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The Farm Bill: An Opportunity to Address Latino Childhood Hunger through Public-Private Partnerships

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Abstract

16.2 million children in America struggle with hunger¹, and Latino children comprise about 40 percent of those who struggle.² These children lack the means to regularly obtain adequate, nutritious food. Much of this hunger is a result of “food hardship,” which means that their household’s access to adequate food is limited by lack of money and other resources, including access to a supermarket. The Farm Bill and its *Farmers Market Promotion Program* provision have the potential to alleviate “food hardship” rates and consequently Latino childhood hunger if reauthorized, implemented and utilized fully. Latino children are the future of the U.S. as they are the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population—currently representing nearly 25 percent of all children under the age of five.³ Since Latino children experience hunger disproportionately, so do they experience its devastating impacts on their health, cognitive development, and social and emotional well-being. Latino childhood hunger requires immediate and effective policy attention and action. For this reason, this brief makes a case to include and fund the *Farmers Market Promotion Program* in the next version of the Farm Bill.

Overview

This policy brief reviews how the Farm Bill’s *Farmers Market Promotion Program*

provision encourages and facilitates the public-private partnerships necessary to address Latino childhood hunger in Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC) districts. CHC districts are congressional districts represented by a Member of Congress who is of Hispanic descent, and chooses to join the CHC. The newly-elected 113th Congress has more Latino representation than ever before and, therefore, an unprecedented number of CHC districts. In addition, Latinos recently captured the nation’s attention as a powerful constituency group exemplified by its ability to deliver high voter turnout, and many would argue determine the results of, the 2012 election. For the aforementioned reasons and political context, this policy brief focuses on addressing Latino childhood hunger in CHC districts.

This brief provides analysis of Latino childhood hunger in the U.S. and gives policy recommendations describing how we can move toward addressing the issue primarily through the Farm Bill’s *Farmers Market Promotion Program*. The Farm Bill is legislation enacted by Congress to set the direction for America’s farm and food policy. The Farm Bill’s *Farmers Market Promotion Program* extends acceptance of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), previously known as Food Stamps, to farmers markets. The brief specifically encourages members of the CHC to leverage their increased representation in

Congress to advocate for the inclusion of the *Farmers Market Promotion Program* in the 2013 reauthorization of the Farm Bill. Farmers markets are ideal mechanisms to address the issue of Latino childhood hunger because they can provide Latino families and children with access to highly nutritious, fresh and healthy foods while supporting the local farming economies that employed over half a million Latinos in 2012.⁴

Background

Analysis of Gallup data by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC)⁵ found that “food hardship” rates for families with children topped the national average of 23 percent from 2008 through 2010 in all but one of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC) districts for which data was available. With continuing talks of budget cuts to safety-net programs at the local, state and federal government levels, including but not limited to Medicaid, Medicare, Social Security Income (SSI), Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and SNAP, interest and need exist for public-private partnerships⁶ to address the serious challenges facing the U.S. today, like Latino childhood hunger.

In its broadest context, a “public-private partnership is a contractual arrangement”⁷ between a public or governmental agency and a private entity that facili-

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tates greater participation by the private entity in the delivery of a public good or service. The 2008 Farm Bill provided opportunities for public-private partnerships through the *Farmers Market Promotion Program*⁸, which extends acceptance of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), previously known as Food Stamps, to farmers markets. Over the course of the Farm Bill's 80-year existence, it has grown to cover a range of different farm and food policy issue areas from crop insurance to exports. Though the Farm Bill covers diverse programs, the most recent Farm Bill passed in 2008 and now extended through September 2013 by Congress spends around 75 percent of its total budget on U.S. food assistance programs like SNAP.⁹ However, the version of the 2008 Farm Bill that was extended by Congress until to September 2013 does not include mandatory funding for the *Farmers Market Promotion Program*. This brief makes a case to include and fund the *Farmers Market Promotion Program* in the next version of the Farm Bill.

Additionally, the Obama Administration has made a public commitment to ending childhood hunger by 2015.¹⁰ The Administration's strategies to address childhood hunger¹¹ make it clear that collaborative partnerships across the public and private sectors are essential to developing an effective and long-lasting solution. The public sector has tried to address the issue independently and it clearly has not worked because childhood hunger remains. In addition, the country's financial crisis has brought about renewed interest in public-private partnerships. Facing fiscal constraints on public resources, the public sector is increasingly turning to the private sector as an additional resource to help solve the challenges facing the U.S. today.

Hunger and food hardship among Latino children in the U.S.

Latino children represent about 40 percent of the children who struggle with hunger in America.¹² Seemingly, this is because rates of hunger due to "food hardship" for children are substantially higher than the national average among households with incomes near or below the federal poverty line.¹³ It was reported in September 2011 that "more Latino children are living in poverty than children of any other racial or ethnic group."¹⁴

In addition, Latino children disproportionately experience and/or are at-risk of experiencing poor nutrition, obesity, and Type 2 diabetes, which is a result of the disproportionate amount of Latino children experiencing hunger and Latino families without access to healthy food options. This reality is essential to consider, because addressing the issue of Latino childhood hunger is not solely about access to food but having access to healthy, nutritious food.

Impact of hunger on children, communities, and our economy

According to a study conducted in Massachusetts with 408 preschool- and school-aged children, hunger was associated with chronic illness, anxiety/depression, and higher levels of internalizing behavior problems. Notably, 56 percent of the school-age children and 75 percent of the preschool-age children experiencing severe hunger in this study were Latino. The study highlights the significant negative relationship between hunger and physical and mental health outcomes for children.¹⁵

Additional studies support this conclusion, demonstrating the negative impacts of hunger on a child's psychosocial functioning and how it compromises the

child's behavioral health, increasing the child's behavioral problems.^{16 17 18} Findings regarding the negative impact of hunger on children are not new. There are studies dating back decades that document the ill effects of hunger and poor nutrition on a child's cognitive ability, physical health, and mental health.¹⁹

The impacts of hunger on children are devastating. The child experiences compromised physical, mental, and behavioral health, and these adverse health effects have been known to manifest themselves in a child's short attention span, lack of ability to concentrate,²⁰ and behavior problems²¹ in the classroom. Each and all of these manifestations can negatively impact a child's school performance, and according to many studies, the academic performance of children in early grades significantly predicts their education and wage-earning trajectories.²²

The effects of hunger on children should be reason enough to find a way to eradicate childhood hunger. Obviously, the children suffer, but repercussions are also felt across communities, our economy, and society at-large in light of stifled educations and wage-earning (consequently tax-paying) abilities. Stifling the education and economic trajectories of the fastest growing subpopulation in the country, Latino children, as a result of hunger calls for immediate address; our economy, society, and communities cannot afford to forgo the opportunity to prepare the next generation of our nation to succeed. When one in three Americans will be Latino by 2060, it is vital we invest wisely in America's future and deplete any deterrents that restrain the educational and economic trajectories of its people.

Previous leaders of this country had the forethought to address hunger, and they

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created and implemented public policy and programs like WIC (Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children) and Food Stamps, now known as SNAP. However, these policies and programs have not worked to fully address the issue over the years of their existence, since hunger persists today. For this reason, we can conclude that public programs cannot solve the issue of childhood hunger on their own, and we must strive to facilitate public-private partnerships, as proposed in this brief, to address the issue of Latino childhood hunger.

Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC) districts

In 2011, CHC districts' food hardship rates among families with children ranged from 23 percent, the only CHC district at the national average, to 45 percent, the fourth highest rate in the nation.²³ These numbers place CHC Members in a unique position to draw federal attention to the issue of Latino childhood hunger and deploy federal resources to their districts and constituents. CHC members can serve as national advocates in Congress to give voice to the Latino communities they represent and the issues faced by these communities.

CHC districts would be an ideal place to focus efforts to address Latino childhood hunger because they are areas with high-density Latino populations, typically higher than national average food hardship rates, and Latino representation in Congress contributing to the largest CHC in the history of Congress. CHC districts would be ideal models for our nation, because our nation's demographics are shifting as indicated by these national numbers: Latinos under the age of 18 grew by 40 percent from 2000 to 2011.²⁴ Between 740,000 and 1 million Latino children have been and will continue turning 18 every

year from 2010 and 2028²⁵ and one in three Americans will be Latino by 2060 according to a Pew Hispanic Center poll.²⁶

Farmers Markets and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

According to the Farmers Market Coalition,

In August 2012, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced that the number of farmers markets across the U.S. had increased 10 percent in the past year. In fact, farmers markets have been on a steady increase over the past 18 years; in 1994, there were 1,744 registered farmers markets with the USDA and today there are 7,864 farmers markets registered.²⁷

The USDA has worked to make the markets accessible to people of all income levels by investing \$4 million to equip markets with wireless point-of-sale equipment to accept payments from SNAP.²⁸ This USDA investment was made to directly address the cost of equipment to accept SNAP which has been a major financial deterrent to farmers markets, thus preventing the acceptance of SNAP at farmers markets.

Currently, under 25 percent of USDA-registered farmers markets — 1,655 out of the 7,864 — accept SNAP.²⁹ Yet, spending at farmers markets under SNAP has already jumped by 400 percent since 2008.³⁰ Findings from a recent report on low-income families' efforts to plan, shop for and cook healthy meals can help explain this big jump in spending. The report found that families participating in SNAP said they typically purchase groceries weekly and they valued cooking and eating healthy.³¹ When individuals using SNAP are provided access to healthy food at a farmers

market, sales increase. Certainly SNAP spending can and will continue to increase at farmers markets as the message is spread further to more SNAP recipients.

These results make a strong case to support the public-private partnerships facilitated by the Farm Bill's *Farmers Market Promotion Program*. This program provides a significant financial benefit to local farmers who participate in farmers markets that accept SNAP while providing healthy food to SNAP recipients. Carmen Humphrey, head of the *Farmers Market Promotion Program*,³² notes "the important role of accepting SNAP benefits at farmers markets plays in both boosting the local economy and giving communities — especially lower income areas — greater access to healthy and fresh foods." The *Farmers Market Promotion Program* not only has the ability to address Latino childhood hunger by creating a new avenue for Latinos who receive SNAP to obtain food, but simultaneously addresses the quality and nutritional value of foods used to combat hunger among Latinos. This proves an important point to make when discussing how to address Latino childhood hunger, because Latino children disproportionately experience and/or are at-risk of experiencing poor nutrition, obesity, and Type 2 diabetes.³³

With 21 percent of Latinos participating in SNAP, farmers markets being able to accept SNAP³⁴ creates a new place for Latino families to obtain healthy food and a new group of consumers to attend and financially support farmers markets. Important to note, only 56 percent of SNAP-eligible Latinos receive SNAP benefits.³⁵ The impact of the Farm Bill's *Farmers Market Promotion Program* provision on Latino childhood hunger will be defined largely by outreach efforts tailored to Latino communities to make them aware of the re-

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sources available to them to combat hunger, including obtaining SNAP benefits for which they are eligible, having access to farmers markets, and knowing that farmers markets accept SNAP. Greater SNAP outreach and enrollment efforts must be made and tailored to the Latino community in order to more effectively leverage the *Farmers Market Promotion Program* to address Latino childhood hunger and create more consumers to financially support farmers markets.

The *Farmers Market Promotion Program* is administered by the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). The program offers competitive grants to help increase and improve domestic farmers' markets, and the maximum amount awarded for any one *Farmers Market Promotion Program* proposal cannot exceed \$100,000.³⁶ Specific grant uses include developing relevant financial and marketing information, business planning, improving market access and education for consumers, organizing markets and direct marketing networks, and supporting innovative approaches to market management and operations. Entities that are eligible for grants are groups of farmers, non-profit corporations, agricultural cooperatives, local governments, economic development corporations, regional farmers' market authorities, public benefit corporations, and Tribal Governments.³⁷ Therefore, funds from the *Farmers Market Promotion Program* grants can be used to create tailored outreach efforts to the Latino community and equip farmers markets with wireless point-of-sale equipment to accept payments from SNAP. The *Farmers Market Promotion Program* must spend a minimum of 10 percent of its total budget funding projects that aim to equip farmers markets with wireless point-of-sale equipment to accept SNAP.³⁸ In 2012, the *Farmers Market Promotion Program* was

funded at \$10 million,³⁹ which means that \$1 million was required to be spent on these projects nationally. With each wireless point-of-sale equipment—there are two versions of the equipment with one only accepting SNAP and the other accepting SNAP/Debit/Credit—there is an average initial start-up cost of just over \$1,000 in addition to monthly fees and ongoing maintenance.

Policy Context

As part of the fiscal cliff negotiations and deal in January 2013, the 2008 Farm Bill was extended by Congress through September 2013. The U.S. faced payroll tax cuts that were set to expire and increase for all Americans and federal budgets were frozen and expected to see major cuts unless Congress took action and moderated the effects of going “over the cliff.” Fortunately, Congress reached a temporary deal with the fiscal cliff. However, the deal they agreed upon extended the 2008 Farm Bill without including mandatory funding for the *Farmers Market Promotion Program*—even though the 2008 Farm Bill indicated mandatory funding for that specific program.⁴⁰

The temporary extension of the 2008 Farm Bill means that the 113th Congress will have to restart the process of reauthorizing a new, full five-year Farm Bill.⁴¹ Though it is disappointing that the *Farmers Market Promotion Program* was not guaranteed funding through September 2013, the fact that the 113th Congress will have to reauthorize a new Farm Bill presents an unprecedented opportunity for the 113th Congress to better serve Congressional Hispanic Caucus districts and address Latino childhood hunger than it has ever before. The 113th Congress has the largest amount of Latino representation in the history of Congress. This means

that for the first time in the Farm Bill's history, it can be impacted and shaped directly by Latinos to effectively serve Congressional Hispanic Caucus districts and more broadly, the U.S. Latino community at-large. It also provides an opportunity to specifically advocate for the incorporation and continued funding of the *Farmers Market Promotion Program*, that facilitates and supports the public-private partnerships to address Latino childhood hunger by extending the acceptance of SNAP at farmers markets, in the 2013 Farm Bill.

Policy Recommendations and Measuring Success

Given the current state of childhood hunger in our country, the Obama Administration's 2015 goal to end childhood hunger is not entirely realistic. However, this should not serve as discouragement from addressing the issue. We can make great strides to decrease childhood hunger, specifically Latino childhood hunger, between now and 2015 if CHC Members carry out the following policy recommendations and utilize the measures of success included in this brief. We will be able to better estimate when we might realistically reach our goal to end childhood hunger in this country, specifically among Latino children, as we document the decrease in childhood hunger between now and 2015 resulting from these policy recommendations.

Policy Recommendations

- The CHC of the 113th Congress must make Latino childhood hunger one of its top policy priorities and leverage its unprecedented increased membership to create new alliances and momentum to make this issue a policy priority in Congress at-large. For example, the CHC should partner with the multiple Congressional committees,

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Congressional caucuses, and members of Congress outside the CHC in order to identify ways to work together and advocate for the inclusion of the Farmer's Market Promotion Program in the 2013 Farm Bill.

- The CHC must advocate for the inclusion of guaranteed funding for the *Farmers Market Promotion Program* in the 2013 Farm Bill that will be voted on in September 2013. In addition, they must demand that the minimum funding set aside for projects funding wireless point-of-sale equipment to accept SNAP be increased from 10 percent to 20 percent of the *Farmers Market Promotion Program* budget for three years of the reauthorized Farm Bill in order to quickly equip as many farmers markets as possible with point-of-sale equipment. The funding for wireless point-of-sale equipment can then decrease after the three years, but should never go below 10 percent, as more farmers markets will possess the equipment needed to accept SNAP and will only require equipment maintenance over time.
- The 2013 Farm Bill must include guaranteed funding for the *Farmers Market Promotion Program*, with designated funds to be deployed specifically to CHC districts. The CHC districts will be used as testing grounds to track the increased use of SNAP at farmers markets and the decreased number of Latino children experiencing hunger as a result of food hardship rates. This process is critical because the successes we observe in CHC districts can be replicated across the country as our nation's demographics change and the Latino population continues to grow rapidly.

Measuring Success

- There should be an increase in the number of farmers markets that accept SNAP specifically in CHC districts and across the country.
- Farmers markets that accept SNAP should see an increase in sales and profit as a result of more customers using SNAP as payment.
- There should be a decrease in the number of CHC districts with 'food hardship' rates above the national average.
- There should be a decrease in the number of Latino children experiencing hunger across the country, and Latino children should not continue representing a disproportionate amount of the children experiencing hunger.

These policy efforts and measures of success must be combined with strategic, effective, and culturally- and linguistically-competent outreach to educate Latinos who currently receive and are eligible to receive SNAP about SNAP acceptance at farmers markets. Only a coordinated, cohesive effort will help decrease Latino childhood hunger in CHC districts and across the nation.

Endnotes

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