



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

June 6, 2013

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Cochran:

As you continue your deliberations for a new Farm Bill, I am writing to urge you and your colleagues to protect and strengthen the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Senators Coburn and Harkin have introduced an amendment that would be an important step in the right direction. Amendment #1152 directs the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to carry out two demonstration projects eliminating the purchase of unhealthy beverages or foods with SNAP dollars, without reducing eligibility or benefits under the program. Any such demonstration project would be evaluated for cost and efficacy.

Health care costs to treat chronically ill Americans are projected to reach \$6 trillion by 2050. Allowing our largest nutrition assistance program to subsidize an estimated \$2 billion per year in sugary drink purchases at grocery stores when these products are a leading contributor to obesity is counterproductive. Every day in New York City, we see the impacts of diet-related disease and obesity on our residents, burdens that are disproportionately impacting the poor. SNAP can play a critical role in better addressing these challenges. In 2010, New York City, in partnership with New York State, requested a waiver from USDA to test the impact of eliminating the purchase of sugary drinks with SNAP benefits with no change in the actual amount of SNAP monies allocated. Our proposal would have helped curtail the suffering caused by these conditions at little or no cost to tax payers, but the USDA denied our request.

Amendment #1152 would make it possible for carefully planned and science-based demonstration projects to be authorized by USDA. A recent study by New York City's Center for Economic Opportunity found that SNAP plays a key role in keeping people at the economic margins out of poverty. The Senate should analyze how to strengthen this program over the long term while also promoting healthful nutritional policy.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Michael R. Bloomberg'.

Michael R. Bloomberg
Mayor