

Congress must continue to re-evaluate SNAP benefits every five years to keep up with the latest dietary guidelines and market prices.

Background: The Thrifty Food Plan (TFP), created in 1975, is the cheapest of four U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) plans, representing the weekly cost of buying food to maintain a healthy diet. This plan determines the maximum Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) monthly benefit based on:

- current dietary guidelines,
- food consumption data, and
- cost of food items at retailers.

The bipartisan 2018 Farm Bill directed USDA to update the Thrifty Food Plan. The resulting update in 2021 was the first in the plan's history and led to a necessary and long overdue increase in SNAP benefits. The benefit increase averages out to \$1.19 per person per day.

Evaluating the Thrifty Food Plan without adjusting the SNAP benefit ignores the reality of market rates and evolving dietary guidelines. In 49 years, the TFP has only been updated three other times — in 1983, 1999, and 2006 — but these updates did not increase the SNAP benefit amount. As a result, the 2021 update was critical to bring SNAP benefits to an adequate level.

The impact: The TFP previously only considered the consumption habits of people living at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level — which is \$30,000 net income for a family of four. The TFP also underrepresented families of various ethnicities and household sizes. The 2021 update looked at food habits that reflect the purchasing patterns of both families with low incomes and of those with slightly higher incomes. This prevented the model from including only foods and prices that families with very low incomes purchase, while adjusting for current food and beverage prices at stores. The TFP update also aligned with current dietary guidelines. This provided SNAP participants an



opportunity to maintain a “thrifty” budget while having more dietary-recommended choices.

FRAC’s ask: Protect the Thrifty Food Plan adjustment from efforts to eliminate or weaken it in the 2024 Farm Bill and in other legislation. The last Farm Bill created a necessary pathway to ensure that the USDA Food and Nutrition Service updates the Thrifty Food Plan every five years. This secures alignment of current dietary guidelines and food prices with the SNAP benefit amount. The regular adjustments also mean a smaller fiscal impact, while waiting several decades for the next adjustment would guarantee a higher fiscal impact. Congress must protect the Thrifty Food Plan and other SNAP provisions, and strengthen SNAP as our nation’s first line of defense against food insecurity and hunger.

Note: *The Thrifty Food Plan update differs from the annual Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA). SNAP benefits receive a COLA increase annually. This only takes into account inflation based on the Consumer Price Index. COLAs do not respond to changes in nutrition science and new nutrient-dense food and beverage products on the market that may help individuals achieve a balanced diet.*