



March 3, 2023

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chair
United States Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition, & Forestry

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
United States Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition, & Forestry

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman,

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the reauthorization of the Farm Bill. AACC is the primary advocacy organization for the nation's 1,038 community colleges and their more than 10 million students.

As you work to reauthorize and modernize the Farm Bill, we urge the Committee to support and invest in community colleges and community college students. For decades, universities have been tightly stitched into the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) research activity. In the process, however, community colleges have not been appropriately supported, and the nation's agricultural activity has suffered as a result. Even programs designated for non-Land Grant institutions have not reached community college campuses. The Farm Bill can and should better support community colleges in two ways—by providing direct assistance to colleges and expanding nutrition assistance for students and their families.

New Support for Community Colleges

Community colleges play an extensive role in supporting agricultural activity, and, with direct federal assistance, they can help the Department of Agriculture achieve agricultural development, growth, and sustainability goals. There are myriad ways that community colleges could more fully assist the agricultural sector. These activities include strengthening workforce training related to agribusiness, aquaculture, horticulture, precision agriculture, livestock, dairy, forest and natural resources management, viticulture and enology, and other areas. Furthermore, community colleges' entrepreneurial assistance and cultivation, as well as their economic development orientation, can be enormously helpful to the agricultural sector, especially in rural areas.

Community colleges support a new \$150 million authorization in capacity building grants for community college agriculture and related natural resource programs. This authorization would allow USDA to provide grant assistance to community colleges in agribusiness, agricultural sciences, and natural resources. Grants would assure a pipeline of trained U.S. agricultural workers, strengthen a reliable supply of healthy foods for consumers, and promote sustainable farming methods. Also, by providing support to many rural colleges, the grants would help invigorate those communities.

SNAP Assistance

The Farm Bill is also a critical opportunity to better support community college students through the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP). Estimates vary as to the exact extent of food insecurity on community college campuses. But without question, the condition is widespread and, by definition, serious. Campuses have expanded their provision of food assistance to students, but they alone are usually not able to adequately meet student and family needs – and the hunger experienced by college students quite frequently extends to their families. When community college students experience food insecurity, it presents barriers to enrollment, academic success, program completion, and entry into good jobs with family-sustaining wages. In light of this, federal assistance is essential in helping address food insecurity and enabling students to focus on academics and other aspects critical to student success. The assistance provided through the SNAP program exists alongside the Title IV student aid structure, which in concept is designed to meet all eligibility to exclude many college students, but which in reality often falls short. Congress has created exemptions to restrictive SNAP eligibility that currently allow some college students to qualify for benefits. While these exemptions somewhat broadened access to SNAP, they added significant complexity to a program that already contained a maze of eligibility rules and application processes.

During the COVID-19 public health emergency, Congress recognized heightened student need and created an important new route for student eligibility. Students with a *\$0 Expected Financial Contribution (EFC)* or who are *eligible for federal or state work-study* could qualify for SNAP without having to meet restrictive work requirements. This provided food assistance to as many as three million more students. This expanded eligibility will cease with the end of the formal declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Farm Bill reauthorization represents an important opportunity to make permanent expanded SNAP eligibility for college students in need. We urge the Committee to allow community college students to substitute work requirements with postsecondary enrollment to ensure that community college students are provided with SNAP access on the same terms as all other potential beneficiaries and that the unique circumstances of college students are reflected benefit access.

For more information, please contact AACC Senior Vice President of Government Relations, David Baime (dbaime@aacc.nche.edu), or Government Relations Manager, Kathryn Gimborys (kgimborys@aacc.nche.edu).

Sincerely,

Walter G. Bumphus, Ph.D.

President and CEO