

Food security bill

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FOODSECURITY BILL:- The National Food Security Bill 2011 promises a legal right to cheap food for the poorest in the country. While India currently provides subsidized wheat and rice to the poor, this legislation would make food cheaper and provide more of it to poor families. The bill aims to cover 75 percent of rural households and 50 percent of urban households. So far, discussion of the bill in the Indian media has focused on the cost of providing more cheap food – the bill would increase government spending by more than 200 billion rupees, or \$3.5 billion, annually. India's agriculture minister, Sharad Pawar, has said it might be difficult for the government to buy enough grain to sustain the program. Congress party opponents argue that it is being introduced solely to garner votes ahead of upcoming elections. First, the bill proposes a new way of identifying beneficiaries. Under the current system, the government provides subsidized food to everyone living below a poverty line. Under the new arrangement, households would be identified as "priority," "general" or "excluded. Priority and general families would receive subsidized food at different prices (those classified as priority would get a larger benefit). Excluded households would receive no subsidized food. The bill does attempt to address the biggest shortcoming of the current system, which is that many of the poor do not get the subsidized food they are entitled to. One of the major concerns among nonprofit groups working with the poor, however, is that the money provided in lieu of food would go to the men of households, who might not use it to purchase food.