



1000 Dean St., Suite 402
Brooklyn, NY 11238

Senator Pat Roberts, Chair
Senator Debbie Stabenow, Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Bobby Scott, Chair
Representative Andy Levin, Vice-Chair
Representative Virginia Foxx, Ranking Member
Committee on Education and Labor
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

August 7, 2019

Re: The Child Nutrition Reauthorization

Dear Senators Roberts and Stabenow and Representatives Scott, Levin, and Foxx;

I write regarding the *Child Nutrition Reauthorization* (CNR) on behalf of Slow Food USA, the national, not-for-profit organization dedicated to a food chain that is Good, Clean, and Fair for All, with Equity, Inclusion, and Justice at Every Link. We believe that all of us, and most particularly our children, have the right to ample, sustainably and humanely produced, culturally meaningful, delicious food that is good for human health and well-being, the planet, and those who work to put food on our tables.

Our nation's federal child nutrition programs - school food, WIC, and CACFP - have served our children for more than half a century. Child nutrition programs, by partnering with states and local jurisdictions, help provide nutrition to more than 35,000,000 children and infants each year including seven billion school meals annually. The previous CNR, the *Healthy and Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010* (HHFKA) was a landmark law that significantly expanded school meal access to low-income children and improved the nutrition of school meals. Presently, almost all schools meet HHFKA nutrition standards, school meal participation rates have increased, and food costs and plate waste have not.

The new CNR affords our nation the opportunity to restore and strengthen HHFKA nutrition standards, further expand children's access to nutritious meals, make federally sponsored meals more climate friendly, and increase child nutrition program equity and inclusion.

A CNR THAT IS GOOD, CLEAN, AND FAIR FOR ALL

These four, high-level, CNR priorities are rooted solidly in our beliefs. Simply, they support more equitable access to good, healthful, nutritious, climate friendly food by more of our nation's children.

- **PRIORITY ONE - END FOOD INSECURITY**
The most fundamental resource that every child needs to learn is an adequate and healthy diet. School meals, summer meals, and meals in childcare and afterschool settings are a significant part of children’s diets - for many, nearly half of their daily food requirements. The next CNR must increase access to federally funded, good nutrition-assured, meals for all children, regardless to their ability to pay. This is critical for the 6.5 to 7 million children who live in “food-insecure” households. Most importantly, Congress must begin moving towards free school meals for all our children by 2021.

- **PRIORITY TWO - ENSURE ACCESS TO HIGH QUALITY, NUTRITIOUS, CLIMATE FRIENDLY FOOD**
Many children live in households with limited access to fresh, healthy, nutritious food. Food production, especially industrial scale livestock production, is responsible for about a fifth of greenhouse-gas emissions, contributing greatly to climate change. Despite rollbacks, HHFKA nutrition standards have been implemented successfully by most School Food Authorities (SFAs - local school meal program operators). Climate friendly school food that emphasizes low-carbon, plant-based, and plant-forward options in the seven billion school meals served annually can deliver compelling health and environmental benefits - even small menu changes cumulatively can make a great difference. The next CNR must restore the important nutrition gains made by HHFKA and drive new initiatives to enhance the accessibility and climate friendliness of federally sponsored child nutrition.

- **PRIORITY THREE - SUPPORT EFFECTIVE NUTRITION EDUCATION**
Poor food options and choices contribute to health inequity in many communities, including vastly different rates of diet-related disease. Food production contributes massively to climate change. Effective good food education can contribute to the future health and well-being of communities and a healthier planet. The next CNR must ensure that child nutrition programs provide experiential education for children to learn good dietary habits that will support their health and well-being for life and the health of the planet for future generations.

- **PRIORITY FOUR - SUPPORT LOCAL FARM AND FOOD ECONOMIES**
Federally funded food programs - School Lunch, School Breakfast, Summer Food, WIC, and CACFP - bring billions of federal dollars to states and local jurisdictions. The next CNR must ensure that local and regional farm to school programs support and strengthen equitable and inclusive farm and food economies, contributing to vibrant rural communities, and that vulnerable children, and their families, are empowered to make informed food choices that are good for them, local and regional producers, and the planet.

DETAILS OF A GOOD, CLEAN, AND FAIR CNR

Below are our detailed priorities, including support for Congressional “marker” bills that are pointing the way to a Good, Clean, and Fair CNR.

PRIORITY ONE - END FOOD INSECURITY

The next CNR must reduce administrative burden and eliminate common barriers to

participation across child nutrition programs and,

- in school food programs,
 - the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs,
 - protect the Community Eligibility Program (CEP) in high-poverty schools and ensure that eligibility verification changes do not cause children to lose school meals and
 - ensure that the school cafeteria is a positive environment for all students, rejecting shaming of students who cannot pay and ending the accumulation of unpaid school meal debt and,
 - Out-of-School Time Programs,
 - expand summer meal programs and Summer EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) to reach more low-income children through alternative delivery models in rural and other areas with limited access to summer meal distribution locations; and most importantly, ensure that, by 2021, all school and out-of-school meals are free;
- in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP),
 - expand access by improving the area eligibility test,
 - support a third meal service (typically a snack or supper) option,
 - allow annual eligibility for proprietary centers,
 - increase reimbursements to support new healthier menu standards,
 - create direct certification and community eligibility options; and,
- in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC),
 - increase access by extending certification periods for infants and postpartum women to two years and enrollment for children until their sixth birthdays,
 - fully implement WIC EBT (WIC paper voucher replacement) nation-wide by 2020, and
 - maintain the scientific integrity of the WIC food package.

PRIORITY TWO - ENSURE ACCESS TO HIGH QUALITY, NUTRITIOUS, CLIMATE FRIENDLY FOOD

The next CNR must:

- most importantly, restore and maintain the nutrition standards of the HHFKA regarding whole grains and salt and ensure that national, evidence-based, nutrition standards set a minimum for healthfulness and do not restrict the ability of SFAs to exceed those standards;
- ensure that USDA Foods (formerly Commodities) continues to expand, in alignment with U.S. Dietary Guidelines, and supports climate friendly meals;
- incentivize and provide technical assistance to SFAs to produce more climate friendly meals by modifying existing and creating new menu options;
- encourage and incentivize Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to “slow down” and provide more time for lunch, increasing average 25 minute lunch “hours” to at least 30 minutes, with at least 20 minutes of actual “eating time” and scheduling lunch after recess, enabling students to enjoy more of, and waste less of, the healthful and delicious food they are offered; and
- encourage and facilitate SFAs to share best purchasing practices, leveraging purchasing power to drive food quality up and costs down, while supporting humane, climate friendly, and equitable production practices.

PRIORITY THREE - SUPPORT EFFECTIVE NUTRITION EDUCATION

The next CNR must:

- assess and share states' best nutrition education practices across programs, such as WIC, Team Nutrition, SNAP-Education, and EFNEP, supporting high-quality nutrition education that contributes to human health and well-being and the health of the planet;
- continue funding CACFP nutrition and wellness education and WIC nutrition education, including breastfeeding support, as a vital component to early health and development of children and continuing care of mothers;
- strengthen School Wellness Policies by linking school meals to learning readiness and academic achievement;
- provide grants and technical assistance to enable SFAs in low-income and underserved communities, including tribal communities, to support paid, district-wide, school garden coordinators to empower students to make food choices good for their health and well-being and the health of the planet through experiential academic programs on growing, preparing, and enjoying healthful, culturally meaningful, climate friendly food; and
- provide grants, loans, loan guarantees, and technical assistance to help SFAs and CACFPs improve food service infrastructure (kitchen, lunchroom, and points of service), recess and lunch scheduling and supervision, and kitchen staff skills to increase scratch cooking of healthful, nutritious, culturally meaningful, climate friendly meals.

PRIORITY FOUR - SUPPORT LOCAL FARM AND FOOD ECONOMIES

The next CNR must,

- in the Farm to School Program,
 - significantly increase funding for farm-to-school programming to meet high SFA demand,
 - facilitate increased participation by beginning, veteran, and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, including tribal farmers and ranchers, and
 - increase tribal schools' access to farm-fresh and traditional foods, especially from tribal producers and,
- in Institutional Food Purchasing,
 - provide SFAs and CACFPs with clear procurement rules simplifying and facilitating the definition and procurement of fresh and minimally processed locally grown, raised, gathered, and caught food.

CONGRESSIONAL MARKER BILLS

Slow Food USA supports these marker bills pointing the way to a Good, Clean, and Fair CNR.

- the *Farm-to-School Act of 2019* (S.TBA/H.R.TBA) that would increase annual funding and participation, advance equitable farmer participation, and increase access by tribal schools to traditional foods from tribal producers. - Senators Leahy (D-VT), Perdue (R-GA), Brown (D-OH), and Collins (R-ME) and Representatives Fudge (D-OH) and Fortenberry (R-NE),
- the *Kids Eat Local Act* (S.1817 and H.R.3220) that would simplify the institutional purchase of locally grown, raised, and caught food. – Senators Brown (D-OH) and Collins (R-ME) and Representatives Pingree (D-ME) and Harder (R-NE).
- the *No Shame at School Act of 2019* (S.1119/H.R.2311) that would prohibit schools

- from stigmatizing children who cannot pay for their meals. - Senator Smith (D-MN) and Representative Omar (D-MN),
- the ***Stop Child Summer Hunger Act of 2019*** (S.1941/H.R.3378) that would provide expanded summer nutrition assistance to eligible families. - Senator Murray (D-WA) and Representative Davis (D-CA),
 - the ***Summer Meals Act of 2019*** (S.1908/H.R.2818) that would expand eligibility and extend access to summer meals in underserved areas. - Senators Gillibrand (D-NY) and Murkowski (R-AK) and Representatives Young (R-AK) and Larsen (D-WA), and
 - the ***Closing the College Hunger Gap Act*** (S.2110/H.R.3718) that would require the collection of data on campus food and housing insecurity and connect eligible students with SNAP to combat food insecurity. - Senators Murphy (D-CT), Blumenthal (D-CT), and Klobuchar (D-MN) and Representatives Hayes (D-CT) and Fudge (D-OH).

Thank you for your timely attention to the next *Child Nutrition Reauthorization* that is so important to the health, well-being, and learning readiness of our children.

Sincerely;



Anna Mulé
Executive Director | Slow Food USA