

Executive Summary

The House Committee on Agriculture completed a comprehensive review of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) during the 114th Congress. Known as the *Past, Present, and Future of SNAP*, the purpose of the review was to provide a better understanding of SNAP and the population it serves, to review how SNAP utilizes cash and noncash benefits to serve that population, and to examine ways the program can be improved. While the series highlighted specific ways that vulnerable populations are well-served, it also demonstrated several areas for improvement. The series also highlighted that there is sincere interest on both sides of the aisle in ensuring that SNAP is meeting the needs of those it is intended to serve. Several key findings emerged from the testimony of 60 witnesses across 16 hearings:

Findings Theme 1: Serving SNAP Recipients through Innovation and Flexibility in Program Delivery

- 1a.** SNAP serves a wide-ranging demographic, and the program must adapt to meet the needs of each recipient.
- 1b.** States can take advantage of available state options and waivers, as well as new and developing technologies.
- 1c.** Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility (BBCE) is the most significant state option in SNAP recipient eligibility determinations.
- 1d.** The need for nutrition assistance cannot be addressed by just one program or just one group—it requires more collaboration between governments, charities, businesses, health systems, communities, individuals, and many others.
- 1e.** The diversity of programs serving low-income households has simultaneously generated overlaps and gaps in recipient services.

Findings Theme 2: Climbing the Economic Ladder through Work

- 2a.** Unemployment and underemployment are leading causes of poverty, and promoting pathways to employment is the best way to help individuals climb the economic ladder out of poverty and into self-sufficiency.
- 2b.** Combined with other welfare programs, SNAP recipients may face a “welfare cliff” when they are just above the income eligibility level, which can create disincentives to finding work or increasing earnings.
- 2c.** Better enforcement of work requirements is needed in some states, and enforcement needs to be coupled with more effective SNAP employment and training (E&T) programs.

Findings Theme 3: Maintaining Program Integrity

- 3a.** SNAP needs clear program goals and must be evaluated according to metrics aligned with those goals to generate program improvement.
- 3b.** SNAP fraud rates can be improved through innovative state and federal strategies and technologies.
- 3c.** SNAP error rates are only as good as the program parameters on which they are based.
- 3d.** State flexibility in administering SNAP should not jeopardize program integrity.
- 3e.** Data availability—with robust privacy protections—is a key concern in ensuring SNAP is functioning as intended.

Findings Theme 4: Improving Food Access and Promoting Healthy Food

- 4a.** Americans in both urban and rural communities cannot improve their diets without adequate access to healthy food.
- 4a.** Nutrition education—working in tandem with targeted incentives—can help SNAP recipients develop healthy lifestyles and healthy eating habits.

Through our *Past, Present, and Future of SNAP* hearing series, the House Committee on Agriculture heard from 60 witnesses in 16 hearings over the course of the past two years on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the most important nutrition assistance program in the United States. With around \$70 billion in benefits going to more than 43 million SNAP recipients each year, even small program improvements can result in better nutrition for hungry families and in taxpayer resources being used more effectively. This report documents the findings of the hearing series, which reviewed characteristics of SNAP recipients, the functioning of the program, and innovations in serving those in need of nutrition assistance.

While it may have generated “hearing fatigue,” the review of SNAP was an essential part of our work as we prepare to reauthorize SNAP in the 115th Congress. SNAP is a complex program implemented uniquely by each state. It serves diverse populations with a wide range of needs, many of which are not visible without taking a deeper dive into the program to see how it works.

We know that we live in a country with the safest, most affordable, and most abundant food supply in the world. While Americans on average spend less of their disposable income on food than any other country in the world, those on the lower end of the income ladder in the United States spend more than 34 percent of their disposable income on food—if they have any disposable income at all. It is our responsibility to help our most vulnerable citizens, whether they are children, the elderly, the disabled, veterans, or those who are down on their luck due to no fault of their own. SNAP serves that purpose, partnering with many other organizations to put food on the plates of those who would otherwise be hungry. It is the Committee’s role to ensure we are successful in accomplishing that purpose.

You will find nothing in this report that suggests gutting SNAP or getting rid of a program that does so much to serve so many. What you will find are a number of ways the program is working successfully and a number of areas in need of improvement. You will find areas for innovation, for adjustment, for education and training, and for rethinking the best ways to serve those in need.

There is common ground to be found on SNAP, both in understanding the needs of the population SNAP serves, and in working collaboratively to improve SNAP. That common ground must be found not only within Congress, but across government agencies, non-profits, the private sector, universities, communities, recipients, and a host of other partners involved in meeting the needs of our nation’s most vulnerable citizens.

SNAP serves a critical mission: to feed those who need it and to empower those who are able to move from SNAP to self-reliance. This report focuses on how SNAP currently achieves this mission, and highlights the suggestions of our many witnesses on how SNAP can more effectively fulfill its mission.

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