

Protect and Strengthen SNAP by Preserving Consumer Choice

Congress must adhere to bipartisan and public support to preserve consumer choice for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in the fiscal year (FY) 2026 Agriculture Appropriations Bill, the upcoming Farm Bill, and any other legislative vehicles.

Any proposals to restrict food and beverage options must be rejected as they will create a lose-lose situation: greater financial and administrative burden for the federal government and private industry, and reduced individual empowerment and dignity.

Background: SNAP is the nation's first line of defense against hunger. The program works with states and the private sector to provide food efficiently and equitably to those in need using existing channels of commerce. SNAP customers are treated with dignity as, by law, they are treated equally to non-SNAP customers. SNAP customers can decide where to shop and what to purchase, including foods applicable to certain medical conditions and foods that are culturally appropriate. There have been several attempts to restrict which foods and beverages SNAP participants can purchase. The rejection of these efforts has consistently been bipartisan.

Issue: There is a misguided notion that restricting food and beverage options available to purchase with SNAP benefits will improve health outcomes for households with low incomes. However, these proposals would complicate any efforts to improve efficiency and achieve cost savings. Instead of improving health outcomes, restricting SNAP choice would burden:

- **State agencies:** Already facing a national shortage of approximately 473,000 vacancies across various agencies, state agencies will need to increase budgets to train staff, update and distribute new materials, and ensure vendor compliance while facing SNAP application backlogs.
- **SNAP-participating vendors:** The increased costs to regularly update thousands of food and beverage items in stores will be borne by the customer. Cashiers will be burdened with policing purchases, leading to difficult conversations and reducing the dignity for those in the program.

- **Program administration:** Previous Farm Bills have rejected SNAP restrictions due to the significant administrative burden that would be imposed, recognizing food restrictions would not address the root causes of food insecurity and would complicate the program. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) found that restricting the food choices of SNAP recipients is both conceptually flawed and impractical, ultimately increasing program complexity and cost.

Research shows: SNAP, in its current, unrestricted form, has positive impacts on food security and health, and Congress should support efforts to strengthen and improve the program.

- Adults participating in SNAP have, on average, annual health care costs that are \$1,400 to \$5,000 lower compared to nonparticipants with low incomes.
- Children who participate in SNAP have better health status than their eligible nonparticipating peers and are less likely to reside in households that forgo health care in lieu of other household necessities. Adults who



had access to SNAP during childhood exhibit lower adult obesity risk and other lower risk of chronic health conditions such as cardiovascular disease and Type 2 diabetes.

- Early reports indicate that increased SNAP benefits during the pandemic reduced food insecurity and more adequate SNAP benefits during the Great Recession improved health and reduced health care utilization.
- The Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program supports health and reduces food insecurity by increasing the purchase and consumption of fruits and vegetables by SNAP participants through the “Double Up Bucks” incentive. Participants eat more fruits and vegetables and experience greater food security.

Solutions: Measures that address benefit adequacy and increase access are key to creating better health outcomes among SNAP customers:

- Strengthen benefit adequacy: Congress should move from the Thrifty Food Plan to the Low-Cost Food Plan. The Low-Cost Food Plan provides for a more nutritionally balanced diet and adjusts SNAP benefits to accommodate that cost.
- Create public-private partnerships to increase access to fresh food and food outlets for individuals and families, especially those living in food deserts in urban and rural areas. (Addressing access includes variables such as price, modes of transportation, and distance from where one can purchase fresh food).
- Continue and expand federal investments in incentive programs to purchase fresh foods.

Congress should strengthen SNAP, rather than restrict it, by ensuring access and providing adequate benefit allotments. Because healthier food and beverage options cost more, adequate benefit allotments will help families afford those options.
