

Low-income Ohioans face food-assistance cut in November

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Nearly 2 million (1,847,000) low-income people in Ohio will see their food assistance cut when a temporary boost to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) expires November 1.¹ SNAP benefits will average only about \$1.40 per person per meal after the cut, which will affect all of the nearly 47 million Americans, including 22 million children, who receive SNAP. For a family of three, the reduction amounts to \$29 a month, a serious loss given SNAP's already low benefit levels and the very low incomes of SNAP participants – over 80 percent of SNAP households live in poverty.

SNAP cuts will hurt Ohio

- Federal government cuts \$193 million from food-assistance benefits for Ohioans.
- Cuts will hurt 1.8 million low-income Ohioans.
- Families lose \$29 a month; benefit drops to just \$1.40 a meal.
- More than 80 percent of SNAP recipients live in poverty.

In Ohio, the benefit cut through October 2014 will total \$193 million, slowing economic growth by reducing overall consumption. Nationally, the cut will total roughly \$5 billion in federal fiscal year 2014 and an additional \$6 billion across fiscal years 2015 and 2016. These cuts will most certainly result in more households seeking help from Ohio's emergency food network, which is already strained.

On top of these already-scheduled across-the-board cuts, the U.S. House of Representatives recently passed legislation cutting \$40 billion from SNAP, potentially eliminating assistance for nearly 4 million people nationwide, including at least 163,000 Ohioans. Families with children, seniors, people who have lost a job and are unable to find work, and even veterans will be hurt by this. The legislation would provide strong financial incentives for states to reduce caseloads, make it much harder for struggling families to put food on the table, and eliminate assistance for some of the poorest Americans. The House-passed SNAP plan coupled with the November 1 cuts would deal a significant blow to millions of Americans who continue to struggle to make ends meet.

Another change to Ohio's recipients of federal food aid is the pending loss of food aid for some. Most SNAP recipients are either already working (13 percent of all SNAP recipients) or are not expected to work (68 percent) because they are children or senior citizens; have a disability; care for a family member who is disabled; or care for a child under six years old while another household member is working.² The other 19 percent include adults without dependents who are out of work –

¹ For more detail on the scheduled cut, see Stacy Dean and Dorothy Rosenbaum, "SNAP Benefits Will Be Cut for All Participants in November 2013," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Aug. 1, 2013, <http://bit.ly/14YdmiN>.

² Helly Lee, SNAP Work Limits and time Limits, CLASP, June 2013 at www.clasp.org/experts?id=0020.

say, a 19-year-old just out of high school, or an adult who lost her job and whose unemployment has run out. Ohio accepted a waiver from the federal government for the 16 counties with the highest unemployment. In those counties adults without dependents who can't demonstrate work participation will still be able to get SNAP assistance. In other counties, Ohio turned down the federal waiver, so adults without dependents will be limited to three months of assistance out of every three years, after which they will have to demonstrate work participation even if there are no jobs available.

Benefit increase designed to boost economy and ease hardship

Congress enacted the benefit increase as part of the 2009 Recovery Act to deliver economic stimulus and ease hardship. The Recovery Act boosted SNAP's maximum monthly benefits by 13.6 percent beginning in April 2009. It provided that SNAP benefit levels would continue at the new, higher amount until SNAP's regular annual inflation adjustments to the maximum benefit exceeded the Recovery Act amount. But Congress has since voted to accelerate the sunset of the benefit increase to October 31 of this year.

The scheduled cuts are especially painful in light of the inadequacy of existing benefits. In a report issued by the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council, nutrition experts identified several shortcomings with the current SNAP allotment and recommended evaluating a change in the benefit calculation, to ensure that households have enough resources for an adequate diet.³

Cuts will increase hardship

These cuts will cause hardship for many SNAP participants, including 22 million children in 2014 (10 million of whom live in "deep poverty," with family incomes below *half* the poverty line) and 9 million people who are elderly or have a serious disability. In Ohio, one in six residents participate in the program.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture found that the benefit boost reduced the number of households in which one or more people had to skip meals or eat less because they lacked money – what the agency calls "very low food security" – by about 500,000 households in 2009.⁴ More recent research finds that boosting SNAP during the summer for households with school-aged children who don't have access to the USDA's summer food program increase food security among these households by nearly 20 percent.⁵

A recent report by the USDA revealed that the number of Ohio households that faced "food insecurity" in 2010 to 2012 rose by 6.3 percentage points from a decade earlier, 2000 to 2002.⁶ Ohio

³ Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Examining the Evidence to Define Benefit Adequacy*, The National Academy Press, 2013, <http://bit.ly/XduZn4>.

⁴ Mark Nord and Mark Prell, "Food Security of SNAP Recipients Improved Following the 2009 Stimulus Package," *Amber Waves*, 9(2), June 2011, p. 6, [www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2011-june/food-security-of-snap.aspx - UnFOkxZNFHw](http://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2011-june/food-security-of-snap.aspx-UnFOkxZNFHw).

⁵ Evaluation of the Impact of Enhancement Demonstrations on Participation in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP): FY 2011; FNS, USDA, November 2012, <http://1.usa.gov/16MWWIS>.

⁶ Catherine Candisky, "Ohio 10th worst state for food insecurity," *The Columbus Dispatch*, 9/6/2013 at www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2013/09/06/ohio-10th-worst-state-for-food-insecurity.html.

ranks 10th among the states in food insecurity.⁷ A reduction in SNAP benefit levels of this size will make it worse.

Evidence doesn't support cutting SNAP

The Obama Administration and some members of Congress have proposed delaying or canceling the November 1 cut, but Congress has taken no action on these proposals. Moreover, the House of Representatives recently passed legislation that would cut \$40 billion from SNAP *on top of* the scheduled cut – eliminating food assistance for nearly 4 million people.

Supporters of large SNAP cuts claim that because SNAP enrollment hasn't declined in tandem with the unemployment rate over the past few years, the program's enrollment growth in recent years is largely unrelated to the poor economy. In reality, however, the recent reductions in the unemployment rate overstate improvements in the labor market, as Federal Reserve chair Ben Bernanke has observed.⁸ The proportion of the adult population with a job – the employment rate – has barely improved since the recession bottomed out.

In addition, the number of unemployed workers not receiving unemployment benefits – the group of the unemployed most likely to qualify for SNAP because they have neither wages nor Unemployment Insurance benefits – has continued to grow and is higher now than at the bottom of the recession. The historical record shows that declines in poverty and SNAP enrollment typically lag behind declines in the unemployment rate following recessions.

**For more information about SNAP cuts,
see the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities fact sheet on Ohio at
www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=3886.**

⁷ Alisha Coleman-Jensen, Mark Nord and Anita Singh, "Household Food Security in the United States in 2012," United States Department of Agriculture, September 2013.

⁸ "Bernanke Talks: A Conversation at the NBER," Real Time Economics, *Wall Street Journal*, July 11, 2013, <http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2013/07/11/bernanke-talks-a-conversation-at-the-nber/>.