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## **Congresswoman Jean Schmidt wields influential vote on Lucas-Peterson Farm Bill** Southwest Ohio representative should protect food assistance

U.S. Congresswoman Jean Schmidt can offer powerful protection to her constituents in Southwest Ohio: she can keep them from going hungry. She can vote ‘no’ on a particularly mean version of the farm bill emerging in Washington. Her vote alone could help a lot of people.

Currently, 1.8 million low-income Ohioans – largely families with children, elderly people and those with disabilities, rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, or food stamps). The program has been particularly important for many in southern Ohio in the wake of summer storms and extensive power outages.

The deep recession and weak economy have been very hard on Ohio families. Many had not relied on help before, but this time struggling families couldn’t hold out and SNAP is the first place people turn.

Unfortunately, Washington is ready to cut SNAP – deeply.

In budget deliberations last fall, committee chairs in the House and the Senate agreed on a bill that made cuts in farm programs as well as relatively small cuts in SNAP. But that plan was not enacted and now House Agriculture Committee Chairman Frank Lucas (R-OK) and Ranking Member Colin Peterson (D-MN) propose to go much further. The committee is voting this week on the Lucas-Peterson Farm Bill, which would cut \$35 billion from agriculture-related programs over 10 years, with more than 45 percent coming from SNAP. In contrast, the Senate-passed farm bill, which had strong bipartisan support, cut \$23 billion with only one quarter of the cuts coming from SNAP. The entire difference between the two farm bill packages comes from the SNAP cuts.

These food assistance cuts are being made in the name of deficit reduction. Despite the political rhetoric, however, SNAP is not contributing to our nation’s long-term fiscal problems. Spending has increased in recent years due to the worst recession since the Great Depression and a weak recovery, but the Congressional Budget Office projects that SNAP costs will drop as the economy comes back. By 2019, they’ll go back to 1995 levels; after that, CBO projects that SNAP will grow no faster than the economy.

Every major deficit reduction package that has passed Congress over the last 35 years has protected low-income people. Policymakers who crafted previous bipartisan deficit reduction proposals have followed a principle of not increasing poverty or hardship to reduce the deficit. This farm bill violates that principle while the economy is still weak. Unemployment remains at 8.2 percent. The most recent U.S. Census statistics show that the poverty rate is at its second highest point in 45

years. Millions of families in America are still struggling in this economy. The Lucas-Peterson Farm Bill proposal ignores that reality and would put low-income families in a more precarious position.

Cutting SNAP doesn't make sense because the \$16.5 billion reduction in this bill would primarily hit low-wage, low-income people. Nearly 75 percent of SNAP participants are in families with children and the rest are in households with seniors or people with disabilities. Nearly half of all SNAP households with children have earned income. These working families are struggling to put food on the table and their lives will be that much harder if their SNAP benefits are reduced.

Here in Ohio, in the wake of widespread and prolonged power outages, expanded SNAP benefits issued in the hardest-hit counties helped replenish food that had to be thrown out. That's what a safety net program should do – be there in times of crisis.

SNAP benefits are spent in local communities at businesses ranging from Wal-Mart to farmers' markets. So cutting SNAP doesn't just hurt the poor, it hurts business too, especially when the economy is weak. SNAP benefits are one of the fastest, most effective forms of economic stimulus because they get money into the economy quickly. Moody's Analytics estimates that in a weak economy, every \$1 increase in SNAP benefits generates \$1.72 in economic activity. Also, the Congressional Budget Office rated an increase in SNAP benefits as one of the two most cost-effective of all spending and tax options for boosting growth and jobs in a weak economy. The average of \$1.50 per person per meal SNAP provides is minimal but crucial help.

If she opposes amendments that cut or weaken SNAP, and votes against the Lucas-Peterson bill, Congresswoman Schmidt will be protecting her constituents from hunger, and will be remembered far longer and in a more positive light than if she supports brutal cuts to food assistance. We urge her to do the right thing.

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