



Secretary Brooke L. Rollins

May 19, 2026

The Honorable Greg Gianforte
Governor of Montana
1301 E 6th Ave
Helena, MT 59601

Charles T. Brereton, Director
Montana Department of Health and
Human Services
111 North Sanders St.
Helena, MT 59601

Dear Governor Gianforte:

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is pleased to approve the Montana Department of Human Services' request to operate a novel demonstration project to amend the statutory definition of food for purchase by Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients. The Montana State agency has requested to amend the SNAP definition of food for purchase to exclude "high-sugar beverages, energy drinks, candy, and prepared desserts." The State agency formally requested this waiver on March 31, 2026. This approval, subject to the enclosed terms and conditions, is for 2 years, effective September 30, 2026.

Due to the novel design of the Project, FNS is committed to carefully and comprehensively evaluating how waiving the State's definition of food in this way impacts SNAP participants and retailers. FNS will carefully review the results of the Project, based on the evaluation data provided by the State and other available information. FNS will continue to collaborate with the State, and any potential evaluation contractor to finalize data collection points, define key metrics, and outline any necessary data analysis for the quarterly evaluation reports.

Please submit written acceptance of this approval and the terms and conditions signed by the appropriate State official. Attach this acceptance letter to a chatter post in WIMS case # 00013915. Please tag the relevant Regional and National staff listed in the WIMS case team using the @ sign when uploading this document.

FNS appreciates the State's willingness to test innovative approaches to support healthy choices and nutrition among SNAP participants. FNS will continue to collaborate with and support the State as it prepares for implementation. FNS is committed to working with the State to obtain robust data to inform ways to improve nutrition assistance programs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brooke L. Rollins".

Brooke L. Rollins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Enclosures

WAIVER SUMMARY
MONTANA SNAP FOOD RESTRICTION WAIVER DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

The Montana SNAP Food Restriction Waiver Demonstration Project (the Project) is approved in accordance with the requirements to operate demonstration projects under Section 17 [7 U.S.C. 2026] (b)(1)(B)(i), and Section 17 [7 U.S.C. 2026] (b)(1)(B)(ii) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, as amended (the Act).

WAIVERS OF THE ACT: Section 3(k)(1) of the Act defines “Food” for SNAP as “any food or food product for home consumption...” The definition goes on to define items excepted from this definition. These “except[ed]” items cannot be purchased with SNAP benefits.

FNS is waiving this section to allow the State to modify the list food items that can be excepted from the definition of “food” items. Items that are not defined as “food” cannot be purchased with SNAP benefits at SNAP-authorized retailers in Montana. Specifically, the State amends the definition’s language of “any food or food product for home consumption except...” to include as an exception, and therefore be ineligible for purchase with SNAP, “high-sugar beverages, energy drinks, candy, and prepared desserts.”

“High-sugar beverages”: Nonalcoholic beverages that are made with carbonated water or flat water and sweetened with more than 10g of sugar per 8 fluid ounces.

- Does not include carbonated or flat water that is plain or naturally flavored, artificially sweetened beverages, or any beverage that is greater than 50 percent vegetable or fruit juice by volume, meal replacement beverages, medical-grade electrolyte replacement beverages, milk, or milk substitute products.

“Energy drinks”: Beverages that contain more than 6 mg of caffeine per fluid ounce, or more than 140mg total caffeine per container, plus one or more of the following ingredients: taurine, guarana, glucuronolactone, ginseng, yerba mate, or other stimulants, including herbal stimulants.

- Does not include coffee, tea, or any beverages that are substantially coffee or tea-based (noting that some of these items may be restricted by the above “High-sugar beverages” definition).

“Candy”: A shelf-stable preparation of sugar, honey, or other nutritive or non-nutritive sweeteners, in combination with chocolate, fruits, nuts, or other ingredients, or flavorings, in the form of bars, drops, or pieces. Includes gelatin-based confections (gummies), licorice, hard candies, and compressed sugar pieces.

- Does not include baking ingredients, fruit snacks made with real fruit and no added sugar, granola, trail mix and similar products that are substantially nut and/or real fruit based, protein bars, or meal replacement bars.

“Prepared desserts (shelf stable)”: Prepared desserts mean processed, shelf-stable, ready-to-eat, pre-packaged sweet food intended for immediate consumption without any further preparation. This would include foods mostly made from “chemically” modified substances extracted from

foods, along with additives to enhance taste, texture, appearance, and durability, with minimal whole foods.

- Does not include store-made bakery items.

WAIVERS OF SNAP REGULATIONS: 7 CFR 271.2 defines “Eligible foods” for SNAP as “any food or food product intended for human consumption...” The definition goes on to define items excepted from this definition. These “except[ed]” items cannot be purchased with SNAP benefits.

FNS is waiving this regulation to allow the State to modify the list of items that can be excepted from the definition of “Eligible foods”. Items that are not defined as “Eligible foods” cannot be purchased with SNAP benefits at SNAP-authorized retailers in Montana. Specifically, the State amends the definition’s language of “any food or food product intended for human consumption except...” to include as an exception, and therefore be ineligible for purchase with SNAP, “high-sugar beverages, energy drinks, candy, and prepared desserts.” The State will communicate this change to all existing and newly authorized SNAP households and retailers during the Project.

IMPLEMENTATION

Eligibility: This Project will apply to the entire Montana SNAP population (100 percent of the SNAP caseload).

Opt-Out: No SNAP household in Montana may opt out of the SNAP eligible food restrictions project. The purpose of this Project is to evaluate the impact of excluding high-sugar beverages, energy drinks, candy, and prepared desserts from eligible SNAP purchases on SNAP participant purchasing behavior and to assess changes in dietary quality among SNAP households. As part of the evaluation of the Project, the State is developing key metrics and data collection methods including, but not limited to, EBT transaction data, quarterly SNAP household surveys, and semi-annual retailer surveys. SNAP households’ participation in these evaluation and data collection methods is voluntary, and any household may opt into or out of the corresponding evaluation tools.

Alternative Procedures: Montana’s proposed alternative procedure is to modify the list of items that can be excepted from the definition of “Eligible foods”. Items that are not defined as “Eligible foods” cannot be purchased with SNAP benefits at SNAP-authorized retailers in Montana. Montana specifically will include as an exception, and ineligible for purchase with SNAP, “high-sugar beverages, energy drinks, candy, and prepared desserts” as defined on page 2.

Montana’s proposed alternative procedures make no changes to the provisions that allow certain populations of SNAP recipients to purchase prepared meals from appropriate facilities like senior centers, domestic violence centers, substance misuse centers, and homeless shelters or to universally banned products. The State is not seeking to propose alternative procedures for items already banned from SNAP purchase such as alcoholic beverages, tobacco, or hot foods, or hot food products ready for immediate consumption.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Prior to the Project's implementation date, September 30, 2026, the State must meet all terms and conditions listed below. If the State cannot meet these terms and conditions in full, the Project's implementation date must be delayed. After Project implementation, the State may request at any time to revise the Project's scope by submitting revisions for FNS consideration and approval. Any changes must be agreed upon by the State and FNS prior to implementation.

- FNS authorizes Montana to operate the Demonstration Project to waive the definition of "food and food products" (the Project) for a period of 2 years from the Project's start date. The Project will begin on September 30, 2026, and end after September 30, 2028, with the option to request three annual extensions thereafter for a total Project period not to exceed 5 years. The State will operate this Project statewide.
- If the State is unable to implement on September 30, 2026, the State will request a new implementation date, and FNS will update the terms and conditions and evaluation schedule accordingly. Moreover, any changes the State wishes to make to their Project (including, but not limited to, Project design, target populations, evaluation procedures, compliance plans, and communication plans) following implementation should be shared with FNS for review and sign-off prior to implementing them.
- The Project may not in any way impede inter-operability of SNAP program benefits, as detailed in 7 CFR 274.8(b)(10).
- Clients' out of State transactions will not be used as a primary indicator of fraud or negatively impact SNAP eligibility for the household.
- The State will provide a finalized communications plan detailing tasks and timelines for engaging with and notifying SNAP-authorized retailers of the Project.
 - The State will update their SNAP webpage to provide information about the Project for SNAP-authorized retailers.
 - The State must provide a designated centralized communication resource, to serve as a point of contact for retailers and to route inquiries FNS receives from the Retailer Service Center. For example, this resource could be a public email inbox or dedicated call center line.
- The State will provide a finalized communications plan detailing tasks and timelines for notifying and educating SNAP households of the Project.
 - The State will update their SNAP webpage to provide information about the Project for SNAP households.
- The State will provide a finalized evaluation plan defining Project health outcomes and behaviors tracked throughout the Project.
 - The evaluation plan must detail how the State will mitigate SNAP client reporting

- bias for any Project data collection methods.
 - The evaluation plan will define Project success (i.e., reduction of diseases/illnesses, changes in behaviors, increase nutrition knowledge).
 - The evaluation plan must describe in detail all data points and metrics that the State will be collecting, aside from those listed in these terms and conditions, and how they will be analyzed.
- If the evaluation plan requires creating, updating or amending existing contracts between the State and another entity, the State will provide FNS copies of the completed contracts.
- The State will provide a finalized proposed budget for the Project.
 - Subsequent to the finalized budget the State will submit quarterly costs to FNS throughout the duration of the Project.
- The State will provide a finalized compliance and monitoring plan for SNAP-authorized retailers.
 - Prior to Project implementation, the State will be responsible for confirming Project compliance for SNAP-authorized retailers that operate in the State. For example, retailers may complete and return a self-attestation compliance form for the Project.
 - After Project implementation, FNS will execute its plans for monitoring SNAP-authorized retailers' compliance with the Project. SNAP-authorized retailers will have a 90-day grace period following implementation of the Project. After the grace period, FNS will use existing fraud detection and investigatory practices to monitor SNAP-authorized retailers' compliance with the Project. FNS will address findings through administrative actions. These plans are described in detail in FNS's December 30, 2025, memorandum *Clarifications on Food Restriction Waivers and Retailer Compliance*.
 - SNAP-authorized retailers are solely responsible for managing Project compliance with third party e-commerce platforms. Third party e-commerce providers will not be held liable or responsible for managing project compliance.
- FNS reserves the right to withdraw its waiver approval and terminate the Project at any time if FNS determines that the Project is inconsistent with SNAP goals to increase the efficiency of the Program and to improve the delivery of SNAP benefits to raise levels of nutrition among low-income individuals.
- Continued approval of the Project is contingent upon the results of the ongoing Project evaluation. This Project may be extended in yearly increments for an additional 3 years, for a total of 5 years, provided that the State and FNS agree upon additional evaluative measures prior to renewal so that FNS can continue to assess this demonstration Project's impact. Any request for extension must be submitted by March 30, 2028, at least 6 months prior to the end of the initial 2-year Project period.
- If any Federal laws regarding this Project change during the approved period, the State will submit a modification request to FNS to ensure the Project's terms and conditions

reflect current Federal law. FNS will review and approve the modification in accordance with section 17(b)(1)(D) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, as amended.

- SNAP participants' surveys, at a minimum, will collect the following information:
 - Meals and foods eaten outside the home or with foods not purchased at SNAP-authorized retailers.
 - Purchase and/or consumption of less healthy or "unhealthy" food items not restricted by the Project.
 - Non-SNAP dollars spent to purchase food items restricted by the Project.
 - SNAP client's ability and confidence in correctly identifying food items that can or cannot be purchased with SNAP benefits during the Project.
 - The point in time in which the SNAP client became aware of the Project and how (State SNAP webpage, retail store signage, State press release, etc.).
 - Any impacts the Project potentially had on participants' shopping routines (such as distance traveled to store, increase spending of non-SNAP dollars, more frequent shopping trips, etc.).

- The State will provide FNS with quarterly reports using the evaluation reporting template FNS will provide to the State in WIMS based upon finalized data collection points, defined key metrics, and data analysis. The quarterly evaluation report template at a minimum will include:
 - Total monthly amount of SNAP client hearings filed related to the Project.
 - Monthly total number of SNAP-authorized retailer Project compliments and complaints received and a qualitative summary.
 - Monthly total number of SNAP households Project compliments and complaints received and a qualitative summary.
 - Monthly total number of Project compliments and complaints from advocacy, community, or retailer association groups and a qualitative summary.
 - Whenever possible, partner with retailers to collect baseline and monthly retailer data on SNAP shopping cart transaction data.

- The State will participate in routine calls with FNS ahead of the Project implementation.
 - Frequency and scheduling of the calls will be set following consultation between the State and FNS.
 - FNS will provide the State with a proposed agenda for each call.

FNS is available and willing to provide technical assistance on all components of the Project, including but not limited to communication plans, evaluation strategies, budgets, and a compliance framework. However, all final decisions regarding the development and implementation of the Project materials and plans reside solely with the State. FNS will serve in an advisory capacity and will not provide final approval on Project materials.

REQUEST FOR AN EXTENSION

If the State would like to continue the Project beyond September 30, 2028, the State should send a request to FNS by March 30, 2028, six months before the Project's two-year period expiration. The extension request letter must include a summary of progress to date, including data from the time between the last quarterly report and the extension request.

EVALUATION

The State must provide FNS with a report for each quarter of the Project during the first year of implementation. The quarterly report will be segmented into monthly sections. Reports are due 45 days after the end of each reporting period. Thereafter, based on the results of the first year quarterly reports the State and FNS will discuss the potential to shift to an annual reporting schedule.

Montana Project Reporting Schedule

REPORT	DATA RANGE COVERED	DUE DATE
Year 1, Quarter 1	September 30, 2026 – December 31, 2026	February 14, 2027
Year 1, Quarter 2	January 1, 2027 – March 31, 2027	May 15, 2027
Year 1, Quarter 3	April 1, 2027 – June 30, 2027	August 14, 2027
Year 1, Quarter 4	July 1, 2027 – September 30, 2027	November 14, 2027
Year 2, Quarter 1	October 1, 2027 – December 31, 2027	February 14, 2028
Year 2, Quarter 2	January 1, 2028 – March 31, 2028	May 15, 2028
Year 2, Quarter 3	April 1, 2028 – June 30, 2028	August 14, 2028
Year 2, Quarter 4	July 1, 2028 – September 30, 2028	November 14, 2028
Extension Request	Submitted by March 30, 2028	

To evaluate the Project the State plans to administer quarterly surveys of a representative sample of SNAP households (including tribal and rural populations). These surveys will measure health indicators such as self-reported consumption of the restricted items. Montana also plans to include state-level data on obesity and diabetes prevalence trends. Additional measures may include redemption data, such as percentage reduction in SNAP purchases of restricted items and percentage increase in SNAP purchases of fruits and vegetables, retailer compliance, client complaints, and cross-border transactions.

Based on previous and ongoing technical assistance calls with FNS, the State may revise its evaluation plan subsequent to this approval. Any updates or revisions to the State's evaluation plan need to be communicated to FNS.

Evaluation Components

The State's quarterly and annual reports must include the following:

1. Executive Summary/Methodology: Summary describing methods of data collection and analysis and the quarter and month(s) covered by the report.
2. Any administrative costs associated with the Project.
3. Various qualitative and quantitative data points, defined metrics, and analytical approaches aligned with the Project's objectives related to health and health behavior change outcomes.

Please note: When submitting reports to FNS, do not include any SNAP clients' Personally Identifiable Information (PII). FNS reserves the right to add additional data fields in consultation with the State for reporting purposes.