

Protect & Strengthen SNAP Benefit Adequacy in the Federal Budget

California is facing an urgent need to improve benefit adequacy in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Studies have shown that on average, households spend close to 80% of their SNAP benefits within the first two weeks of the month. Moreover, hunger has risen to shocking levels: 1 in 5 California households, and 27% of households with children, reported food insecurity in September 2024 and one in four families nationwide are going into debt – financing their groceries - because food is so unaffordable.

The USDA sets SNAP benefit allotments through the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP), the lowest cost of the four USDA food plans. The bipartisan 2018 Farm Bill (H.R. 2), required USDA to reevaluate the TFP every 5 years and recommend adjustments without regard to cost-neutrality.

In August 2021, SNAP benefits increased 23% as a result of this required reevaluation, which kept 2.9 million people out of poverty nationally, reducing poverty by 6% in 2021. Previous, cost-neutral TFPs yielded results that were not practical or nutritious and failed to consider dietary restrictions or religious needs. Researchers estimated a family of 4 on the TFP could purchase, each week:



More than 3 gal of milk



2.4 gal of orange juice & 5 lbs of oranges



12 lbs of potatoes



Endless time to shop & cook from scratch

Even after the 2021 TFP increase, SNAP benefits still only average \$6.20 per person per day - typically not enough to make it through the month. Maximum SNAP benefit levels fall short of the cost of low-income meals in all 58 California counties.

Now, proposals from House Republicans would restrict future TFP updates to only the cost of inflation - or even repeal the 2021 increase altogether. These proposals ignore science, common sense and public sentiment: Most Americans agree that we should continue to increase SNAP allotments to reflect current nutrition guidance and changing food costs.

The Harm of Freezing or Cutting the Thrifty Food Plan

Other proposals being floated would reduce eligibility and benefit levels even further, hitting low-income and working-class California communities that are already struggling with affordability.

The House Budget Resolution mandates at least \$230 billion in cuts over 10 years, targeting SNAP. Previously released House Budget Committee proposals to freeze the TFP would cut SNAP by \$274 billion over 10 years.

Hungry Californians would be harmed the most: Nearly \$36 Billion, or 20%, of the \$274B cuts to SNAP benefits would be taken from the 5.4 million Californians who spend SNAP benefits at 30,753 authorized EBT retailers across California.

Californians would lose:



488,160 Jobs, hurting farmers, farmworkers, truckers, grocers, & others in our critical food sector.



\$36 Billion in SNAP benefits



\$64.8 Billion in potential loss GDP

Cutting the TFP will also force cuts to other critical programs including:



Summer EBT which serves **6.1 Million** children in CA



The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) impacting: **2.2 Million** households getting TEFAP every month

We call on the CA Congressional Delegation to help more than 5 million Californians who rely on SNAP to eat to fight hunger and escape poverty by opposing any cuts or structural changes to SNAP, including to the Thrifty Food Plan. Congress should strengthen SNAP benefit adequacy by passing the Closing the Meal Gap Act [H.R. 3037 (Adams) / S. 1336 (Gillibrand); 118th Congress], without cuts or offsets to SNAP or other Farm Bill or Safety Net programs.

SNAP Cuts Would Take Food From Families, Increase Hunger and Undermine Already Inadequate SNAP Benefits

The 2018 Farm Bill removed the cost-neutrality constraint on TFP reevaluations, enabling the program to better reflect nutrition science and the cost of nutritious food. The inflation-only adjustments in the House Republican plan are not enough, and any benefit rollbacks would be devastating to millions nationwide.

If the Thrifty Food Plan were cut by \$274 billion, SNAP households would see an average estimated cut of about \$42 per month - enough to take multiple meals off the table each month. This includes a nearly 30% cut in benefits for the many older adults, people with disabilities, and working families who receive the current minimum allotment of \$23 a month. In California, these cuts would have an outsized impact on the Central Valley and other agricultural regions, home to many of the top 10 California Districts with the highest SNAP participation, where food is too often out of reach for the communities that grow and sell it. If the 2021 TFP increase were repealed, the cuts would be even deeper.

The proposed cuts would not only harm families but would cost the state in real terms. For example, food insecurity is associated with \$7.2 billion in annual healthcare costs in California. Cuts to SNAP also negatively impact the state's overall economy and affect already-struggling areas, as every SNAP dollar spent returns \$1.79 in economic activity.

The threats to TFP are not isolated. Proposed cuts would expand harsh work rules, stripping food from vulnerable groups, including older adults up to age 65, parents of school-aged children, veterans, people experiencing homelessness, and youth who have aged out of foster care. Radical funding changes could force states into deep cuts, while reinstating a benefit cliff would penalize families for modest earnings or savings, putting millions at risk of losing assistance.

Congress Has the Power to Act: Protect SNAP's Thrifty Food Plan Increases and Strengthen SNAP

Now is the time to lift millions of households out of poverty and hunger, not push them further down. We must protect current benefits and work toward a Low-Cost Food Plan. The Closing the Meal Gap Act (H.R. 3037 / S. 1336--118th) would permanently adopt the Low-Cost Food Plan, remove the shelter cap providing much-needed support to families on SNAP, and raise the minimum benefit—critical changes that would directly uplift Californians.

The effective COVID-era SNAP Emergency Allotments (EAs) helped Californians buy more food, manage income fluctuations, and stabilize households. With the end of the EAs, food insecurity has worsened, families are forced to make tough choices, and both health and local economies have suffered. We must strengthen, not cut, vital SNAP benefits for those fighting hunger and poverty.

"My biggest expenses right now is all my money goes to the utilities, gas and light. I don't have money to get school clothes for my kids, and school shoes. Like, everything is going to the utilities and not towards the day to day needs."

— SNAP Recipient

