



# POLICY BRIEF

## NYC ON THE EDGE OF A HUNGER CLIFF

The national anti-hunger safety net is under the greatest threat seen in Food Bank For New York City's 30-year history. Decisions being made in Washington right now will determine whether cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program) – our nation's first line of defense against hunger – will create new hardship for low-income New Yorkers and plunge New York City off a looming Hunger Cliff.

### New York City's Meal Gap - 235M Meals

Nearly 1.9 million New York City residents (almost one in five) rely on SNAP to keep food on the table, with an average monthly household benefit of \$280 – or approximately \$3.4 billion annually.

Nearly one in three New York City residents struggles to afford food, and approximately 1.4 million New Yorkers rely on emergency food, despite SNAP and other nutrition assistance programs – evidence that a **meal gap** remains.

#### Hunger in NYC

- Nearly 1 in 3 New Yorkers (2.6 million) struggle to afford food.
- Almost 1.9 million New Yorkers rely on SNAP (food stamps).
- About 1.4 million New Yorkers rely on emergency food for basic nutrition.

The meal gap represents the translation of a food budget shortfall *into a number of meals*. Analysis by Feeding America finds **an annual meal gap in New York City of 235 million meals**. Despite the collective efforts of our city's network of emergency food providers to fill the gap, a shortfall of approximately 100 million meals remains each year. Unfortunately, instead of identifying ways to close this gap, **decisions in Washington threaten to make the meal gap even wider**.

### The Hunger Cliff - 208M or More Meals Could Be Lost

#### November 1, 2013: 76 million meals lost

On November 1, sweeping cuts to SNAP benefits took effect, resulting in the estimated **loss of 76 million meals** for New York City residents. A household of three lost, on average, \$29 per month in SNAP benefits – or nearly \$19 million per month in New York City alone.

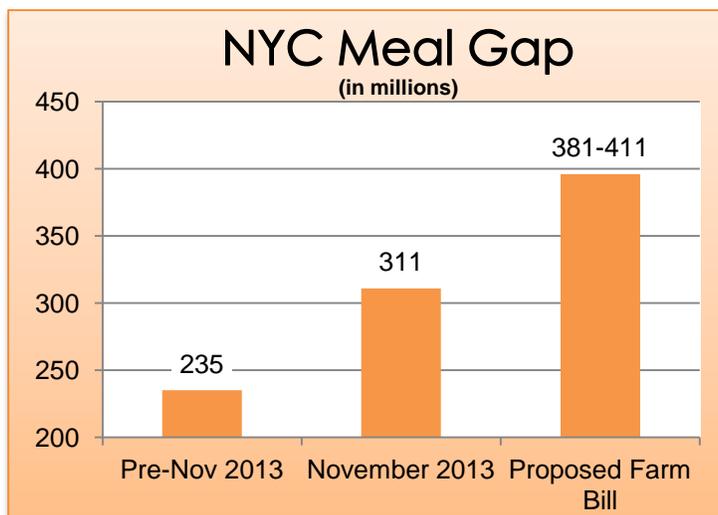
These cuts are the result of a deal struck in December 2010 in order to pay for a \$0.06 per meal increase in federal school lunch reimbursements as part of the "Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act." While the White House promised to work with Congress to restore the funds before the cuts could take effect, the promise has yet to be fulfilled.

#### The Farm Bill: 132 million or more additional meals lost

The Farm Bill, negotiated by Congress every five years, sets policy and funding for critical components of the safety net, including SNAP and emergency food (through the federal Emergency Food Assistance Program, or TEFAP). Reauthorization negotiations provide an opportunity to strengthen anti-hunger programs; instead, leaders in both the Senate and the House of Representatives are promoting bills that would cut SNAP and worsen hunger in New York City.

The Senate's bill included a \$4.1 billion cut to SNAP; the House of Representatives narrowly passed \$40 billion in cuts in a separate, SNAP-only bill. In trying to reconcile those bills, the bipartisan, bicameral Farm Bill Conference Committee is reportedly considering **\$9 billion in cuts to SNAP**. These cuts will result in the loss of \$90-130 per month for 190,000 New York City households. In its first

year alone, these cuts translate to 70-100 million fewer meals in New York City, **increasing New York City's meal gap to as much as 411 million meals.** This may well be a conservative estimate, as final bill language has not been released.



#### Who loses in these deals?

More than half of SNAP recipients in New York State are in households with **children**. More than one third are **elderly** or **disabled**. All saw benefit reductions in November.

**The Farm Bill proposals will disproportionately harm New York City.** New York City alone represents nearly one quarter of the households who will have their SNAP benefits cut in the proposed Farm Bill, which targets SNAP recipients in federally subsidized housing – including NYCHA – who receive assistance from the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program.

More than forty percent of SNAP recipients in New York City were already relying on emergency food *before a single benefit dollar was cut*. For many, SNAP benefits don't last past the third week of the month. Emergency food providers have been struggling to meet unprecedented need: 63 percent of emergency food programs reported food shortages in the year before SNAP cuts took effect. Across the city, **85 percent of food pantries and soup kitchens saw more people on their lines in November 2013 than in the immediate aftermath of Super Storm Sandy.**

The economic impact of SNAP cuts goes beyond those who stand to lose food assistance. Since November, New York City's food retailers have been experiencing a loss of nearly \$19 million per month in SNAP redemptions – putting the jobs supported by that revenue at risk.

## Pulling NYC Back from the Edge of the Hunger Cliff

### Restore Funding to Roll Back November's SNAP Cuts

On November 1, for the first time in the history of the program, families relying on SNAP across the country saw their benefits cut. Congress should restore funds in the FY 2014 budget as an important first step to preventing the added hardship of lost meals in a still struggling economy. The "Extend Not Cut SNAP Benefits Act" (H.R. 3353 and S. 1635) would do just that.

### Protect and Strengthen Anti-Hunger Resources in the Farm Bill

Our nation's anti-hunger resources – primarily those that **bolster SNAP** and **fortify our emergency food system** – are more vital than ever. Avoiding additional cuts in the Farm Bill process is imperative to prevent growth in food insecurity. In addition, the emergency food system must be adequately resourced to meet existing need. Mandatory funding for the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) does not reflect the growth in need since the start of the recession; and discretionary commodity purchases are triggered only by commodities markets, not need – which has resulted in food losses at times of unprecedented demand.



Estimates as of Jan. 23, 2014; subject to change with SNAP participation and new legislative provisions.

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