Progressing the Right to Food in the United States: 2026 Update

Joint Submission to the United Nations
Universal Periodic Review of the United States of America

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Human Rights Council

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by the National Right to Food Community of Practice
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on behalf of the following organizations:

American Friends Service Committee
Broad Street Presbyterian Church Food Pantry
Center for Mississippi Food Systems
Coalition for Carceral Nutrition
Doddridge County Family Resource Network
Florida Food Policy Council
Food and Agriculture Action Coalition Towards Sovereignty (FAACTS)
Food Council of Schenectady County
Food for Maine's Future
Food for Soul
Food in Neighborhoods Community Coalition
Grow Food Northampton
Growing Hope
Iowa Farmers Union
Metro Caring
Mississippi Food Policy Council
Northwest Harvest
Penn State's Center for Economic and Community Development
Presbyterian Church U.S.A. Hunger Program
Rooted In Inc.
Shalom Farms
The Foodshed Network
U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance
Voices of Hunger
West Virginia West Virginia University, Center for Resilient Communities
WhyHunger
Women Advancing Nutrition Dietetics and Agriculture (WANDA)

Who we are

The National Right to Food Community of Practice weaves together and strengthens state and local efforts to advance the right to food in law, policy, and practice across the United States. We bring human rights frameworks into local use through shared strategy and coordinated advocacy at home, while strengthening U.S. participation in global processes.

Executive Summary

This is an update to our 2025 submission, covering new developments for progressing the right to food since April 2025.

Key developments in the Right to Food since April 2025

Immigration

- Immigration enforcement tactics have prevented safe access to food at schools and in communities, while people stay home for fear of violence or detention. This directly affects the right to food for child and adult migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. U.S. citizens are also being affected, as racist targeting and widespread identity checks have resulted in excessive force and violence towards Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people, regardless of their citizenship or immigration status.
- Sufficient food, water, and medical attention have been withheld from people in immigration detention centers. This includes children and pregnant and nursing people.

Nutrition Assistance Programs

- Federal funding cuts and administrative changes to nutrition assistance and public health coverage will cause millions more people to lose access to life-saving support and anti-hunger programs.
- States and local jurisdictions will bear the financial burden of this erosion of social protection programs. This will negatively affect the availability and accessibility of nutritious food for low-income, rural, and urban communities, particularly for disabled people and people of color.

Environmental Protection

- Deregulation of fossil fuel industries and the overturning of long-standing environmental protections will contribute to the climate crisis, exacerbating floods, fires, and storms that are already affecting farmers' ability to grow and produce nutritious food across the country.
- The erosion of environmental protections will cause harm to rivers, wetlands, forests, and agricultural lands, negatively affecting the ability of future generations to grow and access nutritious food.

International cooperation, collaboration, and commitments

- Withdrawing from international organizations, conventions, and treaties threatens global progress on progressing human rights and mitigating the climate crisis.
- Eliminating funding for U.S. foreign aid puts millions more people at risk of malnutrition and hunger.
- Engaging in conflicts contributes to the destabilization of global food production and supply chains.

Suggested Questions

- What steps are you taking to ensure that people in immigration detention centers, including children, pregnant and nursing people, and people with diabetes and other health conditions have reliable access to safe and nutritious food and required medications?
- How are you planning to protect the rights of children, women, seniors, veterans, and disabled people from funding cuts to food assistance and health coverage programs?
- What plans are in place to ensure that eliminating environmental regulations will not increase surface environmental pollutants and threaten agricultural production as a result of increasingly severe floods, fires, and storms in the United States and in other countries?

Recommendations

- Suspend immigration enforcement operations, such as identity checks and arrests, in and around schools, hospitals, food assistance sites, and faith-based institutions.
- Establish non-custodial alternatives to immigration detention, particularly for children, families, and others in vulnerable situations.
- Restore public spending for food and nutrition assistance programs, such as SNAP and WIC, and eliminate punitive and unrealistic income eligibility guidelines.
- Restore funding to life-saving humanitarian assistance programs, particularly in countries affected by conflicts and the effects of the climate crisis.

Introduction

1. Since our previous report in April 2025,[i] we have seen a weakening in the United States government's commitment to promote and protect human rights in our country and around the world. This report focuses primarily on substantive changes to immigration enforcement, nutrition assistance programs, environmental protection, and international commitments. These changes will make it harder to realize the right to food within the United States and in other countries.

Immigration enforcement

2. Enhanced immigration enforcement tactics implemented since early 2025 have threatened rights to life,[ii] liberty,[iii] due process,[iv] privacy,[v] and free speech.[vi] This has in turn eroded the foundation of safe access to food for hundreds of thousands of people.[vii]

3. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) found that migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers have been subject to widespread arrests, excessive force and violence during immigration operations, limited legal safeguards, and death and inhuman conditions in detention.[viii] The "systematic use of racial profiling and identity checks" by immigration enforcement officers means that anyone "who could be perceived" as a migrant, refugee, or an asylum seeker could be subject to this treatment as well.[ix] People observing these operations have also been subject to intimidation, violence, and in some cases death.[x]

Immigration enforcement tactics prevent safe access to food in communities

4. Approaches used by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) have caused hundreds of thousands of families to face wrenching decisions about whether it is safe to go to work, go to the grocery store, or send their children to school.[xi]

5. **Being able to safely access school is an important part of achieving the right to food because schools promote access to nutritious meals for low-income children.** Nine states now guarantee school meals to all students,[xii] and children in low-income households are eligible for free meals throughout the United States. **Free school meals are an entitlement that are at risk when children are afraid to leave their homes to attend school.** ICE presence in Minnesota significantly affected attendance rates and the daily life of students, parents, and school staff.[xiii] After the first week of the 'surge operation' in Maine, one school district reported a 25% decrease in school attendance,[xiv] and in another, figures showed the disproportionate effect for multilingual students (41%), Hispanic or Latino students (39%), and Black students (34%) compared with white students (6%).[xv]

6. **Sheltering at home for fear of detention or deportation means not being able to earn money to pay for food, rent, utilities, medicines, and other essential bills.** One school district in Maine identified at least 120 families in their city who would need rent assistance in February to avoid eviction because parents had been too afraid to go to work since the surge of ICE officers in January.[xvi] In Minnesota, city councils in Minneapolis and St. Paul both passed resolutions urging the governor to enact a state wide eviction moratorium.[xvii] The Greater Twin Cities United Way reported that requests for rental assistance to their resource helpline have nearly tripled – and the Spanish-language line has seen a 1,646 percent increase in calls.[xviii]

Conditions in immigration detention centers

7. In 2025, there was a 75% increase in people being held in immigration detention centers compared to before the Trump Administration took office in January.[xix] This number is predicted to rise to nearly 100,000 detainees by the end of this year.[xx]

8. Pregnant, post-partum and nursing people in ICE facilities have reported lack of access to nutritious food and prenatal vitamins, leading to malnourishment, inability to produce breastmilk, and miscarriage.[xxi] In some cases, nursing infants and children have been separated from their detained or deported parents.[xxii]

9. Multiple lawsuits have been filed about the inhumane conditions in some immigrant detention centers, including lack of adequate clothing, food, or water,[xxiii] insufficient food and water,[xxiv] and food that is moldy or not suitable for children.[xxv] In the Camp East Montana facility, for example, people have reported failures to address dietary accommodations and being provided unclean water and rotten or frozen food.[xxvi] In the Fort Bliss detention facility, people describe being forced to ration food, skip meals or take turns eating food that was sometimes rotten or partly frozen.[xxvii] These incidents are in line with previously reported deprivation of human necessities in ICE detention centers, including **denial of sufficient food, clothing, and medical care**.[xxviii]

Nutrition assistance programs

10. **The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has long been underfunded and insufficient, but federal funding cuts and substantive changes to the program in July 2025 through the 'One Big Beautiful Bill Act' (OBBBA)[xxix] made unprecedented cuts to the safety net.** This Act set in motion[xxx] a foundational, fundamental change to the structure of SNAP,[xxxi] which will make it harder for millions of people to access food with dignity and choice. The loss of these social protections will also have profoundly negative effects on local economies, farmers, and grocers.

11. SNAP is an entitlement that supports an average of 41.7 million people per month to access nutritious food in communities across the United States.[xxxii] Increasing household budgets through SNAP supports people to afford[xxxiii] nutritious foods - fruits, vegetables, meat, poultry, fish, dairy, breads, and cereals. It is the most effective[xxxiv] anti-hunger program our country has, and the investment made in supporting families and individuals to afford food with dignity and choice is an economic multiplier[xxxv] that ripples through local economies to support farmers, grocers, and retailers throughout each state.

Loss of social protections

12. Changes made in the OBBBA will result in fewer people receiving support, and less support for those who do. More than 5 million families across the U.S. are expected to lose nutrition assistance or have their benefits significantly reduced.[xxxvi] This includes a predicted loss of 2.4 million people per month[xxxvii] from SNAP participation between 2025-2034.

13. The OBBBA mandates that future updates to the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) must be "cost neutral", which means the overall spending power of households participating in SNAP will be reduced as food prices rise with inflation and public assistance fails to keep up.[xxxviii] The TFP estimates the lowest cost of purchasing and preparing a diet that meets the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s definition of nutritional needs, and this estimate operates as the basis for SNAP benefits.[xxxix]

14. Removing or reducing SNAP benefits makes it far more challenging for many low-income individuals and families to purchase enough food to meet their nutritional - and sometimes even caloric - needs. The health benefits[xl] of SNAP are clear[xli] and reflect the relationship between food insecurity and poorer health outcomes. Low-income households will have to resort to buying cheaper and less nutritious food. Research demonstrates that older low-income SNAP recipients were less likely to be hospitalized or visit an emergency department, both of which can carry considerable costs and exacerbate barriers to affording nutritious foods.[xlii]

Loss of public and comparable data

15. In September 2025, the USDA terminated the Household Food Security Report.[xliii] With the loss of the federally-funded national data, there exists no comparable report that provides the same information to the public or policymakers who have used the report to justify policies and programs – such as SNAP –

that support families to obtain "enough food for an active healthy life" (the USDA's definition of food security).

16. For thirty years, the annual reports have provided clear, accessible data on household food security in our country. They have analyzed the collected data by race, ethnicity, gender, age, income, household composition, areas of residence (in principal cities, in suburbs, and in rural areas), and by census geographic regions. In short, they have revealed the disproportionate prevalence of hunger and food insecurity among women, children, single parent households, Black and Latinx households, rural households, households in central cities, households in the South, and, of course, low-income households. This is data that researchers use in evaluating programs that administrators use to target action such as outreach programs, and that advocates use to explain the urgency of food insecurity to their communities and mobilize for better public policy.[xliv]

17. Private studies, while helpful, cannot replace robust and regular food insecurity monitoring by the state.

Discrimination against vulnerable groups

18. The OBBBA limited the groups of people who are entitled to support and made it harder for eligible people to prove they are in compliance with program requirements. **Many lawful immigrants will no longer be eligible for SNAP** (undocumented immigrants have never been eligible), including refugees, people granted asylum, and certain survivors of domestic violence and sex trafficking who have been granted humanitarian protection by the federal government.

19. **Work requirements were expanded, despite evidence[xlv] that they are ineffective and harmful.[xlvi]** Many people, especially older and chronically ill people, struggle to demonstrate that they are working or seeking work for the required number of hours per week. Exemptions from work requirements were eliminated for veterans, people experiencing homelessness, and young people who recently aged out of foster care.

Burden placed on states puts wider social and economic services at risk

20. Substantive changes were also made by the OBBBA to how SNAP is funded and operated by each state - placing extraordinary pressures on state budgets.[xlvii] "Reduced federal SNAP funding acts as 'a stimulus in reverse' - weakening local economies, shrinking tax bases, and increasing health care costs as hunger rises."[xlviii] States will bear additional administrative costs, face financial penalties, and need to find funding to replace cut programs if they choose to continue them.

21. Since most states are required to balance their operating budgets, they will have to make difficult decisions[xlix] about whether to raise local taxes, reallocate funding from other programs (like education, healthcare, transportation, or public safety), or find ways to reduce the number of people participating in the SNAP program locally. Not all states will bear the weight of these changes equally, and the political context for these decisions will vary widely.

Effect on local farmers and grocers

22. Farmers and local grocers benefit from SNAP dollars spent by their customers. **Restrictions and cuts to SNAP will mean a loss of revenue, which harms small businesses who produce and sell local, sustainable food as well as the surrounding communities.** With margins already tight, the loss of customers and spending will affect the economic accessibility of food for farmers and grocers, and their families.

23. The Farm, Food and National Security Act of 2026[l] promises to uphold the punitive measures of H.R.1 (OBBBA) and does little to address the concerns of family-scale farmers, such as fair prices, improved credit access, and addressing corporate land consolidation.

24. Customers use their benefits to buy groceries, so when fewer people participate in SNAP each month, this means **less revenue for grocery stores**. This can lead to a **reduction in staff hours or employees, or to grocers having to close**. Reducing hours or cutting staff effects the economic accessibility of food for those workers who have lost wages, and a further impact on everyone when food prices increase to reflect the loss of earnings.

25. **There will be a disproportionately negative impact on grocers and customers in low-income neighborhoods.** SNAP accounts for about 12% of grocery sales per year, but can be up to 60% for grocers in some low-income urban or rural areas.[li] The closure of small, local grocers and farmers markets is likely to limit the geographic accessibility of nutritious food for people living in rural communities, where food outlets providing fresh foods - like meat, dairy, fruits, and vegetables - are less common.

26. Financial pressure on local and independent grocers also means that the food retail market is more easily captured by corporate chains and large grocery stores. The low wages typically paid by the large grocery chains further contribute to both the need for SNAP and the erosion of the economic accessibility of food. In 2020, for example, Walmart was identified as one of the top four employers of SNAP and Medicaid beneficiaries in all 11 states included in the study.[lii]

Disruption to basic services during federal shutdown

27. **During the federal shutdown in October-November 2025, SNAP payments were delayed or withheld, despite reserves available to ensure these essential benefits were continued during the disruption.** Millions of Americans were left hungry or fearful due to repeated roadblocks to receiving payment, and this represented a major step backwards in fulfilling the right to food.[liii]

28. Many food pantries saw their numbers double during this time - in southern West Virginia, some food banks reported an 1,800% increase in families coming to them.[liv] In other instances, hundreds of families were turned away entirely. Furloughed federal workers were also deeply impacted by the shutdown, and many have turned to local food banks for support.[lv]

Environmental regulations and protections

Use of harmful chemicals

29. Instead of curbing the use of harmful chemicals in our food system or taking proactive steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that are contributing to the climate crisis, **there is an upwards trend in deregulating corporations and reducing or removing environmental protections.** These actions threaten our long-term food security as a country by increasing risks to clean and healthy soil, waterways, and air, and they threaten the health and wellbeing of individuals who are in direct contact with harmful chemicals, including food system workers.

30. The Executive Order issued on February 18, 2026, seeks to protect the “corporate viability of any domestic producer” and “ensure a continued and adequate supply” of glyphosate-based herbicides.[lvi] These chemicals have been associated with increased risk of cancer and non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. More than 60,000 lawsuits have been filed against Bayer, which has agreed to a $7.25 billion class settlement.[lvii]

Threats to farmworkers

31. The food system in the U.S. relies largely on the labor of over 2 million farmworkers, who often lack workplace protections and are vulnerable to a variety of harms.[lviii] Environmental concerns, including rising global temperatures, fires and other natural disasters, and pesticide use impact farmworkers heavily.[lix] Higher temperatures create health hazards for those laboring outdoors in the sun. Fires and

natural disasters also put farmworkers at risk of physical harm as well as displacement. Pesticide use can create health risks for farmworkers who are exposed to these pesticides all day long.

International cooperation, collaboration, and commitments

32. We are experiencing an unprecedented loss of commitment from our government to international cooperation and collaboration towards the promotion of human rights and mitigation of the climate crisis. This conflicts with the obligations the United States has to respect, protect, and fulfil human rights both within its borders and extra-territorially in other countries.[lx]

33. In January 2026, the Administration directed U.S. agencies to withdraw from dozens of international organizations, conventions, and treaties,[lxi] including a "clear targeting of environmental, climate, and scientific institutions".[lxii] This will likely affect global efforts to monitor hunger and famine (e.g. through the Famine Early Warning Systems Network, FEWS-NET)[lxiii] and welfare, livelihoods, living conditions, and wellbeing (through the Living Standards Measurement Study, LSMS).[lxiv]

34. The rapid closure and withdrawal of funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has already increased rates of malnutrition, hunger, and death in many countries,[lxv] especially where conflicts continue and in countries most affected by the climate crisis. The full effects will continue to unfold over many years.[lxvi]

Climate and the environment

35. The United States did not participate in the 2025 UN Climate Change Conference (COP 30). Coupled with recent regressive steps in domestic environmental protection,[lxvii] like the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) eliminating the 2009 Endangerment Finding and corresponding responsibility to regulate greenhouse gas emissions,[lxviii] the United States' withdrawal from international cooperation and collaboration represents a major step backwards in efforts to mitigate the climate crisis.[lxix]

36. As the effects of the climate crisis worsen, farmers, food producers, and people across the world are experiencing increased risks to food production and supply chains, and the related threats of food insecurity and hunger.[lxx] This burden falls disproportionately on the poorest communities and countries that have contributed the least to the current crisis.

Food security and conflict

37. Initiating a conflict with Iran has placed global food production and supply chains at risk. Five primary producers of nitrogen- and phosphate-based fertilizers "rely heavily on the Strait of Hormuz to export their wares", which has been effectively closed as a result of the war.[lxxi] The burden of this will fall disproportionately - countries in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa may need to subsidize crop production to avoid shortages, which could add to their national debt.[lxxii] India purchases about 40% of these fertilizers from the Gulf region, so "Prolonged shipping disruptions could leave Indian farmers facing fertilizer shortages and higher input costs" during an important growing season.[lxxiii]

38. The food supply chain in the U.S. relies on diesel-fueled transportation moving both commodity crops and food crops from field to manufacturer to wholesaler to restaurant or grocery store. The disruption in the supply chain caused by rising oil prices will result in a decline in exports of commodity crops and an increase in food prices at retail. Farmers' income will also be affected.[lxxiv]

39. Even before food prices themselves begin to reflect the impact of these disruptions to the supply chain, the rise in household fuel prices has affected people's ability to afford the food that they need.

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