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AARP Urges Support of Farm Bill Conference Agreement

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Yesterday, AARP sent the following letter to members of Congress on the Farm Bill urging support for the reported Conference Agreement and a commitment to restoring access to the vital nutrition provided by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program:

January 28, 2014

Dear Member of Congress:

The Senate and House Conference to resolve Farm Bill differences regarding the nutrition and farm program provisions has reported an agreement for consideration on the floor of each Chamber. The Conference Agreement reported for approval contains increased cuts in SNAP funding (\$8 billion) which AARP does not support, but we believe it offers the best compromise achievable among the options offered. AARP urged conferees to agree to the Senate bill language regarding the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). AARP and other anti-hunger advocates strongly opposed several other legislative provisions in the House and Senate bills that imposed stringent conditions discouraging participation in SNAP to the harm of millions of documented hungry and food insecure Americans. We appreciate that some of these provisions were not included in the Conference Agreement. While AARP supports the Conference Agreement, we believe Congress and the Administration have a future responsibility to restore funds to this critical safety net program.

On November 1, 2013, SNAP benefits were permanently reduced with the elimination of the SNAP benefit boost from the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Indeed, the amount provided to feed the typical family is estimated to have declined from about \$4.50 to about \$4.00 per meal. Increasing SNAP cuts by \$8 billion only exacerbates an already perilous food situation for these families. Further, SNAP cuts decrease local economic vitality. Along with helping low-income persons eat healthier, more nutritious food, the nutrition programs also benefit the economy. For example, every \$5 in new SNAP benefits generates \$9 – nearly twice as much – in total community spending.

Finally, SNAP needs to retain its administrative flexibility. SNAP helps states and communities in times of economic downturn and natural crises or disasters – such as hurricanes, tornadoes, floods and earthquakes -- and provides access to critical food assistance where local supplies have been destroyed or rendered inaccessible. The recent economic recession, the worst since the Great Depression, demonstrated the importance of the Farm Bill nutrition programs in providing food assistance for families that would have otherwise gone without food. Indeed, the major criticism of SNAP is that the program is too successful in responding to the increased need for food assistance. In addition, SNAP has reduced error rates and fraud to levels that are the envy of many major federal programs. AARP believes any outdated rules that encourage waste or fraud should be addressed, but not at the expense of legitimately hungry families – especially children, seniors and persons with disabilities.

We urge support for the reported Farm Bill Conference Agreement and a commitment to restore access to vital nutrition for legitimately eligible persons and households harmed by cuts in the Conference Agreement. If you have any further questions, please feel free to call me, or have your staff contact Ariel Gonzalez or Larry White on our Government Affairs staff at 202-434-3770.

Sincerely,

Addison Barry Rand

Chief Executive Officer

About AARP

AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, with a membership of nearly 38 million, that helps people turn their goals and dreams into real possibilities, strengthens communities and fights for the issues that matter most to families such as healthcare, employment and income security, retirement planning, affordable utilities and protection from financial abuse. We advocate for individuals in the marketplace by selecting products and services of high quality and value to carry the AARP name as well as help our members obtain discounts on a wide range of products, travel, and services. A trusted source for lifestyle tips, news and educational information, AARP produces AARP The Magazine, the world's largest circulation magazine; AARP Bulletin; www.aarp.org; AARP TV & Radio; AARP Books; and AARP en Español, a Spanish-language website addressing the interests and needs of Hispanics. AARP does not endorse candidates for public office or make contributions

to political campaigns or candidates. The AARP Foundation is an affiliated charity that provides security, protection, and empowerment to older persons in need with support from thousands of volunteers, donors, and sponsors. AARP has staffed offices in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Learn more at www.aarp.org.

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