

Community College Farm Bill Priorities, September 2023

Community colleges are vital institutions in their communities. They offer affordable higher education, provide workforce training that responds to local industry, and serve as community anchors and economic engines, including in rural and agricultural-producing communities.

Community colleges also serve a unique student population. The students—who make up nearly 4 in 10 of all U.S. undergraduates—are more likely to be low-income than their counterparts at four-year institutions. They are also more likely to be independent students, parenting students, and veterans. As part of the mission to provide affordable education and training opportunities, community colleges keep tuition rates low (fall, 2022 tuition and fees averaged \$3,860). However, students face enormous non-tuition costs that serve as barriers to success, and many community colleges face resource constraints that limit the growth of innovative, industry-demanded programs.

Community colleges have a strong interest in the 2023 Farm Bill and have identified opportunities to better support students and key programs.

New Support for Community Colleges

Community colleges seek enactment of the bipartisan, bicameral *Community College Agriculture Advancement Act* (H.R. 3425/S. 1740). Introduced by Reps. Trent Kelly (R-MS) and Salud Carbajal (D-CA) and Sens. John Hickenlooper (D-CO) and Deb Fischer (R-NE), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Roger Wicker (R-MS), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), and Todd Young (R-IN), the legislation authorizes \$20 million for new USDA capacity-building grants for community college agriculture, agrobusiness, and renewable resources programs.

Community colleges play an extensive role in supporting agricultural activity, and, with direct federal assistance, can help the Department of Agriculture achieve agricultural development, growth, and sustainability goals. 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. This legislation would support these important programs and affirm the role that community colleges play in agriculture development.

Streamlining SNAP Eligibility for Students

The Farm Bill reauthorization should expand and simplify Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) eligibility for college students in need. Far too many community college students experience food insecurity, with new data from the 2020 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:20) showing that more than 35 percent of community college students are not food secure. When community college students experience food insecurity, it presents barriers to enrollment, academic success, program completion, and entry into good jobs. While many community college students are currently eligible for SNAP by fulfilling a "student exemption" requirement, the rules governing their

eligibility are so complex that many students, families, and administrators are left with the impression that all students are ineligible for these important benefits.

To support their food access and adequate nutrition, community colleges are asking Congress to simplify and streamline SNAP eligibility for college students. This includes examining the overall SNAP work requirements to add postsecondary education to the list of activities that can fulfill the employment and training eligibility requirement. Congress could also reduce the complexity of student eligibility requirements to increase uptake, including by expanding simplified eligibility requirements for certain student populations.

Improving SNAP Employment & Training (E&T)

Finally, community colleges are valuable partners in the employment and training (E&T) components of SNAP, but there are opportunities to better connect SNAP participants with community college programs. Congress should increase state SNAP E&T grant (100%) amounts to states used to launch, scale, and support E&T programs at community colleges. These funds do not require reimbursement and are crucial to establishing and growing new programs.

Community colleges support creating a new income disregard for earnings that students receive as part of an approved paid internship, apprenticeship, or earn-and-learn model. Currently, SNAP participants enroll in these high-quality programs as a pathway to job-paying jobs, but many lose their SNAP eligibility and/or their program eligibility because their earnings increase. By excluding additional income earned through an E&T work-based learning program, students will have the support they need to complete their programs, enter the workforce, and achieve economic independence.