

GBPI's 2023 Farm Bill Recommendations to Improve the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

By: Ife Finch Floyd, Director of Economic Justice

No one should go hungry simply because they cannot afford the cost of food. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as Food Stamps, helps about 700,000 Georgia households put food on the table and protects them against hunger. But the program needs to be strengthened and protected as federal lawmakers consider changes in the Farm Bill, legislation that governs SNAP and agricultural programs. Major restrictions to SNAP benefits or limiting access to the program would mean more children, seniors and workers earning low wages would struggle to afford the cost of food. Cuts would also reduce SNAP's economic impact on Georgia's local communities.¹ Legislators should improve SNAP's effectiveness at reducing food insecurity, promoting health outcomes and improving child well-being.² Now is the opportunity for community members to elevate how SNAP helps families and local businesses.

Policymakers should strengthen SNAP in three key ways: 1) expanding access, 2) ensuring benefit adequacy and 3) enhancing customer service and client protections.

Expand Access

While SNAP reaches many eligible households, federal law restricts the eligibility of many individuals and families with low income. The law also imposes arbitrary and ineffective work rules that hinder rather than facilitate access to well-paying and quality job opportunities for adults in the program.³

GBPI's Recommendations:

- Lift the five-year waiting period on authorized immigrants.
- Expand college student SNAP eligibility.
- End the lifetime ban on people with a drug felony from accessing SNAP. (Georgia rightly opted-out of this policy, but the ban should be struck from federal law to end the policy in every state.)
- Eliminate SNAP's arbitrary three-month limit for certain adults who do not meet work reporting requirements.

Ensure Benefit Adequacy

Currently, SNAP benefits are based on the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP), a budget to afford the bare minimum of a healthy diet. However, despite essential improvements to TFP, the average SNAP benefit is only \$6 per person per day. SNAP households need more resources to afford a wide range of healthy foods.

GBPI's Recommendation:

- Base SNAP benefits on the more adequate Low-Cost Food Plan, the next-to-lowest budget for a healthy diet established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The Low-Cost Food Plan budget is approximately 30% higher than the TFP budget depending on household composition.⁴

Enhance Customer Service and Client Protections

Poor customer service at state SNAP agencies makes applying for and maintaining SNAP benefits challenging. Many states' online eligibility portals are inefficient and confusing; call centers have long wait times; and people with limited English proficiency have inadequate language supports.⁵ Furthermore, electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card security is out of line with the industry standard of protections for debit and credit cards. The Farm Bill should include provisions to improve the client experience and protect clients' benefits from theft.

GBPI's Recommendations:

- Ensure SNAP keeps pace with technological changes to enhance online customer service.
- Strengthen and enforce language access standards.
- Standardize and publish metrics for call center performance.

- Incentivize call center improvement.
- Require EBT card administrators to change to more secure chip EBT cards.
- Establish a policy for continuous replacement of SNAP benefits stolen through card skimming, card cloning or other similar fraudulent means (Current law will only replace SNAP benefits stolen between October 1, 2022, and September 30, 2024.).⁶

Endnotes

¹ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. SNAP is an important public-private partnership. <https://www.cbpp.org/snap-is-an-important-public-private-partnership#Georgia>

² Finch Floyd, I. (2023, September 6). *The basics of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in Georgia*. Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. <https://gbpi.org/the-basics-of-the-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-in-georgia/>

³ Feng, W. (2021, February 22). The effects of changing SNAP work requirement on the health and employment outcomes of able-bodied adults without dependents. *Journal of the American Nutrition Association*, 41(3), 281-290. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07315724.2021.1879692>

Gray, C., Leive, A., Prager, E., Pukelis, K. & Zaki, M. (2023, February). Employed in a SNAP? The impact of work requirements on program participation and labor supply. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 15(1), 306-341. <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/pol.20200561>

⁴ Hartline-Grafton, H. & Weill, J. (2012). *Replacing the Thrifty Food Plan in order to provide adequate allotments for SNAP beneficiaries*. Food Research and Action Center. https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/thrifty_food_plan_2012.pdf

⁵ Code for America. (2023). *What the online enrollment experience for safety net benefits looks like across America*. https://codeforamerica.org/programs/social-safety-net/benefits-enrollment-field-guide/?_gl=1*1xao57l*_ga*MTM1MTgxMjM0My4xNjk1NDAwNTc1*_ga_E86H6WZB5K*MTY5NTQwMDU3NC4xLjEuMTY5NTQwMTM5MS42MC4wLjA.&att=reading&j=AK&app=4&dev=d

⁶ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2023, March 14). *Addressing stolen SNAP benefits*. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/stolen-benefits#:~:text=In%20late%20December%202022%2C%20Congress,30%2C%202024>