

CAPITOL RESEARCH

● ● ● HEALTH POLICY

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Participation Tracks Recession and Recovery

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, also known as SNAP and food stamps, is the nation's largest anti-hunger program. The program is designed to be anti-cyclical — providing more benefits during economic downturns. About 46.5 million Americans received monthly SNAP benefits in the 2014 fiscal year, dramatically up from 28 million in 2008. In 2013, some states began to see SNAP numbers decline and by 2014, all but eight states posted declines in enrollment from the year before. National SNAP enrollment in 2014 was down by 2.3 percent from 2013.



Who participates in SNAP?

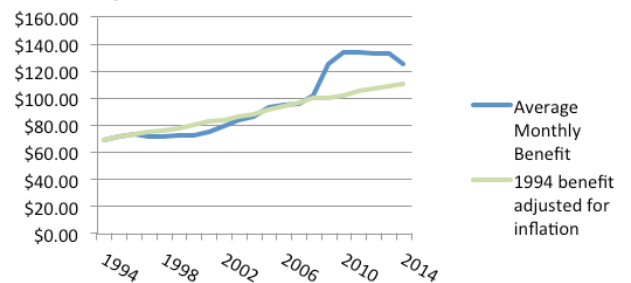
- Eligibility is set at the federal level. A household's gross monthly income must be at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level, or \$25,700 annually for a family of three in 2015. Certain asset limits also apply.¹
- Since the recession, states have been able to waive work requirements due to high unemployment rates, but in 2016, many states will no longer qualify for waivers. Unemployed childless adults will only qualify for three months of SNAP benefits unless, after that time, they are working at least 20 hours per week or involved in a work training or workfare program.²
- Strikers, college students, undocumented immigrants and certain legal immigrants are ineligible for food stamps.³
- Nearly 70 percent of participants in SNAP are in families with children. More than 25 percent are in households with seniors or people with disabilities.⁴

- In April 2009, SNAP benefits increased under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, pumping an additional \$18 billion into state economies between 2009 and 2013. The 13.6 percent bump in benefits translated into a monthly increase of \$80 for a four-person family. These recovery act increases ended on Oct. 31, 2013.⁷

How much is the SNAP benefit?

- For a household of three in 2015, the maximum monthly SNAP benefit is \$511. However, \$378 is the average monthly benefit received by a family of three in 2015.⁵
- The average monthly SNAP benefit per person in 2014 was \$125, down from \$133 in 2009-13.⁶
- SNAP benefit levels have increased to keep up with inflation and have done so since 1994.

Average Monthly SNAP Benefit, Adjusted for Inflation, 1994-2014

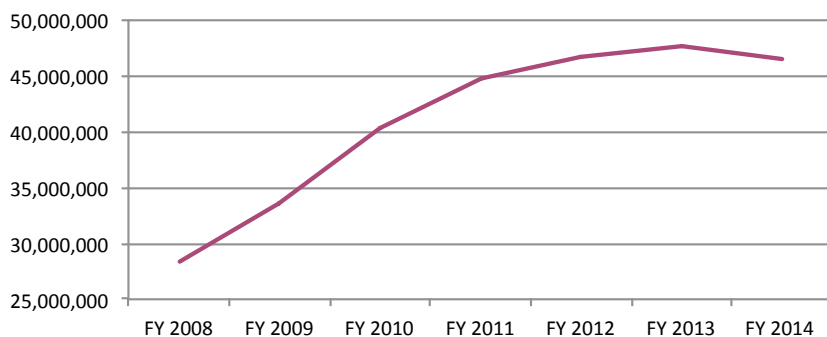


Source: USDA, Food and Nutrition Services. National Level Annual Summary: Participation and Costs, 1969-2014. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>. Inflation calculations made by CSG.

How many people benefit from the SNAP program?

- Fifteen percent of Americans, or 46.5 million individuals, received SNAP benefits in any given month in the 2014 fiscal year.⁸
- The five states with the highest percentage enrollment in SNAP in 2014 were Mississippi (22 percent), New Mexico (21 percent), Oregon (20 percent), Tennessee (20 percent) and West Virginia (20 percent).
- The six states with the lowest percentage of SNAP participation were Wyoming (6 percent), North Dakota (7 percent), Utah and New Hampshire (8 percent), and Nebraska and Colorado (9 percent).
- California had the highest number of people receiving SNAP benefits—4.3 million in 2014—while Wyoming had the lowest number—35,871 individuals.⁹
- The number of people enrolled in the SNAP program declined 2.3 percent from 2013 to 2014, presumably due to economic recovery following the recession. Participation declined in all but eight states. In six states—Kansas, Maine, Missouri, North Carolina, Utah and Vermont—declines were greater than 7 percent.

SNAP: U.S. Average Monthly Participation, FY 2008-2014



Source: USDA, Food and Nutrition Services. National Level Annual Summary: Participation and Costs, 1969-2014. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Policy Basics: Introduction to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)," Jan. 8, 2015. <http://www.cbpp.org/research/policy-basics-introduction-to-the-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap?fa=view&id=2226>
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), data as of March 6, 2015. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ United States Dept. of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services. "American Recovery & Reinvestment Act of 2009." <http://www.fns.usda.gov/arra/snap>
- ⁸ U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), data as of March 6, 2015. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/>

Policy Actions by States

- In 2013, Massachusetts was the first state to pass legislation requiring photos on the electronic benefit card, or EBT, for SNAP participants. According to MassLegal Services, more than half of the population receiving SNAP benefits is exempt from the photo requirement due to age, disability and other exemptions.¹⁰ Grocery stores may not check the EBT card photo unless they also require debit and credit card users to show photo identification.
- Maine's program to put photos on EBT cards is under criticism by U.S. Department of Agriculture officials. According to the Portland (Maine) *Press Herald*, a November 2014 letter from USDA to Maine's Health and Human Services Commissioner Mary Mayhew charged that the program gives the impression photos are required, which is a civil rights violation. The USDA letter orders the state to clarify that SNAP clients have a choice about putting their picture on their EBT card or the state will face revocation of federal funds for the program.¹¹
- Some states—including Maine, Missouri, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee and Wisconsin—have discussed banning the purchase of junk food with SNAP benefits. When New York City sought such permission, the federal government turned down the request, calling the ban "too large and too complex."¹²
- Requiring photo identification, according to supporters, will fight fraud. According to the USDA, trafficking in the program accounts for 1.3 percent of overall SNAP expenditures in 2009-11, and retailers account for 85 percent of all trafficking redemptions.¹³ In other words, only one-fifth of one percent of a state's SNAP costs is likely to be impacted at all by requiring photos on EBT cards.
- In 2015, federal legislation to require photo identification has been introduced in both the House and the Senate.



Debra Miller, CSG Director of Health Policy, dmiller@csq.org

[supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap](http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap)

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ MassLegal Services, "SNAP and Photo EBT Cards: Information and Resources," July 1, 2014. <http://www.masslegalservices.org/content/snap-and-photo-ebt-cards-information-and-resources>

¹¹ Dennis Hoey, "Maine faces federal penalty over photo policy for food benefit cards," Nov. 20, 2014. <http://www.centralmaine.com/2014/11/20/maine-faces-penalty-over-benefit-card-photo-rules/>

¹² Wisconsin State Journal, "Proposed state law to prevent purchase of junk food using food stamps hits roadblock," April 10, 2013. http://host.madison.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/proposed-state-law-to-prevent-purchase-of-junk-food-using/article_351b58b4-a15e-11e2-bc5b-0019bb2963f4.html#ixzz3XOL6vp0g

¹³ U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, "USDA Releases New Report on Trafficking and Announces Additional Measures to Improve Integrity in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program," Aug. 15, 2013. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pressrelease/2013/fns-001213>

SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP/FOOD STAMPS)

State	Monthly Average Number of Participants					Percent change, FY 2013-14	Population Enrolled in SNAP, FY 2014
	FY 2008	FY 2010	FY 2012	FY2013	FY2014		
Alabama	571,591	805,095	910,244	915,322	902,073	-1.4%	19%
Alaska	56,977	76,445	91,298	91,364	87,486	-4.2%	12%
Arizona	627,660	1,018,171	1,123,974	1,111,105	1,044,310	-6.0%	16%
Arkansas	377,883	466,598	502,125	504,621	491,965	-2.5%	17%
California	2,220,127	3,238,548	3,964,221	4,159,031	4,349,634	4.6%	11%
Colorado	252,933	404,679	491,630	507,934	505,169	-0.5%	9%
Connecticut	225,383	336,064	403,466	425,320	438,559	3.1%	12%
Delaware	74,429	112,513	148,257	153,137	150,232	-1.9%	16%
Florida	1,454,928	2,603,185	3,353,064	3,556,473	3,526,311	-0.8%	18%
Georgia	1,021,155	1,591,078	1,912,839	1,948,189	1,815,833	-6.8%	18%
Hawaii	96,551	138,166	176,823	189,350	194,264	2.6%	14%
Idaho	100,198	194,033	233,034	227,006	211,781	-6.7%	13%
Illinois	1,299,443	1,645,722	1,869,713	2,040,053	2,015,303	-1.2%	16%
Indiana	623,415	813,403	908,705	926,011	892,699	-3.6%	14%
Iowa	258,173	340,304	408,050	420,344	408,070	-2.9%	13%
Kansas	187,569	269,710	304,719	316,983	293,456	-7.4%	10%
Kentucky	633,194	778,114	849,248	872,439	828,076	-5.1%	19%
Louisiana	790,733	825,918	948,758	940,100	877,340	-6.7%	19%
Maine	173,039	229,731	252,860	249,119	230,536	-7.5%	17%
Maryland	359,985	560,848	716,379	771,021	787,597	2.1%	13%
Massachusetts	505,782	749,121	861,568	887,619	863,412	-2.7%	13%
Michigan	1,256,373	1,776,368	1,828,384	1,775,646	1,679,421	-5.4%	17%
Minnesota	293,918	430,346	538,869	552,928	533,743	-3.5%	10%
Mississippi	447,181	575,674	659,872	668,624	656,871	-1.8%	22%
Missouri	888,564	901,349	947,889	929,943	858,416	-7.7%	14%
Montana	80,407	113,570	125,874	128,531	124,906	-2.8%	12%
Nebraska	120,809	162,817	176,073	179,711	173,530	-3.4%	9%
Nevada	144,494	278,105	354,900	360,953	383,622	6.3%	14%
New Hampshire	63,583	104,375	116,895	117,315	111,701	-4.8%	8%
New Jersey	437,860	622,022	826,134	876,266	883,434	0.8%	10%
New Mexico	239,959	356,822	438,252	440,362	430,622	-2.2%	21%
New York	1,952,991	2,757,836	3,076,911	3,170,465	3,122,879	-1.5%	16%
North Carolina	946,978	1,346,495	1,668,588	1,703,700	1,575,676	-7.5%	16%
North Dakota	48,412	59,888	58,796	56,523	53,753	-4.9%	7%
Ohio	1,150,928	1,607,422	1,807,913	1,824,675	1,752,135	-4.0%	15%
Oklahoma	419,038	582,492	614,947	621,831	608,492	-2.1%	16%
Oregon	469,315	705,035	815,221	817,575	802,190	-1.9%	20%
Pennsylvania	1,187,822	1,574,783	1,799,209	1,784,790	1,796,154	0.6%	14%
Rhode Island	84,868	138,966	172,846	179,925	178,518	-0.8%	17%
South Carolina	589,763	797,110	869,801	875,866	834,511	-4.7%	17%
South Dakota	62,945	95,336	103,846	104,052	100,938	-3.0%	12%
Tennessee	911,253	1,224,023	1,316,810	1,342,089	1,312,505	-2.2%	20%
Texas	2,532,047	3,551,581	4,038,440	4,041,891	3,852,675	-4.7%	14%
Utah	134,180	247,405	276,890	251,626	229,911	-8.6%	8%
Vermont	55,847	85,538	96,579	100,541	93,000	-7.5%	15%
Virginia	545,079	786,157	913,878	940,932	918,902	-2.3%	11%
Washington	581,001	956,004	1,108,090	1,113,441	1,095,551	-1.6%	16%
West Virginia	276,800	341,156	346,833	350,695	362,501	3.4%	20%
Wisconsin	422,781	715,213	835,312	856,730	841,533	-1.8%	15%
Wyoming	22,608	34,799	34,347	38,046	35,871	-5.7%	6%
TOTAL	28,278,952	40,301,878	46,609,072	47,636,090	46,535,888	-2.3%	15%

Data Source: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Supplemental Food Assistance Program, program data. Data as of Jan. 9, 2015. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>. Calculations made by CSG.