

## Pending cuts to food stamp program could mean additional hardship for those in need

Written by Harry Colbert, Jr.  
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For those with little or no income, government food assistance is the only way in which some are able eat.

But come Nov. 1 that assistance may be greatly reduced. This past May the House Committee on Agricultural passed the Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management Act (H.R. 1947), also known as the Farm Bill. The bill cuts Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits – formerly know as the food stamp program – by \$20.5 billion over the next 10 years.

Fourth District Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN) said these cuts will result in virtually ending access to vital food assistance for nearly two million vulnerable children, families, seniors and persons with disabilities. McCollum said the "massive cut targeting hungry Americans" – in addition to a previously scheduled reduction in benefits – is scheduled to start on Nov. 1.

McCollum said though intended to assist farmers, the bill's cuts to SNAP will adversely affect Minnesota's poor, including those in the farming community. Her remarks came during a listening session at the Minnesota Capitol this past week.

"Minnesota is an agricultural state. Farming is a vital element of our economy – both the production and processing of agricultural commodities," said McCollum. "But we are also a state with half a million children, working families, seniors and people with disabilities who are living in poverty and in need of nutrition assistance to prevent hunger."

McCollum said she is perplexed by the stance many of her Republican cohorts in Congress have taken in calling for continued cuts to the federal budget – cuts that she said are affecting the poor, and middle class.

"The (Rep. Paul) Ryan Republican budget that passed earlier this year cuts non-defense spending by \$5 trillion over the next decade. Of those cuts, 60 percent come from programs and services that serve low income and moderate income Americans," said McCollum. "Meanwhile, tax breaks for the wealthiest Americans are locked in place."

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The Minnesota Congresswoman's harshest critique was directed at Tea Party Republican, Rep. Stephen Fincher of Tennessee.

"One of my Tea Party Republican colleagues who voted to cut SNAP used the Bible to make his point in committee saying, 'The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.' Obviously, my colleague doesn't seem to understand the overwhelming majority of people on SNAP are children, seniors, and working families, said McCollum. "The irony and hypocrisy of my colleague's statement is that he personally has received as much as \$3.5 million in direct agriculture payments from the federal government, yet he wants to take food away from poor children and families."

All together, Fincher, along with his father and brother, have received \$8.9 million in crop subsidies in the past 10 years, mostly from the cotton program, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture data aggregated by the Washington-based think tank, The Environmental Working Group.

One of those fearing any cuts to SNAP is Evelyn Sheafoe.

Sheafoe, a diabetic, was forced into early retirement this past December when she suffered a permanent injury. Due to seven month a gap in Social Security Insurance coverage, Sheafoe, who lives in a senior living apartment, said she pays \$646.84 every month for her medicine.

"Without the help of SNAP I wouldn't be able to buy fresh foods such as fruits and vegetables that are needed to keep my diabetes in check," said Sheafoe. "If they lower the availability of SNAP I don't know what I'm going to do. I'm as low as I can go."

Sheafoe broke into tears and apologized for weeping.

"There's nothing to apologize for; you are speaking for millions of Americans right now," said State Rep. Tina Liebling (DFL 26A), who participated in the listening session.

McCollum is calling on Minnesota citizens to reach out to various members of Congress to let them know they do not support cuts to SNAP.