MEDIA ADVISORY

MEDIA CONTACT: Jordan Rubin
EMAIL: jordanr@northwestharvest.org
TELEPHONE: 206.923.7426
TWITTER: @nwharvest
FACEBOOK: Facebook.com/NWHarvest
WEB: northwestharvest.org

NORTHWEST HARVEST CONDEMNS NEW FEDERAL RULE TARGETING PEOPLE ON SNAP

Official Statement from Washington’s Leading Hunger Relief Agency

(Seattle, WA – December 4, 2019) The United States Department of Agriculture published a rule today that will deepen hunger and poverty for adults that face the most significant barriers to employment. The rule takes food off the tables of more than 700,000 individuals by eliminating their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP benefits. It is set to take effect on April 1, 2020.

The Trump Administration calls the population of people impacted by the rule “Able bodied adults without dependents.” Here in Washington, nearly 89,000 Washingtonians fall into this category. Under current federal regulations, these individuals must regularly report that they are working 20 hours per week or else they are time-limited to just three months of SNAP benefits within a three-year period. Federal regulations currently permit states to waive this work requirement in areas of high unemployment. But this new rule published today significantly curbs states’ flexibility to provide this much-needed protection.

Northwest Harvest condemns this rule which defies logic or reason. You don’t get people to work and be self-sufficient if you take away the food that helps keep them healthy to find and maintain a job. This rule is rooted in animus, shaped by the worst beliefs about who is on SNAP. It willfully ignores the fact that more than two-thirds of the people who are on SNAP are not able to work because they are children, seniors, or people whose disabilities prevent them from working.

This rule is breathtaking in its potential to hurt people that face significant barriers to employment. For so many targeted by this rule, barriers such as lower education attainment, homelessness, and racial or age discrimination create challenges to finding a job. Many live in rural communities where they do hard work in our agriculture, tourism, fishing, and forestry industries but those jobs are often seasonal and not available year-round.

In other words, this rule undermines its own interests when underemployed, working individuals, through no fault of their own, cannot consistently report 20 hours of work each week, and as a result lose the SNAP benefits that help them afford the food they need to stay healthy until the work season begins again.

This rule also circumvents the will of Congress. The 2018 Farm Bill that passed with overwhelming bipartisan support rejected policy proposals like the rule issued today and voted to protect SNAP and invest in employment and training programs for people on SNAP. This follows decades of bipartisan understanding that SNAP works because it helps struggling people put food on their tables. Additionally, every dollar spent on SNAP benefits is returned in greater economic benefit to our communities because that is money used to buy food from local grocery stores, food retailers, and farmers markets.

Northwest Harvest reaffirms our commitment to help people become self-sufficient the right way – by providing nutritious food to anyone in need today while working to pass the legislation and budget investments that dismantle structural barriers that perpetuate poverty and inequality. We are confident in our belief that this is the best pathway in creating a more just and equitable food system for all in Washington.

# # #

About Northwest Harvest
Northwest Harvest is Washington’s leading hunger relief agency – supporting a statewide network of 375 food banks, meal programs, and high-need schools. Focused on improving equity in our food system, Northwest Harvest believes everyone in Washington should have consistent access to nutritious food that feeds the body, mind, and spirit. In addition to making sure those who suffer from hunger have increased access to healthy food, Northwest Harvest aims to shift public opinion, as well as impact institutional policies and societal practices that perpetuate hunger, poverty, and disparities in our state.