



United Way
of Pennsylvania

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Op-Ed: SNAP not only feeds the hungry, it nourishes the economy

By Alex Baloga and Kristen Rotz

September is National Family Meals Month, a nationwide event designed to highlight the benefits of family meals and challenge us all to pledge one more meal at home per week with our families from items purchased from the grocery store.

But, in Pennsylvania and across the country, there are still millions of families that struggle with hunger. According to Feeding America, more than 1.5 million people in Pennsylvania are food insecure, and of them, more than 452,000 children.

This shouldn't happen, but it does. The Keystone State is a global leader in agriculture and food production with more than 57,000 farms and \$7.4 billion in agricultural products sold.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, better known as SNAP, is the country's most effective anti-hunger program, helping one in eight Americans afford a basic diet. Not only does the program provide quality food for families and keep citizens out of poverty, it also benefits food retailers, their employees and families, and the economy as a whole.

The 2018 farm bill, currently being negotiated by Congress, could lead to many vulnerable SNAP recipients losing benefits or having them reduced, and we can't afford to have that happen.

SNAP stimulates the economy. Consider this: According to Moody's Analytics, even in a weak economy, each dollar in SNAP benefits generates \$1.70 in economic activity. SNAP enrollment is also counter-cyclical, expanding when the economy weakens and contracting when the economy recovers, which makes this program one of the country's most responsive.

SNAP benefits are distributed to households through an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card, which can be used to purchase food at any of the 10,400 retail locations in Pennsylvania. Twenty-seven percent of these retailers are in rural areas and 73 percent are in urban areas.

Pennsylvania food merchants and retailers depend on the income generated from these purchases. It helps them continue to provide the lowest prices possible, and employment for thousands of individuals.

In 2017, SNAP recipients in Pennsylvania collectively received \$2.67 billion in benefits. This amounts to just \$121 a month or \$1.32 per person, per meal.

Each billion cut in SNAP, eliminates 13,718 jobs in grocery and other food-related industries.

In addition, SNAP helps keep children fed and leads to academic success. A child who does not get enough to eat on a regular basis can experience delays in brain development and hamper the child's ability to learn, according to the organization Feeding America. The longer food insecurity continues, the greater the chance of cognitive delays.

We urge elected officials in Washington to do all they can to preserve SNAP benefits to ensure the longevity of such a critical program that meets basic needs of humankind and fuels economy growth and prosperity.

Alex Baloga is the President & CEO of the Pennsylvania Food Merchants Association and Kristen Rotz is the President of United Way of Pennsylvania.