



OP-ED SUBMISSION
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STARVING FOR TAX CUTS... LITERALLY

By Michael Bisch, Executive Director and Zane Hatfield, Agency Relations Coordinator

A safety net can't do its job if it is torn apart. If it is torn apart, the people it is designed to protect are left in peril. Currently, the Federal Government is proposing to dismantle the social safety net known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – formerly known as “Food Stamps” – potentially leaving thousands of Yolo County’s most vulnerable residents without assurance that they can afford their next meal.

Known in California as CalFresh, the program originated more than 55 years ago under the Kennedy Administration to help families and individuals most in need stretch their grocery dollars. Today, more than 20,000 struggling Yolo County households benefit from CalFresh each month. But, the latest proposed Federal budget cuts reduce SNAP support by \$130 billion over the next decade – a 20% funding reduction. As a result, these 20,000+ Yolo County households may face a partial, or even complete reduction in their ability to purchase the nutritious foods that they need to stay healthy and engaged in the community.

Another related Federal proposal could require some CalFresh participants to submit to mandatory drug tests in order to receive benefits. In the face of the current opioid epidemic, as well as the gray area created by the legalization of recreational cannabis in

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California and other states, while remaining Federally illegal, the potential loss of benefits enabling access to healthy food only serves to further jeopardize the future for individuals who may be using these substances.

Controversial time and frequency limits and other proposed requirements regarding employment status, volunteer hours and education and training programs also put some of the most challenged CalFresh recipients at risk of a loss of benefits. The possible reinstatement of a 1996 law that includes such stipulations appears to be particularly troublesome for Yolo County's thousands of seasonal farm workers, a cornerstone of our agricultural economy. They are at undue risk of losing benefits due to the nature of their work, as are many part-time employees and those who have lost jobs.

When recipients exhaust their CalFresh benefits, or run out of food before the end of the month, they turn to charitable organizations, such as Yolo Food Bank and our nearly 70 partner agencies, to fill the gap and meet their needs for sustenance. Food banks serve one in 10 emergency meals in the United States, with crucial federal programs, such as SNAP, covering the rest. However, under these proposals, Yolo Food Bank may be faced with an undue burden at the local level to provide nourishment for increasing numbers of children, senior citizens, developmentally disabled, homeless and other struggling neighbors in our communities. At the same time, the wealthiest Americans will enjoy a trillion dollars in tax cuts passed in recent months, while the Federal Government closes the deficit gap created by these cuts on the backs of our country's – and our county's – most at-risk residents. This simply is incongruent with the spirit exemplified by the words of Emma Lazarus, etched on to the Statue of Liberty:

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SNAP/CAL FRESH REDUCTIONS

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“Give me your tired, your poor,

Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,

The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.

Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,

I left my lamp beside the golden door!”

More than 20% of your Yolo County neighbors live in poverty. The loss of CalFresh would impact them...and you. It's a time to come together to invest in, rather than divest from, our community. Together with our nearly 70 partner agencies, Yolo Food Bank serves the needs of more than 52,000 people in 19,000 households every month in pursuit of its mission to end hunger and malnutrition in Yolo County. Funds, food and time are needed to sustain these efforts. To support your neighbors by donating, volunteering or learning more, please visit www.yolofoodbank.org.

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