just no transportation. So, you can believe that there is no food, there's probably no transportation as well.

– **Brian, community leader of Adelpia CDC in Craven County**

Often, I get participants telling me that they can't eat 50% of what's in their box. A lot of it is processed and high in sodium. Their doctors tell them they can't eat things like that. Seniors who are signed up for CSFP need to be able to utilize what's in their box. I would love to see more fresh items added to the box, which could alleviate some of the dietary issues. It means we're not able to serve the number of seniors who are truly in need.

– **Samantha, Coordinator, Senior Nutrition Programs, Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina**





# TEFAP

With the cost of food rising so tremendously over the last year, more folks are needing to utilize programs like TEFAP. People can use these programs in hard times to make sure their family eats well and they can still deal with emergencies that might pop up like car repairs or medical bills. The rise in food prices are impacting everyone, but those who have low or moderate incomes feel the pinch the most.

**-Larry, Director of Network Engagement, Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina**

I think the problem with the TEFAP program is that we got plenty of food obviously during the pandemic and it had been the trade mitigation and then build back better had kind of kept it at those levels or a little less. And then obviously during the pandemic it went way up when they passed the bill for relief. Now [TEFAP] is cut severely back, and the problem is that it seems premature to have done that because clients are still having problems with housing, clients are still having problems with not making enough money or trying to be employed again or make a [livable] wage. So, the thing is that we have seen a huge decrease in the amount of TEFAP we can give out and the problem is we're getting busier. We didn't see Covid sort of being a blip and then things are returning to normal. Tri-Area Ministries is now feeding almost double the number of families since before COVID-19. 1,300 per month now vs. 700 pre-COVID. So, I think they sun-setted some of those programs prematurely.

**- Michael, community leader of Tri-Area Ministries in Wake Forest**

A lot of our partner agencies are no longer using TEFAP as an emergency supplemental program They're depending on it, and they've come to rely on it.

**- Mitch, Engagement & Compliance Coordinator, Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina**

TEFAP to me is [like] shopping at Ross. So, you never know what you're going to get until you go. And so sometimes we come and there's three or four pallets worth of stuff and sometimes we come and there's six or eight pallets of stuff and what's on the pallets is sometimes useful and sometimes not. It's great to have 40 cases of shelled walnuts, but you really can't subsist on shelled walnuts. So, it's a little bit of a grab bag. Of course, we're grateful because it's food that gets into the system and helps to feed people, [but] it would be nice if it would be a little bit more predictable so that we would know what to expect when we come to load up the truck.

**- Michael, community leader of Tri-Area Ministries in Wake Forest**



## AGRICULTURE PARTNER PRIORITIES

My dealings the last 8-10 years with the Food Bank was done from seeing a need for a steady supply of local vegetables and an opportunity to be able to sell all product produced which includes No. 2 product, which has nothing wrong with it. By doing this I can sell crop at a way lower cost per pound and the Food Bank gets the cookie cutter product as well as the No. 2 product.

[To support the increased need, we] need support of all USDA entities. There should be full cooperation from all agencies so that a producer can sell or donate their product to a food bank and the revenue is not counted against them for insurance purposes, which could or would change their indemnity in some cases. There is enough wasted produce and goods that producers can't sell so that if these barriers were done away with most of the needs of the Food Banks would be resolved.

[I'd] like to see the subsidy for crops go away. These payments are for certain commodities and most of the time only benefit larger operations that use the payments to drive up land rent and limit access to land for small and medium-sized producers. [I'd] like to see more incentives for regenerative farming/cover crops and some sort of safety net for specialty crops. Also, some type of program to entice specialty growers to work with food banks so they can get fresh local produce to help with hunger relief.

**- Bill, grower supporting the Food Bank, Herring Farms in Duplin County**







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