



A BRIGHTER, HEALTHIER FUTURE FOR SNAP

How Benefit Restrictions and Administrative Change
Can Ensure a more Effective SNAP

Abstract

SNAP is the largest and most important food program in the Federal Safety Net. Unfortunately, it does not currently meet its dual mandate of reducing food insecurity and improving nutritional outcomes. While it does reduce food insecurity for participants, their nutritional outcomes are equivalent or worse than income eligible peers. This paper explores administrative changes and benefit restrictions that make SNAP more efficient as well as improve nutritional outcomes for participants.

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Professor H. Pickett

"The first essential component of social justice is adequate food for all mankind. Food is the moral right of all who are born into this world."

~ Norman Borlaug, biologist and humanitarian

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"To admit the existence of hunger in America is to confess that we have failed in meeting the most sensitive and painful of human needs. To admit the existence of widespread hunger is to cast doubt of the efficacy of our whole system. If we can't solve the problem of hunger in our society, one wonders if we can resolve any of the great social issues before the nation."

-Senator George McGovern, 1969

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Everyone has felt the pangs of hunger at some point in their lives. This may have arisen because of a lost lunch box during school lunch or a skipped meal ~~on a work~~ during a hectic work week, ~~packed with meetings~~. Fortunately, these feelings are often quickly resolved. Schoolchildren raid the pantry for snacks after school, and it is easy to ~~carve out time for dinner as the work day comes to a close~~ satiate one's appetite with dinner. Forty-two million Americans, however, are classified as food insecure. For them, not knowing where their next meal is coming from is a worryingly routine ordeal; a constant companion that saps productivity and health. A common misconception is that food insecurity and hunger are synonymous, but a closer look says otherwise. Food insecurity is different than hunger, to be clear. Hunger, as defined by the USDA, is an individual level psychological condition stemming from a consistent lack of access to food. Food insecurity, on the other hand, food insecurity indicates that a household lacks access to affordable, nutritious food. Food insecurity is related to, but not synonymous with hunger. However, it is still a serious issue that affects millions of Americans every year.

Commented [MM3]: "Everyone has felt the pangs of hunger at some point, whether it's a lost lunchbox during school lunch or a skipped meal during a hectic work week." Condense. Kinda hard to read right now.

Commented [MM4]: "it is easy to satiate one's hunger at dinner" or like, "double-up on dinner to satiate one's hunger."

Commented [MM5]: How about something like, "42 million Americans don't get to enjoy this luxury" or like, "to 42 million Americans, feeling full is a luxury."

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Commented [MM7]: "misconception is that food insecurity and hunger are synonymous, but a closer look says otherwise" or something like that. This sounds a little too informal.

Commented [MM8]: "insecurity" not capitalized?

Commented [MM9]: Yeah see 2 comments up. Maybe put this earlier? Also, don't start two sentences with "food insecurity"

Commented [MJ10]: Does it work? – find a better word "aim"?

Commented [MM11]: So right now this reads that America is a resource for these citizens.... Or do you mean the system of safety nets is the resource? Restructure the sentence.

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As a resource for these citizens, America has created a system of safety nets that aim to connect people to the food they need. Over seventy different programs of varying sizes seek to address food insecurity issues, such as the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), Women Infants and Children (WIC), and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). The largest, and most notable program, is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formally known as the Food Stamp Program (Aussenberg & Colello, Domestic Food Assistance:

Summary of Programs, 2017). ~~After~~ Through a comprehensive look at SNAP's effectiveness at reducing food insecurity and promoting nutrition, this paper finds mixed results. On one hand, the most current research suggests that SNAP reduces food insecurity. On the other hand, the program fails to fulfill its dual charge of improving nutrition at the same time. The nutritional outcomes of SNAP participants are not positively impacted by membership in the program. As I will come to show, SNAP can better fulfill its dual mandate by restricting the foods that can be bought using benefits, as well as eliminating inefficient anti-fraud initiatives, and continuing integration with other anti-hunger programs. Implementing these changes would make America's biggest food assistance program more efficient and effective, leading to better outcomes for some of the most vulnerable Americans.

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This \$70 billion program has seen dramatic expansions in recent years. During the Great Recession, enrollment in SNAP rose ~~dramatically~~ faster than ever before. Over this time frame, SNAP participation grew from 26 million individuals ~~in 2007-(2007)~~ to 33 million by the end of the recession in 2009. Enrollment continued to rise until enrollment peaked at 47 million individuals in 2013 – four years after the recession had officially ended. This ~~dramatic~~ expansion was financed by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to a magnitude of \$45.2 billion, assisting families in the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression.

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~~great depression.~~

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Why examine SNAP now?

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Pundits and policymakers across the political spectrum are concerned about the implications of SNAP's swelling enrollment and program costs, the increased prevalence of food insecurity among children, as well as other consequences the program has for society. The CATO institute, for example, finds ~~that the SNAP's~~ high enrolment and rising budget merit widespread reductions, expanded work requirements, and shifting control of the program to states. While the reasoning's behind these recommendations do not hold up under scrutiny, they showcase the concern surrounding SNAP in recent years (Tanner, 2013). ~~There has also been~~ Researchers and policymakers have paid significant attention paid to SNAP funding in the next farm bill, which is up for debate in 2018 (Burwood-Taylor, 2017). Funding cuts would have massive implications on millions of dependent Americans – reducing their benefits or pushing them off the program. Sweeping changes, like those suggested by CATO, or cutting the program

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from the farm bill do not truly address some of the problems within SNAP. However, they highlight the desire to make SNAP a more efficient and effective program.

Other groups, ~~such as libertarians and some conservatives, have tried~~ **have tried** to make the case that SNAP should be eliminated entirely, as it is supported by tax funds - which forces redistribution of private wealth. These arguments flounder, however, when one considers the implications stemming from individuals creating an optimal society from **John Rawls'** famous original position. Rawls argues that **from this unbiased** point of view, where one does not know who they will be in the world, people would choose to have fair equality of opportunity, a palate of basic liberties, and a basic safety net. This safety net would provide the means to support a dignified life and assuage the suffering of those who had slipped into poverty, while still incentivizing individual action to alleviate their situation. **An effective nutritional program supported by tax revenues** would fit into this definition of a safety net, ~~supported by government tax revenues.~~ **tax revenues.** If these taxes do not infringe upon the tax bases' basic liberties, it is acceptable to collect funds to provide for those suffering from poverty. Translated into the real world, these principles guide us to support an effective food assistance program.

Because SNAP is our nation's largest food assistance program, **it is important and necessary to determine if the program achieves its stated goals and whether if** it could be modified to better respond to the needs of food insecure Americans. **As discussed previously,** recent political debate adds pressure to this mandate. **Evidence that SNAP reduces food insecurity is mixed,** though the bulk of recent empirical evidence supports the hypothesis that the program has a positive effect (Andreyeva, Tripp, & Schwartz, 2015). **Furthermore, many** ~~academies argue research shows~~ **that SNAP has not eliminated nutritional problems and has suffers from inefficiencies within its administrative structure high administrative costs.** I propose that SNAP should be modified in several ways to address these issues and better fulfill its dual mandate. **Administrative costs can be reduced by lowering barriers to enrollment, curbing anti-fraud initiatives, and integrating smaller nutrition programs into SNAP. This would, allowing** SNAP to increase benefits ~~to recipients, for recipients.~~ **Going further, perhaps contentiously,** SNAP benefits should be restricted to favor food with greater nutritional value, and ~~programs initiatives, like SNAP doubling programs,~~ **that incentivize healthy purchases choices** should be expanded. **These changes will lead to improved diets and stronger local economies**

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Commented [MM26]: Who's this dude? I'm confused

Commented [MM27]: What is it? Is it where "people would choose to have fair equality?" If so, then maybe say that more explicitly?

Commented [MM28]: I think you're jumping to this conclusion a little bit too fast. Or maybe you need to explain this reasoning a lot more. Why does that fit into this definition of safety net? Is this a philosophical perspective? Dig deeper

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Commented [MM31]: Where's the data though?

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Commented [MM33]: Maybe split this sentence up and specifically say, "SNAP should....." or "the government should do this with SNAP"

Commented [MM34]: Can you be more specific? What are "healthy purchases?"

through SNAP's countercyclical multiplier effect – boosting educational and health outcomes, especially for young children. If policymakers can use these lessons to craft more effective SNAP policy, the program will better serve food insecure families and have far reaching, long-term, economic and health effects across America.

A Brief History of the United States Largest Food Assistance Program: SNAP

Out of Dire Need, Food Stamps Arise

The first food stamp programs were created over 80 years ago in the late 1930's as a redistributive effort to combat both the widespread food surpluses and unemployment during the Great Depression. ~~It is worth noting that in~~ these first trial programs, an emphasis was placed on purchases of agricultural products and perishable foods. These programs were limited in scope and scale, fading away as the depression ~~passed past~~. Following the end of World War Two, the US government began to fund the National School Lunch Program to ~~improve address~~ ~~deficiencies in~~ child nutrition, but did not try to address food insecurity in adults. ~~Eventually, the need for a more comprehensive food assistance program was recognized. Finally, after a long hiatus,~~ the first food stamp programs resembling today's system began to arise under President ~~Kennedy's Johnson's~~ administration. The Food Stamp Act of 1964 was passed ~~under President Johnson~~ with the express goal of providing improved levels of nutrition among low-income households. By 1974, 15 million Americans were enrolled, and the ~~Food Stamp Program (FSP – which has now become SNAP)~~ was launched nationwide. A few years later, the Food Stamp Act of 1977 passed with bipartisan support, ~~better further~~ outlining eligibility and streamlining access for families in need. (USDA - FNS, 2014).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990's small changes were made to the Food Stamp Program, ~~increasing its size and scope.~~ Enrollment grew, expanding to a peak of 27 million individuals in 1994 before shrinking in size to 18 million people by the turn of the century. This was largely due to the booming economy of the latter half of the decade. These changes in enrollment indicate the FSP's countercyclical nature. ~~When the program is needed most, rolls enrollment~~ expands and people use the aid they are entitled to. As the years unfolded, the FSP underwent drastic changes, both in scope and implementation

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Commented [MM38]: maybe a background of this too...? Like where did this come from? And how does it relate to SNAP

Commented [MM39]: what happened between Kennedy and Johnson?

Commented [MM40]: So now it's FSP and not SNAP anymore? Or are they different things?

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SNAP in the 21st Century

The most notable changes to the FSP were enacted after the turn of the century. First was the introduction of Electronic Balance Transfer (EBT) cards that eliminated the use of physical food stamp coupons that program participants used previously instead of cash. EBT cards function much like a debit card, and are swiped at participating stores. They are easier to keep track of, harder to use fraudulently, and reportedly reduce the stigma SNAP participants feel in checkout lines from using benefits. The second major change occurred in 2008 when the Farm Bill, an omnibus piece of legislation passed every five years that serves as the U.S. Government's main agricultural policy tool, officially renamed the FSP to SNAP¹ (Imhoff, 2012). This change reflected an effort to incorporate EBT cards, as well as reduce the stigmatization that had come to be associated with the old name (USDA - FNS, 2014). Furthermore, this alteration reflected changing language in food assistance policy. In the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, the same year as the Farm Bill authorized the name change, wording of the law increasingly indicated a dual responsibility of the legislation. The bill states, "[The limited income of low income houses] contributes to hunger and malnutrition among members of such households... To alleviate such hunger and malnutrition, a supplemental nutrition assistance program is herein authorized which will permit low-income households to obtain a more nutritious diet" (United States Senate and House of Representatives, 2008). This bill, which drew enough bipartisan support to override a presidential veto, sets forth the twin goals for federal anti-hunger policy: improved food security and nutrition. It is important to remember these goals, and ensure they are both being met by the current program.

SNAP has grown both in size and scope since 2000. As illustrated in figure 1, the program expanded from a budget of \$17 billion to just over \$70 billion¹ (down from \$79 billion in 2013) and from 17 participants to 44 million. These dramatic increases are largely due to the Great Recession and its long recovery, during which food insecurity spiked and the government appropriated additional funds for the program in the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment

¹ Adjusted to 2017 dollars. make this the same font as the rest of the text. I think this is like Calibri?

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Commented [MM47]: Explain what the "changing language" was that you mentioned like a sentence ago

Commented [SK48]: When did FSP become SNAP?

Commented [MM49]: How has it grown? "SNAP has grown financially" or like "SNAP's budget has grown" or something along those lines

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Act (ARRA) (Rosenbaum, 2013). ARRA also expanded the amount of time and benefits families could receive, further helping families that slipped into poverty during these trying times. These ARRA funded benefit increases ended in 2013, commensurate with the end of the most drastic effects of the recession. The scope of change should come as no surprise; the recession was the largest ever faced by SNAP or FSP. ~~As the~~The economy has recovered ~~and while?~~ SNAP enrollment has fallen as expected. On a whole, however, the SNAP budget ~~has~~ closely mirrored enrollment, ~~indicating that the program effectively expands to meet the needs of food insecure Americans in times of need, indicating that it effectively responds to increased need amongst Americans~~ (Figure 2) (USDA, 2017).

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Commented [MM52]: Like budget has grown so enrollment has grown? I'd be more explicit.

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Who is eligible to receive SNAP?

Current eligibility standards are based on household composition, as well as gross income and asset tests, meaning that there is no one-size-fits-all eligibility test. Monthly income must fall below 130% of the federal poverty guidelines (\$31,525/yr. for a family of four), though for households with elderly or disabled members, restrictions are relaxed or lifted (Aussenberg & Colello, Domestic Food Assistance: Summary of Programs, 2017). Most SNAP households easily meet the income test. Forty-two percent of SNAP household's incomes were at or below half of the poverty line (12,150/yr. for a family of four), while the average income was only 59% of the line (USDA - FNS, 2016). These low incomes suggest that SNAP benefits are being used by families that need them the most. At these reduced levels of income, SNAP benefits have an enormous impact on household budgets, improving diets and lives.

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Commented [MJ56]: Provide figure

Commented [MM57]: Maybe break down how people spend their money? Like how much of their monthly income is food, so then use that proportionally to show mathematically how important this is.

Who receives SNAP?

The majority of SNAP participants are not working age adults. In 2015, 44% of participants were minors, while another 11% were over the age of 60. An additional 10% were disabled nonelderly adults (USDA - FNS, 2016). Thus, they are more dependent on parents, guardians, or caregivers. Of the remaining participants, able bodied adults without dependents are limited to three months of benefits in any 36-month period, and benefits are categorically denied to strikers, noncitizens, post-secondary students, and drug felons. These measures reduce

the number of individuals enrolled in the program and may provide an incentive for individuals to find employment or other long term solutions to food insecurity (Aussenberg, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): A Primer on Eligibility and Benefits, 2014).

Commented [MM58]: Isn't that a good thing? Maybe put it in a way that's not good? Like it's not good that they have to find employment? Bc if it's a good thing, then why SNAP?

Benefits are calculated based on the USDA's Thrifty Food Plan (TFP). Per the USDA, the TFP "provides a representative healthful and minimal cost meal plan that shows how a nutritious diet may be achieved with limited resources." While it fulfills an individual's short-term nutritional needs, it is not intended to be used for long periods of time. (Carlson, Lino, WenYen, Hanson, & Basiotis, 2007). Benefits can be used for most food products that are not alcohol, tobacco, hot foods for immediate consumption, and vitamins. Some argue that SNAP budget and individual benefits should be drastically increased, as these benefits alone often do not cover a family's grocery bills throughout the month. Covering a recipient's entire food budget, however, is not the purpose of the program. As stated in its name, SNAP is "supplemental" and should be used in conjunction with a recipient's discretionary budget to meet a household's food needs. This relieves some of the pressure on thinly stretched budgets and ensures that those who cut their food budgets to pay other bills still have money to eat. Increasing benefits to meet a household's entire food need, however, would necessitate drastic increases in its overall budget. At a time where budget cuts have been proposed for SNAP, increasing its budget does not seem politically feasible (Burwood-Taylor, 2017). SNAP is intended to support a nutritious diet and thwart food insecurity, but must remain economically and politically feasible as a program viable at the same time.

Commented [MM59]: Give us a highlight of what the TFP is?

Commented [MM60]: Do you benefits or the budget that's allocated to SNAP?

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The SNAP program as it stands today is vastly different than it was at inception. Since 1969, enrollment has increased over 1400%, and budgets by 29,000% to meet the needs of a larger population, higher enrollments, and changing responses to food insecurity. Constant review and analysis of its effects are necessary to ensure that the program continues to address the complex needs of those it serves.

Does SNAP accomplish its goals?

There has been considerable scholarly debate as to the effectiveness of SNAP at reducing food insecurity and improving nutrition in recent years. Newly published studies shift the

balance of evidence in favor of the position that SNAP does reduce food insecurity. A comprehensive review of recent studies by [Andreyeva et al.](#) shows that enrollment in snap reduces the food insecurity of participants (Andreyeva, Tripp, & Schwartz, 2015). This paper looked at twenty-five peer reviewed studies published between 2003 and 2014, making it one of the most comprehensive and definitive analyses of current literature on SNAP. While previous work on SNAP's effects has been hazy, this summary work paints a more definitive picture.

Commented [MM62]: I think you need to introduce this dude like a lot more... is he a professor? Give credit to him to make him more legitimate

Despite SNAP's effectiveness at reducing food insecurity, evidence shows that it has not eliminated nutritional problems for participants. A FSP survey in 1996 discovered that "substantial numbers" of participants were lacking in daily nutritional allowances (Currie, 2008). This means that while SNAP funds allow recipients to attain daily caloric allowances, the

Commented [MM63]: Can you get ahold of these numbers?

sources for these calories do not come from nutritious, healthy sources. Furthermore, [Andreyeva et al.'s these](#) studies find that SNAP participants have "low or significantly lower dietary

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quality" than their income eligible peers or people with higher incomes (Andreyeva, Tripp, & Schwartz, 2015). A USDA analysis of foods typically purchased by SNAP households found that twenty cents out of every food purchase dollar were spent on sweetened beverages, desserts, and snacks. Only forty cents were spent on basic food items like fruits, vegetables, meat and bread.

After meat, poultry, and seafood, sweetened beverages were the second most purchased item by SNAP households, making up 9.3% all ~~expenditures~~ ~~expenditures~~ ~~(Sweetened beverages were~~

Commented [MM65]: This number doesn't seem like it's that big of a deal? What does this mean?

~~the 5th most purchased item for non-SNAP households)~~ to a cost of \$608 million dollars. ~~In contrast, sweetened beverages were the 5th most purchased item for non-SNAP households~~

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(USDA - FNS, 2016). These findings are problematic, and align with analyses by [Marion Nestle](#), one of the most prominent and ~~(typo?)~~ health writers of our time, who said "SNAP is a multibillion-dollar taxpayer subsidy of the soda industry." Studies also find that diets of children

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on SNAP, while adequate, have lower levels of nutrients than ~~their income eligible~~ peers (Andreyeva, Tripp, & Schwartz, 2015). This effect is more pronounced in younger children (Currie, 2008). These nutritional deficiencies are cause for concern.

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Commented [MM68]: Who is "their peers?" the children's peers? Or SNAP's peers? If it's SNAP's peers, what are those programs?

The Repercussions of Low Food Security and Inadequate Nutrition

Commented [MM69]: So after reading this entire section, I think that maybe you should just take one or two ideas at most from here and just expand on it a lot

Inadequate nutrition and low food security has significant longstanding negative repercussions on an individual's health and economic success. ~~Recent literature describes~~ ~~the~~

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importance of good nutrition during pre- and post-natal development has been well documented. A fetus or young child adapts to its environment; and assumes that these features will remain as the child grows. When a very young child is nutritionally deprived, it adapts its metabolism to deal with food shortages. If this environment is not perpetuated as a child develops, serious metabolic problems can occur. This can lead to obesity, diabetes, or cardiovascular disease, all medical problems associated with poor health and high medical costs as an adult. Even children who experience food insecurity and poor nutrition for very short periods of time during their childhood are more likely to suffer these effects. Further, severely undernourished children are more likely to suffer have from anemia or have attention disorders (Hoynes, Schanzenbach, & Almond, 2016). These health issues have impacts on a child's development and growth, as well as economic outcomes.

The benefits of ensuring healthier, better fed children will be enormous over time. The healthcare costs associated with obesity are an excellent example of the enormous consequences of poor nutrition. ~~of the consequences of poor nutrition~~. Obesity accounted for 36% of increases in Medicare spending, and 46% of Medicaid spending in 2006. Across our entire health system, obesity accounted for more than \$2,700 per Medicare and Medicaid beneficiary (Finkelstein, Trogon, Cohen, & Dietz, 2009). If obesity can be rooted in food insecurity and nutritional deficiency in children, we should try and fix these problems at their cause, instead of waiting for the costs of obesity to present themselves in Medicare and Medicaid spending expenditures. The benefits ensuring healthier, better fed children will be enormous over time.

Access to adequate food and nutrition also has a significant impact on educational achievement. Food insecurity and consumption of non-nutritious food are tied to hyperactivity and aggression in children. In school children, deficiencies are linked to absenteeism, tardiness, and reduced academic performance (Currie, 2008). Furthermore, kindergarteners who experienced food insecurity suffered from reduced reading and math scores and impaired social skills. Persistent food insecurity increased the magnitude of these effects (Jyoti, Frongillo, & Jones, 2005). These problems have a long-term impact on negatively impact long-term educational and social outcomes.

Commented [MM71]: At your poster presentation, you said how people who have once experienced malnutrition early on in their lives is more likely to go back to that or experience obesity later on in their life... maybe put that? I thought that was very powerful

Commented [MM72]: Maybe have the conclusion sentence wrap up what you say? This is kind of generic and sounds like a topic sentence almost

Commented [MJ73]: find a better word

Commented [MM74]: Is this a lot? Can you give some more context with these numbers? Like does it account for most of it? 90% of it?

Commented [MM75]: Maybe have the conclusion sentence wrap up what you say? This is kind of generic and sounds like a topic sentence almost

Commented [MM76]: Perhaps talk more about implications of these educational impacts? I think this is a really great point and I know very little about it. Perhaps educate the reader more?

Fortunately, research has proven that consistent access to food assistance programs has positive ramifications for the health and economic outcomes of young children. Children who had access to the Food Stamp Program starting before birth to age five enjoyed a variety of benefits compared peers lacking this aid. These children were significantly less likely to suffer from metabolic syndrome symptoms, which range from obesity and high blood pressure to diabetes and heart disease. These benefits extend into adulthood for these children, saving them from expensive and disabling medical conditions later in life (Hoynes, Schanzenbach, & Almond, 2016). When the academic benefits of an adequate diet for children are factored in alongside health benefits, it is easy to see how SNAP can lead to improved outcomes for recipients in the long run. Potential recipients, as well as the American tax base deserve a better SNAP that meets individual needs and prevents enormous future costs.

A Brighter, Healthier Future: Two Broad Recommendations for a more Effective SNAP

Address Expensive Administrative Costs

SNAP has been attacked in recent years for its increasing budgets and mixed results, ~~by many on the political right. Across the aisle, many liberals focus.~~ Others focus on how the program is not doing enough, and needs to be further expanded to reach more Americans. In a strange twist of fate, both sides' opinions are probably correct. Millions of dollars could be freed for recipients by reducing ineffective anti-trafficking measures, reducing costly barriers to enrollment, and better integrating the application for similar food assistance programs such as SNAP and WIC. Utilizing money freed up by these endeavors would satisfy each side. Benefits could be expanded, increasing budgets could be suppressed, and outcomes for SNAP recipients could be improved by implementing these minor reforms.

Commented [MM77]: Wait what's the right side saying that's wrong about SNAP?

The issue of SNAP fraud and trafficking is a common discussion, ~~but the facts do not support such arguments; it shouldn't be.~~ Stigmatizing and discriminatory myths about "Welfare Queens" fraudulently collecting massive benefits have been part of the American dialogue about welfare since the 1970's. In 2013 Republican lawmakers tried to pass legislation that would save \$30 billion over a decade by "eliminating loopholes, waste, fraud and abuse." However, an in depth look at proposed policy changes reveals that savings would have resulted from cutting

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Commented [MJ79]: reorder?

funding and restricting benefits, rather than addressing fraud in SNAP (Schnurer, 2013). These notions and efforts only serve to stigmatize SNAP further and are unfounded. SNAP benefit trafficking is illegal; punishable by fines and imprisonment. Research shows that not only is SNAP fraud and trafficking minimal, but also that many anti-trafficking measures are often more expensive than the waste they prevent. For example, California spent \$40 million on an anti-fraud program that finger printed SNAP applicant, but the fraud this program was intended to prevent paled in comparison to its implementation costs (Currie, 2008). We should do away with these fiscally irresponsible anti-fraud programs. The rate of SNAP benefit trafficking is very low compared to other federal programs. A study from 2009-2011 estimated that only three cents of every dollar spent on SNAP is trafficked (Aussenberg, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): A Primer on Eligibility and Benefits, 2014). For a federal program of this size, this rate is especially low. According to the Office of Management and Budget, the Medicaid program and Earned Income Tax Credit programs have improper payment rates of 9.8% and 23.8% respectively (Viechnicki, Egers, Greene, Lorenze, & Olson, 2016). In comparison, SNAP's rate of 1.3% pales to these larger programs and more substantial leaks (Aussenberg, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): A Primer on Eligibility and Benefits, 2014). Those concerned with levels of fraud in government programs should turn their attention to larger areas of waste before wasting time and money addressing relatively minor issues with SNAP.

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The application process to obtain SNAP results in inefficiencies. Simply applying to receive SNAP benefits can be a time intensive task, especially for individuals without access to the internet or reliable transportation. There are widespread reports of applicants having to take multiple trips to the welfare office, with many taking several hours, to obtain benefits. The mounting cost of transportation left some potential applicants to abandon enrolling altogether, leaving their food needs unmet. Further, applications are long and complicated, requiring a range of documents to prove income, employment, dependents, and/or disability status. Often, applications have invasive or seemingly out of place questions as well. For example, in Nevada and Nebraska, applicants were asked if they sold blood or plasma, and factored these funds into income metrics. In other states, applicants were asked if they owned burial plots (Currie, 2008). Complicated applications and ludicrous questions only drive away applicants who need SNAP.

Commented [MM82]: I really like this paragraph!

Streamlining coordination between federal anti-hunger programs could also help reduce administrative costs, freeing funds to be used on benefits instead of supporting bloated bureaucracy. This has already begun, but should be widely supported and continued. WIC (a food benefits program for Women, Infants and Children), for example, uses the same EBT system as SNAP (Aussenberg & Colello, Domestic Food Assistance: Summary of Programs, 2017). It does not seem infeasible to have an application for WIC benefits as an addendum to a SNAP application. Merging and coordinating programs could save taxpayers from footing the bill for multiple bureaucracies supporting similar programs that could conceivably be better integrated. The savings from these measures should be distributed back into the system, improving the quantity of benefits SNAP participants receive.

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No more Empty Calories. Embracing Nutrition

While the initiatives outlined above will make SNAP a more efficient program, their implementation will not necessarily help SNAP address its failure to improve nutritional outcomes for its participants. To achieve the neglected half of its dual mandate, SNAP benefits should be restricted to use on foods that are healthy and nutritious.

Government spending should not be used on programs or products that reduce (or contribute to reduced) health outcomes. It would be outlandish to suggest that federal or state funds should go towards the purchase of cigarettes, alcohol, or other addictive and harmful drugs or products. This reasoning can be applied barring the use of SNAP benefits on foods that have little or no nutritional value, and whose consumption have proven negative health consequences for consumers. This change would fit SNAP's dual mandate and better serve to achieve the programs goals of alleviating hunger and malnutrition and promoting nutritious diets through "normal channels of trade" (United States Senate and House of Representatives, 2008). This change also aligns with expert recommendations for our anti-hunger safety net. For example, Janet Currie, in her book "the Invisible Safety Net," concludes at the end of her chapter on SNAP, WIC, and the National School Lunch Program that "Food stamp benefits should be restricted to the purchase of nutritious foods." The time has come to implement this common-sense restriction in our nation's largest food and nutrition program.

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Recently, the USDA has started to change SNAP to incentivize purchases of more nutritious staple foods. Laws have changed to target businesses that use loopholes in SNAP's

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rules. Under new regulations, 50% of a store's gross sales cannot come from prepared foods that can be heated or cooked on site. This effectively stops "you-buy-we-fry" stores that skirt SNAP's prohibition on hot food products from operating. These new regulations also force stores to stock a minimum amount of staple foods. As it stands, snack foods and deserts and most beverages are not considered staple foods. This aids SNAP recipients looking for healthier purchases, as retailers are incentivized to stock staple foods to capture the SNAP market. Owners of stores with limited shelf space are effectively forced to limit the number of snacks that they stock if they want to continue attracting shoppers using SNAP benefits. This affords SNAP recipients better options on store shelves, allowing for more diverse, nutritious, diets.

This same logic could apply for SNAP recipients that reside in food deserts who suffer from inadequate access to larger food retailers. In many cities, for example, accessing a supermarket can be difficult, leaving consumer to rely on convenience stores as a primary way to obtain food. New restrictions pressures retailers who want to retain SNAP customers to make the necessary changes to their offered wares. If retailers in food deserts want to continue their access to the billion-dollar market of food stamp recipients, they will stock foods that can be purchased with benefits. As such, this new policy may benefit these customers, who now have increased access to staple foods such as fruits and vegetables, canned goods, or deli meat that previously were not stocked in favor of cheap, unhealthy snacks. These strides to limit unhealthy options and increase buying options should be expanded by placing further restrictions on using SNAP benefits for foods that have limited nutritional value or high concentrations of sugar and fat.

Some critics would construe restrictions on purchases using SNAP funds as an infringement upon individual rights of autonomy and self-determination because these restrictions limit what participants can do with personal benefits. While these arguments are founded in legitimate concerns about autonomy, in the case of SNAP, it is acceptable to limit autonomy because improving nutrition is a stated goal of the program. unfounded. When one considers that snap is intended only as a supplement to a family's budget, and by applying for SNAP, participants accept the fact that benefits can only be used on a limited pool of goods. In this case, those goods happen to be food products. As is indicated by the name, SNAP is supposed to supplement and assist a family's food budget. It is not designed to cover all a family's food needs, rather it provides a means to increase consumption and allows income to be

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Commented [MJ92]: Change – founded on something, but other concerns override them

Justifiable to limit autonomy

STATE and defend principle

Limitations that are part of the nature of the program

Justifiable because program is oriented at improving health AND you contract to participate

Make the case that the program already has limitations to serve nutritional needs, not other needs, we assume that these funds need to be used on nutritious food

Acknowledge not too extreme

Organize paragraphs clearly

used for other things. These proposed restrictions do not limit SNAP recipients' liberty to use their discretionary income, which they are free to use on snacks and sodas, but it does prevent benefits that are explicitly intended to improve nutrition and reduce food insecurity from being misused.

The notion that SNAP benefits should be restricted to healthier, more nutritious foods is not new. In fact, the argument has been levied so many times that the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) prepared a briefing detailing the organization's arguments against restricting the use of SNAP benefits (USDA - FNS, 2007). Their arguments, unfortunately, are insufficient and even contradictory in the light of current evidence, including some presented in USDA publications. I will outline and refute or offer a solution for each of the FNS points, as they are the main empirical arguments levied against restrictions on SNAP benefits.

The FNS argues that no clear standards exist for defining foods as good, bad, or healthy. Federal dietary guidelines apply to a total diet. The USDA continues to say that it would be too challenging to determine which foods should be classified as "healthy" or not. This explanation is unsatisfactory. To quote Ben Jonson, "The fact of twilight does not mean you cannot tell day from night." While some foods may be difficult to categorize as healthy or not, others have no place in a healthy diet. Soda, chips, and pastries, for example are examples of empty calories – foods that supply food energy but little or no other nutrition. All food products and businesses are vetted by the USDA or state and local governments. Developing a more comprehensive vetting system based on nutritional outcomes would have positive ramifications on long-term public health.

If the USDA is concerned about the cost of increased regulation, it could require food companies to pay for nutritional vetting of new products. Products that pass a basic vettingscreening test would be eligible to be purchased using SNAP benefits. Products that did not pass or were not put up for vetting testing would be ineligible. This system would pass the cost of vetting foods onto producers looking to have their food introduced into a \$66 billion market. The USDA anticipates this counterargument, stating that "[food producers] would be expected to pass the cost of the requirement onto consumers in the form of higher prices." This argument is shortsighted, shortsighted; however, the cost of vetting would be very small applied across each unit of product, especially in the long run. the cost of vetting would be very small,

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~~especially in the long run.~~ Furthermore, companies may be wary about increasing prices for customers with tight budgets. Price increases could push consumers to switch to a competitors' product. This solution would address the USDA's concern that implementation of healthy food standards would increase program costs, increasing the political palatability of this change.

The FNS goes on to say that restrictions may be ineffective in changing the purchases of SNAP participants. As stated earlier, however, it is contrary to the programs mandate to allow benefits to be used on non-nutritious, calorie dense foods with little to no nutritional value. SNAP participants are free to use discretionary income to pay for these foods, but government benefits should not apply to them. Federal funds should not subsidize poor health and diet decisions. Even if SNAP participants continue to eat these products, it will not be encouraged through the program.

The FNS concludes its report by saying ~~that~~, "No evidence exists that the Food Stamp Program contributes to poor diet quality." At the time of this article's publication (2007) this may have been the case. Subsequent research, however, some conducted by the USDA itself, directly contradicts this statement. New research finds major issues in the diets of SNAP participants, even in comparison to SNAP eligible non-participants. A comprehensive analysis of twenty-five studies on dietary quality of Americans by SNAP participation status finds that "SNAP participants are struggling more than income-eligible and higher income nonparticipants to meet key dietary guidelines." SNAP participants have worse nutritional outcomes than even their SNAP eligible peers (Andreyeva, Tripp, & Schwartz, 2015). Further, a USDA FNS report, published in 2015, reported several conclusions that contradict the 2007 memo. Notably, the review finds that SNAP participants obtain a larger share of their energy from empty calories, had a lower Healthy Eating Index Score than nonparticipants, and were more likely than income-eligible, demographically comparable peers to be obese (USDA - FNS, 2015). These findings paint a picture of the nutritional failures of SNAP. Incentives and restrictions need to be reordered to ensure better diets for some of the most at risk Americans.

Another promising initiative that encourages nutritious shopping habits are farmers market benefit "doubling" programs. These programs are simple. Shoppers using EBT cards receive matching funds for money spent at markets. A family spending \$10 in benefits may get up to \$10 free through these sorts of programs. These credits are only allowed to be used at

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farmer's markets and allow shoppers to walk away with more produce than they could normally afford (Charles, 2014). These extra funds would also allow for effects discovered by Anderson and Butcher that indicate increased benefits are correlated with spending on more nutritious food. These researchers found that an additional \$30 per capita of monthly SNAP benefits raises food spending, and translates directly into buying more nutritious foods (Anderson & Butcher, 2016). Restricting benefit use on non-nutritious foods and utilizing "double benefits" systems would ensure that families are spending their increased benefits on food that will lead to positive nutritional outcomes. Expanding these programs would further incentivize spending on nutritious foods and would have the added benefit of supporting small farmers across the country.

For those still unmoved by the weight of evidence supporting a more effective SNAP, I draw attention to an issue that many researchers, politicians, and pundits fail to consider when they examine SNAP's effect: its countercyclical multiplier effect. This multiplier effect spreads SNAP benefits far beyond their original source by generating ~~For those still unmoved by the weight of evidence supporting a more effective SNAP, I draw attention to an issue that many researchers, politicians, and pundits fail to consider when they examine SNAP's effect: its countercyclical multiplier effect.~~ The use of SNAP benefits generates consumer spending, and This spurs the economy, especially during economic downturns. ~~This has and has~~ enormous economic ramifications. ~~Furthermore,~~ SNAP benefits are applied at a local level, meaning that their effects are often felt in the communities that most need them. SNAP dollars serve as a catalyst for a multiplier effect that has far reaching effects on our economy. USDA research estimates that "every \$5 in new SNAP benefits generates as much as \$9 of economic activity." For example, when a SNAP recipient purchases groceries at a supermarket, the money spent has wide-ranging economic repercussions. It allows the store owner to pay his employees, or hire new ones who in turn spend their money at shops and stores in town (who continue this effect). It also pays truck drivers and food producers as spent money ripples through the supply chain. These people go on to spend their salaries in their own communities, perpetuating this effect.

On a macro scale, SNAP has a huge effect. Every billion dollars of SNAP spending leads to an increase in GDP by 1.8 billion dollars. This economic benefit ripples is applied throughout through the economy, creating \$92.6 million in agricultural production, and 10,000 jobs

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throughout the economy. Benefit spending allows companies to expand their businesses and hire employees. These jobs range from store clerks, to truck drivers and food producers. Increased food security also bolsters productivity, as workers are healthier and more attentive during the workday. These effects continue the multiplier, sewing SNAP's benefits far and wide (USDA - ERS, 2016). These economic effects have a countercyclical effect during recessions and downturns. While SNAP benefits do roll over month to month, the nature of food insecurity incentivizes recipients to spend them quickly. Unlike other forms of aid, like tax breaks, SNAP benefits are likely to be quickly put back into the economy, providing a boost while also promoting food security at times when both effects are needed most. The economic ramifications of SNAP spending assist in painting a picture of the programs larger place in our economy.

The Road Ahead

SNAP is the cornerstone of our nutritional safety net. For 80 years, it has assisted Americans who, without it, would face reduced food security and resulting impairments to academic, economic, and health outcomes. This hardship would disproportionately affect the children, elderly, and disabled Americans who make up 60% of program participants. Many of these people are dependent on others for care and support, often unable to provide for their food needs in other ways. Supporting improvements to SNAP, such as increased administrative efficiency and benefit restrictions would help assuage the problems faced by these people, and allow the program to better fulfill its dual mandate of improving nutritional outcomes and reducing food insecurity. Investing in an effective Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program supports our nation's future, boosts the economy, and protects our most vulnerable citizens.

While this paper provides an overview of solutions to SNAP's biggest problems, there is still work to be done. Further research must be done on improving access to healthy diets in food deserts in both urban and rural settings as well as methods of reducing barriers to enrollment for SNAP eligible families. The USDA also needs to set a standard set of requirements that defines which foods generally fit into a health, nutritious diet. ~~determine which foods do not belong in a healthy, nutritious, diet.~~ Committed citizens and lawmakers must garner support for change as well as create the policy which implements recommendations listed above. Systems for determining nutritional quality for foods must be created and stores must be brought up to new

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standards. These rabbit holes are for future writers, policy advocates, and politicians to explore. Though the work may be long and hard, the results will justify the effort involved. Success will mean billions of dollars saved in healthcare expenditures, improved nutritional outcomes, and better lives for millions of Americans.

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Appendix

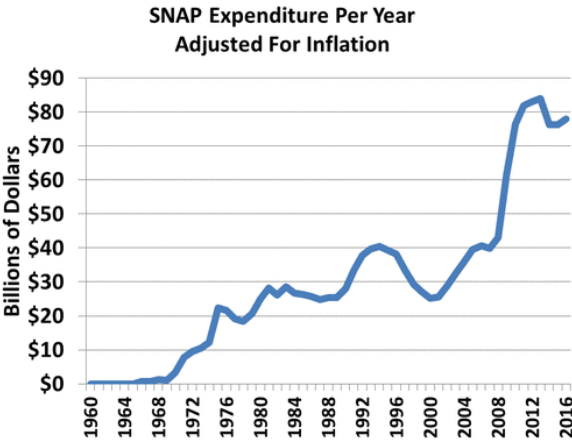


Figure 1. SNAP expenditure per year. From <http://federalsafetynet.com>

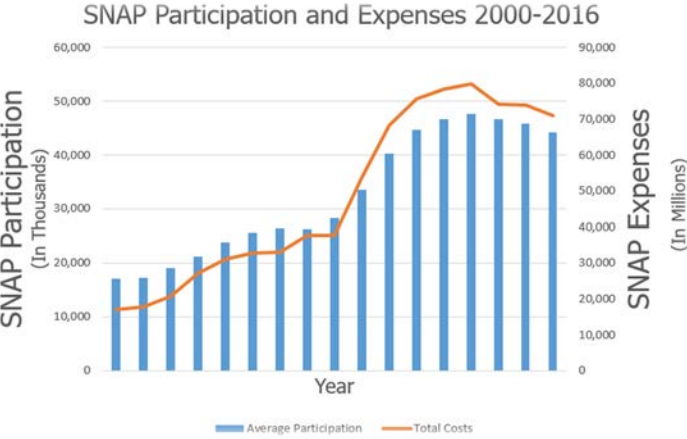


Figure 2 SNAP Participation and Expenses - 2000-2016 (USDA, 2017)

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On my honor, I have neither given nor received any unacknowledged aid on this capstone

Jonah Mackay

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