

SNAP AND OTHER NUTRITION ASSISTANCE IN THE FARM BILL

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON

FOOD AND NUTRITION, SPECIALTY CROPS,
ORGANICS, AND RESEARCH

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY

UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

April 19, 2023

Printed for the use of the
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry



Available on <http://www.govinfo.gov/>

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

53–653 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2024

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SNAP AND OTHER NUTRITION ASSISTANCE IN THE FARM BILL

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 19, 2023

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FOOD AND NUTRITION, SPECIALTY CROPS,
ORGANICS, AND RESEARCH
Washington, DC.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 12 p.m., in room 328A, Russell Senate Office Building, Hon. John Fetterman, Chairman of the Subcommittee, presiding.

Present: Senators Fetterman [presiding], Stabenow, Klobuchar, Bennet, Gillibrand, Booker, Warnock, Braun, Boozman, and Marshall.

Also present: Senators Bennet, Smith, Luján, Welch

STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN FETTERMAN, U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA

Senator FETTERMAN. I call this hearing of the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Food and Nutrition, Specialty Crops, Organics, and Research to order.

Chairwoman Stabenow.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Good morning, or good afternoon.

Senator FETTERMAN [continuing]. and Ranking Member Boozman, thank you so much for coming. I thank you for your leadership on this Committee, and I look forward to working with you to pass a farm bill, a farm bill that works for small farmers, rural communities, and hungry Americans. I would also like to thank my Ranking Member, Senator Braun, and I look forward to working closely with you.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is one of the most effective programs to fight hunger and poverty in the country. In my time in office, as the mayor of Braddock, to lieutenant Governor, to now, I have heard from Pennsylvanians about their support for SNAP. Hunger is not a Republican or Democrat issue. It is all of our issue that we have to take on. We need to come together and stop playing political games with Americans' access to food.

Americans like Charles Jore in the town of North East in Pennsylvania tells me that he was a victim of skimming, where somebody stole money he relied from his SNAP EBT. Mr. Jore is not the first Pennsylvanian I have heard this from, and I fear he will not be the last, and I will work in this farm bill to modernize SNAP to work for recipients in the 21st century.

I look forward to hearing from you and your witnesses on nutrition assistance in the Farm Bill.

I will now turn to Senator Braun for any opening comments that he would like to make.

**STATEMENT OF HON. MIKE BRAUN, U.S. SENATOR FROM THE
STATE OF INDIANA**

Senator BRAUN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks to our witnesses for being here today. This is the second Congress that I am serving as a Ranking Member on this Subcommittee. I am excited to return to the Subcommittee, and I am looking forward to working with Chairman Fetterman to find bipartisan solutions.

We are meeting today as part of the Committee's consideration of the 2023 Farm Bill. The bill will cost us more than it ever has in history, and I want to make sure that if we are spending more we do it efficiently.

Earlier this year, when Secretary Vilsack testified before the Committee, I asked him, as a former Governor, if he was concerned with runaway spending, and he, like many of us, would be. I think whenever we entertain any of this we have got to make sure that we are getting value out of whatever we are proposing.

I ran a logistics and distribution business for 37 years, and did it sustainably by keeping overhead low, being very aggressive in finding new ways of doing things, and was able to pay the bills and grow the company sustainably. I would like to see some parallel here in terms of how we do things in our own Federal Government.

As the Committee drafts and considers the 2023 Farm Bill, I look forward to trying to incorporate these principles into it. In the coming weeks I will introduce bipartisan legislation, the SNAP Fresh Access Pilot Program Act, to create a pilot program with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program that allows participants to spend down a portion of their benefit to receive a food box with fruit, vegetables, meat, dairy, and eggs.

As we learned at this Subcommittee's hearing last year on food as medicine, the private sector has a vested interest in using wellness in nutrition to decrease spending on remediation medically. So not only here, the private sector needs to pick up the slack and do that on their own account as well.

This program checks each of these boxes by creating a new option within SNAP that allows recipients to exercise agency, and it also is going to let increases to healthy foods through SNAP. I think it has got a two-pronged approach to it.

I also plan to introduce legislation, the HAND UP Act, that will ensure SNAP is implemented in a way that measurably improves the employment outcomes of able-bodied Americans. HAND UP Act helps connect SNAP recipients with work by closing the loopholes that government has used to downplay the stability of employment by requiring States to focus on common-sense outcome measures in their employment and training programs.

Able-bodied adults without dependents are required, by law, to work, volunteer, or participate in a work program for at least 80 hours per month to keep their SNAP benefits. This work requirement has been in place since 1996, and was passed with bipartisan support, including that of Senator Joe Biden.

Today, 18 States, including California and New York, operate with full State waivers, and, in fact, half of SNAP's ABAWDs live in waived areas, many of which actually have low unemployment and ample job listings. I think this is an opportunity to find more employment and help feed those better that need it.

We will hear from our witnesses today about how SNAP can be improved to actually help recipients escape poverty, and I am really looking forward to what each one of you has to say.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator FETTERMAN. Thank you, Senator, and we will now move to introduce our witnesses. I am excited about the panel that we have with us today. I will introduce them all now.

Mrs. Ty Jones Cox is the Vice President of Food Assistance Policy at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Welcome.

Ms. Heather Reynolds is the Managing Director of the Lab for Economic Opportunities at Notre Dame. Welcome.

Mrs. Loree Jones Brown is CEO of Philabundance, the largest food bank in Pennsylvania, and also serves New Jersey. It is a great organization, from a great State that I've heard of pretty well.

Mrs. JONES BROWN. We certainly agree.

Senator FETTERMAN. Mr. James Whitford is Executive Director of the Watered Gardens in Joplin, Missouri. Sir, I like that look.

Finally Ms. Whitley Hasty, the Outreach Specialist with Hunger Free America and Foodlink in New York.

Mrs. Cox, you are now recognized for five minutes.

STATEMENT OF TY JONES COX, VICE PRESIDENT OF FOOD ASSISTANCE POLICY, CENTER ON BUDGET AND POLICY PRIORITIES, WASHINGTON, DC

Mrs. JONES COX. Chairs Stabenow and Fetterman, Ranking Member Braun, members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am Ty Jones Cox, Vice President of Food Assistance Policy at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a nonpartisan policy institute in Washington, DC.

I want to make three key points: SNAP plays a critical role in reducing hunger and poverty; SNAP supports and incentivizes work by helping low-wage workers make ends meet; and SNAP should be strengthened in the farm bill.

SNAP is our Nation's most effective tool for combatting hunger and food insecurity, especially among children, older adults, people with disabilities, and veterans. SNAP reduces food insecurity by as much as 30 percent. SNAP also plays a critical role in reducing poverty. SNAP provides families with the money they need to purchase groceries, helping to free up their limited resources to spend more on other basic needs such as housing, utilities, and childcare. SNAP improves outcomes in education, economic security, and self-sufficiency for children later in life. When children are hungry, their performance at school suffers, but when children have access to SNAP benefits they are more likely to complete school, attain higher education, and go on to secure better-paying jobs.

SNAP is also linked to better health. SNAP participants are more likely to report very good health than low-income non-participants, and children participating in SNAP face lower nutritional

deficiencies and poor health, which improves their health outcomes throughout their lifetimes.

SNAP reduces racial disparity. One chart that sticks with me really highlights huge disparities between the food insecurity rate of households headed by a Black, Latino, American Indian, or Alaska Native adult in comparison to average for the households headed by a white adult. The difference in some cases is as big as 15 to 20 percentage points.

Boosts to SNAP benefits in late 2021 reduced poverty for Black and Latino people and helped reduce racial disparities. As we think about improving SNAP our eye must remain on how we can reduce those disparities and not increase them by making harmful cuts.

Finally, SNAP is an important support for workers. The majority of SNAP participants are children, older adults, and people with disabilities. Among SNAP participants who can work, the majority do so or will return in the future. Many of the jobs held by SNAP participants, such as service or sales positions, often pay low wages and do not offer regular work hours or benefits like paid sick leave. SNAP supplements low pay and helps smooth out income fluctuations due to irregular hours.

Take, for example, the mother of two teenagers who was working two jobs at minimum wage but does not make enough to afford rising prices of food and housing. SNAP helps keep both her and her family fed.

For millions of workers, work does not itself guarantee steady or sufficient income to provide for their families. As a legal aid attorney in Virginia I saw clients balance work, childcare, and caregiving demands, and SNAP provided a critical link when their income was not enough to feed their families. SNAP is a program that incentivizes work by providing critical food assistance for low-wage workers while they are working and during periods of unemployment.

Given these realities of low-wage work, any attempt to expand SNAP's existing harsh work-reporting requirements rely on faulty assumptions. Research shows that taking SNAP benefits away from people does not help them find jobs or higher earnings. It just leaves them and their families with less money for food. No one can work when they are hungry.

SNAP is an important but modest benefit at only six dollars per person per day, and SNAP spending did increase during the pandemic, when it greatly reduced hunger, but SNAP spending has begun to fall with the end of the emergency pandemic provisions. Families are already experiencing a cut as a result, which means less money for food at a time when food prices are high.

SNAP is successful at reducing poverty and food insecurity and should be protected from cuts. Instead of making the program less effective by cutting it or creating more barriers for participants, we should make improvements so it does even more to combat hunger for everyone. For example, we must increase access. Some low-income food-insecure people are excluded from the program entirely, including those subject to the three-month time limit, people with drug-related felony convictions, and people living in certain U.S. territories.

In conclusion, in 2018, this Committee showed you can find bipartisan agreement to protect and modestly strengthen SNAP with the farm bill that got 86 votes from Senators. As this Committee works to develop the 2023 Farm Bill, I urge you to work in that vein to shore up this program that has already proven to be so successful at reducing hunger among our most vulnerable and protect it from cuts that would take food away from the people who need it most.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mrs. Jones Cox can be found on page 34 in the appendix.]

Senator FETTERMAN. Thank you, Mrs. Cox. Ms. Jones Brown, you are now recognized for five minutes.

**STATEMENT OF HEATHER REYNOLDS, MANAGING DIRECTOR,
WILSON SHEEHAN LAB FOR ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES,
UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME, NOTRE DAME, INDIANA**

Ms. REYNOLDS. Thank you Chairman Fetterman, Ranking Member Braun, and members of the Committee. I serve at the Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities (LEO), at the University of Notre Dame, where we work with providers across the country to build rigorous evidence around programs designed to move people out of poverty.

Prior to joining LEO, I spent two decades as CEO of Catholic Charities Fort Worth. I will never forget meeting Marsha, a single mom working a full-time job that just did not cut it. She spent hours figuring out which bill to pay, because when you make \$1,200 a month you spend a significant amount of your time making such choices. She came to us because the avalanche of poverty had just closed in around her. She had run out of food and was living in a place with no running water in the bathroom.

We worked with Marsha, helping her with food via SNAP, and getting her into new housing. When Marsha moved into her new apartment she taught her daughter a life lesson that I pray I never have to teach mine. She took her hand and she held it under the warm running water. She squeezed it tightly and told her little girl never to take anything for granted. I struggle to tell this story without feeling sad, and if I am honest, kind of angry. How much potential did our country lose from this woman because she spent so much time figuring out how to feed her family, how behind were her children in school because she could not spend time reading to them, or they were hungry, which we know is not ideal for learning. Instead, this mom spent her energy trying to make sure her family survived in poverty.

Today I want to use my time to suggest two points that I believe would have made her situation better.

First, as we think about the farm bill we need to be less focused on work requirements and more focused on evidence-based reform that will give people a way out of poverty. Seventy-five percent of SNAP recipients who are not disabled or elderly already work. Our solution needs to be to give them solutions that work.

That is why we at Notre Dame spend so much of our time working with providers across the country to understand what works for a path out of poverty. At LEO we have over 90 research studies

across the country, and our partners have solutions. Solutions in Texas. LEO completed a randomized controlled trial to understand the impact of the Padua program, a holistic case management program designed by Catholic Charities Fort Worth. Families get flexible financial assistance that case managers can use to incentivize clients. Clients were 25 percent more likely to be employed, 60 percent more likely to be stably housed, and experienced a sharp decline in credit card debt.

Solutions in New York. The Bridges to Success program is designed by Action for a Better Community to provide working poor residents of Rochester with economic mobility mentors. Seventy-three percent of these participants utilized SNAP at the time of intake. They set explicit goals and worked to achieve self-sufficiency with financial incentives along the way. We have done a randomized controlled trial of this program, and the results show people are more likely to be employed.

We have solutions in Indiana. The Goodwill Excel Center of Central and Southern Indiana operates 15 tuition-free, public charter high schools that support adult learnings in completing their State-certified high school diploma. The Excel Center provides small classes on a flexible schedule and wraparound services. LEO's rigorous study of this program shows adults increased their earnings by 38 percent.

What if Marsha would have just had access to one of these proven programs five years before finding Catholic Charities? Would her daughter have had to learn about the joys of running water? Probably not. In our country we have the Employment and Training programs designed to increase the employment prospects of SNAP recipients. In 2016, only 3.3 percent of SNAP recipients who were subject work requirements participated. States are not incentivized to invest in these programs.

Which brings me to my second point. We need to scale up evidence-based solutions.

Senator, you have access to resources that Catholic Charities, Action for a Better Community, and Goodwill does not. They have already done the hard work for you. They have provided you with solutions that give people a path to upward mobility. They have given you the answers, they have allowed researchers into their business, and now we owe it to them to let their evidence scale about what works.

Families first and Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) laws give us good precedent for how we can put evidence first and make it actionable for providers. In both cases, Federal law now requires providers to either use an evidence-based program or to build rigorous evidence. The clearinghouses verify the validity and strength of the research proving a program is impactful. This combination of legislation requirements plus a well-run clearinghouse shows us a path forward.

As policymakers, we need you allocating public policy dollars to allow these evidence-based services to scale, because they work. What bothers me most about Marsha's story is that while it is just one story, I know there are millions of others just like her. I am asking you to put this evidence to work. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Reynolds can be found on page 63 in the appendix.]

Senator FETTERMAN. Thank you.
Mrs. Jones Brown.

STATEMENT OF LOREE D. JONES BROWN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, PHILABUNDANCE, PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Mrs. JONES BROWN. Good afternoon, Chairman Fetterman, Ranking Member Braun, and members of the Committee. I am Loree Jones Brown, and I have the honor of serving as the Chief Executive Officer of Philabundance, a hunger relief organization serving five counties in southeastern Pennsylvania and four counties in southern New Jersey, and a member of Feeding America, a network of over 200 food banks in the country. I am here to share why passing a bipartisan farm bill is critical to the food security of our neighbors in need and the well-being of our Nation's economy and food system.

Like all of you this morning, I did not make the difficult choice between breakfast or paying my light bill, but for many of our neighbors these are the tough choices they make every day, choosing between food and keeping the lights on. When I spend time visiting our 600-plus community partners and the neighbors we serve, what I see is that people are scared. They are worried about not having a basic thing like food.

Margaux, the founder of our Sunday Love Project, one of our partners, said, "We are noticing an incredible influx of new clients. We are serving 120 to 150 people per day. There is a sense of desperation that is heightened. People are lining up earlier. There is a feeling of scarcity that did not exist before. People are panicked."

It is important to understand that all of the Federal nutrition programs work together. Any cuts to The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), or SNAP, and any policies that make these programs inaccessible for the people who need them the most only puts pressure on food banks to fill the gap. We are seeing the pressure today, with increased demand at food banks as the SNAP emergency allotments and other temporary Federal supports have come to an end, and at a time of high inflation. This makes lines at our partners' pantries longer, and that is why we must increase funding for TEFAP, improve CSFP, and strengthen SNAP.

At Philabundance we take a holistic approach to nourishing our communities. Through our Backpack program that helps kids have a healthy start, our work with seniors provides shelf-stable food, and our partnerships with health care organizations, we know that access to good nutrition and food is vital to improving the health outcomes for low-income families. We must continue to support these critical nutrition programs to ensure that vulnerable populations have access to the food they need.

We also run a culinary job training program that receives support from SNAP Employment and Training. What we have learned is that when you invest in people by providing training and support, that can lead to self-sufficiency. Then you can create a pathway out of poverty. I am here to tell you that it takes time, pa-

tience, and that critical investment to provide people with the tools needed to gain skills to find jobs. These investments, not partial work requirements, are what truly support work and financial stability.

We see it every day, the struggle for working families to make ends meet when too often their pay is not enough to cover their basic needs. One neighbor told us, "I work full-time, and by the time I pay my bills I have nothing left. I do not make a lot, and I am only eligible for \$90 in SNAP benefits a month." People are cobbling together their take-home pay with SNAP and emergency food resources, and sometimes that is not even enough.

During the pandemic, what we learned is that bipartisan leadership to address hunger works. Because the government made bold investments in addressing hunger, more people were fed at a time of high need, and according to the USDA, food insecurity did not increase.

Here is what I am asking you to consider today, that you draft a bipartisan farm bill that strengthens the Federal nutrition programs, adopt policy changes that build on innovations and lessons learned during the pandemic, center the participant experience inequity, and remove red tape to simplify program access and operations.

Specifically, I ask that you strengthen TEFAP funding. As demand for food remains high at food banks, a reliable, continuous stream of TEFAP food is essential. Congress should reauthorize increased funding to \$500 million per year in mandatory funding for food purchases for TEFAP. This level of investment will ensure the flow of TEFAP foods remains steady throughout the food assistance network and support the U.S. agricultural economy as TEFAP bonus and other programs are dwindling.

Protect SNAP's funding and structure while addressing systematic barriers to benefits. SNAP is our best defense against hunger. It is the most effective and efficient way to ensure people have access to the food they need and want. The farm bill must strengthen SNAP, and any cuts to its program cannot be made up by local food banks. We are already concerned with how we will meet the need with the emergency allotments coming to an end.

Reauthorize, streamline, and expand access for CSFP. A program that serves our seniors should be much earlier to navigate. Support partnerships with growers and producers. We can help people who are hungry and farmers at the same time by strengthening the TEFAP Farm to Food Bank Program, which is based on a program that had great success in Pennsylvania.

It is in our Nation's best interest that we have well-nourished communities so they can thrive. That is why I am here asking you to work together to pass a strong bipartisan farm bill that ensure equitable and consistent access to food.

I often quote Martin Luther King, Jr., and he said, "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'" With this farm bill we can do something. We can feed people together.

[The prepared statement of Mrs. Jones Brown can be found on page 68 in the appendix.]

Senator FETTERMAN. Thank you.
Mr. Whitford.

**STATEMENT OF JAMES WHITFORD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
WATERED GARDENS, JOPLIN, MISSOURI**

Mr. WHITFORD. Chairman Fetterman, Ranking Member Braun, and Subcommittee members, thank you for allowing me to testify today.

Twenty-three years ago my wife and I started a small ministry in southwest Missouri that has grown quite a bit over the last two decades. Today we offer emergency shelter services. We have a long-term recovery program for me, focused on character development and work readiness. We have a family center that helps moms and kids struggling with homelessness. We even have a respite unit where folks that are coming out of the hospital, discharging but do not have anywhere to go, they are able to come into our respite unit. We also have a robust food ministry where we are helping hundreds of families in our area with tens of thousands of pounds of food every year.

The things that I want to communicate today, that I think is so important, is that a majority of the needs that are met through our mission are earned by people through our Worth Shop. This is a ministry that we run where people are crafting goods, that are creating things that go to market, and they are actually earning the very basics of food, shelter, clothing, and the like.

Work awakens worth. That is why we call it a Worth Shop. What we have found is that you are either at work or you are in dependency. It is one or the other.

I do not know if you have heard of the book Toxic Charity by Robert Lupton, but he talks about five steps to dependency. If you give something to somebody once they will appreciate it. If you give the same thing to that person again, they will anticipate that you are going to do it a third time. If you give it a third time, they are going to have an expectation that you will do it a fourth. If you give it a fourth time, they will feel entitled to it, and a fifth time, they will be dependent on you for it. It is appreciation, anticipation, expectation, entitlement, and dependency.

I have seen that downward track for far too many people, and after more than 20 years of working among the poor, and now working with leaders across the Nation in various cities who are also fighting poverty, I am convince that we are in a national crisis of dependency. In fact, I would say that dependency is a national epidemic.

Consider, for just a moment, that there are more people who are dependent on Federal anti-poverty programs than there are people living in poverty. Just in the food stamp program alone we have five million people dependent on it who are above the poverty line. Not to mention that if we look at those who are below the poverty line, which is about 37 million Americans, almost all of them are dependent on the government in some form or another, 96 percent. A Pew Charitable Foundation study found that about 70 percent of them will never escape. What that means is that we have about 24.8 million Americans today who are on a trajectory to die in dependent poverty. Dependency is a national epidemic.

Marvin Olasky, in his book *The Tragedy of American Compassion*, he wrote, aptly, he said, "Dependency is merely slavery with a smiling mask."

I believe that FDR would have agreed. In his 1935 State of the Union address he compared dependence on relief as a "subtle narcotic, a destroyer of the human spirit."

Now FDR said it, but I know a woman named Jocelyn who actually lived it. For 10 years, actually more than that, she was a needle drug addict living on the streets. She came into our mission, came to faith in Christ, got clean, but she did not give up her food stamps. It was a lot of work for us to convince her that she had the ability to provide for herself, and when she finally did voluntarily give up her food stamps card, her trajectory changed. She ended up going to college, got her master's degree, and now she runs one of our shelters.

You can imagine reporters were interested in doing a story, and there before the camera, in an interview with a reporter, she said, "It was harder for me to give up food stamps than it was for me to give up heroin."

Dependency is a form of slavery that is holding millions of Americans back from living the flourishing life that God intended. For Jocelyn, her dignity, her freedom, the flourishing life she lives, it did not come through welfare or food stamps. It came through faith, friendships, and work.

Let me leave you with this last comment from a woman I met last week named Selena, who is also homeless. She said, "I just want to thank you for doing the things the way that you do them. Allowing me to work for my bed and my meals has allowed me to feel like I can keep my dignity." For Selena it is the same. She also will step into the flourishing life through faith, friendship, and work. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Whitford can be found on page 87 in the appendix.]

Senator FETTERMAN. Thank you.

Ms. Hasty.

**STATEMENT OF WHITLEY HASTY, OUTREACH SPECIALIST,
HUNGER FREE AMERICA & FOODLINK, ROCHESTER, NEW
YORK**

Ms. HASTY. Thank you. Hi, everyone. My name is Whitley Hasty and I am honored to be here today to share how the Supplemental Nutrition Program has positively impacted the lives of me and my children. I want to thank you, Chair Fetterman, Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Senator Braun for having the hearing and having me here to testify.

I would like to thank my own Senator, Senator Gillibrand, for continuously championing solutions to end hunger.

I am the proud mother of a seven-year-old daughter. She is sweet, protective, hilarious, and cautiously independent. My three-year-old son is the opposite of her. He is grounded, generally likes to follow the rules, and has such an unlimited curiosity about everything. They are the center of my world, and I do everything I can to be present and active in their lives, from going to gymnastics, to hosting sleepovers, to becoming the Vice President of the

PTSO at our local school. I work really hard to model for my kids the importance of civic and community duty.

I am raising my children the way my mother raised me. She never, almost never missed a day of work and still made time to support four children in multiple activities at three different schools. She earned a modest salary but would often bluntly, and still describes our upbringing as “one flat tire away from an eviction.” We often do not see the sacrifices our parents make until we grow up and make them ourselves.

With the help of SNAP, we were able to shop for healthier foods rather than get by with just the basics. As the oldest, I learned how to grocery shop on a limited budget and still maximize the nutrition value of our meals.

Working since the age of 13, I have always craved the independence that comes with making an honest income. Even during college, while on scholarship, I held down two jobs while I worked at the campus dining hall and at Wegmans. My resume is lengthy because I have always been willing, able, and ready to work. I am proud of my strong work ethic and career advancement, but also know that much of what I have accomplished could not have been achieved without SNAP.

In 2015, I obtained both SNAP and WIC during my prenatal care. Applying for both was a really difficult. The two applications being separate meant that I missed work twice and lost wages to visit DHS at 8 a.m., only to wait in line for hours among other families. I am grateful to the caseworker who helped me navigate this process, and I know the staff were trying to make this process as seamless as possible, but I do understand why some eligible participants are too intimidated to apply.

That is why I support Senator Gillibrand’s proposal to make it easier for States and counties to enable eligible people to apply for multiple programs simultaneously online.

Receiving SNAP absolutely helped my family eat healthier. We ate less processed foods, and I started making different recipes. I used SNAP to shop not only at grocery stores, but also at farmers and mobile markets like Foodlink’s Curbside Mobile Market. I utilized incentive programs to maximize my budget and help prioritize fruits and vegetables through programs such as Double Up Food Bucks, which is funded partially through the USDA GusNIP grant.

When the pandemic hit, I was grateful to receive an increase in my SNAP benefits. My son was born two months earlier, before the world turned upside down. The SNAP emergency allotments provided by Congress enabled me to stretch my food budget so that I could keep the heat and lights on. I am a perfect example of how legislation reduced poverty and hunger during one of the largest economic collapses of our lifetimes.

My life refutes the most common SNAP myth. Receiving benefits was never a deterrent for me to work. I continually worked or sought work while receiving SNAP, and that is true of most SNAP recipients. A close, old friend of mine recently celebrated the achievement of financial security when she no longer qualified for SNAP, and I can relate to that. If Congress wants to reduce the use of SNAP, it should raise the minimum wage, increase the

Earned Income Tax Credit, and boost wage, childcare, and transportation subsidies.

I am proud that my work at Hunger Free America and Foodlink has meant not only that I no longer need SNAP benefits, but that I can now pay it forward by helping my community to access those benefits as well.

Every day I witness how the recent end of the SNAP emergency allotments has impacted the diverse communities that I serve. Overnight, the minimum monthly benefit for many seniors fell from \$281 to just \$23. My hope is that this esteemed body again increases SNAP benefits to better help struggling Americans cope with skyrocketing costs for rent, utilities, childcare, and yes, food.

I am thankful that SNAP and WIC helped my family through challenging times, and that I am now able to give my kids a bright future. I hope my story encourages you to strengthen SNAP in the farm bill.

In my written testimony I have also included a few policy proposals supported by both Hunger Free America and Foodlink that would improve the lives of many in both my neighborhood and in the Nation, and it remains a vital truth that medicine is food, and it should still be regarded as such.

Thank you again for this opportunity.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Hasty can be found on page 92 in the appendix.]

Senator FETTERMAN. Thank you very much. Thanks to all of you. Now we will begin the five-minute rounds of questions for each member, and I will begin with my own now.

Mrs. Cox, currently States allow SNAP mostly to do what they see fit. I am concerned about proposals to limit this. My own State of Pennsylvania has the ability to seek waivers on work requirements and times, depending on employment metrics. This also includes tools to ensure that low-wage working households avoid a benefit cliff.

Can you possibly explain the potential impact these proposals would have on States?

Mrs. JONES COX. Yes. Thank you for the question. When we think about the waivers, I think while unemployment has come down across the country there are still areas that have higher unemployment. Each State has experienced some crisis, whether it is a natural disaster, plant closing, some community conditions that have persistent high unemployment, specifically like a Native American community. That means people cannot find jobs where these waivers are needed. States can only request temporary waivers for areas with relatively high unemployment and a lack of sufficient jobs, and States are really in the best position to evaluate the needs of their communities. That is why it is really critical to maintain States' flexibility so that they can respond to their communities' needs.

Then on the other hand, around flexibilities, for example, the asset limit, the broad-based categorical eligibility, a lot of States that have expanded the income limit, it is basically for working families. Families who are just above the poverty line but because of high shelter or childcare costs, at the end of the day they meet the eligibility for SNAP and they are able to receive benefits.

Taking that away, we saw when the Trump administration sought to pursue these reforms it was going to estimate three million individuals were actually going to lose SNAP. When you look at income asset limits, so that mostly impacts older adults who have modest savings, so you would be asking them to not be able to have a savings in order to get SNAP.

So, you know, the States' flexibility is super important because States are in the better position to tell what they need in their State.

Senator FETTERMAN. Thank you, Mrs. Cox. I actually have one more kind of a brief other question please. Many SNAP households have had benefits stolen through skimming. Victims face the serious challenge of losing their purchase power. When debit cards are skimmed there are protections for the cardholder. What needs to be done to ensure that families have that same kind of being protecting?

Mrs. JONES COX. Right. So there has been a lot of skimming over the last few years, and so what is really important is that SNAP participants have the same consumer protections that everyone else has. If you have a debit or a credit card and you have protections for your purchases, the same should happen for EBT card users.

I do want to say I appreciate the quick action of Congress to restore stolen benefits, and that is over the next year or so. We really want to make sure that any new EBT protections and technology does not prevent participants from having access to their benefits.

I do not know if there is one particular solution. There may be a few. It could be chip card technology, improving the detection and elimination of some of the skimming devices that are in stores, training retailers. Ultimately we want SNAP EBT cardholders to not be treated any differently than other consumers, any less protections than other consumers.

Senator FETTERMAN. Mrs. Jones Brown, food banks are really critical for the support and foundation of SNAP. Would you agree with that?

Mrs. JONES BROWN. Absolutely.

Senator FETTERMAN. The Emergency Food Assistance Program, or TEFAP, was established to provide emergency food assistance to low-income individuals, and these individuals may not qualify for SNAP but they might need additional support. Food banks, like Philabundance, and knowing personally the quality of the work that you do in my own State, they distribute 85 percent of TEFAP foods nationwide.

As Americans struggle with high food costs, how have you been able to allow you to continue to provide food support?

Mrs. JONES BROWN. Thank you for the question, and the reality is that food banks like Philabundance, our partners across the commonwealth of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and really across the country, we heavily rely on the government food programs that support farmers across this country that also end up supporting us, enabling us to ensure that our neighbors get access to the food that they need, and often it is produce that the folks are asking for.

What we have seen over the last couple of years is that as inflation has increased and there have been challenges with the food

supply, food banks have found it harder and harder to get donations of food from the private sector or even to purchase food, and so government food becomes that much more important.

We also saw that, in the early days of the pandemic, the government providing additional supports that came through food banks, enabled us to really stave off that huge increase in food insecurity. That is why today we are calling on government to really increase the support for TEFAP to ensure that there are additional food supports that is coming through to our State, to our region, and across the country.

Senator FETTERMAN. Thank you.

Now I recognize Ranking Member Braun for five minutes.

Senator BRAUN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We measure, I think, food insecurity by trying to get it below 10 percent. We have not been able to do that. Families with children, without, it has been 20 years, and we spend more, there are more participants in it. That, to me, is something. It is such a good program. We have got to have metrics that honestly say what is happening. I am disappointed that we have not been able to do better with it.

Ms. Reynolds and Mr. Whitford, take about 45 seconds each because I have got a second question. What are you seeing in the field? What are we doing wrong in Congress? Because it is stubbornly staying at a level where we cannot get it down any lower.

Ms. REYNOLDS. We first have to recognize that we need to feed people in order to make sure that people can have upward mobility. We know cognitively if we do not have someone's basic needs cared for they cannot progress. We cannot stop there. Where we have to go next is making sure they have evidence-based programs to get them on a pathway out of poverty.

Examples I mentioned, like Bridges to Success, Goodwell Excel Center, Catholic Charities Padua, those are all proven by rigorous evidence that they work to give low-income Americans a pathway out of poverty so that they, five years from now, a few years from now, can be feeding their families and not needing SNAP benefits.

Senator BRAUN. Mr. Whitford?

Mr. WHITFORD. Senator Braun, I think that you are right. Things have continued to increase. In 1969, if we were going to look at the average food stamp allotment for a person, with dollars equated to today, it would be about \$50, and now we are talking like \$230 or something per person. It has just continued to increase. The numbers have continued to increase.

I think really, going back to even something that Mrs. Cox was saying about State flexibility, we do need to see more local control, because truth be told, the people that are in my community, I know their needs much better than anyone else. There are some folks who would benefit and do well, just as Ms. Hasty did, and utilizing these benefits correctly, and there are some who do not. I am the one in my community and those like me who understand that.

There is a 100-year-old adage that says "intelligent giving and intelligent withholding are a like true charity." Sometimes it is compassionate to say, "No, we are not going to move in that direction," but right now SNAP, TEFAP, they tie your hands and you do not have that ability.

We need that ability. We need that local control so that communities can be effective in their charity work.

Senator BRAUN. Thank you. Ms. Reynolds, in your written testimony you share the store of three charitable organizations that LEO has partnered with, including, down in my neck of the woods, the Goodwill Excel Center of Central and Southern Indiana, to study the effectiveness of holistic employment and training practices. In your testimony you also suggest that the USDA should leverage studies like yours to help move SNAP recipients out of poverty.

I plan to introduce the HAND UP Act, which would direct USDA to maintain a clearinghouse for evidence-based practices for SNAP employment and training.

Do you believe this clearinghouse would improve SNAP's success at connecting recipients with long-term employment and a path out of poverty?

Ms. REYNOLDS. I believe if you and I walked into our doctor's office and are given a pill to handle an ailment we have, we deserve to make sure that that pill has undergone a certain level of testing where we are protected. Right now, in many cases, when a poor person walks into an organization to receive food, they are given food, but then when they are given some sort of employment and training program it does not have evidence behind it that it works.

We need this evidence. If we do not have this evidence we cannot scratch our heads and wonder why are there still people not achieving upward mobility in our country. We have to give people in poverty programs that work, and one of the successful models for this has been MIECHV as well as Families First, where when you have Federal law requiring that people use evidence or are creating the usage of evidence where it does not exist, paired with clearinghouses that are set up that are actionable to all of us who are in the provider space as well, it can make a tremendous difference.

Senator BRAUN. Thank you. Mr. Whitford, do you want to weigh in on how this might dovetail with what you are doing?

Mr. WHITFORD. Yes. Sure. I think, again, measuring evidence-based practice is incredibly important, and so outcomes are incredibly important to measure. It is important among private charities. It is certainly going to be important among government programs. I think that is what we have got to look at, not thinking that the efficacy of a program is dependent upon the number of people that are enrolled in it but rather the efficacy of a program being how many people got off the rolls and ended up back into the work force.

Senator BRAUN. Thank you. In wrapping up on my end of the questioning I think it is important because whatever we do here in the Federal Government, you have got to have metrics. If it is not producing the results—we all want the same end result—you are going to have to look at maybe other ways of doing it.

I would like to highlight to anyone listening out there, we currently are in peril because of everything we spend here in the Federal Government, just a little over four years ago when I got here, we were borrowing 20 cents on every dollar that we spend. Now it is up to 30 cents, and that is going to put in peril all the good

things we do. Sooner or later we are going to have to figure out better ways of doing it and making sure we are getting a better bang for our buck.

Chairwoman Stabenow.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Well thank you very much, Senator Braun and Senator Boozman. Wonderful as always to see my partner her, and Senator Fetterman, thank you so much for your leadership. Senator Booker, our former Chair of the Nutrition Subcommittee, we have got a great team.

Let me just echo what Senator Braun said in terms of evidence-based programs. I could not agree more. If that is what we do, we will get consensus. We will get bipartisan support, and keep it based on evidence. That is what we need to do.

I also wanted to thank Ms. Hasty. Thank you so much for bringing a real-life perspective to what we are talking about, and for your leadership and being a great role model for your children. I appreciate you very much.

You know, our nutrition programs in the farm bill provide a modest but incredibly important support for Americans who need to put food on their tables, and I appreciate all of you being here today to be involved in this discussion. We know there are children and seniors and working families and veterans, people with disabilities who rely on programs like SNAP, for an average of six dollars and ten cents a day to buy healthy food, and I am reminded every time I go buy a cup of coffee for six bucks. So six dollars and ten cents a day is what we are talking about. Over 41 million vulnerable Americans rely on these modest benefits, and most of them are temporary during tough times.

I want to specifically address something that has been talked about a lot, particularly by House colleagues, House leadership, and just say news flash, SNAP has work requirements. As Senator Braun said, general work requirements have been a law since 1977. They were strengthened during President Clinton's time in 1996, as part of welfare reform. Time limits were added for adults without children, as we know, so that unless they are working 80 per month, or now we say in a job training program, that you can only receive three months of SNAP during three years. That is current law, suspended under COVID, just as we suspended other work requirements, now coming back in July.

That is the basis from which we are operating, is that we have work requirements that have been supported on a bipartisan basis.

The farm bill has always provided a safety net for our farmers and our families. Our farmers and our families, and I believe strongly that it is critical that both safety nets continue.

Ms. Cox, I have a question for you. The Administration reevaluated the Thrifty Food Plan, which is the basis for the SNAP benefit, based on current food prices, which you know have been going up, not down, consumption patterns, food composition data, dietary guidelines, how much time we spend cooking from scratch—I do not know if people know what that is anymore, when you say that term. This was required as part of the bipartisan 2018 Farm Bill, the first comprehensive update since 1975, to really look at all of it.

What is the impact of the reevaluation and why was this meaningful to do?

Mrs. JONES COX. Thank you, Chairwoman Stabenow, for that question. The revision to the Thrifty Food Plan, which was a directive from the 2018 Farm Bill, it really served as a critical and much-needed, long-overdue revision, as you said, from 1975. It had not been reevaluated, and we really look differently at how much time families have to purchase food. We also look at dietary guidelines differently now than we did in the 1970's, so looking at green vegetables, orange vegetables, whole grains, buying lean proteins and seafood. That was also used and taken into account. As a result there was an increase.

I think what is really important, as you mentioned, about the modest benefit amount, while it is modest it was a meaningful increase, and what we found is that that amount lifts some 2.4 million people, including 1 million children, above the poverty line, and it decreased food insecurity for tens of millions. While we made a modest increase, although important, we really showed what we can do and how we can lift people out of poverty by just making that revision, which was much needed.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Thanks so much. Then finally, Mrs. Jones Brown, thank you for all your work. Food bank work is so important. You are on the front lines of fighting food insecurity, and I wonder if you could talk a little bit more about who you typically serve at your food bank, and whether that population has changed over time.

Mrs. JONES BROWN. Thank you very much for the question, Senator. What we saw over the last few years is that more and more of our neighbors found themselves accessing a charitable food network. In middle 2020, we saw 60 percent more people lining up to access food across our region, but across the country as well, and 40 percent of them were newly food insecure. Chances are somebody you know. If there was a restaurant you used to go to, if there was a service provider or small business owner, chances are, for the first time in their lives, they were accessing a charitable food network.

We have seen the face of hunger change in our country. We know that, as we saw from the USDA study, that far too many families with children are food insecure. We know far too many of our seniors and our veterans are food insecure. We are seeing also, more and more, that working folks are.

One of the last pantries I visited right before Easter, I walked in and I saw someone there who I thought was maybe donating food, who was actually in full uniform and was actually shopping for free food at the pantry. Days before, his company had actually donated to Philabundance.

The reality is that more and more we are finding people that are working, that are just having a hard time making ends meet, particularly with the price of eggs, that they are coming to a charitable food network.

I would dare say that everybody in this room knows somebody who at some point, probably in the last year or two, had to come to us to ask for help.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Thank you very much. Thank you.

Senator Braun. [Presiding.] Senator Boozman.

Senator BOOZMAN. Thanks to Chairman Fetterman and Ranking Member Braun for holding the hearing.

It is interesting. I think right now the base of the farm bill is \$1.5 trillion, \$1.2 trillion has to do with food assistance. This is something that is really very, very important; we appreciate you all being here and sharing your expertise.

Ms. Hasty, thank you for sharing, as I said, your expertise, your experience with SNAP and WIC today. It is always good to hear directly from those that have been impacted by these programs. I am also glad to hear that SNAP helped you and your family bridge the gap, which is really what this is all about, and helped you advance in your career. That is exactly what the program is meant to do.

In your time working towards your current career, what were the most important things that helped you move from making ends meet to stable employment? What aspects of the program were helpful, and maybe some areas that were not so helpful.

Ms. HASTY. Thank you for the question and thanks again for allowing me to speak. Like I said in my testimony, I think one of the barriers would be the application process. I mean, having to take time off of work, losing wages to appear, and then if it is easier for me to leave my children at home, paying someone to watch my children while I go and stand in line for a long time and apply. I mean, everyone was really helpful in that process, but that was a difficulty.

I think, as anyone will tell you, receiving SNAP, there is also living with the stigma of being labeled as someone who has failed. That was not an easy aspect of it, but I am proud of the fact that I was able to support my family with the help of SNAP. I think every time I earned a higher wage I could look back and reflect and see that I could attribute that to the way in which it helped me stretch my budget and keep paying my bills, and not have to continue to pay late rent fees and things like that. It has been progressive.

Senator BOOZMAN. Well, the other thing, too, I wanted to ask you about, and you touched on it, you have been an ambassador at the Curbside Market and truly have firsthand experience in reaching those who may be in need of assistance with WIC and SNAP. Tell me, you mentioned the paperwork, are there other barriers that you are finding, so that we can capture those folks that do need help, that have not signed up for WIC or SNAP?

Ms. HASTY. Barriers to—

Senator BOOZMAN. To their participation. In other words, the participation is really under.

Ms. HASTY. Although I know WIC is not part of the farm bill, but my experience is in helping people access benefits to WIC, and I know that there are barriers to participation in both of those programs. Particularly in the communities that I serve, the individuals that I try to help, barriers would be the application process, and—

Senator BOOZMAN. Well, I suppose so, I mean, the other aspect would be the fact that you are out telling people that it actually exists. It is hard for us to understand probably that there are peo-

ple that do not really know, you know, what is going on and the program is available.

Ms. HASTY. Right. Again, in my experience I work right now with helping people access WIC. Again, I know it is not part of the farm bill.

Senator BOOZMAN. Very good.

Ms. HASTY. Sorry.

Senator BOOZMAN. No, no. Thank you.

Real quickly, Ms. Reynolds, you emphasized the need to scale up programs, evidence-based programs like Padua, Bridges to Success, Goodwill Excel Center. What are the barriers to expanding programs in other regions while also keeping in mind that one size does not fit all? How do you think these types of programs might work in our rural areas that are desperately in need?

Ms. REYNOLDS. Yes, thank you for your question. As a fellow Arkansan, I appreciate the rural nod as well.

I would say a couple of things. The first thing I would say is that LEO has built a tremendous amount of evidence around individualized case management that is holistically focused on the family, and what that allows to have happen is the path forward is not just this is what you need and everybody gets this. The path forward is often understanding each family where they are at, understanding what their today needs are, what their tomorrow needs are, and maybe their needs a year from now, and doing life with them for a longer period of time, to get them into upward mobility, the living wage income, those sorts of things.

What we have found is that these solutions, like Goodwill Excel Center, like Catholic Charities Fort Worth, they are showing solutions that are case management paired with flexible financial assistance plus wraparound services, and then tend to be then very customized within that, for getting toward upward mobility.

Senator BOOZMAN. Thank you.

Senator FETTERMAN. [Presiding.] Thank you, Senator.

Now I recognize Senator Klobuchar for five minutes.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Thank you very much, Chair Fetterman. Thank you for holding this really important hearing.

Ms. Brown, during the full Committee hearing on nutrition I asked Under Secretary Dean about her experience at a Minnesota SNAP Employment and Training site, and she spoke very positively about our model, and even suggested it could be good to bring out to the rest of the country. I understand you are also familiar with the collaborative work we are doing between Federal, State, and local. Can you talk about, in more detail, how this kind of programs helps participants overcome barriers to employment?

Mrs. JONES BROWN. Absolutely. Thank you for the question, Senator. At Philabundance we are operate a community kitchen that is supported by SNAP Employment and Training program. They are all adults. They are all either on SNAP or eligible for SNAP. It is a free, 16-week program. We have very positive results, people that stay in the program, the graduation rates, and then getting jobs.

What we talk about is that we teach people, we say both knife skills and life skills. These are very limited, low barriers to entry. People have been through the criminal justice system or, in some

cases, had a health issue, had an injury, and had to change opportunities or change trajectories.

Through this program we also have a catering operation, production, like other Catalyst Kitchens across the country. What we have found with that is that our participants are learning not just to cook, they are also learning about nutrition, and they are also providing meals, much-needed healthy meals to people who are food insecure across the region.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Okay. Very good. The second questions, food banks in Minnesota, like Second Harvest, Heartland, which has seen a 40 percent reduction, about seven million fewer pounds in Federal commodities in the last year, it is very important that, as you know, the program remains responsive to access to supply and increased demand we are seeing, in part because of prices, to purchase bonus commodities at times of high need for emergency food relief.

Ms. Brown—in addition to times of low commodity prices, it goes either way—Ms. Brown, could you speak to the importance of the USDA regular TEFAP spending and CCC purchases and their role in ensuring our food banks have consistent access to food?

Mrs. JONES BROWN. Thank you for the question. You are absolutely right. It is critically important for us to be able to meet the need of our neighbors, that we have access to government foods. We actually have seen that decrease, and we are seeing it decreasing now. At the height in the last two years we received about 19 million pounds of food from government that we were able to get out into our neighborhoods, to ensure that our neighbors had access to fresh, healthy food, primarily produce, which is really helpful for ensuring that they are healthy and providing nutritious food to them.

This calendar year alone it looks like we are on track to get maybe five million pounds. At the same time, we are trying to purchase additional food. With the economy being what it is, it is costing us more.

Really the TEFAP programs are a lifeline for us to ensure that our neighbors have access to food.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Okay. Very good. Last question. Ms. Cox, as you know, the 2018 Farm Bill authorized the Healthy Fluid Milk Incentives pilot to encourage the consumption of milk, which we all know is part of a well-rounded diet. The HFMI pilot builds on the success of previous incentive programs like GusNIP, which have been shown to positively impact purchasing decisions.

With such a high demand for additional nutrient-rich dairy products like yogurt and cheese, what opportunities exist to expand the reach of the program to include more dairy products nationwide?

Mrs. JONES COX. Thanks for the question, Senator. So yes, the GusNIP program, which, in the last farm bill, actually receive an increase, that is pretty much one of the strongest programs that we will be able to use or we can access for participants to have access to fresh fruits and vegetables, to healthy foods, as well as milk. I will have to probably get back to you a little bit on the Healthy Fluid because I do not think we know as much about that. I do know enough about the GusNIP that there was more money placed in it in the last farm bill, and that is really the place where we

are seeing a lot of results. We are seeing the Double Up Bucks programs, and just the place where people are able to access fresh fruits and vegetable, even at farmers markets.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Okay. Thank you.

Senator FETTERMAN. Thank you, Senator.

Let me now recognize Senator Booker for five minutes.

Senator BOOKER. Thanks so much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

I am really grateful to be here, and I loved the testimony that we heard today. I just want to say very clearly, first and foremost, it is important that we protect SNAP.

I think I am one of the small handful of Senators that live in a very low-income neighborhood, and I see every day the profound difference that SNAP makes in the lives of people who are working hard, who are struggling to make it. We live in a country where just finding housing you have to make more than twice the minimum wage, in my State, just to be able to afford your housing needs.

We are seeing, in my communities across New Jersey, how SNAP is a powerful program that needs to be protected, and frankly, needs to be expanded. I think in the United States of America it is outrageous that people who have drug convictions cannot get SNAP. People who admitted doing the same things that Presidents have now said they have done, Senators have said they have done. Privileged folks who do not get drug enforcement like we see in communities like mine do not lose their Federal eligibility for a lot of things. We believe in redemption in this country but yet we hold people, time and time again, who are formerly incarcerated, to higher levels than reflects that spirit and that value.

There are places like Puerto Rico. Each and every one of those people are Americans, and they should have the same access to vital programs like this.

We are facing, in this country, also, not just a hunger crisis but a nutrition crisis. We have an explosion of diet-related diseases, and we know that if we want to try to save costs in this country, one out of every three government dollars right now is being spent on health care, and the overwhelming majority of that is diet-related diseases. What we are seeing is programs that I believe need to be expanded, like GusNIP, for example, or actually getting people off of their prescription drugs.

We have an urban farm in the South Ward of Newark, New Jersey, that I was there filming the documentary, "Food Inc. 2," and you had just people volunteering, coming up, talking about how they had hundreds and hundreds of dollars' worth of prescription drugs. Their co-pay was \$100. One woman was telling me it was \$700. She was off of her prescriptions drugs when she started getting access to fresh, healthy food.

I love, Ms. Reynolds, the evidence-based. We know what works in communities, but we are putting up artificial barriers, as was being said by Ms. Hasty, artificial barriers. We are making it really difficult for the people we need. These are our children. Ms. Cox, you said it so well. Nutritious, healthy diets help people in their brain development years. Not access to healthy, fresh foods actually undermines brain development.

SNAP is great. It needs to become a nutrition program. That is one of the letters in SNAP stands for. And I believe we need to do a lot more, making diet, quality, and nutrition the core of SNAP objectives, scaling up programs like GusNIP, and more.

Just really quick, in the little bit of time I have left, I just would like, say, can we talk about the challenges that are being faced by people at Philabundance, Ms. Brown, in getting access to those fresh, healthy foods are vital to the strength of our families and the potential competitiveness of them for the long term.

Mrs. JONES BROWN. Thank you very much, Senator, for the question, and we absolutely agree with you, and it is why in your State and in Pennsylvania we have actually challenged ourselves. We put out what we call our Good Food Policy. We are holding ourselves accountable to distribute even more nutritious food. And interestingly, research tells us that is what our neighbors want and what they need.

Now, obviously, in the communities that we serve there is a dearth of grocery stores and sometimes farmers markets, and that is why we want to make sure that we are, through programs like TEFAP and other programs, getting more access to more produce that we are getting out to folks.

Interestingly, it is what people are asking for. Each and every time I talk to a neighbor in need in a pantry, they are asking me for produce. They want fresh fruits and vegetables. There is a myth that people do not want that, and so people were asking for collard greens or sweet potatoes or carrots, so we are attempting to provide that.

We also, in addition to providing the free food to folks, we are also working with member partnerships with grocery stores, with health care. We are providing healthy meals, medically tailored meals, and then working with grocery stores to see if there are other ways we can get people access to benefits, like SNAP, while also getting access to the food that they need.

Senator BOOKER. Excellent. And can I just ask you—I want to stay with you, Ms. Brown. My time is out but I want to ask one last question. One out of every three women incarcerated on the Planet Earth is in the United States of America. We are the land of the free but we incarcerate women, overwhelmingly women who have been survivors of sexual violence, sexual trauma. Ninety-five to 98 percent of them coming home, they have got children that they have been separated from, that often end up in multiple different foster homes. And we know, against evidence-based, as Ms. Reynolds said, that when you do things to strengthen the connection with their children they have lower recidivism rates, and they are more successful.

How does it make sense—and again, I am a man of faith so I believe in the story of the prodigal child—but how does it make sense in our society that we take that woman, a survivor of sexual trauma, overincarcerated with mandatory minimums for crimes, again, that many privileged people do every day, and then when they come home and they are trying to reconnect with their children, we deny them the basic benefits to get access to fresh, healthy foods?

Does that make any sense, from not just a policy perspective or a moral perspective, but does it make sense from an economic perspective at all.

Mrs. JONES BROWN. It does not, and one of the things that we have found is that when we provide people additional supports, like SNAP, with the SNAP emergency allotments, I think in Pennsylvania that meant \$200 million each month additionally going into grocery stores. Even if you think about the economic impact of these programs, the reality is that for every dollar we are investing in SNAP, \$1.50 or \$1.80 is coming back into our communities.

Senator BOOKER. And that justice-involved woman, getting herself back on her feet to work, we found with the Child Tax Credit, Kenna's data shows that it actually increased work force participation for the women. Does SNAP for a justice-involved woman, getting eligibility for that, empower them to be successful earners?

Mrs. JONES BROWN. I think that is right, and I think the reality is, you know, I appreciate the moral issue. I, too, am a person of faith, and really feel honored and privileged that we get to do this work every day. I fully believe we have learned a lot of lessons over the last several years. I appreciate your leadership, and Senator Braun's, with the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health.

I believe we can solve hunger. I believe that we can take what works, and we have seen a lot of things that are working across the country. We have seen government work. I think the reality is we have so much in this country, we can ensure that our neighbors have what they need to thrive.

Senator BOOKER. Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, thanks for the indulgence.

Senator FETTERMAN. Thank you, Senator.

Now I recognize Senator Gillibrand for five minutes.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Senator Booker, for your commitment to such an important issue.

I would like to give the floor to Ms. Hasty a bit. I would like to hear a little bit more about your story, what work you were doing at the time, what work you were looking for, did SNAP improve your job security, did it improve your economic self-sufficiency, did you ever feel that SNAP created a cycle of benefit dependency, and what recommendations would you make to improve the SNAP program?

Ms. HASTY. Thank you. In addition to raising my children during the time that I received SNAP I was consistently working an average of 34 hours a week. At that time, when I was able to work, and with the last full-time job I held while receiving SNAP, I actually had mandatory overtime. I had both full-time jobs and simultaneous part-time jobs, but I had a total of five different employers, so a variety of work.

Without it I would not have been able to pay my rent, or I would it have been late. We did not miss a meal. We worked harder. I worked harder. My kids played harder. SNAP has helped me to earn more, I think, each time that I advance in my career, as modest as it was.

In terms of a cycle of dependency, I think that is common language, but it feels like a deflection from the real economic problems

that we are facing. I always sought to strengthen my skills and grow professionally, so I know what it feels like, like I had mentioned before, to kind of feel like you have done something wrong to have that type of help. I mean, even in the grocery line, using your SNAP card or using your WIC card, holding up the line, that is a real reality. I wonder how many people in this room or are watching have ever woken up and drank a bottle of water to make themselves feel full until they knew they were going to eat that one time at the kitchen that they worked at, because I have had to do that before.

The truth is that SNAP and other programs designed to alleviate hunger and poverty are just proof that we all deserve a standard of living that lets us live healthier and happier. We know that SNAP works, but it needs to be expanded.

I never thought that it was going to be permanent, and even when I did not understand the definition of what an entitlement program was, I understood that the more that my income increased, the less net benefits I got, and the reason I was happy about that is because I was, you know, like I said, it is almost celebrated when you are no longer receiving benefits. I was really proud to start earning a salary that exceeded those income limits.

I think improvements to SNAP would obviously be streamlining application processes so that it makes it easier for people, better communication about what the program entails and who is eligible for it, and not imposing absurd extra work requirements, I suppose, or work reporting requirements, and allowing people to have a more diverse purchasing power with the things that they can purchase with it. Online retailers, farmers markets, and there is more detail about that in the written testimony that I prepared.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you. Ms. Hasty, the SNAP benefit today is only six dollars and ten cents a day. Obviously, you cannot feed yourself and two kids on six dollars and ten cents a day. Talk to me a little bit about how SNAP supplemented what you were able to buy from your income and from your earnings, and what difference SNAP actually made to being able to buy more healthy foods for your children and yourself.

Ms. HASTY. Right. It is obviously a supplemental program. We know that it is not meant to be your entire food budget every month. I think the difference with and without SNAP, if you kind of picture going to the grocery store without SNAP, you have to think about how much money should be left so that utility bill could be paid. Without SNAP, you might only purchase bread, milk, and eggs, because you know that you can eat those things for the rest of the week.

With SNAP it kind of just gives you more flexibility. You can buy fruits and vegetables and have raw fruits and vegetables in your house and not just have the basic staples. You can focus more on the nutrition instead of just kind of making these impossible choices.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you, Ms. Hasty.

Just last, for Mrs. Jones, can you talk a little bit about students who need access to SNAP and also the importance of making sure that we move Puerto Ricans from NAP to SNAP.

Mrs. JONES BROWN. Actually, thank you very much for the question. What we see, we do our work at our food bank and the food banks like ours across the country, with agency partners. Those are churches, mosques, synagogues, schools, community service organizations that end up distributing the food. The reality is in our network we have a number of colleges and universities that also have food pantries. Right in Senator Booker's district we opened a food pantry at Rutgers Camden a couple of years ago.

The reality is we have our college students, that as they are trying to get an education so they can get a great job, that they are also food and housing insecure. We are able to support them through food banks like ours.

Mrs. JONES BROWN. I did not. We ended up partnering with them. We are actually part of the same region, interestingly. Through the USDA region we are part of the same region. The Atlantic region includes them, so they are one of our partners in this work. They are a part of our network of 200 food banks, and so we are able to share best practices and ways that we can ensure that our neighbors have access to the food that they need, not just in the continental U.S. but also in Puerto Rico.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you.

Senator BOOKER. Thanks for crossing the Delaware.

Mrs. JONES BROWN. I like Washington.

Senator FETTERMAN. Thank you, Senator.

I now recognize Senator Warnock for five minutes.

Senator WARNOCK. Thank you so very much, Mr. Chair, and it is great to see you back.

During the pandemic, Congress provided an emergency boost to food assistance programs called Emergency SNAP Allotments. This boost ended in a number of States last month, but my own State of Georgia and many other States already ended this increase months ago. After this emergency food assistance was cutoff in Georgia, the Atlanta Community Food Bank, which works very closely with my church, saw visits increase by about 34 percent, 34 percent, when compared to the same period the previous year.

I visited the Atlanta Food Bank. I have spent time with the volunteers and the workers over at Hosea Feed the Hungry and homeless and the work that they do. I have seen those lines get longer as our policies got harsher.

Mrs. Brown, food banks work hard to be a safety net for our Federal nutrition programs but they are struggling to keep up with increasing need. How would further cutting Federal nutrition programs affect our food banks.

Mrs. JONES BROWN. Thank you very much for the question, Senator, and as you saw with my counterpart, Kyle, at the Atlanta Community Food Bank, who I was with just yesterday, across the country we have seen an increase. We saw an increase, obviously, early on in COVID in 2020, but then we also saw an increase with gas prices and inflation for food over the last year. We just had those emergency allotments go away in our States, and so we are anticipating increased need. We have seen 30 percent, 50 percent, even twice as many people access the charitable food network.

We have a number of churches that are a part of our network as well. In fact, one of our churches that is a member is a church

that I attend, Enon Tabernacle, which I believe that you were recently. We really could not do this work without our many partners.

We are here today asking for a bipartisan bill that really asks government to partner with us. We are absolutely willing to raise the fund, get private donations, and leverage the thousands and thousands of volunteers that we have across the country. We really need government support. We need government support to really do what works. We saw what works. We saw how emergency allotments and other additional supports over the last couple of years helped our communities, so we are asking for those kinds of supports.

Senator WARNOCK. I am going to ask an obvious question. You do not have the bandwidth to fill in the gap?

Mrs. JONES BROWN. We do not. We really do need help. We saw additional supports. Millions more pounds of food came through TEFAP to our food banks across the country during COVID. With that being pulled back, we are really concerned with how we are going to fill that. In the same way that everyday people are seeing prices go up in the grocery store, it is costing us more and more to purchase and transport for our neighbors in need.

Senator WARNOCK. On top of that, some of my colleagues are talking about rolling back the Thrifty Food Plan update, which increased food benefits by less than two dollars per day, but is expected to keep one million children above the poverty line. It seems to me that we cannot go backward in this farm bill, and I will be doing everything I can to expand and protect Federal nutrition benefits.

In the time that I still have, currently non-disabled adults without dependents are only eligible for SNAP for three months out of every three years unless then work 80 hours per month. Now I believe the vast majority of SNAP recipients who are able to work, do so. We need to bear in mind that most SNAP recipients are children, elderly, or disabled.

Some of my colleagues in the House, and also in the Senate, have talked about expanding existing work requirements for SNAP. Ms. Cox, can you tell us about these proposals and what the research says about existing work requirements already in place, including whether they increase work force participation?

Mrs. JONES COX. Thank you, Senator Warnock, for the question. Studies consistently demonstrate that taking benefits away from people who are not working or not meeting a work requirement does little to improve their long-term employment outcomes, especially those with limited employment opportunities. Instead, it increases hardship, including among people who are not even expected to work, like children and people with disabilities.

There was a recent peer-reviewed paper that showed that SNAP's time limit reduced participation in the program by 53 percent for those who were subject to it, with no effect on employment. There was another recent paper about no evidence of improved employment earnings, but it did find that SNAP participation was cut by 7 to 32 percentage points a year after the time limit was reinstated.

There have been consistent studies showing that it does not have an impact on earnings. It just takes away food.

Senator WARNOCK. It takes away food from hungry people.

Mrs. JONES COX. Exactly, and you cannot work if you are hungry.

Senator WARNOCK. Thank you so much. I hope we will keep this in mind, keep the research and the actual data in mind as we write this year's farm bill.

Senator FETTERMAN. Thank you, Senator.

Let me now recognize Senator Marshall for five minutes.

Senator MARSHALL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I appreciate all of our witnesses hanging through this lunch hour.

I do not know about you but I grew up every lunch in school that we got to drink whole milk. I would actually get two cartons of whole milk, and I hope that you all would support me that how important milk and the milk products are to the program that you run. Just bear with me a moment here.

[Pause.]

Let us start with Dr. Whitford. My first question should be how is Coach Self doing, but I assume you do not have any exact knowledge. I am glad to let you know that I did speak to the chancellor yesterday, and Coach Self is healing up very nicely and will be ready for next year's basketball season.

You run the Watered Gardens Ministry, and I would just like to hear a little bit more about that. What is your mantra? What drives you to do it? Tell me about the success of it and what is that feel-good moment for you?

Mr. WHITFORD. Thank you, Senator. There are many feel-good moments in this kind of work that we do, but certainly seeing people freed from poverty is the No. 1 thing that we are excited to see. Right now we are seeing a lot of folks who are really struggling and chronic homelessness, a lot of mental health issues, addiction issues, and these types of things.

We have a very robust program where we are sitting down and getting to know people, very relational in nature, setting goals with them, and helping them up and out of poverty. You know, and we measure a lot. I think it is important that charities like mine are outcome driven and really doing a good job of measuring key performance indicators, and we do that.

Interestingly, before the pandemic, we were seeing about 63, 64 percent of folks who would come into our shelter with no job at all, leave with a job, and over the last couple of years that has changed. Now we are really struggling to see people get back into the work force. We are a little below 40 percent at this point of folks coming into the shelter and then not leaving with a job. What we track is successful exits out of our shelter have been dropping.

Senator MARSHALL. You have got to tell us why. How come? What are the barriers?

Mr. WHITFORD. Well, it really does seem that there is so much government largess that is pouring into our communities, and it is not just mine. I mean, I have 11 pages of testimony from leaders across the United States that are fighting poverty that really are seeing perverse incentives from the amount of government help that is coming into the community. It is not help that is able to

discern. It is not a help that is investigative in nature. The very things we are doing with people on the ground in our own community, understanding the individual needs and what is really needed for that person, government programs are not able to do that kind of work.

It creates a perverse incentive that draws people toward it rather than toward the challenging developmental programs that are actually going to help them up and out of poverty.

Senator MARSHALL. You know, coming from the Midwest I think that a work ethic is part of our DNA. It is part of the values that I was raised on. Here in Joplin, Missouri—I will still call Missouri the Midwest, even though we kind of struggle with your basketball team a little bit over there, but I am sure you are still rooting for the Jayhawks.

Tell me, do you still see that work ethic as a value that most of the people coming in to your facility with, that they want to get a job, or where are they on the work part of this?

Mr. WHITFORD. No, no. I am seeing a lot of people coming in that do not have any intention or desire to work. There is an entitlement mentality that has become pervasive in our Nation, and we see it come through the doors of our mission every day. Then what we have to do is we have to be great sources of inspiration and to provide relational accountability, in order to help people realize that they are created in the image of God, created in the image of a maker, and are therefore built and intended to make, to produce, and to contribute, not to be stuck on the receiving end of someone's benevolence.

Senator MARSHALL. In the long-term success, and you can define success how you want to, the folks that have a job, do they seem to be more fulfilled? Do they have purpose in life, or are they bouncing back sooner?

Mr. WHITFORD. Yes, absolutely, and this is what we find. This is why we do work first. You come into our mission and we want to employ you right off the bat, because we do not just see a person who is disabled or a person who is lacking capacity, but people who have ability and capacity and potential. When we start with employment it begins to energize them, because we are built for that. That is what leads to more successful outcomes.

Again, it is a fight. There is a great tension in what we are trying to do, and I think some of the larger, more bureaucratic forms of help coming into our community.

Senator MARSHALL. Well, great. My time has wound down. We appreciate all the witnesses coming today.

Mr. Chairman, I will yield back.

Senator FETTERMAN. Thank you, Senator.

I now recognize Senator Bennet for five minutes.

Senator BENNET. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and it is good to see you in this role. Thank you for having me today. I am not on the Subcommittee but I know how important this is.

Senator FETTERMAN. I thank you so much, Senator.

Senator BENNET. Thank you. Senator Marshall, my mom is proud of you for drinking that milk.

Senator MARSHALL. Thank you. Tell your mom "hey."

Senator BENNET. I will. I will tell her. She is probably the only person—that is not true. I was going to say the only person watching this, but that is not true. She is not, actually. She is not watching because she did not know what you would be doing.

I just wanted to come by because before I was in this job I was the superintendent of the Denver Public Schools, and the vast majority of kids there were living in poverty. They still are. The problem there was not that people did not work. The problem was people were working two and three jobs, and no matter what they did they could not get their kids out of poverty.

That is what is happening all over America, in a country where we are the richest country in the world, Mr. Chairman. It is true. And we have the worst income inequality that we have had since the 1920's in this country. We have the lowest economic mobility that we have had in generations, and lower economic mobility—I am sad to say this—than many other industrialized countries in the world that we compare ourselves to.

Do I think there are some people that do not work, if given the opportunity to work? Probably. I think what is much more likely the case, based on the parents, the families that I have worked with, is that people are working. People are killing themselves. They are not just working. Their kids are working. When you are in a family's house and you are the superintendent, and you show up, and I did show up under these circumstances, when kids were not going to school on a morning after, on a morning they missed school.

I would say, "Well, why have you missed school?" and they said, "Because I was working until 12 last night, at McDonald's down the street." Because we do not have the sense to give kids in this country the opportunity to go to school when it makes sense for them. We have a one-size-fits-all approach to public education that makes it hard, I think, for working families to work in the ways that they want to work and be able to support their kids.

I know Ms. Jones Cox knows that we spend a lot of time working on the Child Tax Credit a few years ago to cut childhood poverty in this country almost in half, which we did. When the Biden administration came in we cut childhood poverty by 50 percent, the most significant reduction in childhood poverty in American history. We reduced hunger in the United States by 30 percent, and we did not add a single bureaucrat to the Federal Government to do it. It was not a bureaucratic program. It was just putting money in the hands of families to be able to spend it, as Ms. Hasty was talking about, in the best interests of their kids.

You know, you said that they could buy a little bit of extra relief at the end of the month when they are paying their rent, when they are paying their light bill, when they are paying for their food, or for school clothes, in the case of kids that I represented in Colorado, whose parents were saying, "This is the first time that we have actually been able to provide school clothes for our kids."

From my point of view, you know, we are living in the richest country in the world, and our level of childhood poverty is criminal. It is inexcusable. It is immoral. It is unacceptable. And I think we should end it. I think cutting it in half was a good start, and I am

very sad that that came to an end. It worked. It did what we said it was going to do.

You know, for me—and I am not talking about people over on this side of the aisle. I am talking about in the other house of Congress—to see people who blew up this deficit so that the wealthiest people in America could have tax cuts when we have the worst income inequity since the 1920's, that makes no sense to me. That is a handout that makes no sense to me, when we have a solution for the childhood poverty that we are facing. And the idea that we would be threatening to blow up our credit rating over the school lunch program or over SNAP does not make any sense to me.

Ms. Cox, with my last 22 seconds—sorry to go on for so long—to the families in Colorado—and I guess what I would say, just two things. One, is it true that there are no work requirements when it comes to SNAP? And two, what is it going to mean to families? You know, two-thirds of the folks that get SNAP are living in families with children, in Colorado. What is it going to mean to those children if we cut these programs the way these folks have been talking about?

Mrs. Jones Cox. Okay. Real quick, so no, it is not true that there are not current work requirements in SNAP. There are. We have been talking about them. There is the three-month time limit for individuals not working, out of three years. There are work requirements.

The second, the proposal that was placed by Representative Johnson, for Colorado, in specific, it would be 115,000 SNAP participants in households that would be at risk of losing SNAP. If we are looking at those households with children seven and below, or we are looking at we are going from age 50 to 64. It is a lot of people in Colorado that would be at risk of losing benefits.

Senator BENNET. I know my time is up, and I am done, but let me just say what I saw when the Child Tax Credit went away, the Enhanced Child Tax Credit went away, was lines at food pantries just, you know, go up like this, skyrocket like this, and I think we are going to see the same thing here. Ms. Hasty, I do not know if you had the benefit of the Child Tax Credit or not. Would you mind saying a word about that, and then I will stop.

Ms. HASTY. In terms of—

Senator BENNET. Just what that enhanced—I am sorry to surprise you with it.

Ms. HASTY. No, I am sorry.

Senator BENNET. What that extra money meant in terms of the Child Tax Credit during COVID.

Ms. HASTY. The extra Child Tax Credit, I mean, me personally, in my own experience, allowed me to pay back rent, so it was extremely helpful. Like I said in my testimony, I mean, it is not an unfamiliar story that it helped just take a huge weight off my shoulders.

Senator BENNET. That is what families say to me, is that the stress, the stress, the stress is what it relieved.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back. Thank you, and I apologize to my colleague for going over.

Senator FETTERMAN. Thank you, Senator, and I especially want to thank, to every one of you, the witnesses today that came in, to hear from you all today, so thank you.

You know, protecting SNAP and preventing fraud is not a Republican or a Democratic issue, though. I think everyone agrees on that. It is time for the USDA and State agencies to update their technology security to prevent fraud. I would hope we would all agree.

I intend to strengthen the USDA's tools to existing mandate to do so. The USDA is already making significant efforts to modernize SNAP and its nutritional assistance. One of these efforts are updating the Thrifty Food Plan, which we have discussed today. This update is a modest investment with a significant impact for working Americans who need it.

We have to work to protect SNAP for the 21st century, and I look forward to working with my colleagues to get it done.

I heard one resounding theme during this hearing: that those who use SNAP do not want to use it forever. I have never met any American hoping that they can stay on SNAP for their whole lives, not at all. No one does. They only are on it because they need it.

SNAP is a program that helps individuals like Ms. Hasty and people like Mrs. Jones Brown, and Ms. Reynolds that work it. It helps Americans who fall on hard times.

I will end with this. We need to pass a farm bill that works for everyday Americans.

The record will remain open for five more days. And now this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:47 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

APRIL 19, 2023



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April 19, 2023

Building on SNAP's Effectiveness in the Farm Bill
Steps to Protecting and Strengthening the Program
Testimony of Ty Jones Cox, Vice President for Food Assistance
Policy, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities,
Before the Senate Agriculture Committee's Subcommittee on Food
and Nutrition, Specialty Crops, Organics, and Research

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am Ty Jones Cox, Vice President of Food Assistance Policy at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan policy institute located in Washington, D.C. CBPP conducts research and analysis on a range of federal and state policy issues affecting families with low and moderate incomes. The Center's food assistance work focuses on improving the effectiveness of the major federal nutrition programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps). I have worked on SNAP policy and operations for more than 15 years, starting as a legal aid attorney in Virginia where I represented clients in their fair hearings and during their engagement with the Department of Social Services. Much of my current work is providing technical assistance to state officials and advocates who wish to explore options and policies to improve SNAP operations to more efficiently serve eligible households. My team and I also conduct research and analysis on SNAP at the national and state levels. CBPP receives no government funding for our policy work or operations.

My testimony today explains the critical and effective role that SNAP plays; threats that would weaken its effectiveness; and opportunities to strengthen SNAP in the next farm bill.

Executive Summary

Research shows that SNAP is one of our most effective tools in reducing hunger and food insecurity. Much of SNAP's success is due to its structure: it is designed so that everyone who is eligible can get benefits; it expands automatically to meet needs during tough times; and it focuses its benefits to the households with the least resources available to purchase groceries, assisting families with low incomes to obtain adequate nutrition, regardless of where they live.

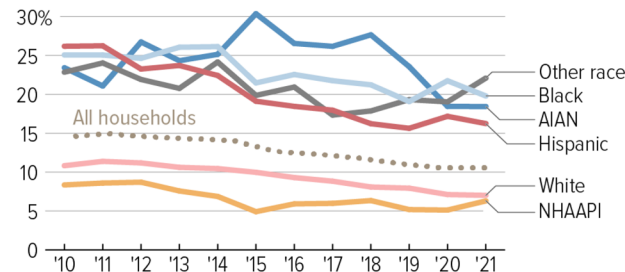
As of December 2022, SNAP was helping more than 42 million low-income people in the U.S. to afford a nutritionally adequate diet by providing them with benefits on a debit card that can be used only to purchase food at about 254,000 retailers across the country. On average, SNAP recipients

receive about \$6 per person per day in food benefits, now that the temporary additional benefits during the COVID-19 public health emergency have ended. SNAP's reach shows the extensive need for nutrition assistance and SNAP's critical role in addressing it.

FIGURE 1

Food Insecurity by Race and Ethnicity Reveals Stark Disparities

Households that lacked access to adequate food at some point in the year



Note: Other race = people who are more than one race. AIAN = people who are American Indian or Alaskan Native. NHAAPI = people who are Asian, Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander. Hispanic people may be of any race. Race and ethnicity for the household are based on that of the household reference person (in whose name the housing unit is owned or rented). Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement 2010-2021

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Despite SNAP's success in reaching people with low incomes, large numbers of households across all backgrounds still struggle to afford food each month. Given this ongoing need, as I will discuss below, I urge you to protect SNAP from efforts to cut it and make it less responsive to people's needs and to take opportunities to strengthen the program, particularly for racial and ethnic groups that continue to face far higher levels of food hardship than white households, often due to a long history of racism and discrimination that has resulted in less opportunity in education, housing, and employment. (See Figure 1.)

SNAP reaches about 80 percent of eligible households. It delivers the largest benefits to those least able to afford an adequate diet. About 92 percent of SNAP benefits go to households with incomes at or below the poverty line, and 54 percent go to households at or below half of the poverty line (about \$12,430 for a family of three in 2023). Families with the greatest need receive the largest benefits; these households, particularly households with children, also have higher rates of participation in the program. Nearly 90 percent of SNAP participants are in households that contain a child under age 18, an older adult 60 years or older, or an individual with a disability.

SNAP is also an important support for workers who are paid low wages. Millions of people in the U.S. work in jobs with low wages, unpredictable schedules, and no benefits such as paid sick leave

— all of which contribute to high turnover and spells of unemployment. SNAP provides monthly benefits that help fill gaps for workers with low and inconsistent pay and can help workers afford food during periods when they are looking for work.

The majority of SNAP participants who can work do so, either while receiving SNAP or before and after. Among SNAP participants who are working-age, non-disabled adults, more than half work while receiving SNAP — and 74 percent work in the year prior to or the year after receiving SNAP. For families with children and at least one working-age, non-disabled adult the work rates are even higher: 75 percent of households with children include someone who works while receiving SNAP and nearly 90 percent of such households include someone who works in the year prior to or the year after receiving SNAP. This shows that joblessness is often temporary for SNAP participants.

SNAP is also highly responsive to the economy. When more households are out of work or see their earnings fall, SNAP automatically expands to serve everyone who is eligible and applies. This mitigates hardship during a recession and gets money into the economy quickly, acting as stimulus for the economy overall.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, SNAP responded quickly to deteriorating economic conditions, pushed back against food insecurity and other forms of hardship, and supported families during periods of unemployment, earnings loss, and uncertainty. Moreover, Congress acted expeditiously to temporarily modify and expand SNAP — changes that states implemented quickly and effectively — to deliver additional food assistance to households in communities across the country. Those temporary pandemic measures have now ended, or will soon end.

SNAP and other forms of economic support prevented food insecurity from surging during the pandemic. But annual measures of food insecurity did rise for households with children and for households headed by Black adults; people of color have faced higher levels of food insecurity for decades.

SNAP is a powerful anti-poverty tool, keeping nearly 8 million people above the poverty line in the years before the COVID-19 pandemic, including 3.6 million children. SNAP not only alleviates near-term hardship, but it is also an investment in the future, as participation is associated with improved long-term outcomes in health, education, and labor market outcomes. Participants are more likely to report excellent or very good health than low-income non-participants and studies have linked SNAP to improved educational attainment, higher rates of high school completion, and improved labor market outcomes in adulthood. Older SNAP participants are less likely than similar non-participants to forgo their full prescribed dosage of medicine due to cost. SNAP may also help low-income seniors live independently in their communities and avoid hospitalization.

The program's effectiveness has been boosted by the recent update to the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) to better reflect the modern cost of a healthy diet, as directed by the bipartisan 2018 farm bill. The TFP update, which took effect at the start of fiscal year 2022, raises the average benefit per person per day by about \$1.35 in fiscal year 2023, which is boosting millions of families' ability to add a greater variety of fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods to their diet. Going forward, the statutorily required reevaluation every five years will ensure that SNAP's benefit amounts reflect the latest research evidence and stay up to date as these factors continue to evolve.

While the SNAP program is strong, some elements of its program design make it less effective in combatting food hardship than it could be. For example, SNAP's harsh three-month time limit for many unemployed adults not raising children cuts off benefits for participants who may be looking for work, who face barriers to work, or who should have been exempted but the state did not correctly screen them, creating hardship with no significant impact on employment among those affected.

Policyholders could also improve SNAP's effectiveness by expanding access to food assistance for groups such as low-income seniors, people in Puerto Rico and certain other U.S. Territories, college students, people who are immigrants, and people with prior drug felony convictions; improving performance metrics so they measure program accessibility; and ensuring that SNAP operations keep pace with emerging technology.

The farm bill should seek to address some of these shortcomings in the program to ensure that more people are able to access the food assistance they need. Unfortunately, rather than focus on these areas for improvement, some Republican members are calling for cuts to SNAP as part of budget negotiations or the farm bill, and have put forward proposals that would undercut SNAP's effectiveness.

A bill from House Agriculture Committee member Dusty Johnson and more than 20 other House Republicans would dramatically expand SNAP's three-month time limit, including by applying it to additional groups of people, such as parents of school-age children and older adults, and severely restricting or eliminating states' flexibility to waive the time limit in areas where there are insufficient jobs.

This would double down on a policy that has been studied and shown to be highly ineffective. Two peer-reviewed papers published in the last two months (whose findings are consistent with other SNAP time limit studies) showed that SNAP's harsh time limit reduced participation in the program by as much as 53 percent among those subject to the time limit, but achieved *no effects on employment*. Evidence both from the existing SNAP time limit and work requirement experiments in Medicaid show that these policies often hurt people who have disabilities who the state should have exempted but didn't, and can even take away SNAP from people who are working but can't navigate the bureaucratic reporting requirements.

The proposals in the Johnson legislation would put more than 10 million people, about 1 in 4 SNAP participants, at risk of losing some or all of their food assistance. This includes 6 million people who would be newly subject to the time limit and at risk of losing eligibility for SNAP, and about 4 million children who live in families that could have their SNAP benefits reduced, harming the entire household.

House Budget Committee Chair Jodey Arrington has similarly called for stricter work requirements in SNAP, and Senator John Kennedy introduced an even harsher bill in the Senate. In addition, budget plans put forward by the Republican Study Committee and by Trump-era Office of Management and Budget Director Russell Vought propose to take food assistance away through harmful work requirements while, respectively, turning SNAP into a strict block grant (often used to promote large, unspecified cuts) and radically restructuring SNAP by capping program spending.

Ironically, some have also put forward proposals to deny SNAP to working households whose income is modestly about the standard income limit but whose high expenses for things like housing, child care, or health care strain their food budgets. Some 37 states have recognized the benefit to allowing these households to receive modest SNAP benefits to supplement their low earnings and have used flexibility in the SNAP law to do so, but some want to take away this state flexibility and cut food assistance to working households even as they insist that more SNAP recipients should be working.

SNAP is a highly effective program that alleviates hunger and poverty, has positive impacts on the long-term outcomes of those who receive its benefits, and supports people in low-paid jobs and those between jobs. This effectiveness is threatened, however, by proposals that would impose harsh new policies that take benefits away from people not meeting work-reporting requirements and other possible cuts or structural changes.

Indeed, SNAP proposals should be evaluated on whether they are likely to reduce food insecurity overall and, in particular, among Black, Indigenous, and Latino households, who face unconscionably high levels of food hardship.

I discuss these issues in more depth in the remainder of my testimony.

SNAP Fights Food Insecurity and Poverty

Research shows that SNAP is one of our most effective tools in reducing hunger and food insecurity, which occurs when a lack of resources causes household members to struggle to afford enough food for an active, healthy life during the entire year. As a result, it plays a critical role in our country.

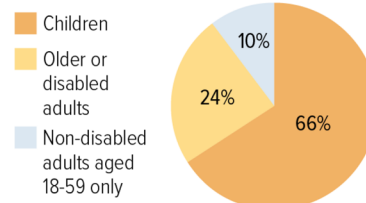
Much of SNAP's success is due to its structure: it is designed so that everyone who is eligible can get benefits; it expands automatically to meet needs during tough times; and it focuses its benefits to the households with the least resources available to purchase groceries, assisting families with low incomes to obtain adequate nutrition, regardless of where they live. As of December 2022, SNAP was helping more than 42 million low-income people in the U.S. afford a nutritionally adequate diet by providing them with benefits on a debit card that can be used only to purchase food at about 254,000 retailers across the country. On average, SNAP recipients receive about \$6 per person per day in food benefits now that the temporary additional benefits during the COVID-19 public health emergency have ended. SNAP's reach shows the extensive need for nutrition assistance and SNAP's critical role in addressing it.

Consistent with its original purpose, SNAP provides a basic nutrition benefit to people with low incomes who cannot afford an adequate diet. SNAP is one of the only federal benefit programs available to almost all households with low incomes; many other programs are limited to certain populations, such as families with children or people with disabilities, or have capped funding that limits the number of people who can receive benefits. Nearly 90 percent of SNAP participants are in households that contain a child under age 18, an older adult 60 years or older, or an individual with a disability. (See Figure 2.) Based on pre-pandemic data, about two-thirds of SNAP participants are in families with children; over one-third are in households with older adults (aged 60 or older) or people with disabilities. Nearly half of SNAP households are headed by a non-Hispanic white person, about a quarter by a non-Hispanic Black person, and more than a fifth by a Latino person (of any race). About 7 percent of SNAP households are headed by a person who is Asian or another race.

FIGURE 2

Nearly 90 Percent of SNAP Recipients Are in Households With Children, Older Adults, or Disabled Adults

Recipients in households with:



Source: CBPP tabulations of USDA 2019 SNAP household characteristics data

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Children under age 18 constitute nearly half (43 percent) of all SNAP participants. Participation in SNAP also helps children receive school meals and confers eligibility to the Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). SNAP also benefits many households with workers paid low wages and many other households with members who are temporarily out of work and will work again soon.

SNAP reduces poverty and food insecurity by giving households benefits to buy groceries, which, in addition to enabling them to afford a more adequate diet, also allows them to spend more of their budgets on other basic needs, such as housing, electricity, and medical care. SNAP reaches about 80 percent of eligible households. It delivers the largest benefits to those least able to afford an adequate diet. About 92 percent of SNAP benefits go to households with incomes at or below the poverty line, and 54 percent go to households at or below half of the poverty line (about \$12,430 for a family of three in 2023). Families with the greatest need receive the largest benefits; these households, particularly households with children, also have higher rates of participation in the program.

These features make SNAP a powerful anti-poverty tool. SNAP kept nearly 8 million people above the poverty line in the years before the COVID-19 pandemic, including 3.6 million children.¹ SNAP has one of the strongest anti-poverty effects among government economic security programs and is particularly effective at reducing deep poverty, that is, in lifting families' incomes above *half* of the poverty line.

¹ Matt Saenz, "Research Note: Economic Security Programs Significantly Reduce Poverty in Every State," CBPP, August 10, 2021, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/economic-security-programs-significantly-reduce-poverty-in-every>.

SNAP reduces the overall prevalence of food insecurity by as much as 30 percent, and is even more effective among the most vulnerable, such as children and those with “very low food security,” in which one or more household members skips meals or otherwise eats less during the year due to lack of money. The largest and most rigorous examination of the relationship between SNAP participation and food security found that food insecurity among children fell by roughly one-third after their families received SNAP benefits for six months.²

SNAP Supports Health and Economic Well-Being

SNAP is associated with improved outcomes in health, education, and self-sufficiency. SNAP participants are more likely to report excellent or very good health than low-income non-participants. Research comparing long-term outcomes of individuals in different areas of the country when SNAP expanded nationwide in the 1960s and early 1970s found that access to SNAP during pregnancy and in early childhood improved birth outcomes and long-term health as adults. Studies have linked SNAP to improved educational attainment, higher rates of high school completion, and improved labor market outcomes in adulthood. Older SNAP participants are less likely than similar non-participants to forgo their full prescribed dosage of medicine due to cost. SNAP may also help low-income seniors live independently in their communities and avoid hospitalization.

SNAP is linked with reduced health care costs. On average, after controlling for factors expected to affect spending on medical care, low-income adults participating in SNAP incur about \$1,400, or nearly 25 percent, less in medical care costs in a year than low-income non-participants. The difference is even greater for those with hypertension (nearly \$2,700 less) and coronary heart disease (over \$4,100 less). Two other studies also found an association between SNAP participation and reduced health care costs of as much as \$5,000 per person per year.³

SNAP enables low-income households to afford more healthy foods. Because SNAP benefits can be spent only on food, they boost families’ food purchases. Low-income individuals generally spend all of their income meeting daily needs such as shelter, food, and transportation, so every dollar in SNAP that a household receives enables the family to spend an additional dollar on food or other basic needs. Nearly 78 percent of SNAP benefits are redeemed within two weeks of receipt and 96 percent are spent within a month.⁴

The updated Thrifty Food Plan (TFP), discussed more below, resulted in higher benefit levels, which will help households better afford a healthy diet featuring more whole grains, different-colored fruits and vegetables, and lean proteins. The fact that SNAP can only be used for food purchased from grocery stores or other food retailers likely encourages better nutrition among

² James Mabli *et al.*, “Measuring the Effect of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation on Food Security,” Food and Nutrition Service, USDA, 2013, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/measuring-effect-snap-participation-food-security-0>.

³ Steven Carlson and Joseph Llobrera, “SNAP Is Linked with Improved Health Outcomes and Lower Health Care Costs,” CBPP, December 14, 2022, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-is-linked-with-improved-health-outcomes-and-lower-health-care-costs>.

⁴ Laura Castner *et al.*, “Benefit Redemption Patterns in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in Fiscal Year 2017,” Insight Policy Research, 2020, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/benefit-redemption-patterns-fy-2017>.

participants, because it shifts food spending away from restaurants. In addition, all states operate SNAP nutrition education programs to help participants make healthy food choices.

SNAP is also highly responsive to the economy. When more households are out of work or see their earnings fall, SNAP automatically expands to serve everyone who is eligible and applies. This mitigates hardship during a recession and gets money into the economy quickly, acting as stimulus for the economy overall. During both the Great Recession and the COVID pandemic, policymakers turned to SNAP as an efficient mechanism for getting additional help to households struggling to afford food and contending with significant income losses and for bolstering aggregate demand, thereby reducing the duration and depth of the economic downturns.

Research backs up how SNAP can act as economic stimulus. Every dollar in new SNAP benefits generates business for local retailers of all types and sizes, and increases the Gross Domestic Product by \$1.50 during a weak economy. Similarly, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) and Moody's Analytics found that SNAP has one of the largest "bangs-for-the-buck" for increasing economic activity and employment among a broad range of stimulus policies.⁵

SNAP also acts as a first responder in the wake of the emergencies and natural disasters, providing critical food assistance to vulnerable households. After disasters, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and states work together to provide quick, targeted assistance. This can include replacing participants' benefits to compensate for lost food, providing temporary Disaster SNAP benefits to non-participants who have suffered significant loss, and relaxing program requirements to ease access and relieve undue burden on staff.

SNAP Acted as a First Line of Defense Against Hardship During Pandemic; Pandemic Policies Are Ending

As mentioned above, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, SNAP responded quickly to deteriorating economic conditions, pushed back against food insecurity and other forms of hardship, and supported families during periods of unemployment, earnings loss, and uncertainty. Moreover, Congress acted expeditiously to temporarily modify and expand SNAP — changes that states implemented quickly and effectively — to deliver additional food assistance to households in communities across the country.

In March 2020, when Congress enacted and President Trump signed the first legislation to address the health and economic impacts of COVID-19, hunger was poised to soar. Calls requesting help with food to state "211" numbers, which households in need of help can use for human services referrals, were over four times greater in late March through mid-May 2020 than earlier in

⁵ Alan Blinder and Mark Zandi, "The Financial Crisis: Lessons for the Next One," CBPP, October 15, 2015, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/economy/the-financial-crisis-lessons-for-the-next-one>; Patrick Canning and Brian Stacy, "The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Economy: New Estimates of the SNAP Multiplier," USDA Economic Research Service, July 2019, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/93529/err-265.pdf?v=8272.8>; Congressional Budget Office, "Estimated Impact of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act on Employment and Economic Output in 2014," February 2015, <https://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/114th-congress-2015-2016/reports/49958-ARRA.pdf>.

2020.⁶ The food bank network Feeding America distributed 42 percent more food in the second quarter of 2020 than it did in the first quarter, and food banks were growing increasingly concerned about their ability to meet the increased need.⁷

During the Great Recession, the share of households that were food insecure rose from 11.1 percent in 2007 to 14.7 percent in 2009, according to Agriculture Department estimates. Yet during the COVID-19 pandemic, because of SNAP's structural ability to respond to increased need as well as the robust relief effort in SNAP and other efforts — including unemployment insurance and economic impact payments — the typical annual measure of food insecurity in 2020 and 2021 held steady at just over 10 percent, statistically unchanged from the 2019 level.⁸

Black, Latino, and American Indian and Alaskan Native households have faced higher levels of food insecurity for decades. (See Figure 1, above.) There was evidence of progress in addressing these disparities in 2021, when food insecurity declined for Black households from 21.7 percent to 19.8 percent after rising the year before.⁹ And other Census data show higher levels of food insufficiency (a different measure of food hardship, in which adults report that their household sometimes or often did not have enough to eat in the last week) during the pandemic than what the annual data show. But it's clear that SNAP and other forms of economic support prevented food insecurity from surging during the pandemic the way it did during the Great Recession.

Because of SNAP's structure, participation can expand automatically in response to job and income losses, and policy changes enacted during the pandemic boosted caseloads modestly as well. SNAP is available within a month — often within a week — of a household's application, so it was one of the first forms of economic relief available to many low-income families during the pandemic when people lost jobs, had their hours cut, or were unable to work because of illness.

The number of SNAP participants grew from 37 million in an average month just before the pandemic to 43 million in the summer and fall of 2020. (The total number of individuals helped by SNAP during the pandemic is higher than these point-in-time figures because households enrolled in and left the program over the course of the last three years.) The number of people participating in SNAP declined in 2021 by about 6 percent. But SNAP participation levelled off in 2022, and by December 2022 (the most recent data available) had started inching up, to more than 42 million people, likely in large part because of increased need due to high food prices. CBO forecasts, however, that the number of SNAP participants will decline in coming years and ultimately fall below pre-pandemic levels.

⁶ Rachel Garg *et al.*, “A new normal for 2-1-1 food requests?” Washington University in St. Louis Health Communication Research Laboratory, June 15, 2020, <https://hcrf.wustl.edu/a-new-normal-for-2-1-1-food-requests/>; Cindy Charles *et al.*, “Trends of top 3 food needs during COVID,” Washington University in St. Louis Health Communication Research Laboratory, August 7, 2020, <https://hcrf.wustl.edu/trends-of-top-3-food-needs-during-covid/>.

⁷ Paul Morello, “The food bank response to COVID, by the numbers,” Feeding America, March 12, 2021, <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-blog/food-bank-response-covid-numbers>.

⁸ Alisha Coleman-Jensen *et al.*, “Household Food Security in the United States in 2020,” USDA, September 2021, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=102075>.

⁹ The food insecurity rate for Hispanic households followed a similar pattern, rising in 2020 and then falling in 2021, but these changes were not statistically significant. See Coleman-Jensen *et al.*, *op. cit.*

After a downturn, SNAP caseloads tend to remain elevated for a number of years. One reason is that during a crisis, families who may have already been eligible before the crisis decide to apply for SNAP as they face greater need and uncertainty. Such households may continue to participate in the program, receiving benefits to augment their low earnings until their earnings rise enough to make them wholly ineligible.

Beginning in March 2020, Congress temporarily modified SNAP rules to further reduce hardship and support the economy, taking advantage of SNAP's ability to deliver benefits quickly and efficiently on households' electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards. These changes included:

- **Emergency allotments (EAs).** In March 2020 Congress gave states and USDA the flexibility to provide emergency SNAP benefit supplements, which all states did. SNAP households received the maximum benefit for their household size; if the difference between the maximum benefit and the household's original benefit under the SNAP benefit formula was less than \$95, then the household's EA was increased so the total EA benefit was no lower than \$95.¹⁰
- Congress originally authorized USDA to approve EAs for as long as the federal government had declared a public health emergency and the state had issued an emergency or disaster declaration. In the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, Congress ended EAs nationwide after the February 2023 issuance, though 18 states had previously ended their disaster declarations and were no longer providing EAs at that point.¹¹
- **A 15 percent SNAP benefit boost.** Congress acted in December 2020 to raise SNAP maximum benefits by 15 percent from January through June 2021. The American Rescue Plan extended the increase through September 2021, when the increase ended.
- **The Pandemic-EBT program (P-EBT).** Congress created P-EBT in March 2020 as a temporary program to provide benefits to households with children who miss out on free or reduced-price school meals due to the pandemic. Congress later extended and expanded it to provide benefits to cover certain younger children and during the summer, when food insecurity among children rises. P-EBT will be available through the summer of 2023 for school-age children.

Average SNAP benefits across all households rose from about \$120 per person per month before the pandemic to about \$230 in the summer of 2021. Since then, SNAP pandemic relief has fallen, first when the 15 percent benefit boost ended in September 2021 and more recently when the emergency allotments ended nationwide after the February 2023 issuance.

At that time, SNAP households in the 35 states and other jurisdictions still providing EAs saw their benefits fall by an average of about \$90 per person per month, or about 33 percent, though the

¹⁰ The Trump Administration originally set EAs at the amount that raised each SNAP household's benefits to the level of the SNAP maximum allotment — which helped those households that didn't otherwise receive the maximum allotment, but left out the 40 percent of SNAP households who have the lowest incomes and already received the maximum allotment. In April 2021, USDA revised the emergency allotment calculations to include the lowest-income households so each household received at least an additional \$95 a month. See USDA, "USDA Increases Emergency SNAP Benefits for 25 million Americans," April 1, 2021, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/news-item/usda-006421>.

exact amount depended on the household's income and other circumstances. The average SNAP benefit per person per day dropped from about \$9 to about \$6. Fortunately, because of the update to the Thrifty Food Plan, described below, SNAP benefits after the EAs ended are far more adequate than they otherwise would have been. The end of the EAs will also contribute to a significant decline in SNAP spending this year, with spending falling by approximately \$3 billion per month.

During the pandemic Congress also enacted additional temporary policies, which will phase out with the end of the federal public health emergency (PHE) in May. These include:

- Temporarily suspending SNAP's harsh three-month time limit, which takes benefits away from many adults under age 50 without children in the home when they don't have a job for more than 20 hours a week. With the end of the PHE, countable months for the three-month time limit will begin in July, and participants who cannot prove they are meeting the work requirement will begin losing benefits in October unless their state determines they are exempt from the time limit, or they live in an area with a waiver.¹²
- Loosening the general rule that makes many college students ineligible for SNAP. Following the end of the PHE, these temporary exemptions will no longer apply for new applicants starting on June 10. Students who were previously certified under one of the temporary exemptions will remain eligible until their next recertification.
- Allowing waivers of certain administrative process requirements in SNAP to enable administrators to deliver benefits promptly and safely even as caseloads surged and eligibility staff worked from home. This authority will end after the PHE ends. However, USDA's Food and Nutrition Service is offering states more limited flexibility under separate authority to support unwinding from the PHE.
- Increasing funding for the nutrition assistance block grants in Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands and funding additional commodity purchases for emergency food programs.

The pandemic highlighted the critical role that SNAP plays in delivering resources quickly to individuals and their communities. It also reinforced the exceptional dedication and perseverance of the state officials across the country who administer the program with compassion and integrity.

SNAP Supports Workers Paid Low Wages

SNAP is an important support for workers who are paid low wages. Millions of people in the U.S. work in jobs with low wages, unpredictable schedules, and no benefits such as paid sick leave — all of which contribute to high turnover and spells of unemployment. SNAP provides monthly benefits that help fill gaps for workers with low and inconsistent pay and can help workers afford food during periods when they are looking for work.

¹² Given that SNAP's 20-hour work requirement for adults without a child in the house operates as a time limit since many subject to it have no way of meeting it, we use the terms "work requirement" and "time limit" interchangeably.

SNAP helps workers in low-paying jobs put food on the table. Close to two-thirds of working SNAP participants work in service, office and administrative support, sales, or professional occupations. Many of the jobs most common among SNAP participants, such as service or sales jobs like cashiers, cooks, or home health aides, often feature low pay and irregular work hours, and frequently lack benefits such as paid sick leave.¹³ These conditions make it difficult for workers to earn sufficient income to provide for their families and may contribute to volatility such as high job turnover. SNAP supplements these workers' low pay, helps smooth out income fluctuations due to irregular hours, and helps workers when they temporarily lose employment, enabling them to buy food and use their limited resources on other basic necessities.

The majority of SNAP participants who can work do so, either while receiving SNAP or before and after. Many turn to SNAP when they are between jobs. Among SNAP participants who are working-age, non-disabled adults, more than half work while receiving SNAP — and 74 percent work in the year prior to or the year after receiving SNAP. For families with children and at least one working-age, non-disabled adult the work rates are even higher: 75 percent of households with children include someone who works while receiving SNAP and nearly 90 percent of such households include someone who works in the year prior to or the year after receiving SNAP.¹⁴ This shows that joblessness is often temporary for SNAP participants.

The low wages and instability in many low-paid jobs can contribute to income volatility and job turnover: workers paid low wages, including many who participate in SNAP, are more likely than other workers to experience periods when they are out of work or when their monthly earnings drop, at least temporarily. These dynamics lead many adults to participate in SNAP for short periods, often while between jobs or when their work hours are cut. Others, such as workers with steady but low-paying jobs or those unable to work, participate longer term.

SNAP's design supports work. Some policymakers have raised concerns that programs that provide assistance for low-income families may discourage work if participants are worried that they will face a “cliff” where they lose their benefits entirely if they take a job or increase their earnings above the program's income limit. SNAP contains three features that result in a fairly small benefit cliff for households with income at the upper end of SNAP's income eligibility limit.

First, SNAP's benefit formula targets benefits based on a household's income and expenses, but the program phases out benefits *slowly* with increased earnings and includes a 20 percent deduction for earned income to reflect the cost of work-related expenses and to function as an additional work support. As a result, each additional dollar of earnings results in most households experiencing a decline of only 24 to 36 cents in SNAP benefits. Most SNAP households see an increase in their total income when their earnings rise modestly — particularly if they are in the income range where the Earned Income Tax Credit is increasing as earnings rise — even if some other benefits begin to phase down as well. As a result of the earnings deduction, a household with earnings will receive a larger SNAP benefit than a household of the same size and gross income in which income comes from unearned sources.

¹³ Brynne Keith-Jennings and Vincent Palacios, “SNAP Helps Millions of Low-Wage Workers,” CBPP, May 17, 2017, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-helps-millions-of-low-wage-workers>.

¹⁴ CBPP analysis of the 2014 panel of the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation.

SNAP does, however, limit gross income to 130 percent of the federal poverty line, creating a small but meaningful benefit cliff or benefit loss for some households who see their earnings increase from just below to just above that level. This loss of SNAP would cancel out more of the increased earnings than is the case for lower-income households, and, depending on how much the household had increased its earnings, the household may not be better off over a narrow income range.

For example, a single parent with two children working full time at \$14.00 an hour would have income at 126 percent of the poverty level and receive about \$374 a month from SNAP, making up about 13 percent of their total monthly income. If their hourly wage increased by 50 cents (or \$87 a month), lifting the household's income just above 130 percent of FPL (\$2,495 for a family of three per month in fiscal year 2023), the family would become ineligible for SNAP under the federal income eligibility cut-off. In this circumstance, the household's loss of SNAP benefits would more than cancel out the higher earnings; their total monthly resources would decline by about \$287 per month.¹⁵ (The parent may see further wage increases over time, now building from a higher base, and at that point their higher earnings would make the family better off.)

Fortunately, states currently have an option to lift the gross income limit through "broad-based categorical eligibility." This state option is the second protection in SNAP against a benefit cliff. Thirty-seven states have taken advantage of the option, thereby allowing benefits to phase out gradually for all working households.

Consider the previous example in a state that used the categorical eligibility option to adopt a higher gross income limit. The household's SNAP benefit would drop by only about \$30 a month when their income rose, so the household would still be better off with the higher-paying job. The option allows states to smooth SNAP's phase out and eliminate the relatively modest benefit cliff; states that adopt the option ensure that if a working household is able to increase their earnings, their SNAP benefits phase out slowly and evenly. The Trump Administration and House-passed farm bills in 2014 and 2018 proposed rolling back this state option. Doing so would have reintroduced a benefit cliff in most states.

The third protection against a benefit cliff is SNAP's structural guarantee to make food assistance available to every household that qualifies under program rules and applies for help. SNAP households that leave the program because they find a job or get a raise and no longer qualify can count on SNAP being available if they need help again later. Without this guarantee a household that loses its job might have to wait until funding became available to resume benefits — as occurs now with child care and other benefits that are constrained by funding limitations from serving all who are eligible. That SNAP can serve all who qualify for its benefits lowers the perceived risks of working, making it easier for low-income families to take a chance on a new job or promotion.

¹⁵ CBPP calculation based on fiscal year 2023 SNAP benefit parameters and fiscal year 2020 pre-pandemic SNAP household characteristics data. In this example, this family claims the \$193 standard deduction and the 20 percent earned income deduction and has \$1,403 monthly shelter costs.

SNAP's Time Limit Does Not Increase Work Effort but Does Cut People Off Benefits

SNAP's role as the nation's primary anti-hunger safety net has long had a gaping hole. Non-elderly adults without children in their homes can receive benefits for only three months every three years, unless they are working at least 20 hours a week or can document they are unable to work. Most states offer little if any help in meeting the 20-hour requirement, so the rule is actually a time limit on benefit receipt, cutting off all individuals who are unable to find enough hours of work. States can temporarily waive the time limit in areas where there are insufficient jobs. Due to the pandemic, the time limit is temporarily suspended nationwide, but it will be reinstated after the anticipated end of the federal public health emergency on May 11.

Research shows that taking food away from households does not lead to increased work effort or earnings.¹⁶ A recent USDA report adds to the growing evidence that the time limit doesn't lead to SNAP participants finding a job.¹⁷ By taking SNAP away, the time limit leaves people with fewer resources to buy food and puts them at risk of food insecurity.

Additional research supports these findings. A recent peer-reviewed paper showed that SNAP's time limit reduced participation in the program by 53 percent among those subject to the time limit, again with no effects on employment.¹⁸ Another recent paper found no evidence of improved employment or earnings, but did find that SNAP participation was cut by 7 to 32 percentage points a year after the time limit was reinstated.¹⁹ Earlier research found people subject to the time limit lost SNAP benefits and that losing SNAP eligibility did not increase employment but did increase the number of days people reported being in poor health.²⁰

Studies also confirm that individuals potentially subject to the time limit are more likely to have significant barriers to employment, such as lack of a high school diploma or GED, a felony conviction, or lack of transportation or a driver's license, and have higher rates of homelessness and mental or physical conditions that can impact their ability to work.

¹⁶ For a summary of academic research on the relationship between the SNAP time limit and employment outcomes, see Tracy Vericker *et al.*, "The Impact of ABAWD Time Limit Reinstatement on SNAP Participation and Employment," *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, March 2, 2023, S1499-4046(23)00008-8, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36868947/>.

¹⁷ Laura Wheaton *et al.*, "The Impact of SNAP Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) Time Limit Reinstatement in Nine States," Urban Institute, June 2021, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/impact-snap-able-bodied-adults-without-dependents-abawd-time-limit-reinstatement-nine>.

¹⁸ Colin Gray *et al.*, "Employed in a SNAP? The Impact of Work Requirements on Program Participation and Labor Supply," *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, Vol. 15, No. 1, February 2023, <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/pol.20200561>.

¹⁹ Vericker *et al.*, *op. cit.*

²⁰ Ed Bolen *et al.*, "Permanently End the SNAP Cut-Off to Support a More Equitable Recovery," CBPP, May 2021, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/permanently-end-the-snap-cut-off-to-support-a-more-equitable-recovery>; Wenhui Feng, "The Effects of Changing SNAP Work Requirement on the Health and Employment Outcomes of Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents," *Journal of the American Nutrition Association*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 2021, pp. 281-290, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07315724.2021.1879692?journalCode=uacn20&>.

Many people who should be exempted from the time limit because of a disability may not be properly screened, resulting in them losing SNAP benefits. Many people who don't receive disability benefits have health conditions that impede their ability to work for the required number of hours. For them to be exempted from the requirements, a caseworker has to screen them properly and exempt them in the computer system properly. Many recipients won't know to ask for the screening and caseworkers may be unaware of a person's relevant health issues.

About 1 in 3 individuals identified by the Franklin County SNAP agency in Ohio as subject to the 20-hour work rule were later identified by a community group trying to help these individuals meet the requirement as having a physical or mental condition that impacted their ability to work, a condition that likely should have made them exempt from the requirement.²¹ And when three states imposed a similar work reporting requirement in Medicaid in 2018, evidence suggests that people who were working and people with serious health needs who should have been eligible for exemptions lost coverage or were at risk of losing coverage due to red tape. Large numbers of beneficiaries in both states reported that they didn't know about the work requirement or whether it applied to them.²²

When the time limit was being debated in Congress as part of the 1996 welfare law, its proponents claimed that the proposed rule was not intended to take effect in areas where jobs were insufficient, so the rule included an option for states to seek waivers for such areas. To qualify for a waiver, states must provide detailed evidence of high unemployment in local areas, in accordance with rigorous requirements.

USDA has consistently used the same criteria to define high unemployment since the late 1990s. The federal law gives states the option to request a waiver of the time limit if they can document that a given geographic area has an insufficient number of jobs or has an unemployment rate over 10 percent. The standards that define how a state may document "insufficient jobs" were first fully codified in regulations under the Bush Administration in 2001, reflecting guidance set in the late 1990s.

Since the time limit was put in place over 25 years ago, every state except Delaware has sought a waiver at some point. States request waivers because local employment conditions in some areas may make it very difficult for participants to comply with a work requirement and to reduce the significant administrative burden states face when administering the time limit.

As discussed in more detail below, despite the growing body of evidence that SNAP's time limit is ineffective and punitive, some policymakers have proposed expanding it, including by applying the time limit to additional groups of people, such as parents of school-age children and older adults, and severely restricting or eliminating states' flexibility to waive the time limit in areas where there are insufficient jobs.

²¹ See Ohio Association of Food Banks, "Franklin County Work Experience Program: Comprehensive Report, Able-bodied Adults Without Dependents," 2014, https://admin.ohiofoodbanks.org/uploads/news/ABAWD_Report_2014-2015-v3.pdf.

²² CBPP, "Taking Away Medicaid for Not Meeting Work Requirements Harms People with Disabilities," updated March 10, 2022, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/health/taking-away-medicaid-for-not-meeting-work-requirements-harms-people-with->

These proposals would put more than 10 million people, about 1 in 4 SNAP participants, at risk of losing some amount of food assistance. This includes 6 million people who would be newly subject to the time limit and at risk of losing eligibility for SNAP, and about 4 million children who live in families that could have their SNAP benefits reduced, harming the entire household.²³

Thrifty Food Plan Update Increasing SNAP's Benefit Adequacy

SNAP's purpose is to help participants afford a variety of healthy foods. SNAP benefit levels are tied to the cost of the Department of Agriculture's Thrifty Food Plan, a food plan intended to provide adequate nutrition at a budget-conscious cost. SNAP expects families receiving benefits to spend 30 percent of their net income on food. Families with no net income receive the maximum benefit, which is set at the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan. For all other households, the monthly SNAP benefit equals the maximum benefit for that household size minus the household's expected contribution.

The bipartisan 2018 farm bill included a long overdue directive requiring USDA to reevaluate the Thrifty Food Plan to better reflect the modern cost of a healthy diet by 2022 and every five years thereafter. (See Figure 3.) USDA's updated Thrifty Food Plan, which was issued in August 2021 (meeting the statutory timeframe) and went into effect at the start of fiscal year 2022, increased SNAP's purchasing power, raising the average benefit per person per day by about \$1.35 in fiscal year 2023, which will boost millions of families' ability to add a greater variety of fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods to their diet.²⁴

²³ Ed Bolen, Dottie Rosenbaum, and Catlin Nchako, "Families, Older People in Every State at Risk Under Proposed SNAP Rule That Would Take Food Away for Not Meeting Work Requirements," CBPP, March 28, 2023, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/families-older-people-in-every-state-at-risk-under-proposed-snap-rule-that>.

²⁴ Joseph Llobrera, Matt Saenz, and Lauren Hall, "USDA Announces Important SNAP Benefit Modernization," CBPP, August 26, 2021, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/usda-announces-important-snap-benefit-modernization>.

FIGURE 3

Original text from Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018:

TITLE IV—NUTRITION

Subtitle A—Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

SEC. 4001. REQUIREMENTS FOR ONLINE ACCEPTANCE OF BENEFITS.

(a) **DEFINITION.**—Section 3(o)(1) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2012(o)(1)) is amended by striking “or house-to-house trade route” and inserting “, house-to-house trade route, or online entity”.

(b) **ACCEPTANCE OF BENEFITS.**—Section 7(k) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2016(k)) is amended—

- (1) by striking the heading and inserting “ACCEPTANCE OF PROGRAM BENEFITS THROUGH ONLINE TRANSACTIONS”;
- (2) in paragraph (4) by striking subparagraph (C), and
- (3) by striking paragraph (5).

SEC. 4002. RE-EVALUATION OF THRIFTY FOOD PLAN.

Section 3(u) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2012(u)) is amended by inserting after the 1st sentence the following:

“By 2022 and at 5-year intervals thereafter, the Secretary shall re-evaluate and publish the market baskets of the thrifty food plan based on current food prices, food composition data, consumption patterns, and dietary guidance.”.

SEC. 4003. FOOD DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM ON INDIAN RESERVATIONS.

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—Section 4(b) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2013(b)) is amended—

- (4) and inserting the following:

It had been 15 years since USDA last revised the TFP and nearly 60 years since it reexamined the TFP’s real purchasing power.²⁵ The revised TFP is a model food plan that’s more: in sync with what families with low incomes eat, or would eat if less budget constrained; attuned to the realities of time-strapped families; and reflective of scientific evidence for a nutritious, varied diet that includes more whole grains, different-colored fruits and vegetables, and lean proteins (including seafood). Going forward, the statutorily required reevaluation every five years will ensure that SNAP’s benefit amounts reflect the latest research evidence and stay up to date as these factors continue to evolve.

Before TFP Update, Evidence Showed Benefits Were Inadequate

Before USDA’s revision, the Thrifty Food Plan had been adjusted only for inflation since the 1970s, even as our understanding of what constitutes a healthy diet changed. That left SNAP benefits badly out of line with the most recent dietary recommendations and the economic realities most struggling households face when trying to buy and prepare healthy foods.

²⁵ The TFP was initially put into place in 1975, nearly 50 years ago, based on the cost of the Economy Food Plan that it replaced, which was established in 1962. So, prior to the TFP re-evaluation that went into effect in October 2021 the purchasing power of the TFP had not been adjusted in nearly 60 years.

Prior to the TFP revision, many families struggled once SNAP benefits ran out. About one-quarter of all households exhausted virtually all their benefits within a week of receipt, and more than half exhausted virtually all benefits within the first two weeks. Numerous studies have found that late in the benefit cycle (that is, toward the end of the month), SNAP participants consumed fewer calories (with the probability of going an entire day without eating tripling from the first to the last day of the month), were likelier to experience food insecurity, visited food pantries more frequently, and may have been more likely to visit emergency rooms or to be admitted to a hospital because of low blood sugar. In addition, at the end of the benefit month, children's test scores were lower and they were more likely to misbehave in school.²⁶

Scientific evidence now emphasizes the importance of eating a broad range of somewhat more costly foods, including more whole grains, red, orange, and leafy green vegetables, lean proteins, and seafood. To prepare a healthy diet, families must have enough money to buy ingredients, as well as the time needed to plan meals, buy and prepare food, consume meals, and clean up. With the increase in women's labor force participation since the 1970s, and with many parents working multiple jobs, many families lack this time for food preparation.

To stay cost-neutral over the years, the TFP had relied on a limited set of less-expensive foods, had assumed that families can spend a considerable amount of time preparing meals mostly from scratch, and had not accounted for varying family types and dietary needs. As a result, SNAP benefits had fallen short of what many people need to buy and prepare healthy food.

Impact of TFP Increase

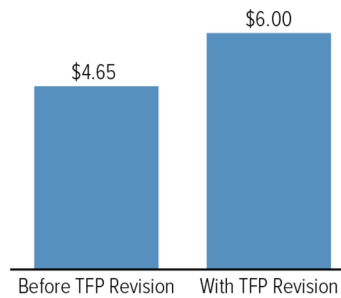
The update to the TFP resulted in a meaningful but modest SNAP benefit increase. The 21 percent increase in maximum SNAP benefits raised the average benefit from about \$4.65 per person per day (without the temporary, pandemic-related increases that recently ended in 2023 dollars) to about \$6 per person per day in fiscal year 2023. (See Figure 4.)

Reduces Poverty

About 2.4 million people, including more than 1 million children, are lifted above the poverty line because of this modest increase, based on a

FIGURE 4

Thrifty Food Plan Revision Meaningfully Increased Average SNAP Benefits Per Person Per Day



Note: TFP = Thrifty Food Plan. Figures do not include temporary, pandemic-related SNAP benefit increases, which ended after February 2023. Amounts are in 2023 dollars.

Source: CBPP analysis of 2020 pre-pandemic SNAP household characteristics data with inflation adjustments to reflect 2023 circumstances

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²⁶ Steven Carlson, Joseph Llobrera, and Brynne Keith-Jennings, "More Adequate SNAP Benefits Would Help Millions of Participants Better Afford Food," CBPP, July 15, 2021, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/more-adequate-snap-benefits-would-help-millions-of-participants-better>.

CBPP estimate that uses the Supplemental Poverty Measure and Census data for 2017.²⁷ The TFP adjustment cuts the number of children participating in SNAP whose families have annual incomes below the poverty line by 15 percent and reduces the number of children in poverty overall by 12 percent, we estimate. In addition, the TFP adjustment reduces the severity of poverty for another 20.5 million people, including 6.2 million children.

Of the roughly 23 million people the change lifts above or closer to the poverty line, 9.4 million are white, 6.5 million are Latino, 5.3 million are Black, and 900,000 are Asian.²⁸

Improves Food Security

More adequate SNAP benefits can help reduce food insecurity, research shows. Those improvements can have long-term impacts, such as supporting economic mobility and reducing health care costs. Children participating in SNAP face lower risks of nutritional deficiencies and poor health, which can improve their health over their lifetimes. SNAP also can affect children's ability to succeed in school. One study, for example, found that test scores among students in SNAP households are highest for those receiving benefits two to three weeks before the test, suggesting that SNAP can help students learn and prepare for tests — and that when benefits run out and families are struggling to afford groceries, children's ability to learn is diminished.²⁹

Improving the adequacy of SNAP benefits is particularly important in addressing disproportionately high rates of food insecurity among Black and Latino households. Poverty and food insecurity rates are higher among Black and Latino households due to racism and structural factors, including unequal education, job, and housing opportunities, that contribute to income disparities.

Improves Nutritional Outcomes

These higher benefit levels will help households better afford a healthy diet featuring enough different fruit and vegetables, a recent USDA study simulating the impact of the benefit increase found.³⁰ And with fewer cost constraints on their food budgets, participating households can better meet dietary guidelines for fruit and vegetable consumption while leaving more of their benefits to purchase other types of nutritious foods.

²⁷ These CBPP estimates are based on the U.S. Census Bureau's March 2018 Current Population Survey, using tax year 2017 tax rules that account for the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. They include corrections for underreported benefits from SNAP, Supplemental Security Income, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families from the Department of Health and Human Services/Urban Institute Transfer Income Model (TRIM). At the time of the TFP adjustment, the most recent version of TRIM was based on tax year 2017. The estimates reflect a pre-pandemic economy and regular SNAP program rules and do not account for temporary measures enacted to help reduce hardship during the pandemic, such as the temporary increase in the Child Tax Credit.

²⁸ Llobrera, Saenz, and Hall, *op. cit.*

²⁹ Anna Gassman-Pines and Laura Bellows, "Food instability and academic achievement: a quasi-experiment using SNAP benefit timing," *American Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 5, 2018, pp. 897-927, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3102/0002831218761337>.

³⁰ Sabrina Young and Hayden Stewart, "U.S. Fruit and Vegetable Affordability on the Thrifty Food Plan Depends on Purchasing Power and Safety Net Supports," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(5), February 2022, <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/19/5/2772>.

In research we helped support, economists Michele Ver Ploeg and Chen Zhen found that increasing SNAP benefits is expected to increase spending on groceries, improve the dietary quality of food purchases, and increase the amount of key nutrients, such as iron and calcium.³¹ In another study, economics professors Patricia Anderson and Kristin Butcher found that boosting SNAP benefits would raise not only the amount that low-income households spend on groceries but also the nutritional quality of the food purchased.³²

Anderson and Butcher estimated the impact of an increase in SNAP benefits of \$30 per person per month — slightly less than the \$36 per-person, per-month increase due to the TFP update. The researchers found that a \$30 monthly increase would result in about \$19 per person per month more in food spending. (This is less than the SNAP benefit increase because the added benefits free up household income for other necessities such as rent, utility bills, or non-food items that SNAP doesn't cover.) That increase in food spending, in turn, would raise consumption of more nutritious foods, notably, vegetables and certain healthy sources of protein (such as poultry and fish), and less fast food. The increased food spending would also reduce food insecurity among SNAP recipients.

Policymakers Should Protect SNAP and Reject Proposals that Would Undermine Its Effectiveness

The Senate Agriculture Committee has a long tradition of working on a bipartisan basis to protect SNAP from cuts or structural changes that would weaken its effectiveness in reducing poverty and addressing hunger. This year some Republican members are calling for cuts to SNAP as part of budget negotiations or the farm bill. Policymakers should reject these damaging proposals and instead focus on protecting and strengthening SNAP.³³

House Republican leaders are pressing for cutting the deficit without raising additional revenues, while saying they will shield certain areas of the budget (Medicare, Social Security, and military spending) from cuts. This approach makes SNAP (as well as Medicaid) prime targets for proposed cuts. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy released a letter to President Biden last month with certain demands in exchange for raising the debt limit. The letter calls for taking assistance away from people who can't document that they meet a work requirement.

House Republicans have put forward such proposals for SNAP. Notably, a bill from House Agriculture Committee member Dusty Johnson and more than 20 other House Republicans would dramatically expand the population of people subject to SNAP's existing three-month time limit, which takes SNAP away from people not meeting onerous work and work-reporting requirements. This punitive and ineffective approach would put SNAP's grocery benefits at risk for adults up to

³¹ Michele Ver Ploeg and Chen Zhen, "Changes in SNAP Benefit Levels and Food Spending and Diet Quality: Simulations from the National Household Food Acquisition and Purchase Survey," CBPP, May 12, 2022, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/changes-in-snap-benefit-levels-and-food-spending-and-diet-quality>.

³² Patricia Anderson and Kristin Butcher, "The Relationships Among SNAP Benefits, Grocery Spending, Diet Quality, and the Adequacy of Low-Income Families' Resources," CBPP, June 14, 2016, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/the-relationships-among-snap-benefits-grocery-spending-diet-quality-and>.

³³ Katie Bergh and Dottie Rosenbaum, "House Republican Proposals Could Take Food Away From Millions of Low-Income Individuals and Families," CBPP, March 20, 2023, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/house-republicans-proposals-could-take-food-away-from-millions-of-low>.

age 65 and many families with school-age children in which parents or other adults are unable to work or cannot find jobs with enough hours. It also would take away flexibility states have had for a quarter century to waive SNAP's time limit in areas with elevated unemployment.³⁴

The idea of conditioning access to basic food assistance on documenting hours of work or work activity is based on several false assumptions. The first is the notion that people who receive benefits do not work and must be compelled to do so. Most SNAP participants who can work do work, and claims to the contrary are often rooted in prejudices about people based on race, gender, disability status, and class. It also ignores the realities of the low-paid labor market, the lack of child care and paid sick and family leave, how health and disability issues and the need to care for family members affect people's lives, and ongoing labor market discrimination. And, as discussed above, numerous studies have found that the existing SNAP time limit doesn't improve employment or earnings; it just cuts people off from the food assistance they need to buy groceries.

Such proposals would run counter to SNAP's core purpose of "safeguard[ing] the health and well-being of the Nation's population by raising levels of nutrition among low income households."³⁵ A total of more than 10 million people, about 1 in 4 SNAP participants, including about 4 million children, live in households that would be at risk of losing food assistance under the Johnson bill, based on our preliminary estimates.³⁶ That includes:

- Some 3 million adults up to age 65, primarily parents or grandparents, who live in households with school-age children. The 4 million children aged 7 to 18 who live in these households would see their household's food assistance fall if their parents or other adults in the family aren't able to meet the requirement.
- About 2 million older adults, aged 50 to 64 who do not have children in their homes.
- Adults who would become newly subject to the time limit in areas with elevated unemployment because their state could no longer seek waivers from it. The bill would substantially limit state flexibility to temporarily waive the harsh time limit if there aren't enough jobs. Only areas with unemployment over 10 percent would qualify for waivers. The Trump Administration estimated that their proposal, which would have been less restrictive than Johnson's, would have resulted in more than 700,000 people losing eligibility for SNAP.³⁷

Not everyone newly subject to these requirements would lose benefits under the proposal. Many people would, for example, be working more than 20 hours a week and be able to navigate the work verification system or states would find them to be exempt from the time limit because of a physical or mental limitation. But a very significant number are likely to be impacted because they are out of work, the state failed to screen them for an exemption they should have qualified for, or they were

³⁴ America Works Act of 2023, H.R. 1581, <https://www.congress.gov/bills/118th-congress/house-bill/1581>; and Rep. Dusty Johnson, "Johnson Leads Work Requirements Fight in the U.S. House: The America Works Act closes loophole states have used to ignore existing work requirements," March 14, 2023, <https://dustyjohnson.house.gov/media/press-releases/johnson-leads-work-requirements-fight-us-house>.

³⁵ Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, Section 2, Declaration of Policy, 7 U.S.C. 2011.

³⁶ Figures are based on CBPP analysis of the 2019 SNAP Household Characteristics data. In 2019 there were approximately 37 million SNAP participants, which is similar to the 38 million average annual number of SNAP participants CBO's current baseline forecasts over the 2024 to 2033 period.

³⁷ We have not independently estimated the impact of the Trump Administration's proposed rule.

unable to navigate the verification system to prove they are working. To properly administer the expanded requirements states would need to substantially expand their human services bureaucracy.

House Budget Committee Chair Jodey Arrington³⁸ has similarly called for stricter work requirements in SNAP, and Senator John Kennedy introduced an even harsher bill in the Senate.³⁹ In addition, budget plans put forward by the Republican Study Committee and by Trump-era Office of Management and Budget Director Russell Vought propose to take food assistance away through harmful work requirements while, respectively, instituting a strict block grant (often used to promote large, unspecified cuts) and radically restructuring SNAP by capping program spending.⁴⁰

Another SNAP rule that long has been a target of some Republicans is a provision that more than 35 states have used to modestly raise SNAP's income eligibility limits which helps working families by eliminating a "benefit cliff" as their earnings rise. The policy, known as broad-based categorical eligibility (BBCE), provides help affording adequate food to many low-income, working families who have difficulty making ends meet, for instance because they face costly housing or child care expenses that consume a sizable share of their income. It also lets states adopt less restrictive asset tests so that families, older adults, and people with a disability can have modest savings without losing SNAP.⁴¹

The Senate Agriculture Committee has soundly rejected such harsh proposals on a bipartisan basis in the past, and I urge you to do so again.

Opportunities to Strengthen SNAP in the Next Farm Bill

There is strong evidence that SNAP is working well, but parts of the program should be improved. The coming farm bill is a time to address areas of the program that could be more effective. It is still early in the farm bill process, and this list is not comprehensive, but rather is meant to suggest possible areas for the Committee to consider.

³⁸ House Budget Committee, "The Debt Limit and Fiscal Restraint," press release, February 8, 2023, <https://budget.house.gov/press-release/the-debt-limit-and-fiscal-restraint/>.

³⁹ "Kennedy introduces welfare accountability package to bolster U.S. economy, empower workers," press release, March 29, 2023, <https://www.kennedy.senate.gov/public/press-releases?ID=CF67193F-083C-4C37-A6B8-2982DE2C6417>.

⁴⁰ Republican Study Committee, "Blueprint To Save America; Fiscal Year 2023 Budget," <https://rsc-hem.house.gov/fy2023-budget>; Center for Renewing America, "A Commitment to End Woke and Weaponized Government: 2023 Budget Proposal," <https://americarenewing.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Budget-Center-for-Renewing-America-FY23.pdf>.

⁴¹ These (37) jurisdictions use BBCE to lift both the income and asset tests: Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Guam, Hawai'i, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Vermont, Virgin Islands, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. Another seven states use BBCE to lift just the asset test: Alabama, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Ohio, Oklahoma, and South Carolina. [https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/BBCE-States-Chart-\(Jan-2023\)-508-1.5.23.pdf](https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/BBCE-States-Chart-(Jan-2023)-508-1.5.23.pdf).

Ensure SNAP Reaches More Low-income People Who Face Food Insecurity

USDA estimates in recent years, prior to the pandemic, that SNAP reached more than 80 percent of people who qualified for benefits. But some people face barriers to gaining access and either participate at lower rates or may not be eligible. A major area for consideration is how to strengthen SNAP to address the risk of food insecurity for these populations, many of whom are disproportionately people of color.

End SNAP's three-month time limit, which excludes many unemployed or underemployed workers. As described above, one of SNAP's harshest rules limits many unemployed individuals aged 18 to 50 not living with children to three months of benefits in any 36-month period when they aren't employed or in a work or training program for at least 20 hours a week.

Those subject to this rule have extremely low incomes and often face barriers to work such as a criminal justice history, racial discrimination, or health impairments. They also tend to have less education, which is associated with higher unemployment rates. In addition to being a harsh policy that takes critical food assistance away from people who need it without any significant positive impact on employment, the rule is one of the most administratively complex and error-prone aspects of SNAP law. Many states also believe the rule undermines their efforts to design meaningful work activities for adult SNAP recipients as the time limit imposes unrealistic dictates on the types of job training that will permit someone to continue to receive basic food assistance so they can eat. For these reasons, many states and anti-hunger advocates have long sought the rule's repeal or moderation.

Congress suspended the time limit during the COVID-19 public health emergency in recognition of the pandemic's effects on the labor market, but it will soon return in many states starting July 1. Legislation introduced last Congress by Senator Booker and Senator Warnock, S. 4486, the Health Equity and Accountability Act, and Senator Gillibrand, S. 2192, the Closing the Meal Gap Act, (both with numerous co-sponsors) would end the time limit, restoring eligibility for many individuals who will have food assistance taken away once the public health emergency ends, regardless of their own circumstances, due to a misguided policy that has been shown to increase food insecurity while having no positive impact on employment.

Allow formerly incarcerated individuals with drug felony convictions to participate in SNAP. Denying food assistance to people who have completed their sentences makes it harder for them to get back on their feet and may contribute to high rearrest rates, which are up to 50 percent for people with prior drug offenses.⁴² Given that formerly incarcerated people also face barriers and discrimination in employment and housing, it's not surprising that 91 percent are food insecure.⁴³ While most states have restored eligibility to *some* individuals affected by the ban, these limited restorations leave too many individuals who have completed their sentences and are complying with parole or probation ineligible for SNAP. SNAP's drug felon ban also

⁴² Louis Reedt *et al.*, "Recidivism Among Federal Drug Trafficking Offenders," United States Sentencing Commission, February 2017, <https://www.ussc.gov/research/research-reports/recidivism-among-federal-drug-trafficking-offenders>.

⁴³ Emily Wang *et al.*, "A Pilot Study Examining Food Insecurity and HIV Risk Behaviors Among Individuals Recently Released From Prison," *AIDS Education and Prevention*, Vol. 25, Issue 2, 2013, pp. 123-123, <https://doi.org/10.1521/aeap.2013.25.2.112>.

disproportionately affects people of color, reflecting — and amplifying — the stark racial disparities in the criminal justice system, with impacts extending to these individuals' children and other family members.⁴⁴ Legislation introduced last Congress by Senator Booker and Senator Gillibrand, S. 2667, the Making Essentials Available and Lawful (Meal) Act, would end disqualifications related to drug felonies.

Bring parity to food assistance in Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Despite higher levels of poverty than the rest of the U.S., these three territories are excluded from SNAP (unlike Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands) and instead receive block grants for nutrition assistance. Because of the block grants' low, capped levels, these territories have more limited eligibility and/or benefit levels and the programs are not able to respond to changes in need because of economic downturns or disasters.

For example, Puerto Rico's household food assistance program, the Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP, or PAN for its name in Spanish, Programa de Asistencia Nutricional) is one of the most important programs helping people meet basic needs in Puerto Rico. On average about 1.3 million people participated in NAP in 2018, about two-fifths of the territory's population. But because it is a capped block grant, NAP's support is more limited than SNAP. Puerto Rico sets eligibility and benefit levels to keep the program's cost within the fixed federal funding limits, which means these levels aren't solely based on, and can't fully respond to, need.

As a result, under regular NAP rules, a parent of two children who lost a job and had no other income received an average of \$376 in monthly NAP benefits in March through June 2019.⁴⁵ By comparison, a parent of two children who lost a job and had no other income would have received the maximum monthly SNAP benefit of about \$505 in the continental United States in 2019, and more in Alaska, Hawai'i, Guam, and the Virgin Islands. SNAP's funding structure also enables it to respond to changes in demand, including those due to natural disasters or recessions, which NAP, with its limited funding, can't.

USDA and Congress have made some progress in recent years in taking steps to address the needs in the territories, document the challenges, and assess the feasibility of changes that would be needed to bring parity to the food assistance provided to these territories' residents, but more needs to be done, in consultation with the territories, to achieve parity in food assistance. In March 2023, Senators Gillibrand, Booker, and Fetterman, along with others, introduced S. 949, a bill that would provide for Puerto Rico to transition back to participating in SNAP.

Raise participation rates among eligible older adults. Many older adults have limited income from Social Security and or Supplemental Security Income and could benefit from SNAP benefits, which before the pandemic averaged about \$120 a month for households with members 60 years or older. But only about half (48 percent in 2019) of eligible adults aged 60 and over participate in SNAP, though participation rates have risen modestly in recent years.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Marc Mauer, "The Changing Racial Dynamics of the War on Drugs," The Sentencing Project, April 2009.

⁴⁵ CBPP, "A Brief Overview of the Nutrition Assistance Program," updated June 11, 2020, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/a-brief-overview-of-the-nutrition-assistance-program>.

⁴⁶ Vigil, *op. cit.*

Moreover, most who would qualify for SNAP also would qualify for Medicare Savings Programs, which defray Medicare premiums and/or cost-sharing charges for seniors near or below the poverty line who are not enrolled in the full Medicaid program, and for the Low-Income Subsidy for the Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit. But participation rates in these programs among low-income seniors also are very low. While these programs have similar eligibility rules, the differences can be confusing and older adults typically must apply for them via different duplicative processes and may not be aware of the assistance that is available.⁴⁷ Tackling low participation rates across programs would address food insecurity as well as help low-income seniors make ends meet overall.

Lower barriers to SNAP participation among certain immigrants and college students experiencing food insecurity. SNAP eligibility rules for immigrants and college students are restrictive and very complicated. Many individuals in these groups who have low income and for whom assistance with affording food could ease hardship and help them improve their future health and economic well-being are not eligible for SNAP benefits. Others who do qualify are not aware they are eligible; are reluctant to participate out of concern about possible ramifications for their immigration status, even though those concerns are generally not accurate; or face barriers navigating SNAP's sometimes complicated and burdensome application procedures.

Participation by eligible people who are immigrants and children in families that include immigrant adults has decreased substantially in recent years, according to USDA estimates, likely due in large part to the Trump Administration's efforts to discourage immigration and to change the public charge rules to include SNAP and other health and economic support programs. Between 2016 and 2019, the participation rate for eligible people who are immigrants dropped from 66 percent to 55 percent and for children who are U.S. citizens who live with adults who are immigrants from 80 percent to 64 percent.⁴⁸

We recommend Congress consider how to improve access to SNAP for low-income immigrants and college students and other groups who cannot qualify or who have low participation rates because of confusion or because they face enrollment barriers.

Support tribal sovereignty and strengthen food security in Native communities. American Indians and Alaska Natives experience food insecurity at a much higher rate than white people. The 2018 farm bill included administrative improvements to the Food Distribution on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) program, which provides food packages to Native American families who live in designated areas near reservations and in Oklahoma as an alternative to SNAP. The bill also authorized demonstration projects through which Indian Tribal Organizations, instead of USDA, can directly purchase commodities for their FDPIR food packages. Congress should work with tribal stakeholders to build on this progress and strengthen food security in Native communities.

Redesign SNAP Performance Measurement to Be More Human Centered

SNAP's current performance measurement system emphasizes preventing improper payments. States and USDA take their roles as stewards of public funds seriously and have a rigorous

⁴⁷ Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission, "Report to Congress on Medicaid and CHIP," Chapter 3, June 2020, <https://www.macpac.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/June-2020-Report-to-Congress-on-Medicaid-and-CHIP.pdf>.

⁴⁸ Vigil, *op cit*.

measurement system in place to assess the accuracy of eligibility and benefit determinations. States are assessed fiscal penalties if their payment error rates are persistently too high.

When a household applies for SNAP it must report its income and other relevant information; a state eligibility worker interviews a household member and verifies the accuracy of information using third-party data matches, paper documentation from the household, and/or by contacting a knowledgeable party, such as an employer or landlord. When errors do occur they are overwhelmingly from unintentional mistakes by applicants or recipients, eligibility workers, or other state agency staff, rather than fraud.

It is critical that SNAP have a strong system in place to assess and address program integrity. But it is also important that the measures states and USDA take in the name of payment accuracy do not undermine the program's purpose to deliver food assistance to households that face difficulties affording an adequate, healthy diet.

Information is not currently available to policymakers or the public about how well SNAP is working in terms of the *human* experience of accessing benefits. While the basic outlines of how SNAP operates is similar across the country, there can be significant variation in the policy and processes that states and counties use to administer the program, and in how programs are operated and resourced even within the same state. Additionally, states often face crises that are specific to their local context such as workforce shortages or a new technology implementation. All of this creates variation in access and how well SNAP reaches low-income households.

This state and local variation underlines the importance of having a strong set of performance metrics that can be used to monitor and compare performance among states and within a state. Without these indicators, it can often take far too long for federal agencies monitoring the programs, or even the states themselves, to recognize that there is a problem and to understand its magnitude and urgency.

Improvements in the benefit delivery process could help low-income individuals by improving participation rates and reducing administrative burden. Creating a more effective process is also crucial to advancing health and racial equity, as these burdens disproportionately impact people of color.⁴⁹ Such improvements also could save state and federal resources through more efficient operations.

The 2018 farm bill eliminated SNAP performance bonuses, which were tied to low or improving payment error rates, participation rates among eligible people, and delivering benefits promptly within federal timelines. But states still are subject to fiscal penalties for high payment error rates, which places a disproportionate emphasis on payment accuracy over access for low-income families.

In collaboration with the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Code for America developed a National Safety Net Scorecard to put forward a package of metrics that federal and state governments could use to track program performance over time and across states or other jurisdictions.

⁴⁹ Suzanne Wikle *et al.*, "States Can Reduce Medicaid's Administrative Burdens to Advance Health and Racial Equity," CBPP and Center for Law and Social Policy, July 19, 2022, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/health/states-can-reduce-medicoids-administrative-burdens-to-advance-health-and-racial>.

The measures in the National Safety Net Scorecard measures performance across three categories:

- **Equitable access:** These metrics help assess whether the programs are open to all eligible people. Are online, telephone, and in-person services available and accessible to all people? How difficult is it to apply? Are people who apply satisfied with their experience?
- **Effective delivery:** Measures in this category examine the smoothness of the process after a person applies. How long does it take to receive benefits? How common is it for cases to be denied for procedural reasons as opposed to reasons related to financial eligibility? Are people who remain eligible able to successfully maintain eligibility?
- **Compassionate integrity:** Finally, this category assesses whether people are receiving the benefits to which they are entitled. What share of eligible people participate? How accurate are eligibility and benefit determinations? How smooth is the appeals process?

Some states measure some of these types of metrics as part of their operations or to make the case to the public that they are running successful programs. While individual states can use the measures in the scorecard to assess their own performance in human-centered benefit delivery, ideally data would be collected for each state using the same methodologies so cross-state comparisons could be made and federal agencies could better assess performance relative to the national picture. There is a need for leadership to make progress toward this vision through federal legislation in the farm bill, administrative action, and further state innovation.

Ensure SNAP Program Operations and Oversight Keep Pace With Technology

The farm bill presents an important opportunity to reassess program operations and ensure SNAP keeps pace with technological and other changes. The pandemic has presented challenges and opportunities that resulted in the program adapting quickly out of necessity. Some technological changes, such as online shopping and remote eligibility practices, that probably would have occurred over time did so instead on an accelerated timeframe. Below are some areas Congress should consider to support these advancements.

- **Online purchases.** Probably the best example of an accelerated timeframe around technology is the rapid expansion of online purchases during the pandemic. Though less than 10 percent of SNAP benefits are redeemed online, USDA rapidly expanded the number of states and the number of stores that allow recipients to redeem their benefits online. The provisions from the last two farm bills that piloted and studied online benefits were a big reason that USDA, states, and retailers were able to expand so quickly during the pandemic. This next farm bill presents an opportunity to continue the progress from recent years and improve access to online benefits for participants.
- **EBT.** The original roll-out of EBT revolutionized SNAP benefit delivery, beginning more than 30 years ago. The committee should consider, in collaboration with USDA and other stakeholders, whether to incorporate advancements in retail transactions, such as mobile payment options, while protecting program integrity and ease of use for participants.
- **The National Accuracy Clearinghouse (NAC).** The 2018 farm bill provided that USDA and states should expand to nationwide a pilot program that several states use to share data on their SNAP participants and prevent individuals from participating in more than one state. An evaluation of the NAC found that less than 0.2 percent of SNAP participants were

participating in multiple states. In addition to improving program integrity, the NAC holds promise as a customer service improvement for applicants because it can help participants who move from one state to another disenroll more quickly from benefits in their former home state so that their new home state can open their SNAP case. Congress should monitor the roll out of the NAC nationwide, which is underway and expected to accelerate later this year, to ensure that it does not pose challenges to privacy or vulnerable individuals' access to benefits.

- **Ensuring accessibility of certification and recertification.** Gradually over recent decades, SNAP and other income support and health programs have transformed from very labor intensive in-person application and recertification processes to making far greater use of online, telephone, and other technological tools. States adapted and expanded these tools very quickly during the pandemic when they needed to move to remote operations. These tools, combined with the temporary flexibilities that Congress and USDA allowed during the pandemic, helped states manage their workloads and helped participants gain and maintain access to the program.

Congress should consider revisions to SNAP rules that would support the use of technology in the SNAP certification process. For example, telephonic signatures and text messaging have shown promise in improving access for some households. Making use of available electronic data sources, when relevant, timely, and accurate can lower documentation burdens on households and state agencies. However, technology does not work for all SNAP households. For example, some households do not have telephones or internet access. Some households, including some with elderly or disabled members and those experiencing homelessness, may prefer an in-person process rather than navigating online and telephone communications. It is important that the program balance the use of promising technology with ensuring that states' certification processes are accessible to everyone.

The recertification process is another area the Committee could focus on where technology could be used to improve customer service. Most households need to reapply for SNAP every year (or for every two years for households with elderly or disabled members) and are required to submit periodic reports about changes in income and some other circumstances halfway through that period. But the recertification and reporting processes present hurdles for many households that result in eligible households losing out on benefits because of mail issues, difficulty scheduling telephone issues, a verification problem, or other procedural issues. Funding to support states making more use of certain technological advancements such as text messaging, reliable third-party data sources, or information from other programs could help keep eligible households connected to SNAP and save state agencies from needing to spend more time processing re-applications from households that lose benefits for procedural reasons.

- **Using data for outreach and enrollment.** Many individuals and families who have low incomes qualify for a package of benefit programs, but they often need to apply separately and provide paperwork multiple times to apply for and maintain different benefits. In some cases, a program can use data (such as income) that another trusted program has collected and verified to reduce burdens on state and local administrators and enable applicants to avoid having to provide the same paperwork to multiple offices. For example, all participants in SNAP, Medicaid, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families monthly cash assistance are

“adjunctively eligible” for WIC, which means the WIC program does not need to redetermine financial eligibility, but the family still must contact the WIC agency to apply.⁵⁰

In other cases states can use information provided to one program to trigger an application for another program, using a check box, for example, or for targeted outreach. These kinds of linkages hold substantial promise to improve efficiency and program participation but can be tricky for states and the federal government because of different administrative and jurisdictional structures. But leadership from Congress in creating the legal authorities and the expectation of cross-program enrollment, collecting and sharing data and best practices, and offering funding to support these efforts could help elevate the issue and smooth the way.

Conclusion

SNAP is a highly effective program that alleviates hunger and poverty, has positive impacts on the long-term outcomes of those who receive its benefits, and supports people in low-paid jobs and those between jobs. This effectiveness is threatened, however, by proposals that would impose harsh new policies to take benefits away from people not meeting work-reporting requirements. I urge you to protect SNAP so that it can continue to support food security, health, and economic well-being and to take opportunities to strengthen the program, particularly for racial and ethnic groups with high rates of food insecurity due to historical structural inequities.

⁵⁰ Sonal Ambegaokar, Zoë Neuberger, and Dorothy Rosenbaum, “Opportunities to Streamline Enrollment Across Public Benefit Programs,” Social Interest Solutions and CBPP, November 2, 2017, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/opportunities-to-streamline-enrollment-across-public-benefit>.



**Testimony of Heather Reynolds
Michael L. Smith Managing Director
Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities (LEO)
University of Notre Dame**

**Before the U.S. Senate
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
Subcommittee on Food and Nutrition, Specialty Crops, Organics, and Research**

April 19, 2023

Introduction

Thank you, Chairman Fetterman, Ranking Member Braun, and Members of the Committee. I serve at the Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities, or LEO, at the University of Notre Dame, where we work with innovative service providers to build rigorous evidence around programs designed to move people permanently out of poverty.

Prior to joining LEO, I spent two decades as CEO of Catholic Charities Fort Worth. The clients we had the honor to serve are people who taught me about poverty, about struggle, about strength.

I will never forget meeting Marsha. Marsha was a single mom, working a full-time, minimum wage job that just didn't cut it. Her annual earnings were just over \$15,000 a year. She spent hours a week figuring out which bill to pay, and how much of it to pay—because when you make \$1,200 a month, you have to spend a significant amount of time making these sorts of choices. Do you grocery shop so you can feed your children this week or do you pay just enough of your utility bill to ensure that you don't lose power?



Marsha came to Catholic Charities because she had no more choices—the avalanche of poverty had closed in on her. She had run out of food, her utilities were about to be shut off, and where she was living was a place that no one should ever call home. They had no running water in the bathroom and no hot water at all. As a mom, I cannot fathom my child growing up in a situation like this. Can you? Can you imagine your child or your grandchild living in a home with no hot water? No bath time ritual, no hand washing lessons, no warmth from the chill of the winter. We worked with Marsha to stabilize her situation, helping her with food via SNAP, utilities, and getting her into new housing.

When Marsha and her children moved into their new apartment, Marsha taught her daughter a life lesson that I pray I never have to teach mine. Marsha took her daughter's hand and held it under the warm running water. She squeezed her hand tightly and told her to never take anything for granted. It brings tears to my eyes to put myself in this mother's shoes and that she even had to share this life lesson with her child.

I struggle to tell this story without feeling sad, and if I am honest, pretty angry. It makes me want to just shout "come on!" How much potential did our country lose from Marsha because she had to spend so much of her time figuring out how to feed her family? How behind are her children in school because she was not reading to them or because they were hungry, which we know is not ideal for learning? Instead, Marsha spent her energy just trying to ensure her family survived in poverty.

Today, I want to use my time to suggest two points which I believe would have made Marsha's situation better.

Most people don't want to be on government benefits. Most people want to provide for their families. Most people want a way out of poverty. Which is why my first point is so important—as we think about the Farm Bill, we need to be less focused on just work requirements and **more focused on evidence-based reform that will ensure we give people a way out of poverty.**

Work requirements do not get people out of poverty. 75% of SNAP recipients with children who are not disabled or elderly already work. They are just underemployed

or underpaid. Our solution must be to give them programs that work towards upward mobility and are proven to be successful, so they can feed their families and live a life outside of poverty.

That's why we at Notre Dame spend so much of our time working hand-in-hand with innovative service providers to study what works for a pathway out of poverty. At LEO, we have over 90 research projects across the country. And our partners have solutions that our research shows work for people like Marsha.

Solutions in Texas: LEO recently completed a randomized controlled trial study to understand the impact of the Padua program, a holistic case management program designed by Catholic Charities Fort Worth to address the unique assortment of barriers faced by families in poverty. Around 63% of these families utilize SNAP benefits. Because of small caseloads, Padua case managers are able to build strong relationships with families. Families have access to strategic, flexible financial assistance that case managers can use to incentivize the behavior that leads them to achieve their goals. Padua clients were 25% more likely to be employed, and those who were unemployed when offered Padua services earn 46% more. They are 60% more likely to be stably housed 24 months later and experience a sharp decline in credit card debt that persists over time. And it is cost effective. Participants' earnings gains over the first eight years equal the cost of the program. For participants who were unemployed when they first enrolled, it takes only five years for their earnings to surpass the cost of the program.

Solutions in New York: The Bridges to Success program is designed by Action for a Better Community to provide working poor residents of Rochester, New York with economic mobility mentors. 73% of these participants utilize SNAP at the time of intake. Their mentors help participants move out of poverty, one issue at a time, by focusing on housing, family support, debt and savings, education, and employment. Participants set explicit goals and work to achieve self-sufficiency while being provided with financial incentives along the way. This pairing of mentorship and financial help allows the clients to handle today and make measurable steps closer to a life outside of poverty tomorrow. In collaboration with our Bridges to Success partners, LEO worked to build evidence around this program through a randomized controlled trial and results show that participants, compared to a control group, are more likely to be employed. This result persists over time.

Solutions in Indiana: The Goodwill Excel Center of Central and Southern Indiana operates 15 tuition-free, public charter high schools that support adult learners in completing their state-certified high school diploma. The Excel Center provides small classes on a flexible schedule, assistance with transportation, on-site childcare, and life coaching. LEO's rigorous study of the Excel program shows amazing impact—adults who enroll in and complete the program increase earnings by 38% and these results also persist.

What if Marsha would have had access to one of these proven programs five years before finding Catholic Charities? Would her daughter then have had to learn about the joys of running water? Probably not. In our country, we have Employment and Training programs designed to increase the employment prospects of SNAP recipients. In 2016, only 3.3% of SNAP recipients who were subject to work requirements participated. States are not incentivized to invest in these programs.

Which brings me to my other point. **We need to scale up evidence-based solutions. And we need the federal government demanding it to be so.**

Senators, you have access to resources that Catholic Charities Fort Worth, Action for a Better Community, and Goodwill Excel Centers do not. But they have already done the hard work for you. They have provided you with the solutions that work to help people with their immediate needs—in many cases leveraging programs like SNAP—while getting them out of poverty over the long haul with a goal of not needing SNAP. They have given you the answers, they have allowed us as researchers into their businesses, despite research adding complexity to their already hard jobs, and now we owe it to them to let their evidence-based solutions scale.

Families First and Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) laws and clearinghouses that provide us with evidence-based programs give us good precedent for how bipartisan leaders can put evidence first and make it actionable for providers. In both cases, federal law now requires providers to either use an evidence-based program or to build rigorous evidence in the new program they are running to serve people in need. The clearinghouses verify the validity and strength of the research proving a program is impactful. This combination of legislative requirements plus a well-run clearinghouse that is accessible to

providers shows us a way forward towards continued evidence building and usage to ensure SNAP works better for more people.

Closing

It is your role to pay attention to this evidence and to use it. As policymakers, we need you shouting from the rooftops—or said another way, allocating policy dollars to allow evidence-based services to scale, because they work.

What bothers me most about Marsha's story is that while it is one story, I know there are millions of others just like her. I am asking you to put evidence to work. Thank you.



Nutrition Programs in the Farm Bill

Hosted By:

U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

Subcommittee on Food and Nutrition, Specialty Crops, Organics, and Research

Loree D. Jones Brown, Chief Executive Officer

April 19, 2023

Introduction

Good afternoon, Chairman Fetterman, Ranking Member Braun, and all members of the Subcommittee on Food and Nutrition, Specialty Crops, Organics, and Research. Thank you for inviting me to speak about the issue of food insecurity in our region and the importance of the Farm Bill and its nutrition programs.

I am Loree Jones Brown, Chief Executive Officer of Philabundance, a hunger relief organization serving five counties in southeastern Pennsylvania and four counties in southern New Jersey.

Every day I wake up not worrying about what I will eat for breakfast or dinner later in the day. I imagine many of you in this room never worry about where your next meal will come from. We plan our days around lunch meetings and coffee breaks knowing we can easily make those purchases. We don't wait in long lines hoping the pantry or cupboard will have the items we need or food that our kids like. We don't miss meals to make sure our kids have something to eat and don't go to bed on an empty stomach. When I am in the community visiting our partners, I see firsthand the long lines, the worry, and the stress that people in all of our communities are facing daily. While my team and our partners are steadfast in our efforts to end hunger, we know that charitable food organizations, like Philabundance, alone cannot meet the need. It is in our nation's interest that we have well-nourished communities so they can thrive. That is why I am here before you today asking that you work together to pass a strong bipartisan Farm Bill that ensures equitable and consistent access to food.

Access is paramount to our work at Philabundance. As a member of Feeding America's national network of over 200 food banks, our mission is to drive hunger from our communities today while we work to end hunger for good. We are dedicated not only to meeting the immediate need through emergency food provision, but also to addressing the root causes of hunger. We understand that the charitable food network alone is not going to solve hunger or poverty, but we are one piece of a much larger puzzle.

I began my time at Philabundance in 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, which exacerbated existing disparities and revealed the pervasiveness of hunger. The pandemic brought into full view what we already knew: that it's our neighbors and the kids down the street who are food insecure. I have seen firsthand the dedication of our staff, partners, volunteers, and donors as we have all worked together to address the increased need for food. I have seen firsthand the impact of Congress' bipartisan leadership to avert a national hunger crisis. Thanks to your leadership and your support of the federal nutrition programs in 2020, Philabundance doubled the amount of food we distributed when compared to 2019. Since then, the demand for food assistance has consistently remained above pre-pandemic levels as a result of inflation causing the price of food and other basic needs to soar.

Food banks like Philabundance have been able to keep up with high demand through these challenging years due in large part to the aid provided during the Public Health Emergency and the generous support of our donors. Now, most temporary federal support has come to an end and the influx of donations we received throughout the pandemic have slowed, at a time when food costs remain stubbornly high and supply chain disruptions continue. Food banks are experiencing a continued increase in demand for food assistance as the lines continue to grow.

Although our network helps many people avoid hunger, we cannot truly end hunger in our communities without government support. Federal nutrition programs like The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) work hand in hand with food banks to help families put nutritious food on the table. Food banks know that a strong Farm Bill is critical to ensuring the people we serve have the food they need.

Philabundance Background

At Philabundance we strive to ensure equitable and broad access to nutritious food and resources to help all our neighbors lead healthy, active lives so they can thrive. Philabundance was founded in 1984 with the simple belief that no one should go hungry while healthy food goes to waste. Our mission is to drive hunger from our communities today while we work to end hunger for good.

In partnership with more than 600 community organizations, we provide nutritious food to those in need in our service area, which includes Philadelphia, Montgomery, Bucks, Chester, and Delaware counties in Pennsylvania and Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, and Salem counties in New Jersey. In no area, no county, do we not see a need for food – and in every county our partners continue to see an increased need at this time.

Our Programs

To achieve our mission, Philabundance works to combat hunger in a number of ways. We distribute millions of pounds of food to our partners primarily using three methods:

- **Produce Deliveries** – Philabundance delivers large amounts of produce and perishable goods directly to our community partners each week.
- **Perishable Food Hubs** – Philabundance provides multiple pick-up locations in our service area where our community partners can pick up perishable products each week.
- **Agency Express** – Philabundance has an online system where our community partners can order non-perishable products to either pick up or be delivered.

In addition to providing items to our partner network through these mechanisms, Philabundance also provides food to our partners through specially targeted programs. We tailor or create programs based on the needs of the communities we serve. These programs include:

- **BackPack** – Philabundance provides free, nutritious, and easy-to-prepare supplemental meals for families with kids at community partner sites.
- **Lunchbox** – Philabundance provides ready to eat meals for kids who may rely on school meals during the school year. This summertime program focuses on giving kid-friendly nutritious lunches at sites across our area.
- **Let's Eat** – To address the summer hunger gap, Philabundance did a meal kit program that provided families with all of the ingredients they would need to create delicious and nutritious meals at home. Over the summer, Philabundance and our partners distributed these meal kits at 20 sites across our service area.

Improving Community Health with Our Partners

Philabundance works with a wide range of incredibly dedicated partners and supporters to distribute food.

In our **600 plus community partner network**, Philabundance works with a wide range of partners that include religious institutions, schools, community organizations, and others who are committed to addressing hunger. We are able to reach this many partners through direct distribution and by working with a few organizations who help us redistribute food to additional partners. **This network reaches over 135,000 people each week with a wide range of products.** To give that context, that is enough people to fill Lincoln Financial Field, where the Philadelphia Eagles play, twice.

Philabundance encourages our partners to provide the people they serve with options, creating an experience where they operate as close to a grocery store as possible so people can shop with dignity and select the items they want and need. Research has shown that when people have a choice in what they get at a pantry, they make healthier choices and have a better diet that can lead to improved health outcomes.

To support this effort, Philabundance has been investing in our partners by granting over \$5 million in support of their infrastructure over the last 3 years. We know that if we want to distribute more food that is healthy, including fresh vegetables and fruits, we need to ensure that our partners have the refrigeration, transportation, and space to store and distribute the food safely. That is why we are asking Congress to support our request to increase funding for TEFAP Storage and Distribution and Infrastructure grants.

As we consider the health and well-being of the people coming to our pantries, we are also working directly with healthcare partners to address the nutritional needs of their customers directly. We have been doing a number of projects with health care providers in Pennsylvania. Thanks to support from the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, Managed Care Organizations are required to partner with community-based organizations to address the social determinates of health. Philabundance has been working to provide home delivered meals, produce, and other staples to people identified by providers as in need of food resources. We know the strong connection between nutritious food and health outcomes, and partnerships like these allow us to reach people in need of nutritious food directly in their homes.

Below is an overview of some of our projects:

Partner	Project
Jefferson Health/Health Partners Plans	Health Partner Plans is funding this project and Jefferson is referring members. Philabundance will provide produce every other week for 6 months. Philabundance will conduct phone surveys with participants to learn the impact of the program while Jefferson will measure health outcomes.
Jefferson Health/Keystone First	Keystone First is funding the project and Jefferson is referring members. Philabundance will provide grocery boxes for 12-weeks and refer participants to receive medical nutrition therapy. Philabundance will conduct phone surveys with

	participants to learn the impact of the program while Keystone First will measure health outcomes.
Health Partners Plans	Health Partners Plans is funding and referring members to this program. Each household receives 3 meals made by Philabundance Community Kitchen (PCK) per person and a box with produce every other week for 12-weeks. Health Partners Plan has already contracted with Philabundance for a second round of this program that will include Philabundance conducting phone surveys to understand the program's impact.
University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC)	UPMC is funding and referring members to this program. Working with MANNA, Philabundance will provide produce to households who previously received medically tailored meals from MANNA. Along with nutrition education, Philabundance will provide the produce as a step down to the program provided by MANNA. Participants will receive produce every other week for the year-long program. Philabundance will conduct phone surveys with participants to learn the impact of the program while UPMC and MANNA measure health outcomes.
Einstein Medical Center	Einstein Medical Center is a community partner of Philabundance. The partnership began in 2018, with Philabundance providing loose produce for distribution. Last year, we formed a partnership with Einstein to provide produce boxes for weekly distribution. Between July 2021 and June 30, 2021, Philabundance provided Einstein with more than 2,000 pounds of produce boxes weekly.
Hospital of University of Pennsylvania (HUP)	The Hospital of University of Pennsylvania's food pantry is a community partner of Philabundance. Since June 2022, the HUP food pantry has received approximately 650 pounds of dry and frozen food per week. The food pantry has participated in our retail rescue program and has previously received produce boxes for distribution.

Later this year, Philabundance, in conjunction with several managed care organizations, local grocery stores, food service providers, and health care providers, is launching a wrap-around pilot program to provide tailored nutritional supports for patients with gestational diabetes in North Philadelphia, called the Philadelphia Partnership for Nutrition and Health. This project aims to establish a real-world evidence base to demonstrate impact with an overall goal to scale to additional patient populations and become a replicable model that will set a new standard of care around benefits and services. By leveraging our connections with food, Philabundance is able to work with these partners to fill a need for their patients and clients so they can focus on their health and well-being. We believe that Congress should support these pilot programs through the Department of Health and Human Services and in coordination with USDA.

Our Kitchen and SNAP Employment and Training

Philabundance is a recipient of the SNAP Employment and Training funding for our Philabundance Community Kitchen (PCK). PCK began over 20 years ago and is a free culinary arts training program that

provides the participants with knife skills and life skills. PCK is a part of the Catalyst Kitchen, a national network of non-profit organizations with teaching kitchens leading a movement to end joblessness through foodservice job training and social enterprise. This free 16-week program is available for people who meet the SNAP eligibility guidelines for Pennsylvania. They learn the skills they would need to work in a professional kitchen while also being provided with career training and support.

Our work with PCK has demonstrated there is no quick fix or easy solution to addressing the root causes of hunger and poverty. Our students are successful in securing positions with restaurants and institutions with the goal of them becoming independently financially stable as they transition from social supports, but it is a long process. While the students are in the PCK program, we help connect them to wrap-around supports and pay a stipend for the work they complete for our vendor contracts.

The team at PCK meets the students where they are in life while providing them with the stability and structure they need to help them find and sustain employment. SNAP Employment and Training participants receive transportation, childcare, and clothing allowances so they can make it to class prepared. We believe that work is one pathway out of poverty and Congress should invest in work programs that have a track record of success, like PCK, versus policies such as restrictive work requirements that impede work.

Eric, a current student noted that, “When I started this program, I didn’t have any money. I didn’t know how I was going to make it to school every day. I didn’t know how I was going to have the tools and resources needed for me to complete the program. SNAP really was the program that assisted with all of that. I don’t feel like I would be here if it wasn’t for SNAP. When you are unable to generate your own income and you are required to be at a place 5 days a week, 16-weeks in a row, how do you get there without some assistance?”

What our PCK students, and anyone struggling to make ends meet, need is relevant assistance and the opportunity to be successful. The SNAP Employment and Training dollars are an investment in students like Eric, enabling them to get the training they need to find a job that can lead to financial stability and mobility. Work requirements only increase hunger and impede work, while investments like these are proven policy solutions that support work and help people create the path to self-sufficiency. We are asking Congress to continue to support and invest in the SNAP Employment and Training program.

Food Distribution and Government Support

Philabundance receives food in the following ways: donations, purchasing, and government programs. Each of these sources is key to ensuring we have the right quantity, quality, and mix of food to provide to the people we serve.

Philabundance participates in the following government programs that provide food:

- **The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)** provides USDA-donated food to low-income seniors through monthly senior boxes. Philabundance packs and distributes these boxes to strategically chosen locations. Boxes contain approximately 30 pounds of canned and boxed

food including vegetables, fruit, juice, pasta, milk, cereal, canned meat, and a non-meat protein. We provide 3,500 boxes per month.

- **The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)** provides Philabundance with access to commodity food purchased by the USDA that we make available to eligible households.
- **The State Food Purchase Program (SFPP)** and the **Pennsylvania Agriculture Surplus System (PASS)** are two Pennsylvania specific nutrition programs that provide organizations like Philabundance with funding to purchase food. The PASS program also supports PA farmers as the funds are used to reimburse them for donated products.

The chart below shows the amount of food we have distributed by how we acquired it:

Food Acquired for our Neighbors (in pounds)					
Calendar Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023 - YTD*
Donations	22,605,012	25,693,104	22,267,609	24,835,912	6,659,550
Government	3,065,610	19,679,973	12,561,087	4,534,525	1,187,251
Purchasing	4,947,820	12,050,359	19,058,003	24,570,424	4,417,597
TOTAL	30,618,442	57,423,437	53,886,699	53,940,861	12,264,398

*March 2023

With increased government support in 2020 and 2021 Philabundance was able to more readily meet the need of the people we serve. We saw a sharp decline in that support in 2022 and were able to make up the difference by purchasing food. **However, as the cost of food increases and the financial and food donations decrease, it is simply not possible for Philabundance to continue purchasing food at this level in the long term.** As a result, we will need to make tough decisions moving forward if this gap continues.

Providing Good Food to the Communities We Serve

The food that we provide now falls under a Good Food Policy we instituted in 2022. While we want to continue to provide food at a high volume, we must prioritize food that falls into the following categories:

- **Nutritious:** providing all people, regardless of income, with access to the food necessary for an active, healthy life.
- **Culturally Responsive:** offering connections to families, cultures, and communities through familiar and beloved foods.
- **Equitably Sourced:** intentionally choosing to purchase food from businesses that reflect our values and represent a diverse blend of local, minority, and women-owned businesses.

- **Accessible:** partnering with organizations that can help us ensure the right food reaches the right people at the right time.

At Philabundance, we are committed to centering our work on the people we serve. To us, that means it is not enough to say we distributed over 50 million pounds of food this past year. We must understand whether those pounds were the food people wanted and were distributed in a way that truly works for them. “Right food, right time, right way,” we say. We are committed to adjusting to meet the needs of people and are engaging our agency partners in discussions about how we can better serve people at times that work for them, in ways that are dignified, and with foods they want to eat.

Food Insecurity

Hunger by the Numbers

Often referred to as hunger, food insecurity is a pervasive issue that impacts the health, well-being, and success of those who face it. Food insecurity is defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) as a lack of regular access to enough food for a healthy and active life. It is an economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food. Above all, food insecurity is a solvable problem.

Nationally, nearly 34 million people – that’s over 1 in 10 people – in the United States are food insecure.¹ There is no county, no zip code, no community in the United States that hunger doesn’t touch. Food insecurity disproportionately affects children. Nationally, 1 in 8 children experience food insecurity.

Measurement	2019	2020	2021
Overall Food Insecurity	10.5% of households (13.7 million households, with 35.2 million people living in food insecure households)	10.5% of households (13.8 million households, with 38.3 million people living in food insecure households)	10.2% of households (13.5 million households, with 33.8 million people living in food insecure households)
Food Insecurity in Households with Children <i>*means anyone in the household is food insecure</i>	13.6% of households with children	14.8% of households with children	12.5% of households with children
Food Insecurity among Children <i>*means a child in the household is food insecure</i>	6.5% of households with children	7.6% of households with children	6.2% of households with children

Source: USDA Report Economic Research Service

¹ USDA Economic Research Service, Household Food Security in the United States in 2021, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/104656/err-309.pdf?v=4640.9>

In Pennsylvania, nearly 10% of residents are food insecure, including over 13% of children and 5% of seniors. In New Jersey, 8.4% of the population is food insecure, including 9.0% of children and 6.1% of seniors.² These numbers are unacceptable. In a country with so much farming, agriculture, and resources, no one should go hungry.

County	2019 Food Insecurity	2020 Food Insecurity	2019 Child Food Insecurity	2020 Child Food Insecurity
Pennsylvania				
Bucks	7.2%	7.3%	8.5%	8.7%
Chester	6.3%	6%	6.8%	6.3%
Delaware	8.5%	9.1%	12.8%	15.9%
Montgomery	6.9%	7%	8%	8.9%
Philadelphia	14.4%	15.8%	24.2%	30.9%
New Jersey				
Burlington	6.6%	7.1%	8.8%	9.7%
Camden	9.5%	10.9%	13%	16.6%
Gloucester	7.5%	8.2%	8.9%	9.3%
Salem	10.7%	11.7%	15.5%	17.6%

Source: Feeding America Map the Meal Gap³

While we did not see a huge spike in reported national food insecurity rates at the height of the pandemic, we do know that more people were in need of food assistance. **Over 60 million people (1 in 5 people) turned to food banks, food pantries, and other private food assistance programs in 2020 – 50% more than in 2019.**⁴ Food banks like Philabundance were able to do more to meet the need, lessening food insecurity, thanks to the incredible amount of government support.

Both in our service area and nationally, people of color also disproportionately face food insecurity.

Demographic	2019	2020	2021
Black Households	19.1%	21.7%	19.8%
Hispanic Households	15.6%	17.2%	16.2%
White non-Hispanic Households	7.9%	7.1%	7.0%

Source: USDA Report Economic Research Service

² Feeding America, State-by-State Resource: How Food Banks and the Farm Bill's Nutrition Programs Address Hunger in the United States, <https://feedingamericaaction.org/resources/state-by-state-food-banks-and-farm-bill/>

³ Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap, <https://map.feedingamerica.org/>

⁴ Feeding America, Charitable Food Assistance Participation in 2020, <https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/Charitable%20Food%20Assistance%20Participation%20in%202020.pdf>

People of color in our service area are facing hunger at more than double or triple the rate of white people. We all, government and non-profits, have to do more to address the needs of all communities but we have to focus on communities of color and children.

County	2020 Food Insecurity Overall	2020 Food Insecurity Black Persons	2020 Food Insecurity Hispanic Persons	2020 Food Insecurity White non-Hispanic Persons
Pennsylvania				
Bucks	7.3%	15%	17%	4%
Chester	6%	19%	16%	4%
Delaware	9.1%	20%	18%	6%
Montgomery	7%	15%	16%	4%
Philadelphia	15.8%	23%	25%	10%
New Jersey				
Burlington	7.1%	10%	16%	3%
Camden	10.9%	17%	21%	4%
Gloucester	8.2%	13%	16%	3%
Salem	11.7%	22%	24%	5%

Source: Feeding America Map the Meal Gap

Causes and Consequences

We know that the high rates of hunger are directly linked to high rates of poverty. Hunger is an issue of resources and access, worsened by the many existing obstacles people face: low-wage jobs, part-time hours, transportation challenges, the high cost of childcare and housing, and language barriers. When wages are too low or jobs are hard to find, it becomes impossible for families to meet the ever-rising costs of living and put food on the table.

Access to affordable nutritious foods is critical to the health and well-being of our communities and it is widely accepted as a key social determinant of health, while research shows food insecurity has a negative and detrimental impact on individuals at all ages. Food insecurity can damage children's health and brain development before they enter school. By kindergarten, food-insecure children often are cognitively, emotionally, and physically behind food-secure peers.⁵ As children get older, not having a balanced breakfast or lunch can lead to an inability to focus in school, health consequences, and even an increase in suicidal ideation.⁶ Food insecure adults have a greater likelihood of depression, diabetes, hypertension, and overall report being in poor or fair health.⁷ We must ensure that kids have food at school and at home so they can reach their full potential.

⁵ Children's HealthWatch, Too Hungry to Learn: Food Insecurity and School Readiness, https://www.childrenshealthwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/toohungrytolearn_report.pdf

⁶ Health Affairs, Food Insecurity and Health Outcomes, <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/pdf/10.1377/hlthaff.2015.0645>

⁷ Gucciardi et al., The Intersection between Food Insecurity and Diabetes, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4218969/#CR32>

Among seniors, food insecurity contributes to malnutrition, which exacerbates disease, increases disability, decreases resistance to infection, and extends hospital stays.⁸ Malnutrition increases caregiving demands and inflates health-care costs associated with premature or extended hospital or nursing home stays. A pre-pandemic national report estimated that hunger costs our country over \$160 billion in increased health care costs, lost productivity, lost educational attainment.⁹ Hunger is costly and critical investment are required to address the need and underlying impacts. We can choose to pay for it in health care and other costs or instead invest in programs like SNAP, TEFAP, and others that we know can keep people healthy and allow them to thrive. We urge Congress to strengthen and expand the reach of the federal nutrition programs to meet the nutritional needs of families, seniors, children and veterans.

New Challenges, Less Support

From 2020 through today, Philabundance has been distributing food to more people in need than we ever thought possible. The demand for food assistance has consistently remained above pre-pandemic levels as the pandemic's economic fallout and supply chain issues have continued, and new challenges like inflation have emerged – particularly historically high food inflation.

Rising Cost of Commonly Purchased Grocery Items in our Region			
Food Item	2019 Average	January 2023	Increase
Large Eggs	\$1.98/dozen	\$5.27/dozen	↑ 166.2%
Whole Milk	\$3.59/gallon	\$4.51/gallon	↑ 25.6%
White Bread	\$1.18/loaf	\$1.76/loaf	↑ 49.2%
Ground Beef	\$3.72/pound	\$4.81/pound	↑ 29.3%
Chicken Breast	\$3.27/pound	\$4.16/pound	↑ 27.2%

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Price Index, Northeast Region

Overall food costs have risen by over 10% in the last year, with many food staples increasing much more than that. But inflation isn't felt equally - like many other hardships, inflation is often felt mostly by people with lower incomes. Low-income households spend over 20% of their income on food and have less wiggle room in their budget when prices rise. Our neighbors who had already been working to overcome the hardships exacerbated by the pandemic are now faced with the rising cost of living. When difficult times hit, food is often the first thing people forego to make ends meet. For many, a daily meal is a simple choice of what to eat. But for people facing hunger, a daily meal poses a very different type of choice. It's often an impossible choice between food and other crucial needs, such as electricity, childcare or medicine.

⁸ Food Research & Action Center, Hunger, Poverty, and Health During COVID-19, https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/HPH_Older-Adults_2021.pdf

⁹ Bread for the World, The Cost of Hunger, <http://www.hungerreport.org/costofhunger/>.

COMMENTS ON FOOD COSTS FROM OUR COMMUNITY MEMBERS

"I'm paying my bills and I can't even afford to buy food. Things are so expensive. I'm just barely making it."

"In order to meet other needs - medical needs, dental needs - sometimes I have to cut back even more on grocery shopping. It may sound a little strange, but food is one of the first things we have a tendency to cut back on. You shop different. You eat different."

"Fresh fruits and vegetables that used to be a lower price are now high. It's just been really, really hard for me to navigate what to get. I take certain medicines...I know I need certain nutrition to go along with all the medicines that I take. Sometimes that's not easy when you're on a fixed income you need to pay your rent, pay your utilities, and buy medicines too - that's costly! So you're gonna cut back on some of the food that's good for you."

"Everything's going up except your paycheck...it's hard."

These challenges affect the people we serve – keeping demand high – as well as food banks. Beyond the sustained demand, these new challenges continue to put a strain on food banks' operations and services. Inflation soared over the past year and is at its highest rate in four decades, hammering American consumers but also cutting into the limited resources with which food banks must operate. There are few signs that inflation will slow significantly anytime soon. The same applies to supply chain disruptions. Major alterations to the food supply chain have compounded the challenges food banks face accessing products that had previously been donated but are no longer available. This means organizations like ours must use money allocated to meet other outstanding operational expenses to instead purchase more costly products to meet demand. **For example, last year a truck load of chicken would cost us \$60,000 whereas today it costs us \$120,000 for that same amount.** Acquiring the food is only part of the equation - distributing food has also been a challenge amid increased gas prices.

While it has been a challenge, food banks have been able to keep up with high demand in the past few difficult years thanks to robust federal pandemic aid and the generous support of donors. Now most of the additional federal support has come to an end and donations have slowed, while groceries remain historically expensive and supply chain disruptions continue. Temporary government relief made available in recent years has ended, including:

- Federal stimulus checks
- Expanded Child Tax Credit
- Farmers to Families food boxes and added TEFAP support
- Free school and summer meals for all children
- Greater flexibilities for programs like CSFP and WIC

The people we serve are now facing another loss of federal temporary support – nationally, about \$2.5 billion each month with the sunset of SNAP Emergency Allotments. Our states of Pennsylvania and New Jersey lost over \$200 million per month and \$75 million per month, respectively. This loss, coupled with historically high food inflation, has created a hunger cliff. Our food banks are already seeing an increase in demand, and struggling to fill the hole the end of SNAP Emergency Allotments has torn in the safety net at a time when we already have less federal support. Food banks alone cannot meet the elevated demand for food assistance. We cannot food bank our way out of this crisis.

We have seen the results when the government invests in anti-hunger programs, we can clearly see that it works. Not only can we say “government works” when it comes to addressing hunger, but we have concrete examples of *how* it can work. To address hunger long-term, Congress must build upon these proven solutions by permanently codifying the enhancements, flexibilities, and investments temporarily made to these critical nutrition and safety net programs.

We Can’t Do It Alone

While food banks play a necessary role in the fight against hunger, the charitable food network cannot meet the need alone. SNAP is the most effective anti-hunger program in the United States and is the cornerstone of our nation’s nutrition and food security safety net. In 2022, SNAP helped over 41 million people put food on the table.¹⁰ These benefits improve the food security, financial security, and health of recipients while providing a high level of dignity and autonomy to recipients. SNAP serves our most vulnerable. 44% of SNAP recipients are children, 33% seniors and people with disabilities, and the majority of SNAP recipients who can work do work.^{11,12} Additionally, SNAP infuses money into local economies. SNAP is an economic multiplier – for every \$1 invested into SNAP, \$1.50-1.80 is generated in economic activity.¹³

SNAP is the nation’s first line of defense against hunger. Research prior to the pandemic found that for every one meal the Feeding America national network of food banks provides, SNAP provides nine. Additionally, SNAP relieves pressure on food banks. SNAP “shortens the line” so that we can do our job of “feeding the line” more effectively. Without strong SNAP benefits, food banks and pantries become overburdened and unable to meet the need.

Before SNAP Emergency Allotments, SNAP’s biggest shortcoming had long been inadequate benefit amounts. Regular SNAP benefits have not been enough to get most families through the month.

¹⁰ Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, The Basics: The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/the-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>

¹¹ Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, Most Working-Age SNAP Participants Work, But Often in Unstable Jobs, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/most-working-age-snap-participants-work-but-often-in-unstable-jobs>

¹² Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, SNAP Helps Millions of Children, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-helps-millions-of-children>

¹³ Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, The Case for Boosting SNAP Benefits, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/the-case-for-boosting-snap-benefits-in-next-major-economic-response>

Without SNAP Emergency Allotment, the average SNAP benefit is now only about \$6 per person per day.¹⁴ Though still insufficient, it is a meaningful improvement from the prior average of \$4.20 per person per day before the Thrifty Food Plan was updated to better reflect the cost of a healthy diet based on today's nutrition standards and consumption patterns. While we understand that SNAP Emergency Allotments were intended as temporary relief, the devastating impact of their loss is a testament to the need to protect and strengthen SNAP in the Farm Bill – such as protecting and expanding upon the recent increase to the Thrifty Food Plan.

On average, SNAP recipients lost \$82 per person per month when SNAP Emergency Allotments ended.¹⁵ Many people lost much more. For example, many seniors and people with disabilities only qualify for the minimum SNAP benefit – just \$23 per month. Our neighbors are already struggling to make ends meet after a loss of this magnitude, forced to make impossible tradeoffs between food and other necessities like rent, bills, and medication. Any further cuts to SNAP would be catastrophic. Allow me to share our community members' experiences in their own words:

"We now have to choose between bills and food even more than before. Prices are rising and we can't keep up. We shouldn't have to decide if we can eat or have heat, buy groceries or pay the rent." – Anonymous

"My wife and I are greatly affected by the loss of the extra SNAP income. My wife is a cancer patient with the expenses that creates, like prescriptions not covered or copays through the roof...and I'm at 76 years old with a quadruple heart bypass operation and a carotid artery operation and other illnesses along with that. I am no longer able to hold a job, part-time or full. The extra income for food was a Godsent as we could afford to eat something besides peanut butter and crackers, which we're now back on as \$23 a month does not even cover eggs, milk, and butter now." – Ronald

"It's really scary when you have to worry about whether you're going to pay your rent or feed your kid. And not to mention my rent went up in January as well so it was already getting tougher. I live in a two-person household – it's myself and my 13-year-old autistic son. I was struggling since January but at least I knew I was getting the [extra SNAP] so I didn't worry about food but when they took it away my life and my son's life was turned upside down." – Anonymous

¹⁴ Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, Temporary Pandemic SNAP Benefits Will End in Remaining 35 States in March 2023, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/temporary-pandemic-snap-benefits-will-end-in-remaining-35-states-in-march>

¹⁵ Food Research & Action Center, SNAP Emergency Allotments and Public Health Emergency: Preparing for the Hunger Cliff, <https://frac.org/programs/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap/emergency-allotments>

"I am 93 years old and live on my Social Security with no savings. They have just taken \$200 a month away from my food buying. How can I live on \$78 a month for food? I buy no nonessentials and I can't afford to go to the dentist. I am really concerned." – Olive

"Having the extra benefits allowed us to eat like normal people. Now going to \$23 a month will be extremely hard on us. My wife and I have medical issues and eating decent should be a given, not a luxury. In my 73 years I never thought I would be living like this: from a two-income household to poverty. I am a Vietnam vet, gave my all to my country, and yet a decent meal is far and few between." – Jim

"I work full time and rent a house with no utilities included so by the time I pay \$775 rent, \$300 electric, \$135 water, internet and phones, car payments, and insurance...I have nothing left. I don't make a lot and [without SNAP Emergency Allotments] I am only eligible for \$90 [in SNAP benefits]. The additional [SNAP benefits] helped my family so much to be able to eat and I don't know what we will do...I don't know how we will make it without paying our basic bills." – Anonymous

Our partners, including faith-based and community pantries, are already experiencing extreme increases in demand as a result:

"We're noticing an incredible influx of new clients. We're serving 120 to 150 people per day. There's a sense of desperation that's heightened. People are lining up earlier. There's a feeling of scarcity that didn't exist before. People are panicked. Our guests are now constantly asking for other services, other financial assistance. They're having a hard time paying rent. One woman, she goes to the pantry every week to meet her family's needs, she told me, 'Without these services, I wouldn't survive.' We're just not getting enough in-kind donations. We're spending about \$2,000 a week shopping for food. Before, we could shop once or twice a week. Now we're shopping pretty much every day. The people need help *and* the pantries need help." – Margaux, Founder, Sunday Love Project (Philadelphia, PA)

"The SNAP changes really impact people because we have noticed within the past month, more people are coming to the pantry, more families, people that have children, and older adults. During the pandemic, we had a lot of people. Then when jobs started opening, people went back to work so we were not getting that crowd. But now that the SNAP benefits have been cut off, we are noticing that some of those people are coming back plus we are getting a lot of new people. We are serving these people the best that we can. [In addition to serving more people]...we are not getting as much food as we used to. We have to cut back on what we can give them so that everyone can get something." – Elaine, Food Pantry Volunteer, Willow Grove SDA Church (Willow Grove, PA)

“Before March, we were seeing about 60-70 families coming to the pantry on a distribution day. And then all of a sudden, it zoomed up and we had 141 families on a Tuesday. We were just shocked. And it’s been consistently in the 100s since then. That’s like a Thanksgiving distribution. We normally see 130 families on Thanksgiving which is our biggest day of the year. So, for a normal Tuesday to see 141? That was just off the charts. We’re really just starting to see the reality of what people are losing. It’s significant.” – LeeAnn, Executive Director, Patrician Society (Norristown, PA)

Additionally, it is important to note that many people who are food insecure do not qualify for SNAP benefits. Food banks are key to filling the gap and meeting the need. Nationally, nearly 50% of food insecure households are above the income limit for SNAP – meaning they make too much to qualify for SNAP but not enough to make ends meet.¹⁶ For these households, food banks are a critical source of food.

To truly end hunger in our country, we need a comprehensive approach. Different programs address different needs and must work in tandem. We need bold investments in programs that help food banks serve our communities – like TEFAP and CSFP, as well as programs that directly benefit people in need – like SNAP – to address our nation’s hunger crisis. Without these investments we will end up paying more in health care related expenses and losing income that could be spent in communities.

Policy Recommendations

Hunger is a solvable issue. As a nation we have enough food to feed everyone, but too many people lack the resources to be able to access that food. We need the political will to make policies and systemic changes that remove barriers and help people get the food they need. The Farm Bill provides a key opportunity to apply the lessons learned from the past few challenging years and address the hunger crisis by permanently improving critical federal nutrition programs like SNAP, TEFAP, and CSFP.

As Congress works to reauthorize the Farm Bill, Philabundance, along with our Feeding America network, urges lawmakers to strengthen the federal nutrition programs — programs that work in tandem with food banks across the country to provide food assistance to families and individuals facing hunger. Now is not the time to cut or weaken federal nutrition programs; now is the time to be bold and build on the bipartisan leadership we saw during the pandemic that averted a national hunger crisis and contained the rate of food insecurity. We are requesting the Committee to strengthen our nation’s commitment to ending hunger by enacting the following policy recommendations in the 2023 Farm Bill.

Our nation’s food banks, and programs like **TEFAP** and **CSFP** that support them, are lifelines for families who struggle to put food on the table. Charitable donations alone can’t ensure that families get enough to eat. To ensure food bank shelves are full, Congress must:

¹⁶ Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap, <https://map.feedingamerica.org/>

- **Strengthen TEFAP Funding**

TEFAP is a means-tested federal program that provides food at no cost to individuals in need through organizations such as food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, and emergency shelters. As demand for food remains high at food banks, a reliable and continuous stream of TEFAP foods is essential. TEFAP also has a strong impact on the farm economy. TEFAP purchases give U.S. growers and producers an average of 27 cents per dollar. By contrast, just around 16 cents of every retail food dollar go back to farmers.

- Congress should reauthorize and increase to \$500 million per year mandatory funding for **TEFAP food purchases**, adjusted for inflation. This would double the annual amount of funding for TEFAP entitlement commodities set by the Farm Bill. This level of investment will ensure the flow of TEFAP foods remains steady throughout the food assistance network and support the U.S. agricultural economy.
- Congress should reauthorize and increase to \$200 million per year discretionary funding for **TEFAP storage and distribution** and reauthorize \$15 million per year in discretionary funding for **TEFAP infrastructure grants**. These funds will help food banks offset the cost of storing and transporting USDA foods, especially in rural communities. They will help cover expenses like refrigeration and fuel.

- **Reauthorize, Streamline and Expand Access for CSFP**

Every month, CSFP provides nutritious food boxes to around 760,000 seniors who are low-income and aged 60 years and older. CSFP helps to combat the poor health conditions often found in seniors who are experiencing food insecurity and who are at risk for hunger. In a pulse survey of Feeding America food bank members, they shared that the certification length for seniors was too short, the waitlists were very long, and the reporting requirements are too burdensome, costing more to administer the program versus the actual return. In addition to the administrative hurdles within CSFP, seniors face eligibility barriers when their Medicare payments for health services are included in income determination. Adding a healthcare deduction will increase access to CSFP for any in-need seniors that do not meet requirements under current income eligibility provisions.

- **Support Partnerships with Growers and Producers**

Annually, around 70 billion pounds of food in the U.S. does not make it from farm to plate. Congress should increase funding and streamline state participation in the TEFAP Farm to Food Bank program by removing the state match and allowing states to prioritize projects for donated food or food purchased at low cost from local growers and producers. This will help increase food donations from farmers to food banks to communities in need.

Congress must protect SNAP's funding and structure while addressing systemic barriers to benefits. Our **SNAP priorities** for the Farm Bill include:

- **Improve Benefit Adequacy**

Congress should increase SNAP benefits to an adequate level. While we celebrate and seek to protect the increase to the Thrifty Food Plan, it is still not sufficient. Basing SNAP benefits on the Low-Cost Food Plan (rather than the current Thrifty Food Plan) would increase SNAP's purchasing

power and bring benefit amounts in line with grocery prices and need. SNAP benefits must keep up with the actual cost of food, and they should taper more gradually until participants truly have enough income to support themselves without feeling like they are being pushed off the “benefits cliff.” Increasing SNAP benefits would also help seniors, people with disabilities, people working low-wage jobs, and others who are most likely to qualify for the minimum benefit. Additionally, Congress should eliminate the cap on the SNAP Excess Shelter Deduction and streamline SNAP Standard Excess Medical Deductions for older adults and people with disabilities.

- **Expand SNAP Eligibility and Streamline Enrollment Processes**
Current eligibility rules and enrollment processes can be complicated, confusing, and restrictive – creating red tape and blocking access among vulnerable populations. Congress should improve SNAP access for seniors, college students, immigrants, and others who do not qualify for or are unable to participate in SNAP due to eligibility barriers. Congress should also simplify application processes and remove administrative barriers to make it easier to apply for or renew benefits.
- **Strengthen Pathways to Economic Mobility**
Congress should end SNAP’s three-month time limit for able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs). This harsh policy that ceases food assistance after only three months results in increased food insecurity with no correlation to increased employment. Instead of inflexible penalties that provide an error-prone one-size-fits-all approach, Congress can better support SNAP participants in finding work by removing the time limit on benefits, as well as improving and adequately funding state employment and training programs. Additionally, earnings generated from participation in work-based learning programs like SNAP Employment and Training should be excluded from SNAP eligibility and benefit determinations. This will help ensure people have the food *and* opportunities they need to get back on their feet.
- **Congress must ensure equity within the nutrition programs by:**
 - Improving data collection to further inform policy solutions,
 - **Centering the participant experience in the design and implementation of the federal nutrition programs,**
 - Ensuring access to culturally appropriate foods in the nutrition programs such as Halal and Kosher foods,
 - Providing food sovereignty and parity for tribal communities and the US territories,
 - And repealing the lifetime ban on individuals with past felony drug convictions from receiving SNAP.

Conclusion

“Eating decent should be a given, not a luxury,” said Jim from Pennsylvania.

We all get to go home to a full refrigerator and stocked shelves. Food is a basic staple. Something we don’t have to think about beyond simply what we are craving today. But for 34 million people in this country, they question that very necessity. They do not ask, “what’s for dinner tonight?” but instead,



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"do I have anything to eat for dinner tonight?" It is a heartbreaking reality for far too many individuals, children, and seniors.

My incredible team at Philabundance, including our donors, partners, and supporters and the entire Feeding America network are working so hard to do something about that. But we cannot do this alone, especially as it keeps getting harder. I implore each of you to think tonight when you have your dinner about what it would feel like if that food was not available to you. If you could not just throw open the fridge or order whatever you wanted.

The Farm Bill is a pivotal opportunity to make a difference in the lives of so many so that they too can know they have the resources to consume the food they need. During COVID, the federal government chose to invest in programs that ensured people were fed. It showed how government can work to address hunger. The overall well-being of our nation is dependent on a well-nourished society.

I often quote Martin Luther King Jr. and he said, "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'" With this Farm Bill we can do something – we can feed people.

Testimony for "SNAP and Other Nutrition Assistance in the Farm Bill."

Subcommittee on Food and Nutrition, Specialty Crops, Organics, and Research

April 16, 2023

Chairman Fetterman, Ranking Member Braun, and Subcommittee Members;

Thank you for receiving my written testimony today regarding the SNAP program. About 25 years ago, I was impacted significantly while serving at a homeless mission in Ft. Worth, Texas. My heart broke as I engaged men, women and children living on the streets.

Not long after that, I met my beautiful bride and we married in the chapel of that same mission, the homeless as our guests. Three months later we opened the doors to our own compassion-driven ministry called Watered Gardens in our SW Missouri community of Joplin.

After the first year of operation, we made the difficult decision of reducing my full-time work as a physical therapist to part-time. This was a sacrifice for us and our five children, but it was evident the ministry needed more of my attention. My wife and I worked hard to build a team of compassionate volunteers and for the next nine years it remained completely volunteer driven with no payroll at all. But the sacrifice paid off. The ministry is now the largest privately funded poverty-fighting organization in our four-state area. Today, we serve both the poor and the homeless, offering 105 beds in three facilities serving those in long term recovery, adult men and women in need of emergency shelter, homeless moms with children and we have a respite unit for those discharging from the hospital who have nowhere to go to finish their recovery. Our non-homeless services include workforce development, education, and meeting basic needs like furniture, appliances, clothing and food. We served more than 70,000 meals last year and from our Mission Market we helped nearly 400 families with more than 52,000 pounds of food for their homes through private donations. I say, "We helped them," but really, they helped themselves through a unique ministry we operate called the Worth Shop. We call it a Worth Shop because we have found that work awakens worth in people's lives. It is a place where people can trade their time to earn everything from clothing and shelter to furniture or food by working in the recycling area or craft sections of our Worth Shop. Work is dignifying.

Just last week I met Selena, a young homeless woman and a guest in our shelter. She said, "I love how you guys do things around here. Allowing me to work for my bed and meals makes me feel like I get to keep my dignity."

I've heard countless comments like that over the years. One man said, "You take the shame out of the game." One lady named Beth who was earning her food by knitting stocking caps for newborns in the local hospital called me later and left a voice message that said, "Thank you for treating me as equal."

These are more than just anecdotal stories. Research also bears this out. The American Journal of Applied Psychology published a paper in 2015 "Personality Change Following Unemployment," a study of 6000 unemployed, subsidized adults.¹ They discovered the longer people are without work, the more they suffer. Specifically, there was statistically significant decline in three of five psychosocial metrics: agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness. In other words, people become disheartened and grumpy when they're not working. So, if we want to help energize people to get back in the workforce, then we should couple our charity with an expectation to be productive – people feel better about themselves when they're productive.

We do this at our mission every day, viewing people who many call poor and needy as people who also have great potential, capacity and ability. April was one of those people. When she first stepped into the doors of our mission, she was homeless, addicted and had lost her children. She was on SNAP and had been in and out of HUD housing, but it was at the mission surrounded by people who cared for her – willing to develop a relationship with her - that she found the courage to get clean, get a job and turn in her SNAP card. She said that was the one of the scariest things she ever did simply because she had never known that she had the ability to provide for herself. But with a compassionate support-team who esteemed her as able, she did it. Not only that, but she got her kids back, went back to school and ended up working as our office manager before opening and leading her own recovery ministry to inspire women to discover their God-given potential.

I'll never forget Mike, a middle-aged man who has a 3rd grade education, riding his bicycle down to the mission after seeing one of our public service announcements. When I greeted him, he said, "I saw you on the TV say that the working poor are happier than the welfare poor, so I went and got a job!" He was so excited. When I asked him what he needed that day, he said he wanted to earn his food at the mission instead of using his SNAP card. That was more than 10 years ago and Mike never lost the job. I have many more first-hand stories of people finding freedom from dependency simply because we

viewed them as unique individuals with unique gifts rather than charity cases intended to be stuck on the receiving end of someone's benevolence.

Unfortunately, I have no shortage of stories that go in a different direction. For us and others who operate work-oriented missions like ours, SNAP benefits are often more hurtful than helpful. Kenny, horribly addicted to alcohol, would stand on the median with a cardboard sign that read "Food Stamps half price." I have recorded testimonies of others who have openly shared with me how easy and common it is to liquidate these benefits at fifty cents on the dollar. Kevin an able-bodied homeless man earned his bed and meals like everyone else because he could, but when I asked him about employment, he said, "No way. I can only work for cash under the table. I'm waiting on my disability." That conversation led to a mention of SNAP. He pulled his card out and leaned across the table, "James," he said. "They put hundreds of dollars on my card last month. I don't even know what I'm going to do with it. I think I'm going to go buy some bulk food and give it away." Later I learned that Kevin failed his drug test. He ended up back out on the streets.

The right kind of help – rehabilitation and development – are available for guys like Kevin and Kenny but for them and countless others, means-tested welfare programs disincentivize work that would otherwise lead to a flourishing life. Instead, millions of Americans remain dependent today.

Dependency is a national epidemic. A little more than 37 million people are in poverty³ but as of January 2023, more than 42 million people are enrolled in the food stamp program. Not only are there more people dependent on federal anti-poverty programs than there are people in poverty, but they are receiving more in food stamp allotments than ever before. In 1969, the average person received a little more than \$50 per month (adjusted to 2019 dollars) compared to \$129 per person per month in 2019. In 2022, benefits were at an all-time high of \$230/mo/person.⁴

The record-low labor force participation rate among men also signals a dependency crisis. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, more than 41 million men have dropped out of the workforce as of last month.⁵ Sixty-four percent of them are receiving government assistance and more than half of those, food stamps.⁶

During an interview on philanthropy, John D. Rockefeller said, "Charity is injurious unless it helps the recipient become independent of it." That kind of help requires work on behalf of those recipients. A job is the only way to escape poverty and work requirements for welfare have a history of achieving it.

While work requirements were waived in my state in 2016, more than 43,000 able-bodied adults were on the program not working at all. But by the end of the year, after the waiver for SNAP work requirements had been removed, that number had dropped by 85%.² I remember that - before the new law went into effect. There was a lot of talk in the news about how people might go hungry. But when it passed, no one went hungry. Why? Because on average, there was a 70% increase in earnings by those able-bodied adults on the program and the rest of it was taken up by private sector charity.

We should never underestimate the incredible potential of civil society's response in times of need. On May 22 of 2011 one of the most historically devastating F5 tornadoes tore through the center of our city of Joplin rendering more than 7000 people homeless in an hour and killing 161. It wasn't federal government relief that saved us. Caring neighbors, compassionate citizens and local leaders were involved in rescue, relief and then organized a coordinated response long before government help showed up.

James Madison, debating on the floor of the House in 1794, asserted, "Charity is no part of the legislative duty of the government." After twenty-three years of fighting poverty, that makes sense to me. The government doesn't know Kevin, Kenny, Mike, April, Beth or Selena. I know them. And without a personal knowledge of each individual and what's really going on in their lives, needs cannot be met in a way that does not tend toward trapping people in dependency and stripping them of dignity. Charity has never been administered well from the government. FDR himself admitted this in his 1935 State of the Union Address. After comparing dependency on relief as a narcotic – "a subtle destroyer of the human spirit," he went on to promise, "The Federal Government must and shall quit this business of relief." That was sound conviction because although the government might be able to feed people, it can never give those struggling in poverty what justice demands – dignity and friendship. That comes by way of compassionate neighbors like the ones who volunteer at our mission who also develop vital relationships with those who come for food. I implore this committee to consider what it can do to safeguard the future of those vital relationships that are certainly undermined or crowded out when food simply comes on a card with nothing required.

James Whitford
Co-Founder, Executive Director
Watered Gardens Ministries

1. <https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/apl-a0038647.pdf>
2. <https://thefga.org/paper/missouri-food-stamp-work-requirements/>

3. <https://poverty.ucdavis.edu/fag/what-current-poverty-rate-united-states>
4. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/29SNAPcurrPP-4.pdf>
5. <https://data.bls.gov/>
6. [3-18-jec-report-inactive-disconnected.pdf \(senate.gov\)](#)

**Written Testimony of Whitley Hasty
Outreach Specialist, Hunger Free America & Foodlink (Rochester, NY)**

**Before the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry;
Subcommittee hearing for Food and Nutrition, Specialty Crops and Research
“SNAP and Other Nutrition Assistance in the Farm Bill”**

April 19, 2023

My name is Whitley Hasty and I’m honored to be here today to share how the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has positively impacted the lives of me and my children. Thank you to Chair Fetterman for holding this hearing and inviting me to testify. I also thank my own senator, Senator Gillibrand, for continuously championing solutions to end hunger.

I am a proud mother of a 7-year-old daughter who is sweet and protective, hilarious, and cautiously independent. My 3-year-old son is the opposite of his sister; he is grounded, generally likes to follow the rules, and has such an unlimited curiosity about everything.

They are the center of my world, and I do everything I can to be present and active in their lives, from attending gymnastics classes, to hosting sleepovers, and volunteering as Vice President of the PTSO at our local school. I work hard to model for my kids the importance of civic and community duty.

I’m raising my children the way my mother raised me. She almost never missed a day of work and still made time to support four children participating in multiple activities at three different schools. She earned a modest salary and often bluntly describes our upbringing as “one flat tire away from an eviction.” We often do not see the sacrifices our parents make until we grow up and make them ourselves. With the help of SNAP, we were able to shop for healthier foods rather than get by with just the basics. As the oldest, I learned how to grocery shop on a limited budget and maximize the nutrition for our family.

Working since the age of 13, I have always craved the independence that comes with making an honest income. Even during college, while on scholarship, I held down two jobs at the campus dining hall and at Wegmans. My resume is lengthy, as I have always been willing, able, and ready to work. I’m proud of my strong work ethic and career advancement, but also know much of what I have accomplished could not have been achieved without SNAP.

In 2015, I obtained both SNAP and WIC during my prenatal care. Applying for both was a really difficult process; the two applications being separate meant that I missed work twice and lost wages to visit DHS at 8am, only to wait in line for hours with dozens of other families. I am grateful to the government caseworker who helped me navigate the process, and I know the staff tried to make it as seamless as possible, but I do understand why some eligible participants are too intimidated to apply. That's why I support Senator Gillibrand's proposal to make it easier for states and counties to enable eligible people to apply for multiple programs simultaneously online.

Receiving SNAP absolutely helped my family eat healthier. We ate less processed foods, and I started cooking new recipes. I used SNAP to shop not only at grocery stores, but also at farmer's and mobile markets like Foodlink's Curbside Market. I utilized incentive programs to maximize my budget and help prioritize fruits and vegetables through programs such as Double Up Food Bucks, which is funded partially through the USDA GusNIP grant.

When the pandemic hit, I was grateful to receive an increase in SNAP benefits. My son was born two months earlier, before the world turned upside down. The SNAP emergency allotments provided by Congress enabled me to stretch my food budget so that I could keep the heat and lights on. I am a perfect example of how legislation reduced poverty and hunger during one of the largest economic collapses of our lifetimes.

My life refutes the most common SNAP myth; receiving benefits was never a deterrent for me to work. I continually worked or sought work while receiving SNAP, and that is true of most SNAP recipients. A close, old friend of mine recently celebrated the achievement of financial security when she no longer qualified. I can relate to that. If Congress wants to reduce the use of SNAP, it should raise the minimum wage, increase the Earned Income Tax Credit, and boost wage, childcare, and transportation subsidies.

I'm proud that my work at Hunger Free America and Foodlink has meant not only that I no longer need SNAP benefits, but that I can now pay it forward by helping others in my community.

Every day I witness how the recent end of the SNAP emergency allotments has impacted the diverse communities that I serve; overnight, the minimum monthly benefit for many seniors fell from \$281 to just \$23. My hope is that this esteemed body again increases SNAP benefits to better help struggling Americans cope with skyrocketing costs for rent, utilities, childcare, and yes, food.

I am thankful that SNAP and WIC helped my family through challenging times, and that I am now able to give my kids a bright future. I hope my story encourages you to strengthen SNAP in the Farm Bill.

It remains a vital truth that food is medicine, and should be regarded as such. I have had the privilege of seeing the “food is medicine” theory come to life while connecting with people almost daily to hear about their needs and assist them with accessing local resources. I have been an Ambassador with Foodlink’s Curbside Market – a mobile market that travels to communities that lack grocery stores and/or farmers markets, increasing access to affordable, healthy foods. I have years of personal experience on SNAP, but through that role I gained an even greater appreciation for how valuable SNAP is for low-income individuals who want to make the healthy choice, but often lack the means to do so. For these loyal shoppers, access to SNAP allows them to purchase a wide array of fruits and vegetables.

After the Curbside Market expanded to become the first *mobile* market in the nation to sell WIC-eligible foods, I was hired as an outreach specialist, focused on WIC – a program that has assisted me and my children for the past seven years. It’s fulfilling work to help women and young families overcome barriers to accessing WIC, so that they can have the same opportunities that the program has given me.

While serving in this new role through my association with Hunger Free America, I have become more familiar with how policy change can directly impact the young families I meet every day. I have grown more aware of how federal legislation, such as the Farm Bill, can improve the lives of so many of my neighbors – especially regarding their ability to feed themselves and their children.

As Stacy Dean, the USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services, recently said in her Feb. 16 testimony¹ for this same subcommittee, now is an exciting and appropriate time to rethink how our nation addresses food insecurity and nutrition. After a global pandemic shined a spotlight on just how many Americans were one crisis away from food insecurity – and on the heels of the historic White House Conference and National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition and Health – I look forward to the possibilities ahead to reshape and reimagine our food system.

¹ https://www.agriculture.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2b4ae580-dea7-720f-8427-06883d46e5bc/Testimony_Dean_02.16.2023.pdf

Just this week, however, we took a step backward when we heard newly proposed legislation² that would impose stricter work requirements for SNAP (and Medicaid). Work requirements already exist for Able-bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDS), and stricter requirements (including extra requirements for those already working hard to raise children) do very little to encourage work, recent studies have shown³. The harm done to public health and the resultant economic impact of legislating more Americans into poverty far outweighs the economic impact of minimal changes to our labor force.

While almost all of my interactions with prospective WIC families occur in the City of Rochester, I am lucky to work for an organization that serves such a diverse population throughout a 10-county service area, full of residents of different races, ethnicities and beliefs. One of our food distribution partners in rural Wyoming County said it best, when asked about the concept of work ethic and “earning” the food on your plate:

“As a culture here in rural communities, we care a lot about that hard work ethic, and sometimes what comes out of that hard work ethic is a belief that you have to do the work to earn the food on your plate. What’s missing in that assumption is you need the food to do the work – you need nourishment in order to do hard work. There are a lot of people who want to work hard, but don’t necessarily have access to the right food and the quality food to nourish their bodies so that they can do their part and contribute into the community.”

I echo that sentiment. I’ve helped hundreds of residents by connecting them with resources to help them put food on the table. They want to work. They need to work. But sometimes they still need support to get the nutrition they need that will set them up for success.

In addition to opposing excessive work requirements for SNAP recipients, below is a summary of other policy priorities that both Foodlink and Hunger Free America support as leading public health and anti-poverty organizations in New York State. More importantly, these proposed policy changes would increase the wellbeing of so many of my clients and neighbors:

- Both HFA and Foodlink support the **HOPE Act**, which was introduced by our local Congressman, Joe Morelle, and Senator Gillibrand in 2021. I know first-hand the challenges that families face in applying for multiple benefits programs. By creating pilot programs to increase access and modernize the delivery of social services, we can help low-income households develop assets to climb out of poverty and create economic

² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2023/04/11/gop-medicaid-food-stamps-work/>

³ <https://www.nber.org/papers/w28877>

opportunity.

- Through the **SNAP Plus Act** championed by Rep. Grace Meng of New York, we support the allowance of SNAP benefits for certain hot and prepared food purchases. I know how purchasing these items is a convenient option for many working mothers like myself, and lifting this restriction is long overdue. This change would give extra food purchasing choices to SNAP recipients and would not raise benefit amounts, rather it would help to boost economic activity at retailers who sell hot and prepared foods.
- Through the **Enhanced Access to SNAP Act (EATS Act)**, championed by Senator Gillibrand, more low-income college students would access SNAP and receive the nourishment needed to graduate. Preventing a student from accessing SNAP, simply put, would only increase the likelihood that they would need SNAP assistance as an adult. Imposing a work requirement on students is burdensome and wrong, and its expiration is long overdue.
- Another population that sorely needs greater access to SNAP are those that have served in our armed forces⁴. A recent study by the Department of Defense⁵ revealed that 24% of active-duty service members were food-insecure. Language from the **Military Family Nutrition Access Act**, which has received bipartisan report, should be included in the upcoming Farm Bill. One key provision would be to exclude the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) from the income calculations used to determine SNAP eligibility. No one who has served our country should live in a food-insecure household, and this key policy change would help achieve that.
- Those who have access to SNAP benefits do not have equitable access to vendors and retailers where benefits can be redeemed. I have met families who can easily access a nearby store to satisfy all of their shopping needs, while others are more reliant on **online options** that are not authorized to accept SNAP benefits. This revenue-neutral proposal would simply provide more options for more households without changing benefit levels.
- As an Ambassador at Foodlink's mobile farmers market, the Curbside Market, I know the clear health benefits of easily accessing fresh fruits and vegetables at **local farmers**

⁴ <https://www.dataforprogress.org/blog/2023/4/10/sen-gillibrand-americans-know-snap-feeds-the-hungry-lawmakers-attempting-to-slash-it-do-so-at-their-own-peril>

⁵ <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Jul/14/2003035423/-1/-1/1/STRENGTHENING-FOOD-SECURITY-IN-THE-FORCE-STRATEGY-AND-ROADMAP.PDF>

markets with my SNAP benefits. I also know that technical assistance and funding is sorely needed to not only help replicate this mobile market model across the nation, but help markets accept a wide range of benefits, including but not limited to SNAP, WIC, and Farmers Market Nutrition Programs coupons. The use of varied electronic and paper redemption methods presents a massive barrier for many small markets. By making it easier for low-income customers to use their benefits, we are helping to make the healthy choice the easy choice for many members of the community afflicted by diet-related illnesses.

- I have benefited from both SNAP and WIC and remember having to take a day off of work – to lose wages – so that I could apply for the programs. The USDA should issue rules and new procedures that allow for the **combining of SNAP and WIC applications** and redemption. This would help many young families access benefits and help redemption rates at local retailers.
- Similarly, our local residents would encounter less barriers to accessing SNAP if we **lengthened the certification period** (from 12 to 24 months for most recipients, and from 36 to 48 months for seniors and people with disabilities). This would reduce paperwork, increase efficiency – and leave unchanged the requirement to immediately report any income or household changes that impact a household’s eligibility and allotment. The oral interview requirement still in place in some states should also be eliminated, as it is burdensome on the recipient, and the states and counties required to do them.
- The increased benefit levels introduced by the Biden administration resulted in the **Thrifty Food Plan** being re-evaluated and updated for the first time in nearly 50 years. This increase should be made permanent, and future Farm Bill legislation should make clearer the USDA’s right to do so. In fact, in states such as New York with a high cost of living, the **Low-cost Food Plan** would be a more appropriate basis for SNAP allotments.
- The benefits cliff is real and has impacted many residents I have spoken to during my time as an outreach specialist. We would be in favor of a proposal that not only **increased SNAP eligibility to 200% of the poverty line**, but one that would include a gradual ramp down of benefits as household income increases. These changes would reward and bolster work and ensure workers do not suddenly become food insecure again if they work additional hours and/or get a slight raise.

- Finally, the elimination of asset requirements for SNAP in every state is one key element of Senator Gillibrand's **Closing the Meal Gap Act**. The elimination of Excess Shelter Deductions (particularly in areas of New York with high rent) would bolster benefits and result in fewer people having to make the difficult choice of paying for food vs. paying for rent.

Thank you to the chair and esteemed members of the committee for allowing me to contribute to this critical discussion about SNAP and its impact on the food security of millions of Americans. I look forward to following the work of this committee and subcommittee as we collectively work to advance sound policy changes in the upcoming Farm Bill, and help more Americans put healthy food on the table.

**DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE
RECORD**

APRIL 19, 2023

April 17, 2023

The Honorable John Fetterman
Senate Agriculture Committee
Subcommittee on Food and Nutrition, Specialty Crops, Organics, and Research
Washington, DC 20510

Chairman Fetterman:

On behalf of the International Fresh Produce Association and the American Mushroom Institute, we thank you for holding the hearing, “SNAP and other Nutrition Assistance in the Farm Bill.” Our nation’s emergency feeding and nutrition programs support the health and nutrition for millions of Americans.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) represents arguably the most efficient feeding program in the world – relatively seamlessly providing food assistance to more than 40 million Americans through grocery retail right in their communities. SNAP has been proven to be highly effective at reducing hunger and the complementary program, SNAP-Education, provides millions of participants with supplementary assistance to help them live healthier lives, including guidance around fruit and vegetables.

This year’s Farm Bill reauthorization falls on the heels of the historic White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health, held last September, with the goal of achieving the national strategy to end hunger and dramatically reduce diet-related disease by 2030. These ambitious goals cannot be met without critical investments in this Farm Bill reauthorization.

With only one in ten Americans meeting Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) fruit and vegetable recommendations, improving access for those who rely on SNAP is a critical component of improving dietary quality. Recent United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) research shows that SNAP recipients must allocate 40 percent of the SNAP benefit on fruits and vegetables to meet DGA targetsⁱ. Yet, American households allocate, on average, 26 percent of food budget on fruits and vegetables, with levels significantly lower for low-income and SNAP householdsⁱⁱ. Additionally, low-income consumers consistently cite affordability as the primary barrier to healthy eatingⁱⁱⁱ. While fruits and vegetables cost less per serving than less nutrient-dense foods, consumer perception can contribute to consumption challenges^{iv}.

Providing adequate benefit amounts for SNAP participants to access fruits and vegetables, including support for the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP), produce prescriptions, and exploring a stand-alone dedicated fruit and vegetable benefit amount can help those who rely on SNAP access fruits and vegetables. While not authorized through the Farm Bill, the WIC program has proven that when low-income households have access to adequate amounts of fruit and vegetables, their health improves. Since the WIC program introduced the fruit and vegetable benefit in 2009, it has consistently been one of the most highly redeemed components of the program, has proven to increase fruit and vegetable consumption, is associated with a reduction of obesity in children participating in the program, and resulted in increases in fresh produce availability at WIC-retailers – benefiting individuals beyond just recipients.

USDA's procurement program represents an additional example, and opportunity, of how emergency food can be distributed in a way to improve access to fruits and vegetables. While most foods that USDA procures includes DGA-recommended foods, there is no systemic effort to use purchasing programs to address the foods most under-consumed and most USDA emergency feeding programs do not include a wide variety of fresh fruit and vegetable options, including the Emergency Feeding Assistance Program (TEFAP), Food Distribution for Indian Reservations (FDIPR), and Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CFSP) for seniors. The Fiscal Year 2020 USDA State of Origin report shows only four varieties of fresh produce commodities were purchased, representing \$8.8 million out of \$1.8 billion in purchases overall.^v The USDA's approach of utilizing a lowest-cost bid model, coupled with a procurement and delivery system not designed to be inclusive of fresh fruits and vegetables, has had the unintended consequence of leaving out the majority of domestically-grown fresh fruits and vegetables from USDA emergency feeding programs. By enhancing USDA's procurement approach in the next Farm Bill, even more individuals in need can have access to the full bounty of fruits and vegetables grown by domestic producers.

Finally, expanding the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) to all low-income elementary schools represents an important opportunity to increase access for our nation's most vulnerable children. Congress first allocated funding for the FFVP in 2002 and quickly expanded to all states and territories due to its success and popularity. A USDA evaluation found FFVP increases consumption among low-income students, helps reduce plate waste at school meals, and, most notably, can reduce obesity rates by three percent^{vi}. The program is currently oversubscribed with more districts (all low-income) applying than funded. Expanding options to participate in FFVP to all low-income elementary schools could significantly improve access to fruits and vegetables.

Expansion of nutrition opportunity for students results in expanded opportunities for the country's specialty crop producers, including mushroom farmers, whose high-protein food has a unique ability to be added to and extend meat, or simply replace it as a main protein. Mushrooms are a whole-food, high-protein, high-fiber meat additive and alternative that, when adopted in the diet early, result in a lifetime of nutritional benefits and healthy eating habits across multiple other foods.

In closing, we once again thank you for your commitment to examining opportunities to support and strengthen nutrition programs in the next Farm Bill. Strong and effective federal feeding programs support produce growers and, most importantly, support the health of all Americans. We look forward to working with you as the Farm Bill cycle continues.

Sincerely,

International Fresh Produce Association
American Mushroom Institute

ⁱ Young, S. K., & Stewart, H. (2022). U.S. Fruit and Vegetable Affordability on the Thrifty Food Plan Depends on Purchasing Power and Safety Net Supports. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 19(5), 2772. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19052772>

ⁱⁱ Carlson A., Frazão E. Food Costs, Diet Quality and Energy Balance in the United States. *Physiol. Behav.* 2014;134:20–31. doi: 10.1016/j.physbeh.2014.03.001

ⁱⁱⁱ Young, S. K., & Stewart, H. (2022). U.S. Fruit and Vegetable Affordability on the Thrifty Food Plan Depends on Purchasing Power and Safety Net Supports. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 19(5), 2772. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19052772>

^{iv} Carlson A., Frazão E. Food Costs, Diet Quality and Energy Balance in the United States. *Physiol. Behav.* 2014;134:20–31. doi: 10.1016/j.physbeh.2014.03.001

^v <https://www.fns.usda.gov/usda-foods/state-origin-usda-foods>

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Apr 17, 2023

Dear Sen. Fetterman,

Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to share my story with you.

I live with my family in Fayette County, in Spring Hill Township, on what used to be a farm, though it lost most of its value due to nearby fracking. We have a couple of horses, four chickens, and a garden. That garden, along with our food stamps, has been the only way we've been able to afford to eat in recent years.

I'm 53 (I turn 54 on Saturday) and I've never had much. My family moved up here from Virginia when I was in the fourth grade. My mom stayed at home, and my dad was a union worker. He traveled a lot for work. My mom was considered disabled and was sick most of the time.

I also would probably be considered disabled, though I never applied for benefits. I have a herniated disc, osteoarthritis in my back, and asthma. Because I have dyslexia and ADHD I didn't get to go beyond high school. My older son, Grant, is 27, and I have a son at home, Adam, who is 15. My husband, David, is a retired driver, and the three of us live on his Social Security benefits and a small retirement. He got a raise in his Social Security a few months ago and so his SNAP benefits went down. We lost the extra pandemic SNAP at the same time, so we're down to \$190/month for him, me, and our younger son.

With their help I grow food, which I can and freeze as much as possible; I try not to waste anything. We grow tomatoes, green beans, cucumber, peppers, watermelon, and cantaloupe. But the weather sometimes just doesn't cooperate. You could have a drought or like what happened last year – we have a peach tree and it started blooming, but then it froze, so we didn't have any peaches. My apple trees are blooming right now, but they might freeze. I don't use any herbicides or pesticides in my garden and last year I had a huge infestation of every bug possible. Having those extra SNAP benefits during the pandemic saved us.

When I learned from Just Harvest (an anti-hunger organization in Allegheny County) about a Republican proposal to make it harder for me to keep SNAP, I was horrified. Because I'm not a senior and they consider me "able-bodied" and my son is older than 7, they want it so I would have to go get a part-time job of 20 hours/week or else my husband would have his food stamps cut.

The jobs I'm qualified for are physical jobs. What would it take for me to find a job if I have to tell an employer I can't lift or be on my feet for hours? If I did find work, it would be in Morgantown or Uniontown, which are 25 miles away. So that's 20 hours of work but then also a half hour each way. When they require 20 hours of work they aren't counting the cost of gas, the cost of maintaining the car, having oil changes, and having to go get special clothes.

And then we'd need two cars because if my child gets sick in school, they call you, they want you there. My family is gone, my parents and David's parents have passed so we don't have anyone to pick up our kid at school if he is sick. And this year was terrible with Adam; he's missed so much school. Whatever went through the school this year, he got. We got the flu, Covid, the head cold from hell -- you name it, we got it. Then they wonder why people are having so many issues with their kids. I couldn't imagine Grant, my older child, being a latchkey kid, leaving him at 10 years old to his own demise. I couldn't imagine leaving either one of them at home -- for the child's own safety.

It's probably going to cost me more to work for those 20 hours than I'm going to make. And with whatever little money I earn they would probably throw me off of SNAP. It's hard enough as it is now when we're getting SNAP. We're just trying to find cheap food because the cost of food in the stores has nearly doubled. We've cut back our meals so we don't have two sides anymore, only one. We have a protein, like meat or fish, and then if we have a potato, for example, we won't have a salad or green beans. The nearest grocery store is 25 miles away so we plan our week: when we're going to town, what exactly we're going to get, and hopefully, we don't forget anything because you don't want to make that trip twice.

I pride myself on being able to stretch a dollar -- being able to plan my meals and eat well on a budget. But it is getting harder and harder to do that, almost impossible. If I lost SNAP due to these changes, we would have to choose and go without. Do you pay your water bill or your electric bills - or do I buy food? There are people who are worse off than me; I have the land, I can grow some food. Other people don't have that option. So we would be bad off if we lost the SNAP benefits, but others would be so much worse.

I hope you'll be able to stop this work requirements bill from passing.

Thank you for listening.

Linda Headley
132 Volek Rd.
Smithfield, PA 15478

MAZON | A Jewish Response To Hunger

United States Senate Committee on
Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

Subcommittee on Food and Nutrition,
Specialty Crops, Organics, and Research
"SNAP and Other Nutrition Assistance in the Farm Bill"
Hearing – April 19, 2023

Statement for the Record submitted by:
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

Chairman Fetterman, Ranking Member Braun, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to share this statement for the record from MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger for this hearing on SNAP and other nutrition programs authorized in the Farm Bill.

Inspired by Jewish values and ideals, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger is a national organization fighting to end hunger among people of all faiths and backgrounds in the United States and Israel. MAZON is not just a Jewish response to hunger, it is the Jewish response to hunger. In Jewish tradition—and across all faith traditions—there is a fundamental value of taking care of the most vulnerable among us. In Leviticus, we are commanded to leave the corners of our fields and the gleanings of our harvest and vineyards for the poor and the stranger. This commandment is a clear expression of our collective responsibility for each other. It reminds us that we are not to judge those who are poor, nor should we assume to know the circumstances of their lives. Its wisdom respects the dignity of every human being, all created in the image of God, by empowering individuals to decide what they need, not presuming to know what is best for them.

When he founded MAZON in 1985, Leibel Fein (of blessed memory) posed challenging questions that drew upon Jewish texts and traditions and envisioned the possibilities for the federal government in fulfilling our collective responsibility to address hunger in the United States:

"Can we move from the language of kindness to the language of justice?
Can we move from philanthropic sensibility to political commitment?"

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* Past Chair

MAZON's work is a step. It moves us from indifference to charity, but the question is whether we can then be moved from charity to advocacy, thence to policy?"

Leibel's questions remain relevant and urgent today as Congress takes up the Farm Bill reauthorization. We will never "food bank" our way to an end of hunger. Responsibility for addressing this far-reaching and preventable crisis cannot be abdicated by the federal government and passed off to a charitable sector that does not have the capacity nor the purview to achieve the necessary systemic changes and fully address the problem. No matter a person's circumstances, no one deserves to be hungry.

This hearing takes place in the wake of proposals by some in Congress to make cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in the name of deficit reduction and as a bargaining chip to raise the debt ceiling. There is a stark moral deficit in such ideologically driven government spending reduction proposals made on the backs of low-income Americans. Our country and our leaders should be held accountable by how we care for those among us facing hardship, not by the volume with which politicians and pundits perpetuate harmful stereotypes and blame those facing difficult circumstances. Legislation should be considered favorably when it reduces hunger and hardship, not when it exacerbates struggle and misery. The Farm Bill reauthorization presents a meaningful and timely opportunity to reinforce our collective values and strengthen our nation through fair, just, and compassionate policies.

MAZON is committed to shining a spotlight on issues and populations where the government and larger organizations have yet to turn their focus. Blanket solutions cannot meet the needs of every community, and our special focus has been pivotal to help remove the unique policy barriers that overlooked and challenged communities face in accessing adequate, nutritious food. These populations include currently serving military families, veterans, Indigenous communities, the people of Puerto Rico and the territories, single mothers, LGBTQ+ older adults, and migrant farmworkers.

The Farm Bill is one of the most transformational pieces of legislation that Congress regularly reauthorizes. In addition to authorizing SNAP and other federal nutrition programs that serve tens of millions of Americans each year, the Farm Bill presents a unique opportunity to advance long-

overdue policy solutions to the food security challenges of many special populations prioritized by MAZON.

MAZON urges Congress to approach the Farm Bill reauthorization process and consideration of priorities in the Nutrition Title by reflecting on our shared values, exploring effective policy solutions, and acting with compassion and humanity toward those among us experiencing hardship and who need assistance.

The Farm Bill must protect against hunger by strengthening and improving SNAP and other essential federal nutrition assistance programs; remove barriers for struggling individuals and families; and increase access to affordable, nutritious foods for vulnerable populations to support good nutrition and health.

MAZON urges you to incorporate the following policy priorities in the forthcoming Farm Bill:

Protect and Strengthen the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and other federal nutrition programs

- Maintain the update to the Thrifty Food Plan benefit and explore transition to more adequate benefit levels, including shifting to the Low-Cost Food Plan as the basis for SNAP benefit allotments.
- Prevent the reinstatement of harmful and ineffective work requirements/time limits for able-bodied adults without dependents or “ABAWDs.”
- Streamline client access and eligibility standards for individuals seeking to benefit from The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP).

Promote Food Security Among Active-Duty Military Families

- Eliminate the barrier to SNAP for low-income military families by excluding the Basic Allowance for Housing as counted income.

Address Food Insecurity Among Veterans

- Lower the VA disability rating required for veterans for SNAP purposes.
- Support veteran access to affordable healthy foods and expand veteran farmers market nutrition programs and produce prescription programs through the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP).
- Establish a veteran food security grant program open to states, Tribal Nations, and territories, and formalize the establishment of the Office of Veteran Food Security at the VA
- Establish a transition assistance pilot program to support low-income military families as they separate from the Service and begin the transition back to civilian life.

Empower Tribal Food Sovereignty and Address Food Insecurity in Indian Country

- Empower Tribal Nations to self-administer SNAP, the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) using Section 638 authority, if they choose to do so.
- Eliminate the prohibition on dual participation in SNAP and FDPIR.
- Allow Tribal eligibility for SNAP-Ed funds.
- Enable more Native-produced and culturally appropriate foods to be purchased as part of FDPIR, CSFP, and TEFAP, and CSFP and expand the traditional foods pilot program under FDPIR.

Improve Equity and Food Security for the People of Puerto Rico

- Authorize plan for transition for Puerto Rico from the block-granted and inadequate Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP) back into SNAP

Remove Barriers to SNAP for Single Mothers

- Eliminate the state option in effect in several states that requires SNAP applicants to comply with state child support authorities

Improve Nutrition Support for LGBTQ+ Older Adults

- Expand SNAP access and participation for LGBTQ+ older adults through targeted outreach and develop innovative approaches to strengthen nutritional support for this community, including an understanding of and response to the nutritional needs of those aging with HIV or AIDS.

MAZON is a leading national voice in advancing lasting policy solutions to reverse the course of hunger. From drafting and championing critical legislation, to testifying before Congress, to hosting meaningful conversations with policymakers, MAZON has invested in systems-changing efforts across the nation for nearly 40 years. We make multi-year advocacy partnership grants to emerging anti-hunger organizations in the most food insecure regions in the country. We listen to our partners in the field, learn from their experience and expertise, and partner with them to advance education, organizing, and policy solutions to eliminate hunger.

Drawing from our experience as a national anti-hunger leader, MAZON recently launched our groundbreaking all-virtual museum to illuminate the history of hunger in America and the opportunities to create a future without it. The Hunger Museum is a dynamic, interactive, entirely digital experience that creatively immerses its visitors in each exhibit and each gallery. The museum illuminates the political, economic, and cultural influences that have shaped American history, revealing the expansion and dismantlement of the social safety net over the last century and how, with history in mind, we can forge a path forward to end hunger. MAZON hopes that the examples and lessons highlighted in The Hunger Museum can help inform thoughtful and effective policies as part of the 2023 Farm Bill process. We invite members of the Committee and your staff to join us for a tour of the museum.

MAZON urges the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry to strengthen and improve federal nutrition programs in the

2023 Farm Bill process and ensure that in this land of plenty, there is plenty for all to eat. We stand ready with expertise, passion, and resolve to work together to achieve a Farm Bill that endeavors to end hunger in the United States.

REVIEW

OPEN



Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program as a health intervention

Jerold Mande^a and Grace Flaherty^b

Purpose of review

In 2020, obesity prevalence among US children reached 19.7%, impacting about 14.7 million children and adolescents. Food insecurity among children is also a public health concern but has largely decreased or remained stable over the past decade, reaching 6.2% of US households with children in 2021. Given food insecurity and obesity's interconnected nature and their negative consequences on children's health, it is of interest to assess the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program's (SNAP's) impact on childhood food security, dietary quality, disease risk, and health outcomes.

Recent findings

Evidence suggests that SNAP participants, including children, struggle to meet key dietary guidelines and perform poorly on key health indicators when compared with income-eligible and higher income nonparticipants. Children participating in SNAP were more likely to have elevated disease risk and consume more sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs), more high-fat dairy, and more processed meats than income-eligible nonparticipants. However, research suggests that federal food assistance programs with more stringent nutrition standards – the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) – improve dietary quality, increase birth weight and gestation periods, and reduce childhood obesity, infant mortality and healthcare costs.

Summary

After reviewing the evidence on SNAP's impacts on food insecurity, dietary quality, and health as well as research on the health impacts of other more successful federal food assistance programs, we provide three policy recommendations to strengthen SNAP's effectiveness as a health intervention for children and families.

Keywords

diet quality, food insecurity, health intervention, nutrition assistance, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

INTRODUCTION

Obesity and diet-related disease are a growing public health crisis for both adults and children, with significant disparities by race and ethnicity. Childhood food insecurity is also a public health concern and is closely tied to diet-related disease and overall child health. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the largest federal food assistance program and is of interest for its potential to further alleviate food insecurity among children while also improving health outcomes.

BURDEN OF OBESITY, DIET-RELATED DISEASE, AND FOOD INSECURITY

From 2017 to 2020, for children aged 2 to 19 years, the prevalence of obesity in the United States was 19.7% and impacted about 14.7 million children and adolescents [1^{*}]. Obesity prevalence was 26.2% among Hispanic children, 24.8% among non-

Hispanic black children, 16.6% among non-Hispanic white children, and 9% among non-Hispanic Asian children [2]. Obesity increases a child's risk for adverse diet-related health conditions, including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and certain cancers [3]. Among adults, from 2017 to 2020, obesity prevalence was 41.9%, a record high [3]. Obesity

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Curr Opin Pediatr 2023, 35:33–38

DOI:10.1097/MOP.0000000000001192

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KEY POINTS

- Childhood obesity and diet-related disease are growing public health concerns. Childhood food insecurity is also an important public health concern but has been decreasing over the past decade, thanks in large part to federal policy efforts.
- Research suggests that the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has positive impacts on child health by reducing food insecurity and providing economic benefits to families, but SNAP participants are still struggling more than income-eligible and higher income nonparticipants to meet key dietary guidelines.
- Research on other federal food assistance programs suggests that making diet quality a SNAP core objective, applying more stringent nutrition standards to SNAP authorized retailers, and pairing incentives for purchasing fruits and vegetables with restrictions on unhealthy foods and beverages would improve participants dietary patterns and metabolic health.

prevalence was 49.9% among non-Hispanic black adults, 45.6% among Hispanic adults, 41.4% among non-Hispanic white adults and 16.1% among non-Hispanic Asian adults [3]. In 2017–2018, 93.2% of adults had less-than-optimal metabolic health [4*]. Diet-related chronic diseases are among the leading causes of death in the United States, and research during the coronavirus 19 (COVID-19) pandemic showed that diet-related chronic diseases were associated with higher risk of COVID-19 infection and two-thirds of COVID-19 hospitalizations [2,5*].

Food insecurity and very-low food insecurity among households with children decreased from 2020 to 2021. Food insecure households, as defined by USDA, are those that had difficulty at some time during the year providing enough food for all members because of a lack of resources [6]. Very-low food insecurity is a more severe range of food insecurity, wherein the food intake of some household members was reduced, and normal eating patterns was disrupted at times during the year because of limited resources [6]. In 2021, 6.2% of households with children were food-insecure (compared with 7.5% in 2020) and 0.7% had very low food security (compared with 0.8% in 2020) [7*,8*]. Food insecurity is associated with a host of short-term and long-term health consequences for children, including infant mortality, fetal epigenetic changes, suboptimal development and function, increased hospitalizations and healthcare use, disrupted or under use of prescribed medications, poorer management of chronic diseases and poor diet quality [9–19].

SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM BACKGROUND

SNAP is a federal program with the potential to impact childhood food insecurity, obesity, and diet-related disease simultaneously. SNAP provides food-purchasing assistance to low-income Americans. SNAP is the largest federal food assistance program, serving 41.5 million people in fiscal year (FY) 2022 at an expenditure of \$140 billion [20]. The most recent data on SNAP household characteristics found that in FY 2019, 41% of participating SNAP households included children [21]. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) pays the full cost of SNAP benefits and shares half of the administration costs with states, which operate SNAP. To be eligible to receive SNAP benefits, an individual or household must have a gross income of less than 130% of the federal poverty standard, net income less than 100% of the federal poverty standard, and assets must fall below certain limits [22]. Households deemed eligible for SNAP benefits receive an electronic benefit card (EBT), which is loaded with benefits monthly. Households may use EBT cards at an authorized retailer, of which there are more than 247 000 [23]. SNAP participants may use EBT benefits to purchase food and allowable beverages but may not be used to purchase alcoholic beverages, tobacco, paper goods, and other nonfood items [24]. Heated and hot prepared foods are not considered staple foods and are also not eligible for purchase, except in some areas under certain circumstances [25]. On average, SNAP participants received an estimated \$217.88 per month per person in regular SNAP benefits in FY 2021 [26]. Each household's monthly benefit amount is based on the household's net income, so that if a household's net income after deductions is zero, the household receives the maximum SNAP benefit, and the benefit reduction rate is 30% (meaning the monthly benefit is reduced by 30 cents for each dollar of net income) [27]. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress provided all SNAP recipients the maximum benefit. The maximum SNAP benefit is tied to the cost of the USDA's Thrifty Food Plan (TFP), a diet plan intended to provide adequate nutrition consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, and which was updated in 2021 as directed by Congress, increasing SNAP benefits by 21% [28,29].

SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM'S IMPACT ON CHILD HEALTH

Research suggests that SNAP has positive impacts on health by reducing food insecurity and lifting individuals out of poverty. Research has shown that SNAP meets its goal of reducing hunger and food

insecurity among participants, including children [30,31^{**}]. Participation in SNAP has been shown to reduce the incidence of low-birth weight among newborns by 7% for whites and 5–11% for blacks [32]. Research on the relationship between SNAP purchasing power and children's health and health care utilization found that a 10% increase in SNAP purchasing power increases the likelihood a child had a preventive check-in in the past year by 8.1%, increases the likelihood that children had any doctor's visit in the past 12 months by 3.4%, and is associated with a 22% reduction in the number of school days missed because of illness [33]. Research has shown that children receiving SNAP are less likely than low-income nonparticipants to be in fair or poor health or underweight, and their families are less likely to make tradeoffs between paying for health care and paying for other basic health needs, like food, housing, heating, and electricity [34,35]. Reductions and cut offs in SNAP benefits because of increased income have also been associated with poorer child health [36].

SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE AND DIET QUALITY

Although SNAP effectively alleviates food insecurity for children in terms of caloric, macronutrient, and micronutrient intake, SNAP participants are still struggling more than income-eligible and higher income nonparticipants to meet key dietary guidelines.

The average USDA Healthy Eating Index (HEI) score among Americans is 58 (out of a possible 100), suggesting that the majority of Americans have suboptimal diets [37]. However, while other USDA food assistance programs, such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP), significantly improve diet quality, research suggests that SNAP does not.

The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) has frequently been used to assess Americans' dietary quality and health, including by income and SNAP participation status. A study using 2011–2016 NHANES data found that, on average, SNAP participants had lower total HEI scores than income-eligible and higher income nonparticipants (55, 57, and 60 points, respectively) [38^{**}]. SNAP participants scored lower for total fruits, whole fruits, total vegetables, and added sugar components [38^{**}]. Adults participating in SNAP had a higher prevalence of obesity than matched income-eligible nonparticipants (44 versus 38%) [38^{**}]. Children participating in SNAP had a higher prevalence of

elevated blood pressure compared with higher income nonparticipant children (9 versus 7%) [38^{**}]. In terms of disease risk, a higher percentage of SNAP participants than either income-eligible or higher income nonparticipants had very high or extremely high-disease risk (31 versus 27%, and 26 and 11% versus 8 and 7%, respectively) [38^{**}].

A study of 1999–2008 NHANES data found that children who received SNAP benefits had standard diets, consuming 43% more SSBs, 47% more high-fat dairy, and 44% more processed meats than income-eligible nonparticipants [39].

A study of 1999–2014 NHANES data found that between 2003 and 2014, SNAP participants had less improvements in diet quality using American Heart Association (AHA) diet scores than both income-eligible nonparticipants and higher income individuals [40]. Disparities in diet quality persisted for most foods and nutrients and worsened for processed meats, added sugars and nuts and seeds [40].

In addition to NHANES, sales data have also been used to assess foods purchased using SNAP benefits. Sales data obtained from a large supermarket chain in the northeastern United States from April 2012 to April 2014 revealed that customer transactions paid at least partially with SNAP benefits included lower spending on fruits, vegetables, and poultry, and higher spending on SSBs, red meat, and convenience foods than transactions that did not involve SNAP [41]. A USDA study assessed the content of SNAP purchases in 2011 from a leading retailer and found that soft drinks were the number 1 purchase in terms of share of expenditures by SNAP households and the number 2 purchase by non-SNAP households [42].

LESSONS LEARNED FROM OTHER FEDERAL FEEDING PROGRAMS

In contrast to SNAP, other USDA feeding programs targeting children perform better with respect to diet quality. The NSLP, SBP, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, and the WIC Program all apply nutrition standards based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

The Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) in 2010 established stronger nutrition standards for the NSLP and SBP, which significantly improved dietary quality. Specifically, the HHFKA regulations required schools to increase the amount of fruits and vegetables served and limit starchy vegetables; serve only low-fat or fat-free milk; and serve more whole grains [43]. The HHFKA also established standards for food and beverage products sold in schools outside of the breakfast and lunch programs, which eliminated most sugary beverages and reduced the

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sugar and calorie content of food products for sale [44]. Following the changes, the USDA found that the nutritional quality of NSLP lunches increased significantly between school year 2009–2010 and school year 2014–2015 [45**]. Evaluations found that students consumed more fruit, vegetables, whole grains, and fewer starch vegetables than before the HHFKA, without contributing to increases in food waste or reductions in program participation [45**,46]. The mean total HEI-2010 score for NSLP lunches increased 41% – from 57.9 to 81.5 out of a possible 100 [45**].

Unlike SNAP, which does not limit food or non-alcoholic beverage purchases, WIC purchases are limited to different food packages for different groups of participants. Research has shown that WIC lowers Medicaid costs for participating women, and WIC participation is associated with longer gestation periods, higher birth weight, and lower infant mortality [47,48]. The WIC food packages were revised in 2009 to align with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans more closely and to introduce incentives for the purchase of fruits and vegetables, which research showed was associated with a 17.5 and 27.8% increase in fresh and frozen vegetable purchases (respectively) and a 28.6% increase in fresh fruit purchases [49]. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the USDA analyzed WIC data from 56 states and territories from 2010 and 2018 and found that 31 WIC agencies reported significant declines in obesity among children aged 2–4 years [50]. Between 2010 and 2018, overall obesity prevalence among WIC participants aged 2–4 years decreased from 15.9 to 14.4% [50].

POLICY INTERVENTIONS TO IMPROVE HEALTH OUTCOMES FOR SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

There are three evidence-based policy changes that lawmakers should consider, and that pediatricians could support, to strengthen SNAP's effectiveness as a health intervention for children and families, build on the successes of WIC, CACFP and the NSLP and SBP, and help ensure that every child reaches the age of 18 at a healthy weight. First, policymakers should make diet quality a core SNAP objective and define and report on nutrition security. SNAP's current core objectives (food security and fiscal integrity) should be continued and supplemented with an additional, congressionally mandated focus on diet quality and healthy nutrition. Adding a diet-quality component to SNAP's current core objectives could be accomplished through the next Farm Bill (the omnibus, multiyear law that governs U.S.

agricultural and food programs), an executive order, or a voluntary internal policy change at USDA. Once this core objective is in place, the USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) should include nutrition security in its annual reporting of US food security. Nutrition security should be defined using an evidence-based metric such as USDA's HEI (e.g. nutrition security defined as HEI of 80 or higher, nutrition insecurity at HEI between 80 and 60, and very low nutrition security defined as HEI below 60). In addition, the USDA should report on any policy changes that have been made to improve diet quality and nutrition, the impact of USDA policies on diet quality and healthy eating, and any additional authorities that the USDA has identified it needs in order to improve diet quality, nutrition, and healthy eating.

Second, policymakers should strengthen requirements for SNAP-authorized retailers to promote healthier retail food environments, especially for large retailers such as Walmart, Kroger, and Amazon. SNAP-authorized retailers are currently required to either stock three units of three different varieties for each staple food category (vegetables or fruits; dairy products; meat, poultry, or fish; breads or cereals) on a continuous basis or a store must have more than 50% of its total gross retail sales from the sale of staple foods [44]. Despite these requirements, research shows that SNAP authorized retailers offer comparatively fewer fresh fruits and vegetables, whole-grain foods and low-fat dairy products in lower income communities than retailers in higher income communities [51–55]. SNAP retailers should be prohibited from in-store (brick and mortar and on-line) marketing of unhealthy foods such as sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) (e.g. endcap displays and favored placement, including for online purchases).

Third, policymakers should support healthy purchases in SNAP by pairing incentives for purchasing fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods with restrictions on unhealthy foods and sweetened beverages. Today, soft drinks are top commodity typically purchased by SNAP households [42]. Evidence suggests that restricting SSB purchases in SNAP could reduce the calories consumed from SSBs by 15% and reduce negative health consequences including obesity prevalence and diabetes [56]. A separate study of the impact of restricting SSBs on children's health found that if SSBs were substituted with fruit juice and milk, the restriction would be expected to reduce obesity prevalence among SNAP participants by 6.2 percentage points [57**]. A randomized controlled trial found that pairing incentives for purchasing more fruits and vegetables with restrictions on the purchase of less nutritious foods (e.g. SSBs, sweet baked goods, candies) improved diet quality, reduced

consumptions of SSBs and sweets, and increased fruit intake compared with individuals who made purchases with no restrictions or incentives [58].

A survey of public attitudes towards policies to improve the nutritional impact of SNAP, including SNAP participants, found that 82% of respondents supported providing additional benefits to SNAP participants that can only be used on healthful foods, 69% of respondents supported removing SNAP benefits for SSBs, and of the 46% of respondents who initially opposed removing SSBs, 45% supported removing SNAP benefits for SSBs if the policy also included additional benefits to purchase healthful foods [59].

Multiple-expert, nonpartisan bodies have supported one or more of these recommendations, including the National Commission on Hunger; the Bipartisan Policy Center; Healthy Eating Research; and the Report of the 50th Anniversary of the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, and Health [60–63]. They also build on the recommendations of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans; the CDC; the National Academy of Medicine; and the WHO [64–67].

HOW PEDIATRICIANS CAN LEVERAGE THESE LEARNINGS

Pediatricians can act to improve SNAP's efficacy as a health intervention by urging the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) to advocate for the three aforementioned policy recommendations in its legislative priorities. They can also advocate individually and with their local colleagues to their Senator & Representative to make these changes in the 2023 Farm Bill. Pediatricians can become involved with their state SNAP-Education (SNAP-Ed) program (SNAP-Ed is USDA's largest nutrition-education and obesity-prevention program) and seek to have our three recommendations implemented at the state level using SNAP-Ed funds.

CONCLUSION

SNAP has demonstrated its benefit as an economic support for children and families to reduce food insecurity and allow for greater spending on other vital expenditures, such as healthcare. However, research suggests that there is an opportunity to improve its efficacy as a health intervention for children and families, in line with other federal food assistance programs.

Acknowledgements

Nourish Science (<https://nourishscience.org/>) for funding writing and open access.

Financial support and sponsorship

None.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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- of special interest
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