

HOUSE AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE TO TAKE UP FOOD STAMPS

House committee plan does not include sufficient funds to fix food stamps. The House Agriculture Committee may vote on reauthorization of the Food Stamp Program as early as July 26, 2001. Committee Chairman Larry Combest (R-TX) drafted a proposal for the Farm Bill that includes reauthorization of food stamps. Under this plan, the Food Stamp Program would receive \$2 billion in increased funds over the next ten years. In contrast, other programs contained in the Farm Bill would receive over \$70 billion over the same time period. **The proposed funding levels are insufficient to implement changes, such as those outlined below, to improve food stamp eligibility, access, and benefits.**

Restoration of food stamp benefits to immigrants would be an important step to fight hunger in California.

- California's food stamp caseload has dropped 45 percent since 1995. One reason is that most legal immigrants are no longer eligible for federal food stamps.
- California has a state-only food stamp program for immigrants, at an annual cost of over \$60 million. Many other immigrant families, including families with citizen children, no longer receive food stamps due to confusion over eligibility.
- Despite the booming economy of the late 1990s, many California families do not have enough to eat. According to the Urban Institute, over half (53 percent) of California's low income children live in families that worry about or have difficulty affording food.

The Food Stamp Program should be more user-friendly and accessible for working families.

- While welfare reform promotes work, the Food Stamp Program has many barriers to participation for working families. A USDA sponsored study shows that just 54 percent of eligible Californians receive food stamps.
- Studies show that the majority of families who leave welfare in California do not receive food stamps, though they are working at low wages. For these families, food stamps could serve as a nutritional supplement as well as a work support as they transition off welfare.

Benefit levels are not adequate to meet the needs of low income Californians.

- Housing and other costs in California are out of reach for low income families. For instance, the Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment in California is currently \$868. However, the food stamp "shelter cap" restricts benefits to low income families who are forced to pay high rents.
- Increasing the minimum benefit level would encourage participation among those who are discouraged by the bureaucratic hassles associated with food stamps.

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For more information on the Food Stamp Program and reauthorization, see also www.cfpa.net and www.cbpp.org.