

# Opinion: Make healthy food key to farm bill

By Ken Cook and Kari Hamerschlag

If you believe the government ought to play an aggressive role in the nation's economic life, admit it: You're a liberal. But you're probably not as liberal as the average Republican member of the House Agriculture Committee.

Thanks to their generosity with your tax dollars, the government has shelled out a quarter of a trillion dollars since 1995 in federal farm subsidies to grain and cotton farmers and landowners. (Go to [farm.ewg.org](http://farm.ewg.org) for a list of every recipient and the amount each received.)

Right now, the farm subsidy lobby and its friends on Capitol Hill are on track to write a costly, ill-conceived new chapter to this unhappy history of bankrolling industrial commodity crops. But it doesn't have to be that way. Instead, we can invest in healthier eating and a cleaner environment. In the bargain, we can help keep 20 million kids from going hungry, give a huge boost to California agriculture, save taxpayers money and support family farmers.

What would a "healthy food" bill look like?

It starts with a moral commitment that no children in this country should go to bed hungry because their families can't afford to feed them. Today, more than 45 million Americans, half of them children, receive benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly "food stamps"), which accounts for more than 70 percent of farm bill spending. Are they deserving? If you're in a household of three and make more than about \$24,000 a year, you're too prosperous to qualify.

Next, by redirecting some of the billions we now are spending on industrial crops such as corn and cotton, we could help make a reality of the government's public health advice to cover half our mealtime plates with fruits and vegetables every day.

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