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HOUSE FARM BILL PUTS LOCAL FARMERS AND WORKING FAMILIES AT RISK

Northwest Harvest's Response to the 2018 House Farm Bill

(Seattle, WA – April 18, 2018) Everyone deserves to have nutritious food: it is essential for good health, and good health is essential to focus on learning, to find and keep work, and to contribute to our communities. The House Republican Farm Bill, introduced last week, undermines this vision. It establishes a framework that will empty the refrigerators and pantries of hardworking people, children, seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities.

The House Republican Farm Bill punishes working families and individuals in several ways. It proposes limiting access and eligibility to SNAP by imposing even harsher time limits on assistance for individuals who can't find employment for at least 20 hours/week. In Washington, where many of our rural communities rely on jobs in agriculture and tourism, work is plentiful but not consistently so year-round. It is ironic that this bill governing agriculture and land conservation should include a policy that is so fundamentally terrible for agriculture communities, taking away food from workers during lean seasons, leaving them unhealthy to return to work when the planting season arrives.

In Washington, 1 in 8 people count on SNAP ("food stamps") to buy groceries from small and large chain grocery stores, farmers markets, and farm stands. SNAP is a highly effective and efficient anti-poverty program: last year, SNAP kept 3.6 million Americans from slipping below the poverty line. It is an anti-poverty program that gives back to our economy: for every \$5 of SNAP benefits spent, we see \$9 of economic activity in the local economy. In fact, last year, SNAP pumped \$1.5 billion into our state's economy.

Yet the House Republican Farm Bill is the latest attack in a relentless assault on SNAP and other programs that provide basic living supports for our neighbors in need. Motivating these attacks is a cynical and fundamentally gross mischaracterization of low income people. The fact of the matter is that SNAP is doing exactly what it was designed to do—it puts food on the tables of people who would otherwise go hungry because they cannot work, face significant barriers to finding work, or who are working but whose wages still aren't enough to get by.

Additionally, the House Republican Farm Bill will take SNAP away from low-income, working families with children. These families are working to improve their earnings but could still use assistance as they build a pathway out of poverty. The loss of SNAP impacts the availability of food in their homes and for their children at school since they will no longer be automatically eligible for free school meals.

We are living in a time of great uncertainty. People who have been left behind in this economy are suffering. Our growers face serious economic threats as trade disputes with other countries escalate. What we need is a Farm Bill that has bipartisan solutions to support our country's farmers, diversifies economic opportunities in rural communities, and strengthens the programs that feed those who are struggling to get by. The House Republican Farm Bill is a missed opportunity to do this and may further set back negotiations with a Senate that is committed to passing a Farm Bill with 70 votes. What we need is a Farm Bill that repairs our food system, but this bill wreaks even more damage, and the loss is the price that all of us will have to pay.

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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 are being fed, 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.