

# THE IMPORTANCE OF DISASTER SNAP: SNAP RESPONDS WHEN WE NEED IT MOST



A vital structural feature of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, CalFresh in California) is that the program rapidly responds to disasters whether natural or humanmade. When a disaster strikes – whether a recession, fire, or other crisis – SNAP is there to meet the urgent need for food and bring much-needed resources into the community.

A major natural disaster, such as an earthquake, hurricane or fire may trigger special Disaster SNAP rules to meet the temporary nutritional needs of disaster victims. These may include:

- Replacing benefits for those who lost power or were evacuated and lost valuable groceries,
- The ability to purchase hot foods, as well as groceries, due to the loss of the ability to prepare food at home, and
- The provision of Disaster SNAP benefits to those who lost their home or place of work and have an extraordinary need for food.

In such situations Disaster SNAP is a lifeline to the households who have experienced these traumatic losses, and also helps communities get back on their feet by providing 100% federally-funded nutrition benefits that are spent in stores and circulate in the local economy.

SNAP is equally responsive in the case of an economic downturn. While a recession does not trigger special Disaster rules, the entitlement structure of the SNAP program means that anyone who meets the program rules is eligible for benefits. When a recession occurs, the program expands to fit the need, and contracts again as economic conditions improve.

By providing a benefit to those who would otherwise lack the resources to purchase food, SNAP not only reduces hunger but also boosts our economy. Nationally, SNAP has been found to have an economic multiplier of \$1.79. Last year, SNAP brought approximately \$7.1 billion in benefits to California, producing about \$12.7 billion in total economic activity.<sup>1</sup>



*A child who lost her home in the Tubbs Fire receiving food at Redwood Empire Food Bank while her parents meet with CalFresh outreach workers. Photo by Kevin West.*

Disaster SNAP provides this economic boost when communities need it most. Following the historically devastating fires in Sonoma County, for example, SNAP brought \$1.5 million in benefits that are helping families put food on the table and the community to rebound.<sup>2</sup>

## IMPLICATIONS AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL

Whether in the Farm Bill, the Budget, or any other legislative vehicle, we ask every California member of Congress to protect and strengthen SNAP which reduces hunger for some four million Californians while bolstering our economy. Congress must preserve the fundamental structure of SNAP, meaning no block grants, no structural changes and no cuts to this vital program.

**Instead, we ask that all members of our delegation co-sponsor [H.R. 1276](#), which would make key improvements such as providing an adequate benefit to households in need.**

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<sup>1</sup>California Budget & Policy Center. <http://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/calfresh-reduces-hunger-every-county-california-changes-federal-level-cut-benefits/>.

<sup>2</sup>The Press Democrat. <http://www.pressdemocrat.com/news/7670960-181/additional-15-million-in-calfresh>