



Fiscal Year 2022 Budget and Appropriations Priorities

March 2021

The federal nutrition programs are a critical safety net for tens of millions of struggling households — including individuals of all ages — by helping them put food on the table during times of need. Investing in hunger prevention and relief makes good fiscal sense. Hunger increases health care costs, lowers worker productivity, harms children’s development, and diminishes children’s educational attainment. These negative impacts can be minimized with robust funding and support for the federal nutrition programs.

Even before COVID-19, more than 35 million people in the United States were living in households experiencing food insecurity. As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, Feeding America estimates that the number of individuals in food-insecure households may have risen to 45 million in 2020. COVID-19’s harsh impact on the economy threatens to persist for years.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SNAP is the nation’s first line of defense against hunger. It responds quickly and effectively to changes in need, whether due to local or national economic downturns or natural disasters. As conditions improve, SNAP caseloads fall. Nationally, the onset of the pandemic saw a rapid rise in SNAP caseloads over 2020, demonstrating the importance of this program in getting food resources to individuals quickly and efficiently.

SNAP benefits are targeted to the most vulnerable. An estimated 85 percent of all SNAP benefits go to households with a child, older adult, or person with a disability. The average SNAP household has a gross monthly income of only \$844, which is just under 63 percent of the federal poverty level.

SNAP has a positive impact on the economy. Each \$1 in SNAP benefits during a downturn generates between \$1.50 and \$1.80 in economic activity. These dollars flow through all parts of the food supply chain — from farmers and food manufacturers, to truckers, food retailers, and store employees.

Unfortunately, SNAP benefits are inadequate to maintain a healthy diet throughout the month: SNAP benefits historically average less than \$1.40 per person per meal and more than 90 percent of benefits are spent after only three weeks. Benefit inadequacy has serious consequences: research has linked diminished food budgets later in the month with a drop-off in caloric intake, lower school performance, and an increase in hospitalizations for low-income adults due to low blood sugar.

Congress should take these steps to protect and improve SNAP:

- continue an increase in the adequacy and duration of SNAP benefits by **at least 15 percent** until the health crisis has ended and sufficient economic recovery has been realized;
- strengthen SNAP permanently by basing benefit allotments on the more adequate Low-Cost Food Plan, removing the cap on the shelter deduction, increasing the minimum benefit level, and better accounting for out-of-pocket medical expenses incurred by SNAP participants who are older or have disabilities;
- promote equity, including by eliminating SNAP time limits and improving SNAP access for college students, immigrants, former drug felons, and families working their way up the economic ladder; and
- provide such sums as are necessary to ensure continuity of SNAP operations and benefits.

Child Nutrition Appropriations

The child nutrition programs play a critical role in helping children, especially in families with low incomes, achieve access to quality nutrition, child care, and education and enrichment activities, while improving their overall health, development, and school achievement.

As Congress considers the reauthorization of the child nutrition programs this year, it is vital for there to be a significant new investment to ensure that critical program improvements are possible.

In addition to maintaining robust eligibility structures, Congress should take key actions in the child nutrition programs, including what's listed below.

- **School Meals:** Preserve the improvements made in school meals access, nutrition standards, and the overall school nutrition environment. Congress should provide **\$10 million** for school meals direct certification grants to reduce paperwork for schools, and **\$100 million** in school equipment grants to enable school districts to build their capacity to prepare healthier and more cost-effective meals on site.
- **Summer Meals:** Provide **\$100 million** to continue the current and expanded Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Demonstration Projects to ensure that children in rural and underserved areas have access to nutrition during the summer.
- **Team Nutrition:** Provide **\$25 million** for Team Nutrition funding, the primary resource for promoting healthy eating and nutrition education in child nutrition programs. These funds assist schools, child care centers and homes, and community-based sponsoring organizations to successfully implement the healthier meal patterns.
- **Child Care Meals:** Continue to provide **\$10 million** for the Child and Adult Care Food Program's (CACFP) nutrition and wellness education and program efforts. These funds are crucial for supporting the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) important role in providing materials, training, and support to state agencies and program operators to bolster nutrition knowledge among child care providers.
- **Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC):** Fund WIC at **\$7 billion** to serve anticipated caseloads while accounting for the rising costs of delivering high-quality nutrition services. Included in the WIC appropriation should be set-asides for WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counseling (**\$90 million**), infrastructure and technical assistance (**\$14 million**), and management information systems (**\$35 million**).
- **WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP):** Support FMNP at **\$18.5 million**. FMNP provides fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables to WIC participants.
- **Farm to School and Early Care and Education:** Provide **\$12 million** to support farm to school efforts and to continue expanding farm to early care and education settings.
- **21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC):** Provide **\$2.5 billion** for the program, which is the largest source of funding for afterschool and summer programs.

Older Adults Nutrition Programs

- **Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP):** Provide an increase beyond the current **\$325 million** for CSFP. Additional funding is needed to meet the needs of older adults who are struggling with hunger during the pandemic. In 2020, CSFP provided nutritious food boxes to approximately 736,000 older adults each month.
- **Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs (SFMNP):** Support SFMNP at **\$21 million**. SFMNP provides low-income seniors with coupons for eligible foods at farmers' markets, roadside stands, and community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs.
- **Older Americans Act Nutrition Programs for Older Adults and Native American Communities:** The home-delivered meal and congregate nutrition programs are important sources of nutrition for older adults in many communities around the country. Funding must be increased in order to keep up with the escalating demand for services.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

- **TEFAP Commodities:** Congress should provide **\$900 million** for TEFAP food purchases to ensure food banks and emergency food providers are able to better meet the high demand that's being seen in their communities. This also will mitigate the cliff effect from the reduction of food coming through the Food Purchase and Distribution Program. Nutritious TEFAP foods are an essential resource for local emergency food providers, which combine government commodities with privately donated foods to maximize TEFAP benefits far beyond the budgeted amount for the program.
- **TEFAP Storage and Distribution Funds:** Congress should appropriate the fully authorized amount of **\$100 million** for TEFAP Storage and Distribution Funds. These funds help cover costs associated with distributing TEFAP commodities to emergency food providers and help defray the costs of storing, transporting, and distributing TEFAP foods. Currently, appropriated funds in fiscal year 2021 have only covered approximately 36 percent of the costs of handling TEFAP commodities.

Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR)

FDPIR provides USDA food to low-income household members, including older adults who are living on Native American lands, and to Native American families residing in nearby designated areas.

- Congress should provide
 - **\$200 million** for administrative costs and food purchases that are consistent with prior fiscal years;
 - the fully authorized amount of **\$5 million** for demonstration projects for tribal organizations to enter into self-determination contracts to procure foods for FDPIR packages; and
 - **\$5 million** for FDPIR traditional foods market development.

Congressional Hunger Center

- **Emerson/Leland Hunger Fellowship Program:** Congress should fund this fellowship program at its authorized level of **\$2 million**. Since 1994, Congress has funded this program and, by doing so, has enhanced the effectiveness of local, state, and national anti-hunger and anti-poverty efforts, as well as the work of nonprofits, government agencies, and faith-based organizations, by the research, analysis, and policy work conducted by the Fellows.

Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP)

- Provide funding and authorization for Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands to transition from NAP to full participation in SNAP. The choice of and path toward transition should be approved by the territories' leadership.