

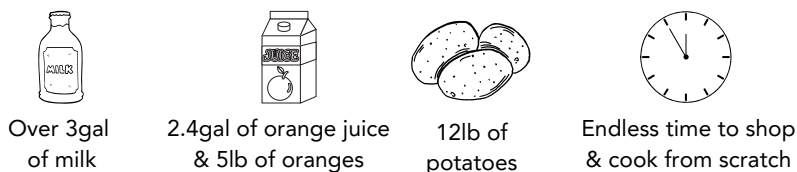
# Protect and Strengthen SNAP Benefit Adequacy in the Farm Bill



California is facing an urgent need to improve benefit adequacy in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Studies have shown that on average, households spend close to 80% of their SNAP benefits within the first two weeks of the month. Moreover, hunger has risen to shocking levels: 23% of all households, including 49% of Black households with children, report food insecurity.

The USDA sets SNAP benefit allotments through the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP), the lowest cost of the four USDA food plans.

Thankfully, following the bipartisan 2018 Farm Bill (H.R. 2), USDA is required to reevaluate the TFP to reconsider the cost of food, the nutrients in food, nutrition guidance, and what Americans eat every 5 years. Earlier, cost-neutral TFPs proved the failure of that policy, in yielding results that were not practical, nutritious, and failed to accommodate dietary restrictions or religious needs. Researchers estimated that a family of 4 on the TFP per week would purchase:



Even after the TFP reevaluation, however, **SNAP benefits still only average \$6 per person per day** - barely enough for a cup of coffee. Current maximum SNAP benefit levels still fall short of the cost of low-income meals in all California counties.

Most Americans agree that we should continue to increase SNAP allotments to reflect current nutrition guidance and changing food costs.

The Closing the Meal Gap Act H.R. 3037 (Adams) / S. 1336 (Gillibrand) would improve SNAP benefit adequacy by permanently adopting the Low-Cost Food Plan, raising the minimum allotment that's currently a meager \$23 a month, and removing the shelter cap that harms rent-burdened Californians.

## The Harm of Cuts to the Thrifty Food Plan

Chair Thompson's proposal to freeze the TFP would cut SNAP by about \$30B over the next decade by restricting future updates to only count for inflation, ignoring science-based changes to dietary guidelines.

**Hungry Californians would be harmed the most:** Approximately 3.6 billion, or 12% of the \$30B cuts to SNAP food would be taken from the 5 million Californians who spend SNAP benefits at 23,874 authorized EBT retailers across California.

**Californians would lose:**



**\$3.59 Billion** in SNAP benefits



**\$6.46 Billion** in statewide economic activity hurting farmers, farm workers, truckers, grocers, and others across our critical food sector

**Nationally, all SNAP Households would face a cut, including nearly:**



**17 Million**

Children



**6 Million**

Older adults



**6 Million**

Working Families



**4 Million**

People with disabilities

**Forcing cost neutral TFP reevaluations is not only a SNAP cut but will also cut TEFAP food bank aid and Summer EBT benefits.**

**We call on the CA Congressional Delegation to help more than 5 million Californians fight hunger and escape poverty by protecting against any cuts to SNAP, including to the Thrifty Food Plan. Instead, Congress should strengthen SNAP benefit adequacy through the Closing the Meal Gap Act H.R. 3037 (Adams) / S. 1336 (Gillibrand), without cuts or offsets to SNAP or other Farm Bill programs.**

# Cutting the Thrifty Food Plan Takes Food From Families Undermines Already Inadequate SNAP Benefit

The 2018 Farm Bill no longer constrained reevaluations to be cost-neutral, as doing so would prevent the USDA from incorporating changes based on current scientific evidence, therefore harming the food security, health, and nutrition of families. Inflation adjustments on their own are not enough, future reevaluations must continue to follow the science so SNAP benefits reflect the dietary restrictions, cultural and religious preferences, time pressures, and other factors to ensure equitable food access for all Californians.

If the Thrifty Food Plan were cut by \$30 billion, SNAP households would receive approximately a \$6 per month cut - a whole day's worth of food. This includes many older adults, people with disabilities, and working families who receive a minimum allotment of \$23 a month, an approximate 25% cut. Cuts would have an outsized impact on the Central Valley and other growing regions, which are home to many of the top 10 California Districts with the highest SNAP participation, where food is sadly often out of reach for the communities that grow and sell it.

This not only harms families but costs the state as food insecurity is associated with \$7.2 billion in annual healthcare costs in California and cuts to SNAP mean cuts to local economies. We must look forward, and mitigate hunger by moving towards a Low-Cost Food Plan and passing the Closing the Meal Gap Act to also remove the shelter cap to support families on SNAP like the one described below.

**Example:** Married couple Sara and Isaac live in California with their two children Ana and Jacob. Sara receives \$500 monthly from state disability benefits and Isaac gets \$1200 monthly from work. They pay \$150 monthly in dependent care (afterschool program). Their rent and utilities is \$1400.

Proposed cuts to Thrifty Food Plan	Thrifty Food Plan	Low Cost Food Plan	Closing the Meal Gap Act H.R. 3037 (Adams) S. 1336 (Gillibrand)
\$1.68 per meal per person	\$2.33 per meal per person	\$2.58 per meal per person	\$3.19 per meal per person

## Congress has Solutions in Hand: Strengthen SNAP Benefit Adequacy in the Farm Bill

SNAP Emergency Allotments (EAs) allowed Californians to buy more and a greater variety of food, helped families weather income fluctuations, and stabilized households. Now that EAs have ended, food insecurity has intensified, households are making tradeoffs between food and other expenses, physical and mental health have declined, and local economies have suffered. We must strengthen, not cut, critical food benefits for households facing hunger.

*“My biggest expenses right now is all my money goes to the utilities, gas and light. I don’t have money to get school clothes for my kids, and school shoes. Like, everything is going to the utilities and not towards the day to day needs.”*

— SNAP Recipient