



PROTECT THE THRIFTY FOOD PLAN: A LONG OVERDUE AND REASONABLE UPDATE

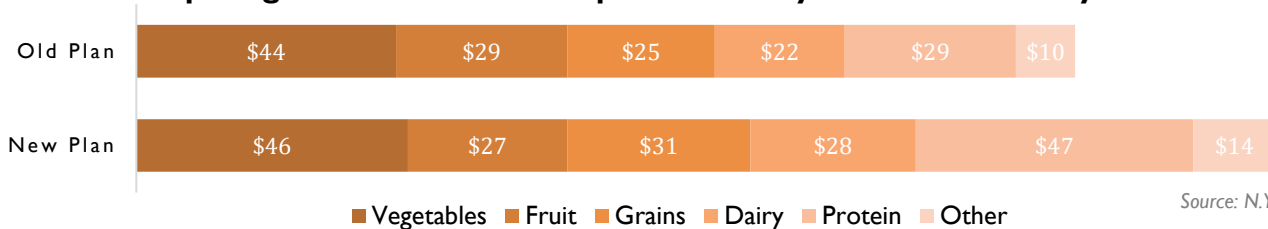
Congress directed an update of the Thrifty Food Plan, which estimates the cost of a healthy diet for families on a limited budget and is used to calculate SNAP benefits. The update, the first meaningful update since 1975, increased purchasing power for SNAP participants.¹

- Previous updates to the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) adjusted it for inflation, but failed to meaningfully account for changes in the way working families buy, eat, and prepare foods.²
- To address this longstanding problem, Congress, in the bipartisan 2018 Farm Bill, directed the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to re-evaluate the TFP every five years to consider “current food prices, food composition data, consumption patterns, and dietary guidance.”³ The first update took effect in October 2021.

USDA’s update was reasonable and necessary to align the real value of the Thrifty Food Plan with the current cost of a healthful and practical diet.

- The update recognized that people need access to food that is both healthful and convenient. Previous TFP versions assumed family members spent two hours each day preparing meals—making pasta sauce from scratch or cooking dried beans, for example.⁴ In reality, the average adult spends only 35 minutes per day on food preparation.⁵
- The 2021 update—which increased the average SNAP benefit by \$1.19 per person per day—helps SNAP recipients access enough of a variety of foods to build a healthy diet.⁶ Prior to the update, 88% of SNAP recipients faced challenges accessing a healthy diet.⁷
- The update reflects updates to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, including supporting cultural food patterns. As illustrated below, the largest changes occurred to allow for purchases of whole grains, dairy products, and lean proteins like poultry and seafood.⁸

Comparing Previous and 2021 Updated Thrifty Food Plan Weekly Amounts



Benefit amounts lifted nearly 2.3 million people out of poverty in the first year after the TFP was adjusted.¹⁰ Regular updates to the TFP will allow for increased clarity and predictability.

- Childhood poverty fell by 8.6% and overall poverty fell by 4.7% in the first year after the TFP benefits were updated.¹¹
- Regular updates to the Thrifty Food Plan will enable USDA to improve its process¹² and ensure greater transparency and cost clarity.¹³

References

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² *Id.*

³ Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, P.L. 115–334, sec. 4002,

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-115publ334/pdf/PLAW-115publ334.pdf>.

⁴ Food and Nutrition Service, *supra* note 1, at 49; Robert Gerstein, *Science-based Increase in SNAP Benefits Should Result in a Healthier Citizenry*, Brookings (Aug. 16, 2021),

<https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/science-based-increase-in-snap-benefits-should-result-in-a-healthier-citizenry/>; Joseph Llobrera, *Modernizing SNAP Benefits Will Help Millions of Families Afford Healthy, Nutritious Diet*, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (Aug. 16, 2021), <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/modernizing-snap-benefits-will-help-millions-of-families-afford-healthy-nutritious-diet>.

⁵ Steven Carlson, Joseph Llobrera, and Brynne Keith-Jennings, *Policy Brief: Modernizing SNAP Benefits Would Help Millions Better Afford Healthy Food*, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 2 (July 20, 2021),

<https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/7-30-19fa2.pdf>.

⁶ Press Release: U.S. Department of Agriculture, *USDA Modernizes the Thrifty Food Plan, Updates SNAP Benefits: First Update in More Than 45 Years Reflects Current Cost Realities* (Aug. 16, 2021),

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⁷ Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Barriers that Constrain the Adequacy of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Allotments (Summary)* (June 2021), <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNAP-Barriers-Summary.pdf>.

⁸ Food and Nutrition Service, *supra* note 1, at 35, 43–45; Michael Dykes, *Statement from Michael Dykes, D.V.M., IDFA President and CEO, on USDA Update to the SNAP Thrifty Food Plan*, International Dairy Foods Association (Aug. 16, 2021), <https://www.idfa.org/news/statement-from-michael-dykes-d-v-m-idfa-president-and-ceo-on-usda-update-to-the-snap-thrifty-food-plan>;

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⁹ The New York Times, the Learning Network, *What's Going On in This Graph? SNAP 'Thrifty Food Plan'*, (October 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/07/learning/whats-going-on-in-this-graph-oct-13-2021.html>.

¹⁰ Laura Wheaton and Danielle Kwon, *Effect of the Reevaluated Thrifty Food Plan and Emergency Allotments on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Benefits and Poverty*, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation 2 (Aug. 2022), <https://www.rwjf.org/en/insights/our-research/2022/08/effect-of-the-reevaluated-thrifty-food-plan-and-emergency-allotments-on-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-benefits-and-poverty.html>.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*

¹² Food and Nutrition Service, *supra* note 1, at 49–50.

¹³ Government Accountability Office, *Thrifty Food Plan: Better Planning and Accountability Could Help Ensure Quality of Future Reevaluations* 58–65 (Dec. 2022), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-23-105450.pdf> (USDA response to GAO report).