



Fast Facts About SNAP

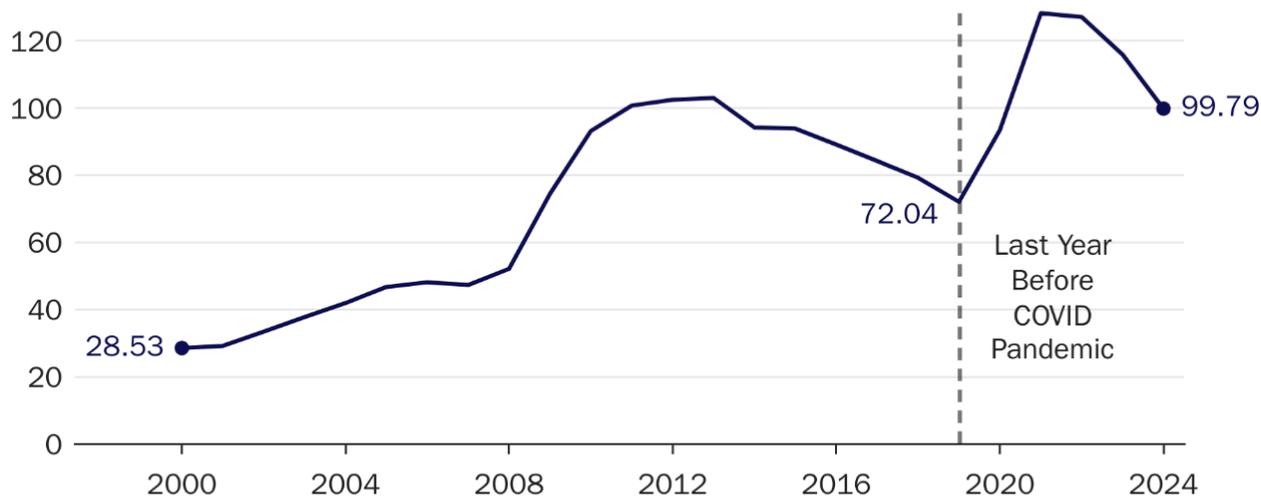
By Romina Boccia and Tyler Turman

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) served 41.7 million Americans on average each month at a cost of roughly \$100 billion in [fiscal year 2024](#). The program suffers from rising costs, lax eligibility enforcement, and significant waste due to misaligned incentives as a result of its near-total reliance on federal funding. SNAP's inclusion in the Farm Bill—combining rural agricultural interests seeking more subsidies and nutrition assistance advocates seeking expanded benefits—makes enacting meaningful reforms to reduce spending difficult. This fact sheet lays out key details that legislators and the public should know about SNAP's problems and potential reforms to align authority with responsibility by devolving nutritional assistance to the states.

SNAP spending has grown [far faster](#) than population increases, economic conditions, and unemployment rates would predict.

SNAP Spending Has Grown Dramatically and Has Not Returned to Pre-Pandemic Levels

(Adjusted for Inflation) In Billions, 2024 USD



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using USDA, FNS data

Note: The figure is based on preliminary data from the September 2024 Program Information Report (Keydata) released by USDA, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) in December 2024. Spending was adjusted for inflation to 2024 dollars using the Personal Consumption Expenditures price index, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis.



Reasons include:

- **Benefit increases.**
 - The [2021 Thrifty Food Plan](#) (TFP) reevaluation [violated](#) congressional spending authority and broke a 45-year precedent by allowing TFP to grow faster than inflation, [increasing benefits](#) by 21 percent. The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget [estimated](#) that the reevaluation would add \$180 billion to the deficit over FY 2022–2031.
- **Loosened eligibility standards.**
 - State SNAP policies, including loosened eligibility and simplified reporting requirements, accounted for [nearly half](#) of SNAP's caseload increase from 2000 to 2016.
 - Federal SNAP guidelines limit [eligibility](#) to households with gross monthly incomes at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL)—\$2,292 for a family of two, the average SNAP [household size](#)—and countable assets less than \$3,000 (\$4,500 for households with elderly or disabled).

- According to 2025 estimates from the Foundation for Government Accountability (FGA), [over 5.9 million people](#) enrolled in SNAP through broad-based categorical eligibility (BBCE) did not meet the program’s eligibility requirements. Thirty-eight states use BBCE to abolish asset limits, and 35 have raised gross income limits above federal rules, with 27 setting the limit at 200 percent of FPL. In [2023, the FGA estimated](#): Four million had assets above federal limits, and 1.4 million had incomes above federal limits.
- **Poorly enforced verification protocols.**
 - The 1996 welfare reforms required able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) to participate in a qualifying employment/training program for at least 80 hours/month.
 - Per FGA, [roughly four million](#) ABAWDs were on SNAP in 2023. Policies, including [geographic waivers](#), allowed most states to shirk work requirements. [In 2022, 84 percent](#) of ABAWD SNAP recipients didn’t meet work requirements through employment.
 - The [One Big Beautiful Bill Act \(OBBBA\)](#) expanded work requirements for most ABAWDs from ages 18–54 to 18–64, restricted geographic waivers, removed or tightened most exemptions, and imposed stricter verification requirements.

SNAP’s top-down financing structure contributes to poor health outcomes, encourages widespread waste, and stifles innovation.

- States rely almost entirely on the federal government to fund SNAP. Although states are responsible for half of SNAP’s administrative costs, they pay nothing to provide benefits, which account for over 90 percent of the program’s total costs.
- SNAP’s financing model gives states little financial incentive to reduce improper payments.
- [The US Department of Agriculture \(USDA\) reported](#) in 2015 that 42 of 53 state agencies had weakened their quality control procedures, which artificially [lowered](#) reported improper payment rates. Consequently, the USDA suspended reporting of payment error rates for 2015 and 2016.
- Average improper payments have almost tripled from 3.66 percent in [FY 2014](#) to 10.93 percent in [FY 2024](#).
- A [2016 USDA](#) study found that one in five SNAP purchases were for sweetened drinks, desserts, salty snacks, candy, and sugar. SNAP participants have [poorer nutrition](#) and [higher rates of obesity](#) compared to nonparticipants.
- As of December 2025, the USDA has granted [18 states waivers](#) to restrict the purchase of items such as soda and candy. These changes will be implemented throughout 2026. Federal rules restrict states from setting their own nutritional standards without a waiver.
- By bundling SNAP with agricultural subsidies in the Farm Bill, Congress has created a durable political coalition of nutrition assistance advocates and farm interests, making cost-control reforms difficult. This is a textbook case of logrolling that shields both programs from accountability, transparent debate, and reform.
- OBBBA reduced the federal share of administrative costs from 50 percent to 25 percent (effective FY 2027) and required states with payment error rates above 6 percent to pay a portion of SNAP benefit costs (ranging from 0–15 percent, effective FY 2028).

Congress should devolve SNAP to the states. Short of that, Congress should:

- Rescind the TFP reevaluation and follow OBBBA’s requirements for cost-neutral future reevaluations.
- Eliminate BBCE and require all SNAP participants to meet the program’s federal income and asset requirements, as Rep. Cline’s (R-VA) [No Welfare for the Wealthy Act \(H.R. 416\)](#) would do.
- Decouple SNAP from the Farm Bill so the program can be reformed on its own merits rather than tied to agricultural subsidies.
- Block grant SNAP to stop the program’s open-ended spending growth.
- Phase down the federal benefit share (e.g., 10 percentage points each year for 10 years) to gradually devolve nutrition assistance to the states.

Further reading:

[“The SNAP Loophole that Lets Millionaires Receive Food Stamps” by Romina Boccia and Tyler Turman](#)

[“How Biden’s Thrifty Food Plan Change Broke SNAP’s Cost Controls” by Romina Boccia and Tyler Turman](#)

[“Food Stamp Shutdown Reveals the Fragility of Federal Welfare” by Romina Boccia and Tyler Turman](#)

[“SNAP: High Costs, Low Nutrition” by Chris Edwards](#)