

# Federal Nutrition Assistance Programs: Evidence of Impact, Policy Shifts, and the Path Forward

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# Disclosures

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## Outline

- Evidence of impact – Look back
- Major policy shifts – Look ahead
- Path forward





# **Evidence of Impact – Look Back**



# Federal Nutrition Assistance Programs

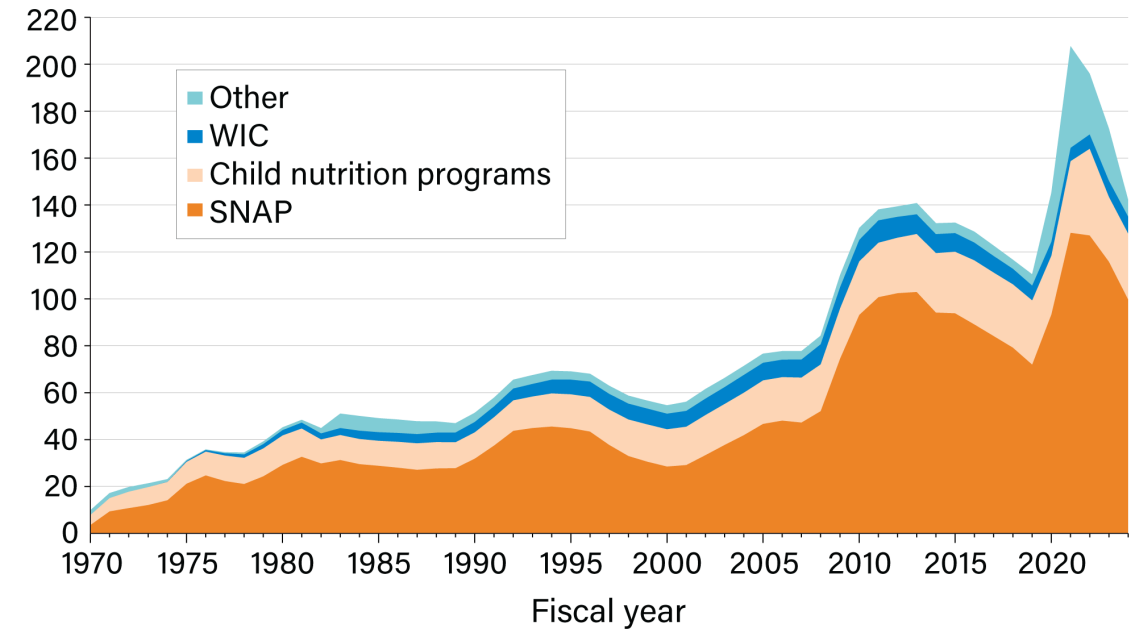
- Suite of 16+ programs that serve 1 in 4 Americans over the course of a year
- Aim to provide children and income eligible people with access to safe, nutritious, and equitable food, along with nutrition education and promotion resources that encourage healthy eating
- Typically represent 70% of the total USDA budget



# Trends in spending on USDA's food and nutrition assistance programs

## Inflation-adjusted USDA spending on food and nutrition assistance, fiscal years 1970–2024

Billion 2024 dollars



FY = Fiscal year. SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Child nutrition programs = National School Lunch Program; School Breakfast Program; Special Milk Program; related commodity costs; Child and Adult Care Food Program; and Summer Food Service Program. WIC = Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children. Other = All other program and administrative spending, including Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) in FYs 2020–24 and the Farmers to Families Food Box Program in FYs 2020–21.

Note: The figure is based on preliminary data from the September 2024 Program Information Report (Keydata) released by USDA, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) in December 2024. Spending was adjusted for inflation to 2024 dollars using the Personal Consumption Expenditures price index, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis. The figure excludes spending on the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children (also known as Summer EBT or SUN Bucks) Program in FY 2024, for which data were not available as of April 2025.

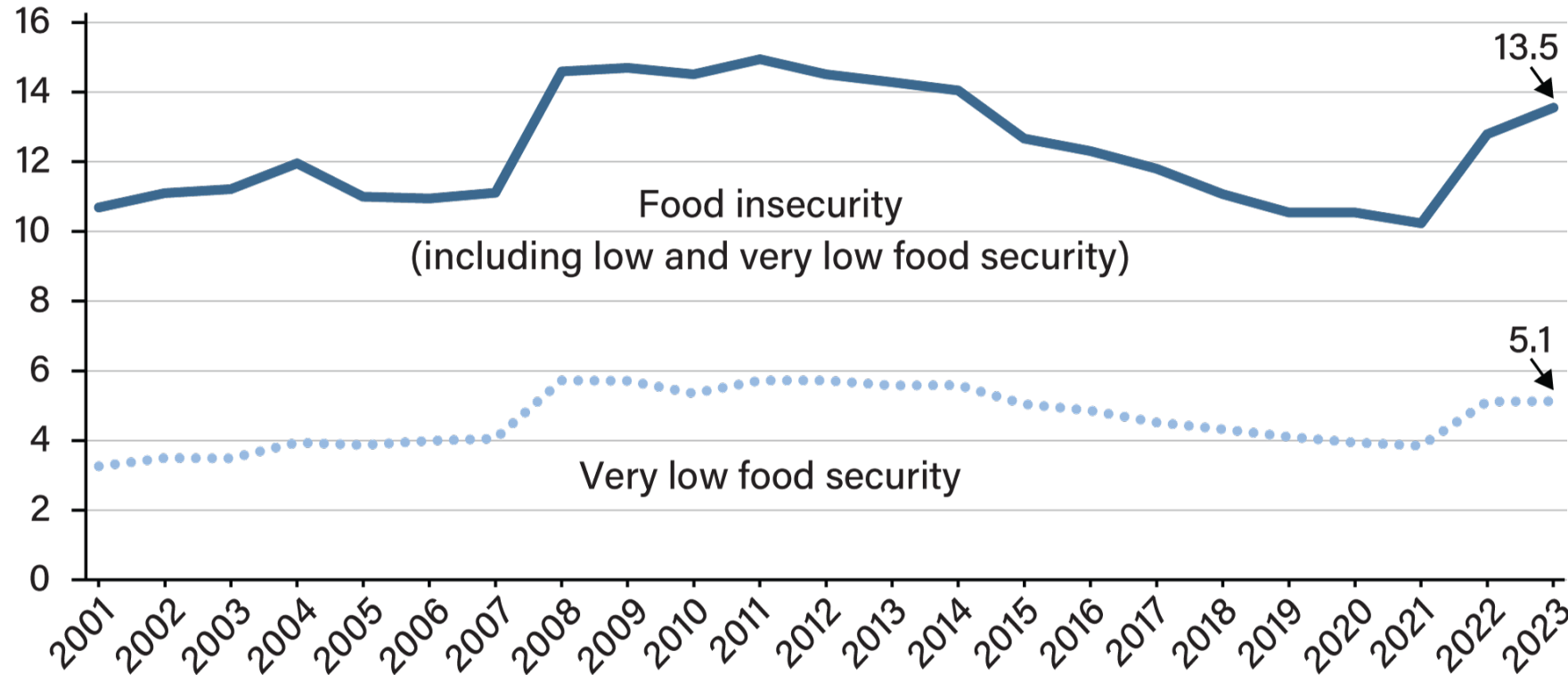
Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using USDA, FNS data and USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service data.

# Prevalence of food insecurity and very low food security in U.S. households, 2001–23



Economic Research Service  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Percent of households



Note: **Low food security** means at least one or more household members reported reduced quality, variety, or desirability of their diet at some time during the year. **Very low food security** means at least one or more household members reported disrupted eating patterns and/or had their food intake reduced at least some time during the year because they could not afford enough food.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements.

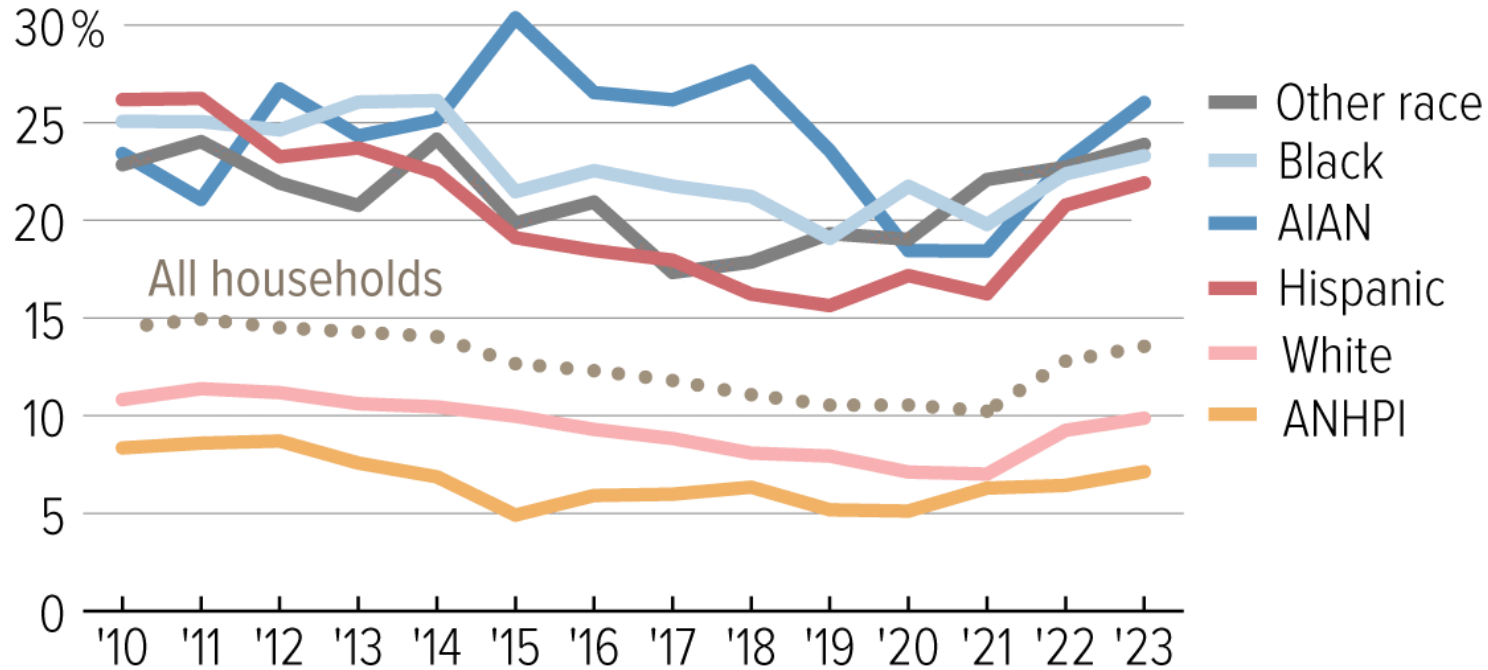
Due to robust COVID relief efforts food insecurity:

- Did not surge as it did during the Great Recession
- Fell to a two-decade low of 10.2 percent in 2021

However, as relief measures expired and food prices remained higher than they were before the pandemic, food insecurity rose.

# Food Insecurity by Race and Ethnicity Reveals Stark Inequities

Households that lacked access to adequate food at some point in the calendar year



Note: Other race = people who are more than one race. AIAN = people who are American Indian or Alaska Native. ANHPI = people who are Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander. Hispanic households may be of any race. Race and ethnicity for the household are based on that of the household reference person (in whose name the housing unit is owned or rented).

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement 2010-2023

<https://www.cbpp.org/media/food-insecurity-by-race-and-ethnicity-reveals-stark-inequities>



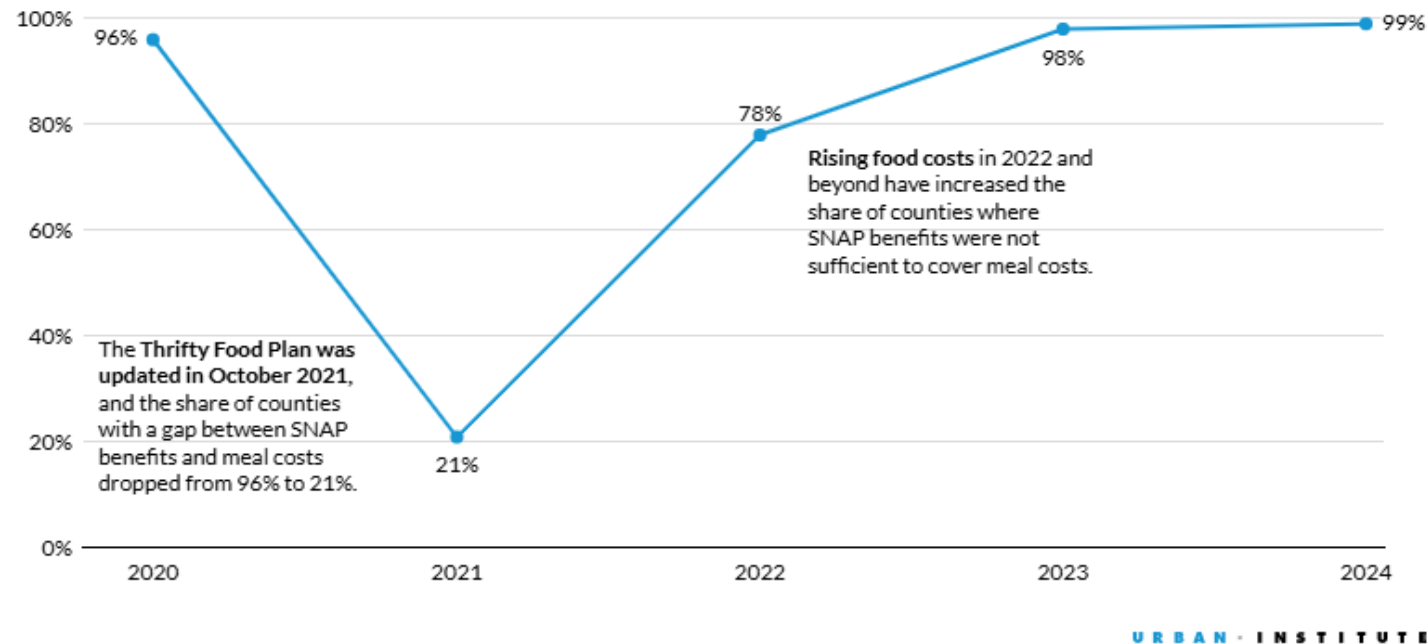


## SNAP works

- Serves about 42 million Americans each month with a budget of \$110 billion in FY25
- Average monthly benefit per person in FY 2026 is \$188
- Helps to stabilize the economy and lift Americans out of poverty
- Helps reduce food insecurity and improves health and wellbeing
- Reduces health care costs
- Benefit size permanently increased - Increased monthly benefits by 21% or \$36 per person per month

# The Updated Thrifty Food Plan Drastically Reduced the Share of Counties with Insufficient SNAP Benefits, but High Food Costs Have Reversed That Progress

Share of counties where the maximum SNAP benefit did not cover the cost of a modestly priced meal in the last quarter of the year (October–December), 2020–24



**Source:** Authors' calculations of Census Bureau estimates of SNAP participation by county; Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap data, including NielsenIQ county-level food price data (adjusted for state and local taxes) and Office of Management and Budget geographic classifications; and fiscal years 2020–24 US Department of Agriculture maximum benefit allotments.

**Notes:** Each year uses the corresponding US Department of Agriculture cost-of-living-adjusted monthly SNAP benefit allotments, aside from the estimate for 2021. The 2021 estimate artificially inflates the previous fiscal year's maximum monthly SNAP benefits by 21 percent to reflect the Thrifty Food Plan update.

**Bottom line:** After the reevaluation of SNAP benefits under the Thrifty Food Plan in 2021, SNAP benefit adequacy significantly improved. But persistently high food prices since 2022 have meant the benefit hasn't been enough to cover meal costs for the past three years, even with annual inflation adjustments.

Food prices are 29% higher in 2025 than in 2020.

[Cuts to SNAP in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act Would Widen the Persistent Gap between Benefits and Food Costs | Urban Institute](https://www.npr.org/2025/09/19/nx-s1-5539547/grocery-prices-tariffs-food-inflation)

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# School meals work

- Serve nutritious meals to ~30 million children each day to support their growth, learning, and overall health (e.g., reduced risk for obesity)
- Healthiest meals children eat in a day
- By law, school meals must be based on the goals of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*



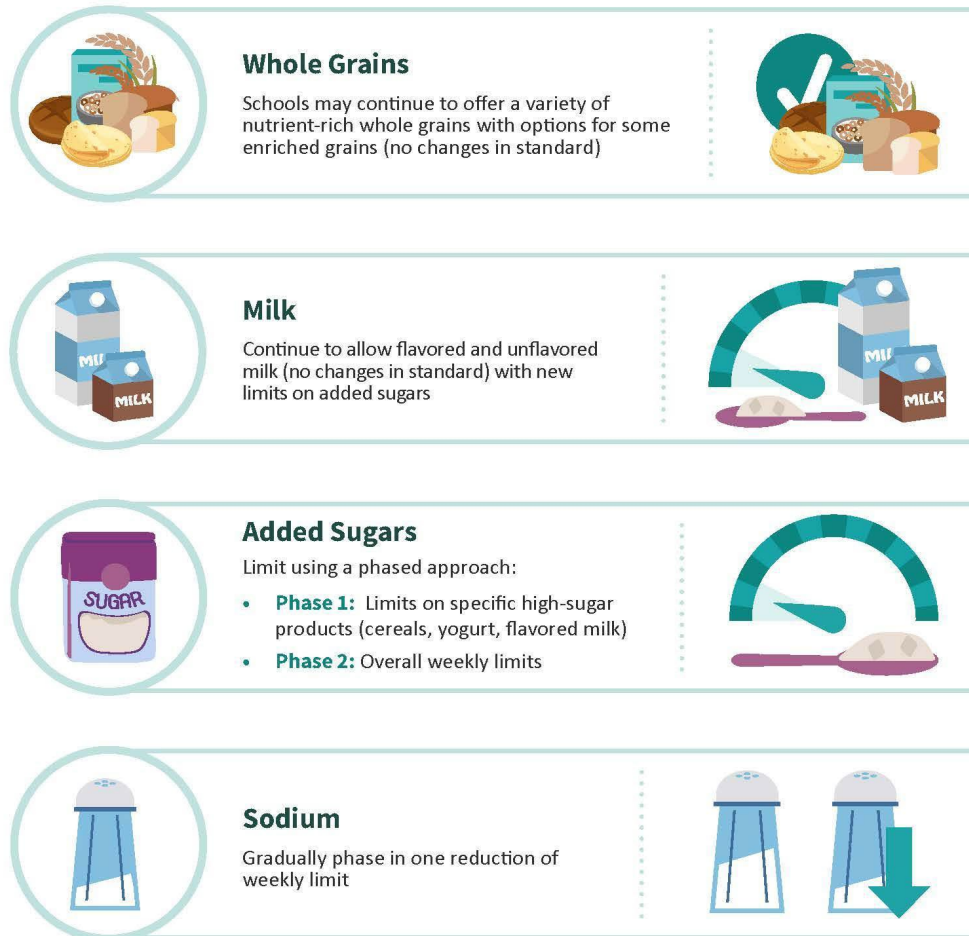


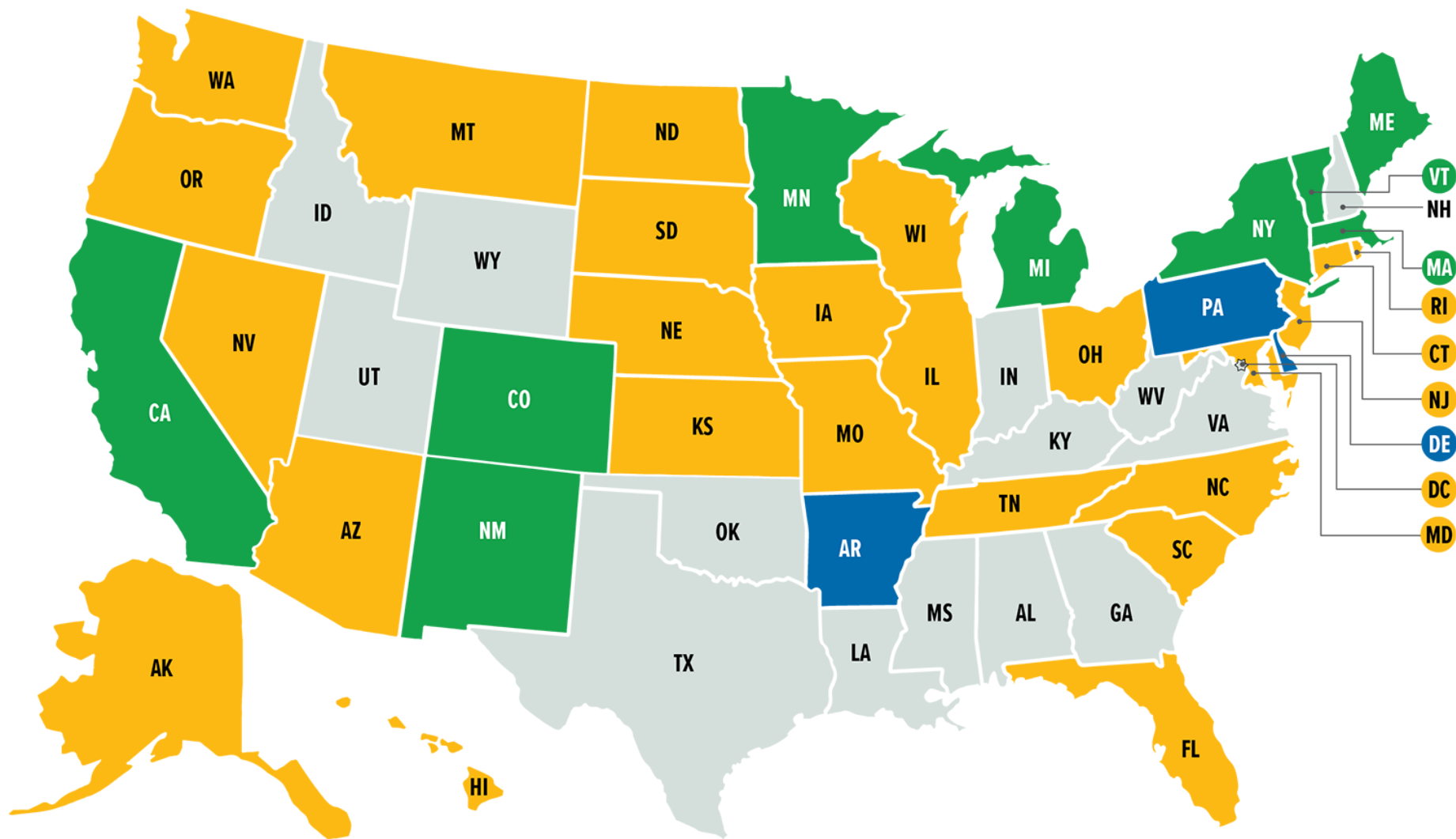
## FINAL RULE FOR SCHOOL MEAL STANDARDS

**Updated School Meal Standards: working towards a common goal of healthy children and helping them reach their full potential.**

School meals are the main source of nutrition for millions of children every school day. USDA is ensuring these meals are even more nourishing, while keeping them appealing to kids.

### Key Provisions





- Healthy School Meals for All policies
- Free School Breakfast for All policies
- Healthy School Meals for All legislation introduced

UPDATED SEPTEMBER 2025

## WIC works

- Serves over 6 million pregnant and post-partum women, infants, and children through their fifth birthday
- Participation results in fewer infant deaths, fewer premature births, and increased birth weights and it reduces health care costs
- Linked to higher academic achievement for students
- One of the nation's most effective public health nutrition programs
- \$390M investment from ARPA





## Updates to WIC Food Packages

*More flexibility, greater choice, better health*

**Here's how the WIC food packages are changing:**

### More choices

to ensure participants have access to essential nutrients that promote healthy growth and development.



### More balance

to address key nutritional needs and support healthy diets.



### More flexibility

and variety to accommodate personal and cultural food preferences and special dietary needs.



### More support

for individual goals to establish and sustain long-term breastfeeding.



## SUN Bucks works

- Provides \$120 to purchase food during the summer months for each school-age child who is eligible for free or reduced-price school meals
- Highly effective in combating food insecurity
- 37 states, 5 Indian Tribal Organizations, and all 5 U.S. territories participated in summer 25
- ~30 million qualifying children nationwide

# Dietary Guidelines for Americans: The Core of Nutrition Policy





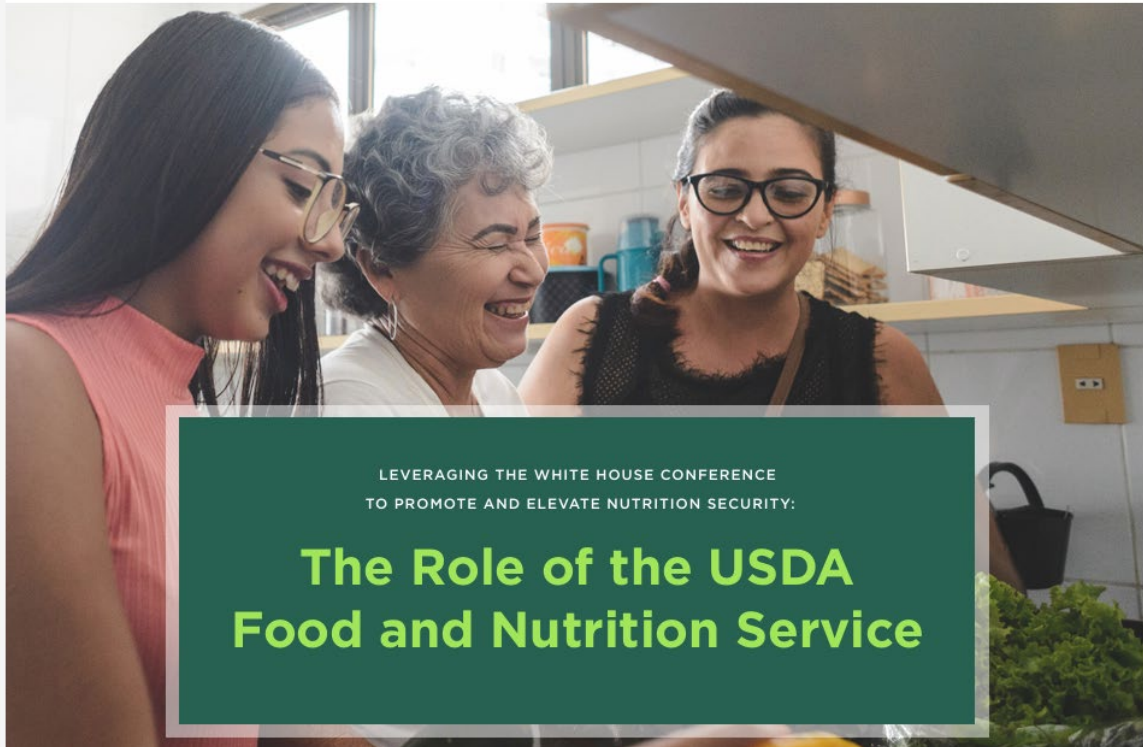


## WHAT IS NUTRITION SECURITY?

Consistent access to nutritious foods that promote optimal health and well-being for all Americans, throughout all stages of life.



USDA Food and Nutrition Service  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



LEVERAGING THE WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE  
TO PROMOTE AND ELEVATE NUTRITION SECURITY:

## The Role of the USDA Food and Nutrition Service

## Nutrition Security



### Support access to healthy, affordable food for all

Learn how USDA works to ensure all Americans have consistent access to safe, affordable, and culturally relevant foods through its nutrition security efforts. Explore USDA initiatives, budget-friendly eating tips, webinars, and research. Find information on assistance programs, community food systems, historical dietary guidance, and data to support food access.

## Featured Resources



### Nutrition Security

Learn how USDA is advancing nutrition security through meaningful support, healthy food, collaborative action, and equitable systems.



### Healthy Eating on a Budget

Find USDA's MyPlate tips for making healthy eating affordable on a budget.



### NIFA's Nutrition Security Webinar Series

Browse nutrition security webinars from USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA).



### Nutrition Security Research Resources

View data, reports, articles, and interactive tools about nutrition security from USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS).

# Status of nutrition policy at the end of the Biden Administration

- SNAP benefits permanently larger
- WIC received investments to modernize outreach and service delivery
- Nutrition standards for the WIC food packages and school meals are aligned with DGAs
- SUN Bucks is permanent
- CEP is broadened
- Commitment to nutrition security is imbedded in programmatic and policy efforts





# **Major Policy Shifts – Look Forward**



# Summary of major changes to nutrition policy in first year of Trump Administration

- Executive Orders
  - Termination of “equity-related” grants (January)
  - Stronger immigration verification (February)
  - Require states to submit personal data on SNAP (April)
- Cuts to federal nutrition assistance programs (March)
  - Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement (\$420M)
  - Local Food for School Program (\$660M)
  - TEFAP (\$500M)
- Proposed cuts to WIC in the President’s FY26 budget proposal (May)
- “One Big Beautiful Bill Act” H.R.1 (July)
  - SNAP
  - SNAP-Ed
- MAHA Strategy Report (September)
- Household Food Security Report terminated (September)
- Proposed rule on ‘Public Charge’ (November)
- SNAP waivers to restrict purchases (ongoing)

# Overview of SNAP changes in H.R.1

**Bottom line:** ~ 4 million people (including 1 million children) in a typical month to lose all or a substantial amount of benefits:

- Benefit cuts
- Stricter work requirements
- Shift of costs to states

# SNAP changes in H.R.1:

## Benefit cuts

**Bottom line:** The largest cut to SNAP in history

- \$186 billion through 2034 (~ 20 percent reduction in total program costs)
- Requires all updates to the Thrifty Food Plan to be cost neutral – this means future benefits will not go up as much as they otherwise would have



# SNAP changes in H.R.1:

## Expansion of work requirements

Bottom line: Increases the number of individuals who face stricter work requirement

- Parents of school-aged children over 14
- Older adults age 55 through age 64
- Ended exemptions for homeless and veterans

Real-world impact: A single mother with one child who loses benefits for herself would see their food assistance drop from a maximum of \$536 monthly to \$292 monthly. Individuals have to work and provide proof and states have to document it every month

# SNAP changes in H.R.1:

## Shift of costs to states

**Bottom line:** States will pay more for administration and are at risk to cover a share of benefits

- Starting in FY2027, states are required to cover 75% of administrative costs, up from 50% now
- Starting in FY2028, a state will be required to pay:
  - 5% of SNAP benefits if its error rate is 6-8%
  - 10% of benefits if its error rate is 8-10%
  - 15% of benefits its error rate is 10% +

**Real world impact:** NC's FY24 error rate was 10.21%. Benefits were about \$3 billion; 15% is \$450 million. CBO estimates that state responses to this unfunded mandate will result in about 300,000 people having their SNAP benefits reduced or terminated in a typical month

# **SNAP changes in H.R.1:**

## **Other key benefit and program cuts**

- Restricts utility expenses that can be deducted when determining benefits
- Eliminates SNAP-Ed
- Restricts access for legal immigrants in the US such as refugees, people granted asylum, or survivors of trafficking



## Other collateral impacts

- For families on SNAP, all enrolled children automatically qualify for free school meals and SUN Bucks
- When children lose SNAP benefits, they can then lose access to food at school or SUN Bucks
- Cuts to SNAP are expected to produce higher rates of food insecurity and poorer health outcomes in the long run



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PRESS RELEASE

# USDA Terminates Redundant Food Insecurity Survey

PUBLISHED: September 20, 2025

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<https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2025/09/20/usda-terminates-redundant-food-insecurity-survey>

# Overlap of SNAP and Medicaid benefits

- Most people (78%) receiving SNAP benefits are also enrolled in Medicaid
- Four in 10 (40%) Medicaid enrollees receive SNAP benefits
- Changes in eligibility will reduce access to both programs since there is significant overlap in the eligibility requirements





# Path Forward



# Promising strategies for local leaders

- **Leverage the bully pulpit to clarify SNAP changes, conduct outreach, and engage employers**
- **Reduce harm via policy changes** such as steps to minimize churn, simplify the user experience, and leverage technology to improve access
- **Document and elevate impacts** by collecting and publicizing stories and using evidence to advocate
- **Invest in local food access strategies** by pairing physical and financial access and develop strategically

# Promising strategies for health professionals

- Support enrollment among all eligible
- Help guide patients towards healthy eating habits given elimination of SNAP-Ed
- Help interpret forthcoming DGAs
- Recent directive by HHS and the Department of Education calling for the integration of nutrition education across pre-med, medical school, and residency programs is a good first step
- Hospital leadership can review procurement policies and seek opportunities to improve the nutritional quality of food and beverages offered within their institutions

# Promising strategies for researchers

- **Leverage existing data** for secondary analysis to monitor and document policy impacts
- **Download government reports or data** from federal webpages that can support your future research or reach out to those who have already done so to gain access
- **Actively look for ways to communicate** policy relevant results to decision makers and the public
- **Research and evaluation** on SNAP food restriction waivers





**Wrap up**



# Takeaways

- Nutrition safety net has experienced massive shifts
  - Expansion and science-based approach under Biden administration has been replaced with contraction during the Trump administration
  - Large changes with little lead time complicates implementation
- Reduced federal workforce limits administrative capacity
- Lack of key data makes it hard to demonstrate policy impact making ground-truthing critical
- Massive confusion about policy changes
- Likely to increase food insecurity and adverse health outcomes

Thank you and questions

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