

Protect and Strengthen SNAP Benefit Adequacy in the Federal Budget



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: 1 in 5 California households, and 27% of households with children, reported food insecurity in September 2024.

The USDA sets SNAP benefit allotments through the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP), the lowest cost of the four USDA food plans. The bipartisan 2018 Farm Bill (H.R. 2), required USDA to reevaluate the TFP every 5 years and recommend adjustments without regard to cost-neutrality.

In August 2021, SNAP benefits increased 23 percent as a result of this required reevaluation. Previous, cost-neutral TFPs yielded results that were not practical or nutritious and failed to consider dietary restrictions or religious needs. Researchers estimated a family of 4 on the TFP could purchase, each week:



Over 3gal of milk



2.4gal of orange juice & 5lb of oranges



12lb of potatoes



Endless time to shop & cook from scratch

Even after the 2021 TFP increase, **SNAP benefits still only average \$6.20 per person per day** - typically not enough to make it through the month. Maximum SNAP benefit levels fall short of the cost of low-income meals in all 58 California counties.

Now, proposals from House Republicans would restrict future TFP updates to only the cost of inflation - or even repeal the 2021 increase altogether. These proposals ignore science, common sense and public sentiment: Most Americans agree that we should continue to increase SNAP allotments to reflect current nutrition guidance *and* changing food costs.

Other proposals being floated would reduce eligibility and benefit levels even further, hitting low-income and working-class California communities that are already struggling with affordability.

The Harm of Freezing or Cutting the Thrifty Food Plan

Circulating House Republican proposals to freeze the TFP would cut SNAP by about \$36B over the next decade by restricting future updates to only count for inflation. Rolling back to pre-2021 TFP levels, another potential cut under consideration, would cut \$274B over the same period, according to House documents.

Hungry Californians would be harmed the most: Approximately \$3.9B, or 13% of the \$36B cuts to SNAP benefits, would be taken from the 5.4 million Californians who spend SNAP benefits at 30,753 authorized EBT retailers across California.

Californians would lose:



\$3.9 Billion in SNAP benefits



\$7.0 Billion in statewide economic activity - hurting farmers, farm workers, truckers, grocers, and others in our critical food sector.

Nationally, all 41 million SNAP recipients would face a cut, including nearly:



17 Million
Children



6 Million
Older adults



7 Million
Working Families



4 Million
People with disabilities

90 percent of SNAP participants live in a household with a child, an elderly person 60 years or older, or an individual with disabilities.

We call on the CA Congressional Delegation to help more than 5 million Californians continue to fight hunger and escape poverty by pushing back against any cuts to SNAP, including to the Thrifty Food Plan. Instead, Congress should strengthen SNAP benefit adequacy by reintroducing and passing the Closing the Meal Gap Act [H.R. 3037 (Adams) / S. 1336 (Gillibrand) in the 118th Congress], without cuts or offsets to SNAP or other Farm Bill or Safety Net programs.

SNAP Cuts Would Take Food From Families, Increase Hunger and Undermine Already Inadequate SNAP Benefits

The 2018 Farm Bill removed the cost-neutrality constraint on TFP reevaluations, enabling the program to better reflect nutrition science and the cost of nutritious food. The inflation-only adjustments in the House Republican plan are not enough, and any benefit rollbacks would be devastating to millions nationwide.

If the Thrifty Food Plan were cut by \$36 billion, SNAP households would see an average estimated cut of about \$7.30 per month - more than a day's worth of food. This includes a nearly 30% cut in benefits for the many older adults, people with disabilities, and working families who receive the current minimum allotment of \$23 a month. In California, these cuts would have an outsized impact on the Central Valley and other agricultural regions, home to many of the top 10 California Districts with the highest SNAP participation, where food is too often out of reach for the communities that grow and sell it. If the 2021 TFP increase were repealed, the cuts would be even deeper.

The proposed cuts would not only harm families but would cost the state in real terms. For example, food insecurity is associated with \$7.2 billion in annual healthcare costs in California. Cuts to SNAP also negatively impact the state's overall economy and affect already-struggling areas, as every SNAP dollar spent returns \$1.79 in economic activity.

The threats to TFP are not isolated. Other cuts being discussed would expand SNAP's already harsh work rules to take food away from people living in areas with insufficient jobs, older adults up to age 65, parents of school-aged children, veterans, people experiencing homelessness, and youth who have aged out of foster care. States could also be forced to make deep cuts to programs if proposals to radically alter SNAP's funding structure were approved, and millions could lose eligibility if Republicans reintroduce a benefit cliff for households that modestly increase their earnings and those who build even small amounts of savings.

Congress has Solutions in Hand: Preserve SNAP Thrifty Food Plan Increases and Further Strengthen SNAP Through Legislation

Now is not the time to plunge millions of households into further poverty and hunger. We must preserve current benefits and taking steps to move towards a Low-Cost Food Plan. Passing the Closing the Meal Gap Act would also remove the shelter cap to support families on SNAP. In the 118th Congress, the Closing the Meal Gap Act [H.R. 3037 (Adams) / S. 1336 (Gillibrand)] would have permanently adopted the Low-Cost Food Plan, raised the minimum benefit and removed the shelter cap that disproportionately harms Californians.

SNAP Emergency Allotments (EAs) provided during the pandemic 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 struggling to avoid hunger and greater poverty.

“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

