

Farm Bill Improved, but Still Will Do Harm; Renewed Commitment to Fighting Hunger in MO Needed

(JEFFERSON CITY, MO) The Missouri Association for Social Welfare (MASW) today expressed concern for the estimated 850,000 U.S. households who will have an average of \$90 less per month for food due to provisions of the Farm Bill signed into law by President Barack Obama today.

Jeanette Mott Oxford, executive director of MASW, said, “While hungry families in Missouri will see little change, the deep cuts in other states cause us sorrow.” The new law calls for a reduction of \$8.6 billion to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, commonly known as food stamps) over ten years by increasing the threshold at which persons receiving the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) may receive SNAP benefits. Missouri has not chosen to use this option, often abbreviated as “heat and eat.” Missouri SNAP recipients had already seen a reduction of about \$36 per month for a family of four when additional federal cuts went into effect on Nov. 1, 2013.

“We fear the cuts in the Farm Bill are more evidence that our state and national leaders are not taking the problem of hunger seriously enough,” Oxford added. “One out of four families with children in Missouri currently face food insecurity. Changing this will require the attention and commitment of all of us.”

MASW does celebrate that social justice advocates were able to get many punitive measures removed from the Farm Bill as it went through the legislative process. Among these were:

- Reduction of cuts from almost \$40 billion over ten years down to the \$8.6 billion cut to SNAP in the final version.
- A plan to eliminate aid to some able-bodied adults without dependents, simply because they cannot find work in a struggling economy.
- Restoration of a national lifetime ban on SNAP receipt for convicted drug felons, even after they serve their time and return to society. The ban was part of the 1996 federal welfare reform law, but most states have now sought waivers to end the ban in total or in part.

Oxford concluded, “We were glad to see rejection of the return of the national lifetime ban on SNAP receipt for ex-offenders who have paid their debt to society. Missouri has the opportunity to join the forty other states who have ended this senseless and cruel ban by passing House Bill 1589 or SB 680 this year. We strongly support this legislation.” HB 1589 will be heard by the House Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities on Tuesday, February 11.

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