



November 13, 2007

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
United States Senate
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: FARM BILL AMENDMENTS

Dear Senator Feinstein,

We are writing to ask you to vote for increased food stamp funding, subsidy reform and nutrition standards for competitive foods sold in schools. The Farm Bill debate continues to evolve. As your critical vote on the bill and related amendments draws near, California Food Policy Advocates would like to provide updated information on provisions to improve nutrition in the farm bill.

We are well aware that the Farm Bill is a large and complex piece of public policy. We believe the most important action you can take in this year's Farm Bill is to improve the Food Stamp Program. In California, over 2.5 million adults struggle to put food on the table. CFPA is about to release a new report, *Shared Tables, Shared Struggles*, which finds that 7.6 million other people (including children and the elderly) live in households with these struggling adults. As you know, the cost of living is higher in California than in much of the country and working families in California find it increasingly difficult to make ends meet with the rising costs of fuel, food, utilities, housing, and other basic necessities. We believe that the Food Stamp Program – with your support – can do a better job of helping millions across California meet their basic needs.

When the House passed its version of the Farm Bill, we were pleased to see increased investments in nutrition, particularly in food stamps. Then, as your colleagues on the Senate Agriculture Committee took up the Farm Bill, we were again pleased to see increased investments in nutrition. Though the Senate included a number of unique nutrition provisions of benefit to California growers, the overall funding support for the Food Stamp and Emergency Food Programs was much higher in the House bill. While we are truly grateful for the unique Senate contributions to the debate (which we are happy to highlight for your staff in greater detail), we urge you to seek additional improvements in food stamps and emergency food when the Senate takes up the bill on the floor.

Our understanding is that an additional \$1 billion has been identified for improvements to the Food Stamp Program. Specifically, these resources would be targeted to update the outdated



asset limits and to raise the minimum benefit above previously-proposed levels. As the changes are of great importance to California, we urge you to ensure these increased investments prevail on the Senate floor and in conference committee.

If you and your colleagues are looking for ways to fund additional investments in nutrition, consider substantial subsidy reform. We recently sent you a joint letter with our colleagues in the California Food and Justice Coalition urging you to support the Lugar-Lautenberg and the Dorgan-Grassley amendments to overhaul commodity payments. We believe that this farm bill must transform commodity programs to support consumer and environmental health, as well as fiscal stewardship. And in doing so, this action would not only free up resources for additional efforts to improve nutrition for low-income Californians, but also strengthen the viability of family farmers.

The bill on the Senate floor may also present a unique opportunity for school nutrition as well. Senators Harkin and Murkowski are planning an amendment to establish nutrition standards for foods sold outside the school meals program. Though California already adopted similar standards, we see this amendment as an historic opportunity to bring similar benefits nationwide. As you may be aware, California has slightly different standards than those proposed by Harkin-Murkowski. However, the proposed standards proposed are a significant step forward for the country. We know that such standards come at cost – particularly as they preempt state legislative standards. But after careful analysis and negotiation, the proposed standards now allow local school districts to retain flexibility to enhance the nutrition requirements for competitive foods sales on their local campuses. With much of the country lagging far behind the few state leaders (California and New Jersey) on statewide competitive foods policy, the Harkin-Murkowski amendment can push the rest of the nation forward to improve snack and beverages sold in schools.

A strong coalition of stakeholders from a wide range of voices has coalesced around support for increased investments in nutrition and food stamps, substantial subsidy reform, and improvements to school vending machines. We respectfully urge you to support increased food stamp investments, comprehensive subsidy reform, and the Harkin-Murkowski amendment to improve school nutrition. Please contact me with any questions at 415.777.4422x102.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken Hecht". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Kenneth Hecht
Executive Director