

2023 Farm Bill: Congress Must Pursue a Bold & Equitable Vision for SNAP

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The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the nation's most important anti-hunger program, assisting 41 million people to put food on the table monthly. SNAP provides essential nutritional support for diverse populations, including families with children, older adults, and people with disabilities.

Yet eligibility rules in SNAP and other public benefit programs have **historical roots in anti-Black racism, xenophobia, and false narratives about people experiencing poverty**. SNAP policies have focused too narrowly on individual choice and behavior, perpetuating systemic inequities rather than eradicating the underlying causes of poverty and hunger. CLASP and the **Community Partnership Group** propose a bold vision for transforming SNAP into a program that meets the needs of participants; values their lived experiences; promotes trust, respect, and opportunity; and rejects racism, xenophobia, and false narratives. As Congress debates SNAP benefits and policies during the 2023 Farm Bill reauthorization, we urge lawmakers to consider our priorities for achieving a bold and equitable vision.

SNAP Benefits Must Be Sufficient

SNAP must offer benefits enabling people and families to purchase the amount and types of food that meet their needs. Pandemic-era provisions such as emergency allotments improved people's economic and emotional wellbeing but have since expired or are set to expire. A long-overdue update to the **Thrifty Food Plan**, the formula used for SNAP benefits, increased benefits by 21 percent, raising the benefit's purchasing power for the first time in nearly 50 years and lifting millions out of poverty. Congress must ensure that SNAP benefits reflect the true cost of food and the diverse dietary needs of participants. We urge Congress to:

- Replace the Thrifty Food Plan with the **Low-Cost Food Plan** to reflect the cost of healthy meals more accurately,
- Adjust benefit levels more than once per year during periods of high inflation,
- Boost the minimum benefit level, currently \$23 per month for a two-person household,
- Lift the cap on the shelter deduction to account for rising housing costs,
- Add a deduction for student loan payments, recognizing that these funds aren't available to purchase food or other necessities,
- Expand access to fruits and vegetables by making **Double Up Food Bucks** and other federal programs aimed at boosting consumption of produce widely available at grocery stores, and
- Develop a long-term plan to protect participants from **Electronic Benefits Card (EBT) skimming** and restore stolen benefits.

SNAP Must Be Available to All Who Need It

SNAP is a critical support, but too many restrictions limit access. People shouldn't be denied food because of where they live or if their employers cut their hours. Policymakers must change rules that block access to vital nutritional supports, which disproportionately harm people of color.

Beyond making benefits available to residents of Puerto Rico and other territories, Congress should eliminate:

- The **five-year bar on SNAP benefits** for lawfully present immigrants,
- The **ban on people with felony drug convictions** receiving benefits,
- **Time limits** for people who are unemployed or underemployed and neither live with dependent children nor have a documented disability,
- Restrictions on receiving SNAP and aid through the **Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations** in the same month, and
- **Additional requirements for college students** with low incomes.

In addition, we urge Congress to make the USDA hold states accountable for expanding access to SNAP to eligible participants and improving timeliness and quality of service.

Trust, Respect & Trauma-Informed Care Must Guide Program Administration

To overcome systemic inequities and a legacy of exclusion, the SNAP program must build trust and confidence among participants and ground policies and practices in respect and trauma-informed care. We urge Congress to:

- Simplify application processes and **remove administrative barriers** to make it easier to apply for or renew benefits,
- Reject restrictions on participant food choices and purchases and **lift prohibitions on hot or prepared foods**,
- Focus fraud prevention efforts on EBT skimming rather than harming and disrespecting participants by treating them as criminals, and
- Value **participants' perspectives and lived experience** by involving them in program design, implementation, and evaluation while also compensating them for their time.

SNAP Must Encourage Economic Opportunity

Finally, we encourage Congress to support employment and training programs that are voluntary and provide access to greater opportunities for education, better jobs, and supportive services.

Congress should eliminate policies that discourage work or savings, such as gross income limits, asset limits, or counting of income earned in subsidized employment programs.

*This draws on **A Community-Driven Anti-Racist Vision for SNAP**, produced by CLASP's Income and Work Supports policy team in partnership with the **Community Partnership Group**, a diverse group of activists who partner with nonprofits, administering agencies, and policymakers to ensure their work is grounded in the expertise of people directly impacted by poverty and/or antipoverty policies.*