



## PROTECT FOOD CHOICE OPTIONS FOR SNAP RECIPIENTS

### The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is an Effective and Efficient Program that Increases the Well-Being of Millions of Families.

- SNAP reduces poverty, increases nutrition, and stimulates economic growth by providing monthly benefits to families with low incomes to supplement their grocery budgets.
- SNAP recognizes the dignity of participants by empowering them to make their own choices about which foods to buy. It provides a seamless shopping experience by allowing families to use benefits through Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards that are accepted like debit cards at grocery stores and other retailers across the country.
- SNAP has a proven track record of:
  - **Improving Health:** SNAP improves nutrition, protects against obesity, and reduces health care costs by an estimated \$1,409 per participant.<sup>1</sup>
  - **Enhancing Education:** Access to SNAP during pregnancy and early childhood increases the likelihood of completing high school by 18% and enhances long-term economic self-sufficiency.<sup>2</sup>
  - **Reducing Poverty:** SNAP reduces the poverty rate by 14% to 16% and reduces extreme poverty by over 50% when the Supplemental Poverty Measure is used to analyze changes.<sup>3</sup>

### Restricting Food Choice Will Not Help Families Participating in SNAP.

- Imposing new restrictions on foods purchased with SNAP would deny people the most basic level of dignity and increase stigma around participating in a program that helps people access food, a basic human need.
- Singling out people who receive SNAP, policing their shopping carts, and delaying their purchases at the register would weaken program efficacy and decrease participation rates.

Proposals to limit SNAP food choice fail to take into account the needs of individuals with certain health conditions or nutrition needs, as well as cultural or religious food selections.<sup>4</sup> Implementing restrictions would disproportionately impact communities of color that have higher SNAP participation rates.<sup>5</sup>

### Restricting SNAP Food Choice Will Increase Costs for Taxpayers, Businesses, and Consumers.

- Imposing new restrictions on SNAP would require expensive new infrastructure for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), grocery stores, and other retailers.
  - **Taxpayers:** Taxpayers would foot the bill to expand USDA's capacity to patrol grocery transactions. Under some proposals, USDA would have to categorize more than 650,000 existing food and beverage products already in grocery stores, as well as 20,000 new products each year.<sup>6</sup> USDA estimates that implementing a system to capture the necessary point-of-sale data would initially cost more than \$400 million and an additional \$600 million per year.<sup>7</sup>

- **Businesses:** Grocery stores would be forced to update or purchase new point-of-sale systems, which could strain small independent grocers that have fewer resources to devote to software and personnel. For these reasons, more than 2,500 grocers have come together to oppose any new legislative restrictions on SNAP food choice.<sup>8</sup>
- **Consumers:** Increased costs would be passed on to consumers through higher prices.<sup>9</sup>

**The Alliance to End Hunger, a diverse coalition of non-profit organizations, corporations, small businesses, faith-based organizations, universities, and foundations, is united in opposing restrictions on SNAP food choice.**

### Myth v. Reality

**Myth #1:** Proposals to restrict SNAP food choice may be based on paternalistic, faulty, and sometimes racially-biased assumptions that families who participate in SNAP eat more unhealthy foods than non-participant families of similar income levels. But research consistently demonstrates this is not true—there are no major differences in grocery spending patterns between SNAP participants and nonparticipants.

**Myth #2:** Proposals to limit SNAP choice may be based on an incomplete understanding of how SNAP works. SNAP supplements grocery purchases. Families can—and often do—acquire certain foods, like produce, through other means like food banks or farm stands.

### What Can We Do?

Proposals to restrict SNAP food choice are harmful and misplaced. But there are things we can do to help combat hunger and improve nutrition:

- **Expand food choice, don't limit it.**  
For example, Congress should authorize the use of SNAP benefits for hot and prepared foods like rotisserie chicken and hot soup.
- **Pursue broad-based solutions.**  
Address the root causes of hunger and systemic poverty by targeting resources to address acute problems such as livable wages and ready access to food.

<sup>1</sup> Food Research & Action Center, *SNAP Benefits Need to Be Made Adequate, Not Cut or Restricted* (2018), <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/snap-food-choice.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Northwestern Institute for Policy Research, *SNAP's Short- and Long-Term Benefits* (2017), <https://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/documents/policy-briefs/SNAP-policy-research-brief-Schanzenbach.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Food Research & Action Center, *The Role of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in Improving Health and Well-Being*, (2017), <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/hunger-health-role-snap-improving-health-well-being.pdf> (citing Laura Tiehen et al., *The Effect of SNAP on Poverty* (2015), <https://www.irp.wisc.edu/resource/the-effect-of-snap-on-poverty/#:~:text=Using%20re%2Dweighting%20methods%20to,by%2014%20to%2016%20percent>).

<sup>4</sup> Food Research & Action Center, *supra* note 1, at 6.

<sup>5</sup> Letter from American Bakers Association et al. to Secretary of Agriculture Thomas J. Vilsack (2024), [https://civilrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/SNAP-choice-USDA-letter\\_.pdf](https://civilrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/SNAP-choice-USDA-letter_.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> *Pros and Cons of Restricting SNAP Purchases: Hearing Before the House Committee on Agriculture*, 115th Cong. 14 (2017), <https://agriculture.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=3644>.

<sup>7</sup> Steven Garasky et al., *Feasibility Study of Capturing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Purchases at the Point of Sale—Final Report* U.S. Department of Agriculture (2016), <https://www.fns.usda.gov/research/snap/feasibility-study-capturing-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap-purchases-point-sale>.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from American Bakers Association et al. to Secretary of Agriculture Thomas J. Vilsack, *supra* note 5; National Grocers Association, *Protect SNAP Choice*, I, [https://www.nationalgrocers.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/2024-04-NGA\\_Issue-Brief\\_SNAP-CHOICE-I-I.pdf](https://www.nationalgrocers.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/2024-04-NGA_Issue-Brief_SNAP-CHOICE-I-I.pdf); *NGA and Feeding America Hold Congressional Briefings on the Importance of SNAP Choice*, National Grocers Association (2024), <https://www.nationalgrocers.org/news/nga-and-feeding-america-hold-congressional-briefings-on-the-importance-of-maintaining-snap-choice/>.

<sup>9</sup> Food Research & Action Center, *Protect and Strengthen SNAP By Preserving Consumer Choice* (2024), <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/Protect-and-Strengthen-SNAP-by-Preserving-Consumer-Choice.pdf>.