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Farm Bill will help ensure good health for many Americans

By **MIKE OWEN**

When money is tight, it is especially prudent to find investments that yield high returns. Food Stamps offer a good opportunity.

This year, Congress will renew the Farm Bill; the Food Stamp Program is a big element of it, and its recipients are in need of a boost. As Robert Lemke noted in a recent letter in the Courier (June 10), this assistance is critical to low-income working families yet provides only \$1 per meal per person.

What's more, Food Stamp benefits have eroded with inflation and policy changes and need to be updated. Due mainly to benefit cuts enacted in 1996, a typical household receives \$37 less per month than it would if those cuts had not been enacted.

In the Waterloo-Cedar Falls area, nearly 21,000 people in over 9,300 households received Food Stamp benefits in May. Not only were people fed, almost \$1.9 million in federal dollars made their way into the local economy of Black Hawk County and the surrounding seven counties.

And that's just the local impact. Other figures show the value of Food Stamps:

- In America, 1 in 5 children are served by Food Stamps (about 13 million kids).
- In Iowa, almost a quarter of a billion dollars – \$244.2 million in 2006 – come into the state's economy and are churned over multiple times because of Food Stamps.
- In Iowa, almost a quarter of a million Iowans – 240,000 in May – benefit from Food Stamps.
- Four out of five dollars in value from Food Stamps go to households with children – many of them in working families. The rest of the benefits in large part go to households with elderly or disabled family members.

You get the idea. In a state in which 1 out of 9 households is unable to count on access to adequate food, Food Stamps stand between many thousands of Iowans and hunger.

So what has to happen? That's up to Congress and to people who take the time to talk to their representatives.

We so often hear "health care" from the lips of everyone involved in public policy. It is worth a reminder during deliberations on the Farm Bill, there is no greater boost to good health than quality nutrition. This Farm Bill will determine much about good health for many Iowans and other Americans.

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