



Secretary Brooke L. Rollins
Washington, D.C. 20250

May 19, 2025

The Honorable Jim Pillen
Governor of Nebraska
Lincoln Office/State Capitol
1445 K Street
Lincoln, NE 68508

Shannon Grotrian
Director of the Office of Economic Assistance
Nebraska Department of Health and Human
Services
301 Centennial Mall South
Lincoln, NE 68509

Dear Governor Pillen:

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is pleased to approve the request dated April 14, 2025, from the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services to allow the State to operate a novel demonstration project to amend the statutory definition of food for purchase by Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients from “any food or food product for home consumption” to exclude soda, “soft drinks,” and energy drinks. This approval, subject to the enclosed terms and conditions, is for 2 years, effective January 1, 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 its evaluation contractor to finalize data collection points, define key metrics, and outline any necessary data analysis for the quarterly evaluation reports, as well as finalize key implementation parameters such as a threshold standard for retailers.

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 # 00012120. 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 healthy outcomes to best serve SNAP participants. FNS is committed to working with the State to obtain robust data to inform ways to improve nutrition assistance programs.

Sincerely,

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

Enclosures

WAIVER SUMMARY

NEBRASKA SNAP HEALTHY CHOICE WAIVER DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

The Nebraska SNAP Healthy Choice Waiver Demonstration Project (the Project) waiver 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 of 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 Nebraska. 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, “soda”, “soft drinks” and “energy drinks.” Nebraska’s definition of “soda” or “soft drinks” is any carbonated non-alcoholic beverage that contains water, a sweetening agent (including but not limited to sugar, high-fructose corn syrup, or artificial sweeteners), flavoring, and carbon dioxide gas to create carbonation. Additionally, Nebraska’s definition of “energy drinks” is carbonated or non-carbonated beverages containing a stimulant such as fortified caffeine, guarana, glucuronolactone, or taurine. They may also include herbal extracts such as ginseng, mineral salts and vitamins, or high doses of organic acids, amino acids, inositol, sugars, or other similar compounds in addition to sweeteners. Juices or natural fruit pulp or concentrates may also be added. Energy drinks are specifically formulated to enhance energy, alertness, or physical performance. Under Nebraska’s definition, both soft drinks and energy drinks are intended for human consumption and are available in various flavors, formulations, and packaging. However, beverages marketed primarily as sports drinks to increase hydration, like Gatorade or medically necessary nutritional products, are not included.

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 provision of the regulations 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 Nebraska. 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, “soda”, “soft drinks” and “energy drinks.” Nebraska’s definition of “soda” or “soft drinks” is any carbonated non-alcoholic beverage that contains water, a sweetening agent (including but not limited to sugar, high-fructose corn syrup, or artificial sweeteners), flavoring, and carbon dioxide gas to create carbonation. Additionally, Nebraska’s definition of energy drinks is carbonated or non-carbonated beverages containing a stimulant such as fortified

caffeine, guarana, glucuronolactone, or taurine. They may also include herbal extracts such as ginseng, mineral salts and vitamins, or high doses of organic acids, amino acids, inositol, sugars, or other similar compounds in addition to sweeteners. Juices or natural fruit pulp or concentrates may also be added. Energy drinks are specifically formulated to enhance energy, alertness, or physical performance. Under Nebraska's definition, both soft drinks and energy drinks are intended for human consumption and are available in various flavors, formulations, and packaging. However, beverages marketed primarily as sports drinks to increase hydration, like Gatorade or medically necessary nutritional products, are not included. 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 Nebraska SNAP population (100 percent of the SNAP caseload).

Opt-Out: No SNAP household in Nebraska may opt out of the SNAP eligible food restrictions project. The purpose of the Project is to evaluate the impact of excluding soda, soft drinks and energy drinks from eligible purchases under SNAP on participants' consumption of these products. As part of the evaluation of the Project the State is developing key metrics and data collection methods including, but not limited to, surveys, interviews, and collection of retailer Point-of-Service (POS) data. The State will also assess how SNAP participants' health and health behaviors are impacted by this pilot with additional nutrition support and education through the SNAP-Ed program. Participation in the SNAP-Ed program is voluntary, and any household may opt into or out of the SNAP-Ed program and any corresponding evaluation tools, such as surveys, or interviews.

Alternative Procedures: Nebraska'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 Nebraska. Nebraska specifically will include as an exception, and ineligible for purchase with SNAP, "soda", "soft drinks" and "energy drinks." Under Nebraska's definition of "soda" or "soft drinks" is any carbonated non-alcoholic beverage that contains water, a sweetening agent (including but not limited to sugar, high-fructose corn syrup, or artificial sweeteners), flavoring, and carbon dioxide gas to create carbonation. Additionally, Nebraska's definition of energy drinks is carbonated or non-carbonated beverages containing a stimulant such as fortified caffeine, guarana, glucuronolactone, or taurine. They may also include herbal extracts such as ginseng, mineral salts and vitamins, or high doses of organic acids, amino acids, inositol, sugars, or other similar compounds in addition to sweeteners. Juices or natural fruit pulp or concentrates may also be added. Energy drinks are specifically formulated to enhance energy, alertness, or physical performance. Under Nebraska's definition, both soft drinks and energy drinks are intended for human consumption and are available in various flavors, formulations, and packaging. However, beverages marketed primarily as sports drinks to increase hydration, like Gatorade or medically necessary nutritional products, are not included.

Nebraska'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. FNS also recognizes that the State is not seeking to propose alternative procedures to ban SNAP products 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, January 1, 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 Nebraska 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 January 1, 2026, and end on December 31, 2027, 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 January 1, 2026, the State will communicate 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, increased 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 updating or amending existing contracts between the State and another entity (including, but not limited to Public Consulting Group, Fidelity Information Services, Nebraska University SNAP-Ed contract) 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.
 - As part of the compliance plan prior to Project implementation, the State will have SNAP authorized retailers confirm Project compliance. For example, retailers may complete and return a self-attestation compliance form for the Project.
 - 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.
 - As part of the compliance plan, the State will have a method for notifying SNAP-authorized retailers that are not in compliance with the Project. For example, the State may send a compliance warning letter to retailers. Compliance warnings and other procedures will adhere to 7 CFR Part 278.

- 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 June 30, 2027, 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:
 - Baseline and monthly data collection for out of State transactions for all States that border Nebraska.
 - Baseline and total monthly amount of SNAP dollars spent out of State.
 - Total monthly amount of SNAP client hearings filed related to the Project.
 - SNAP-Ed programming data:
 - i. Quarterly number of cohorts participating in the Project
 - ii. Number of individuals in each cohort
 - iii. Monthly attrition rates for each cohort
 - iv. Reporting on any SNAP-Ed evaluation framework or indicators

used with each cohort

- 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 December 31, 2027, the State should send a request to FNS by June 30, 2027, 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.

Nebraska Project Reporting Schedule

REPORT	DATA RANGE COVERED	DUE DATE
Year 1, Quarter 1	January 1, 2026—March 31, 2026	May 15, 2026
Year 1, Quarter 2	April 1, 2026- June 30, 2026	August 14, 2026
Year 1, Quarter 3	July 1, 2026- September 30, 2026	November 16, 2026
Year 1, Quarter 4	October 1, 2026- December 31, 2026	February 15, 2027

Year 2, Quarter 1	January 1, 2027- March 31, 2027	May 17, 2027
Year 2, Quarter 2	April 1, 2027-June 30, 2027	August 16, 2027
Year 2, Quarter 3	July 1, 2027- September 30, 2027	November 15, 2027
Year 2, Quarter 4	October 1, 2027-December 31, 2027	February 14, 2028
Extension Request	Submitted by July 31, 2027	

To evaluate the Project the State will undertake a mixed-methods approach, and activities will include tracking and analyzing SNAP households and SNAP-Ed program participation and an assessment of participant changes to behavior and health outcomes. The State will also evaluate retailer participation, such as feedback relating to concerns, barriers and outcomes of Project.

Based on previous and ongoing technical assistance calls with FNS, the State will contract with the Public Consulting Group as its evaluation contractor, to provide evaluation services including, but not limited to, retailer point-of-sale data to include both SNAP and non-SNAP shoppers and statistical analysis.

The State's evaluation plan will focus on three survey component efforts through its SNAP-Ed partners. For example, assessing changes in what is learned, skills gained and purchasing behavior changes; frequency of purchase and consumption for same major food groups; and quality of life questions. The goal is to evaluate how these changes contribute to overall health and wellbeing pre and post Project. The State also informed FNS that the State's contract with Nebraska University for its SNAP-Ed plan will be updated to account for the Project and increase the cadence of SNAP-Ed surveys and reporting. Other evaluation tools will potentially include, but are not limited to, retailer and SNAP participant surveys, food logging, SNAP-authorized retailer point-of-sale transaction log data.

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