

## SNAP Facts vs. Fiction

### **Fiction: SNAP is too expensive and adds to long term budget problems**

Fact: While the cost of the SNAP program is no trivial expense, SNAP expenditures create a targeted economic boost nationwide. USDA estimates that every \$1 in SNAP benefits creates an economic multiplier effect of \$1.54 during an economic downturn.<sup>1</sup> Almost all benefits are spent within a month of receipt at more than 250,000 authorized food businesses, like grocery and big-box stores.<sup>2</sup> While providing an important safety net to Americans in need, SNAP also strengthens local economies and supports American jobs.

Cuts to SNAP could have cascading economic impacts. A Commonwealth Fund study<sup>3</sup> found that if SNAP is reduced by \$230 billion over 10 years, about 143,000 jobs would be lost nationwide, including 78,000 direct job losses in food-related sectors such as agriculture, retail grocery, and food processing. Another 65,000 jobs would disappear in other business sectors as the economic effects of the funding cuts spread. Budget cuts for SNAP could cause state and local tax revenues to fall by \$1.8 billion in 2026, and the aggregate GDPs of state economies would be nearly \$18 billion lower, with total economic output \$30 billion lower. In Illinois, 9,379 authorized SNAP retailers redeemed a total of \$5,487,456,282 in 2023 alone.<sup>4</sup> These retailers would lose significant revenue with proposed cuts, and shocks would be felt throughout the food system.

### **Fiction: People receiving SNAP aren't working**

Fact: In an average month in 2024, 41 million U.S. residents were enrolled in SNAP. In FY22, nearly 80 percent of participants were in households with a child under age 18, an adult age 60 or older, or an individual who is disabled. Children under age 18 constituted 40 percent of all SNAP participants.<sup>5</sup>

In 2015 data, over half of individuals enrolled in SNAP in a typical month were working in that month, and 74 percent worked in the year before or after that month. At the household level, 89 percent of households with children and a non-disabled adult included at least one member who worked in this 25-month period. More than two-thirds of SNAP

---

1. [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\) - Key Statistics and Research | Economic Research Service](#); USDA.gov

<sup>2</sup> [SNAP Retailer Management Year End Summary FY 2023 | Food and Nutrition Service](#); USDA.gov

<sup>3</sup> [Medicaid, SNAP Cuts Could Trigger Job Loss, Less State Revenue | Commonwealth Fund](#); Commonwealthfund.org

<sup>4</sup> [SNAP FactSheets\\_022525\\_IL14.pdf](#); FRAC.org

<sup>5</sup> [Characteristics of SNAP Households - FY 22 | Food and Nutrition Service](#); USDA.gov

participants are not expected to work, primarily because they are children, older adults, or disabled people.<sup>6</sup>

### **Fiction: SNAP funds are being wasted due to abuse and fraud**

Fact: For decades, SNAP has had among the most rigorous eligibility determination and payment accuracy measurement systems of any federal benefit program.<sup>7</sup> USDA works closely with state and federal partners, law enforcement, SNAP retailers, EBT processors, and other industry experts to continually strengthen and enhance its efforts to prevent, detect, and eliminate fraud and ensure those who commit it are held accountable.<sup>8</sup> Upfront eligibility determinations for participants require substantial scrutiny and back-up documentation, and participants must re-certify their eligibility frequently. States are subject to penalties for high error rates (overpayments or underpayments), which are evaluated through an intensive Quality Control process with an independent reviewer.

There are, however, some very real concerns with fraud in the SNAP program. One of the most immediate challenges is the issue of EBT skimming,<sup>9</sup> whereby criminals pilfer benefits from deserving SNAP recipients and convert them to cash or make bulk purchases at major retail outlets. When Congress temporarily provided funding for states to restore stolen SNAP benefits, between January 2023 and September 2024, states replaced \$150 million in stolen SNAP benefits for over 315,000 impacted households.<sup>10</sup> While credit and debit cards now incorporate advanced chip technology to thwart criminals, SNAP remains vulnerable. This is a fixable problem that can help significantly reduce SNAP fraud and theft.

In terms of waste, SNAP is a very efficient program. 94 percent of all dollars spent on the program goes directly to benefits,<sup>11</sup> and just 6 percent is spent on the administrative costs of executing the program.

### **Fiction: SNAP has grown out of control**

Fact: About 12.5 percent of all Americans are currently receiving SNAP benefits.<sup>12</sup> SNAP is a means tested program designed to grow as the economy contracts and shrink as the

---

<sup>6</sup> [Policy Basics: The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\) | Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#); CBPP.org

<sup>7</sup> [SNAP Includes Extensive Payment Accuracy System | Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#); CBPP.org

<sup>8</sup> [SNAP Fraud Prevention | Food and Nutrition Service](#); USDA.gov

<sup>9</sup> [Fraud is gobbling up one-fifth of SNAP benefits; Congress must act to stop it](#); thehill.com

<sup>10</sup> [Congress Must Extend Protections for SNAP Households Who Are Victims of Benefit Theft | Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#); CBPP.org

<sup>11</sup> [Policy Basics: The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\) | Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#); CBPP.org

<sup>12</sup> [What the data says about food stamps in the U.S. | Pew Research Center](#); pewresearch.org

economy recovers, meaning it grows when it needs to grow. SNAP expanding means that the program is working as intended, which is to help vulnerable people access food when the economy is in bad shape. SNAP benefits are one of the fastest, most effective forms of economic stimulus because they get money into the economy quickly during an economic downturn.<sup>13</sup>

### **Fiction: SNAP should be restricted to “healthy” options**

Fact: SNAP’s purpose is to help participants afford a variety of healthy foods. All states operate SNAP nutrition education programs to help participants make healthy food choices. The best way to ensure SNAP dollars are spent on healthy foods is to update the benefit amount to allow for healthier food purchases.

Prior to the 2021 update, the Thrifty Food Plan—the basis for how SNAP benefits are calculated— had been adjusted only for inflation since the 1970s, even as our understanding of what constitutes a healthy diet changed. That left SNAP benefits badly out of line with the most recent dietary recommendations and the economic realities most struggling households face when trying to buy and prepare healthy foods. Scientific evidence now emphasizes the importance of eating a broad range of somewhat more costly foods, including more whole grains, red, orange, and leafy green vegetables, lean proteins, and seafood. To prepare a healthy diet, families must have enough money to buy ingredients.

Past attempts to limit the types of foods available through SNAP have consistently demonstrated how burdensome and complicated such restrictions can be.<sup>14</sup> For instance, when food restrictions were proposed in the 1964 Food Stamp Act, the Senate Agriculture Committee rejected the idea due to the significant administrative burden it would impose. Similarly, the 1977 Farm Bill recognized that food restrictions would not address the root causes of food insecurity and would only complicate the program. Since then, the focus has shifted to more effective approaches, such as providing produce incentives, as seen in the 2008 Farm Bill. These initiatives have successfully encouraged healthier food choices without infringing on the autonomy and dignity of individuals.

---

<sup>13</sup> [Temporary SNAP Benefit Bump a No-Brainer for More Economic Stimulus | Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#); CBPP.org

<sup>14</sup> [SNAP Choice Is the Right Choice-Preventing Harmful SNAP Restrictions - Food Research & Action Center](#); FRAC.org

Misguided attempts to blame SNAP for diet-related disease and poor health ignore the strong evidence that SNAP participation is linked to improved health and lower health care costs.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> [SNAP Is Linked With Improved Health Outcomes and Lower Health Care Costs | Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#); CBPP.org