

YOU SPOKE, WE LISTENED

USDA ASKS FOR FEEDBACK ABOUT UPDATING SNAP BENEFIT LEVELS

USDA is preparing an update to the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP), which is used to determine Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. The TFP was last updated in 2006. To complement the evaluation, USDA hosted 5 listening sessions with SNAP participants as well as local and national advocates, researchers, and policymakers to gather diverse insights on the TFP. Here's a snapshot of what they shared...

A SNAPSHOT OF WHAT THEY SHARED

FAMILIES ARE STRUGGLING TO GET ENOUGH FOOD WITH CURRENT SNAP BENEFIT LEVELS

"In my practice, I am seeing too many families and children of all ages who consistently don't have enough food to make it through the month... This benefit must be increased in order to decrease food insecurity and set children up with healthy eating habits for the rest of their lives."

– **Dr. Valerie Smith, Pediatrician | St Paul Children's Services, Tyler Texas**

"In Virginia... 81 percent of adult-only SNAP households reported that they were food insecure. And 83 percent of households with children reported that they were food insecure...when this sample frame was taken, Virginia was and still is issuing its emergency allotments, meaning that we are providing the maximum benefit amount for each household, and yet households are still struggling and are still food insecure."

– **Duke Storen | Virginia Department of Social Services**

"Households on SNAP still experience a great deal of food insecurity. Ninety-five percent of SNAP participants, in Minnesota, in our survey, reported being food insecure."

– **Colleen Moriarty | Minnesota Hunger Solutions**

"Picking up the slack from the inadequacy of SNAP benefits also keeps food charities from meeting the needs to the people, who most need our help, who aren't eligible for SNAP, or who might require greater assistance, during times of crisis and natural disaster."

– **Celia Cole | CEO of Feeding Texas**

"It's difficult to describe the trauma that results when SNAP benefits have run out and the paycheck is still days away, forcing parents to put their children to bed on empty bellies."

– **Diane S. | Current SNAP participant**

LIMITED RESOURCES PUSH FAMILIES TO MAKE LESS HEALTHFUL CHOICES

"We don't buy the right foods because we can't afford the right foods."

– **Kyrie M. | Current SNAP participant**

"[T]hese are choices that we got to do, whether have our benefit last through like the last week of the month buying unnecessary foods that aren't healthy, or the choice of buying healthy food and have a benefit only to last you for two weeks."

– **Wanda P. | Current SNAP participant**

While the dietary guidelines direct participants to healthy foods...families routinely have to make choices that are very difficult... The frequency with which we hear from families that they have run out of food early in the month and they have to choose foods that would stretch which are typically less expensive and certainly less healthy, tells us this is not meeting needs."

– **Kate Garvey | Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services**

"We're all encouraged to eat the rainbow, but with limited funds you're not able to necessarily pick and choose higher nutrient fruits and vegetables. And it encourages more filling, or higher fat diets so that we feel less hungry."

– **Cathy Buhrig | Pennsylvania Department of Human Services**

"Even maxed out we can't afford to buy much that isn't canned or boxed so fresh food is less frequent than we need or is healthy. ...It is hard to choose between having enough to eat and trying to get healthier."

– **Alina S. | Current SNAP participant**

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A SNAPSHOT OF WHAT THEY SHARED

SNAP PARTICIPANTS WANT TO EAT BETTER – AND THEY ARE MOTIVATED TO DO IT ON A BUDGET

“Nutrition education is very often done... We teach people how to eat on a budget. Budgetary changes can only go so far for families. If you just don’t have enough resources to eat, no amount of education on budget can stretch it.”

– **Pam Koch | Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior**

“According to one client, “I try to cut costs as much as possible to make my SNAP benefits last, and even doing that I run out at least a week early. I use coupons, watch for sale and clearance items, anything I can to save money...”

– **The Greater Boston Food Bank**

“[A]ll I need for you to do is give me what I need. I don’t need anybody to show me how to shop because I know how to shop. I know when the stuff goes on clearance. I know where in the supermarket I can go to, you know, receive the fruits and vegetables that are about to go bad but you have like one more day where you can make a stew or something. I know how to do all of those things.”

– **Tianna G. | Current SNAP participant**

“If our SNAP benefits were higher I could afford to buy more healthy fresh food. I might be able to afford different kinds of meals instead of recycling the same meals over and over... We survive on what we get for food by being extremely frugal and buying the same staple items every month and not deviating from that path.”

– **Alina S. | Current SNAP participant**

ADDITIONAL SNAP BENEFITS CAN PROMOTE NUTRITION SECURITY—AND MAKE BETTER FUTURES POSSIBLE

“We know that when nutrition needs are met and hunger is not an additional stressor, families can better focus on what they need to thrive, promoting well-being across people and systems. To move health and human services upstream, we must recognize and acknowledge the interconnectedness of nutrition and food security with comprehensive health and well-being... As a critical social determinant of health, increasing access to affordable, sufficient, culturally appropriate, and desirable food can make a significant impact in advancing an equitable nation that promotes well-being for families and communities.”

– **American Public Human Services Association**

“With an increase in the benefit, SNAP households will be able to purchase more healthful and often more expensive foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables and low sodium canned goods, and culturally appropriate foods. Additional benefits would also reduce the burden that charitable food providers take on, especially towards the end of the month.”

– **Teresa Jackson, MS, RDN, LD & Karen Ehrens, RD, LRD**

“Upgrading the [Thrifty Food Plan] and expanding SNAP benefits would not only increase the food expenditure capacity for low-income families, improve food security, and help families afford nutritious food for more days of the month—but also contribute to other positive outcomes, such as advancing overall health outcomes, lowering healthcare costs, and improving the economy.”

– **Association of State Public Health Nutritionists**

USDA is committed to ensuring SNAP benefits provide all participants access to a healthy diet. The feedback from these listening sessions will be essential to the department’s efforts to modernize the TFP.

For more information, visit www.fns.usda.gov