



American Heart Association  
American Stroke Association

August 17, 2018

Dear Member of Congress,

On behalf of the American Heart Association, the American Stroke Association, and its more than 40 million volunteers and supporters, I am writing to share our priorities for the farm bill conference. Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is our nation's number one killer and by 2035, nearly half of the U.S. population will have some form of CVD. In 2016 alone, CVD cost \$555 billion in medical care and lost productivity and by 2035, it is expected to cost our nation \$1.1 trillion annually. The good news is that CVD is largely preventable, and we can reduce its prevalence and cost by adopting healthy habits such as eating a nutritious diet. No other piece of legislation influences what we eat more than the farm bill.

First, it is vitally important that the Supplement Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) remain strong, robust, and intact. Any changes to the program should preserve access and not lower program benefits. SNAP provides food assistance to more than 45 million Americans and the majority of them and contribute to t

success of the U.S. economy. The bipartisan Senate bill protects SNAP while at the same time, strengthening the integrity of the program, adding more accountability, and basing programmatic changes on evidence-based analysis.

Second, we are pleased that both the Senate and House bills provide robust investment into the Food Insecurity Nutrition

and allowing more implementation money to be spent on incentives. It is also important that we improve on the reporting and evaluation system to identify and

Finally, we are concerned about the lack of policy focused on improving diet quality in either bill. While their dietary profile is similar to those of low-income Americans overall, SNAP participants consume 39 percent fewer whole grains and 46 percent more red meat than non-SNAP beneficiaries and women participants consume 61 percent more sugary beverages. In addition, the quality of food purchases declines considerably at the end of the month when benefits are exhausted. While policies to increase incentives and fruit and vegetable consumption are important, more needs to be done to help improve the quality of American diets.

We support the inclusion of two policies from the House bill that represent small – but important – steps to address diet quality. These provisions include updating the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) every five years and collecting purchase data from retail stores. Regular TFP updates would align this program with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and ensure that it reflects current economic conditions. The current TFP levels are based on the 1997-2005 Dietary Reference Intakes, the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2001-2002 food price data (though updated by with the current Consumer Price Index), and the 2005 MyPyramid – an initiative that no longer exists. Data on SNAP beneficiaries retail purchases are limited and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) does not have access to that data. This information would be valuable in informing future policies aimed at improving diet quality and strengthening SNAP benefits.

The American Heart Association stands ready to work with you as the conference moves forward. If you have any questions or need further information, please contact Kristy Anderson, Senior Government Relations Advisor at 202-785-7927 or [kristy.anderson@heart.org](mailto:kristy.anderson@heart.org).

Sincerely,

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Sue Nelson  
Vice President, Federal Advocacy