

Ohio should expand use of federal waiver of SNAP time limits in 2017

By Wendy Patton and Kenza Kamal

Every year states choose how to maximize the use of federal food aid. Ohio could request a waiver of time limits on food aid that affects thousands of people. At least 19 counties with locally high unemployment, including many cities within those counties, are eligible for a federal waiver of rules that limit aid to men and women without disability and custody of children. Up to nine additional cities are eligible as well.

In each of the last three years, state policy failed to maximize use of food aid from the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (referred to as “SNAP” and formerly known as food stamps). Under this program, administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), states can request a federal waiver of time limits on food aid if unemployment is high. The state did not request this waiver of time limits for all eligible places in 2014. The state continued to ignore the eligibility of many counties and cities for the waiver of time limits on SNAP food aid in 2015 and 2016 despite [protests from advocates](#), the faith community, and [local](#), [state](#) and [federal](#) officials. State Representative Dan Ramos introduced [legislation](#) to require the state to request aid for any eligible area. The Legal Aid Society of Columbus filed a [civil rights action](#) due to the disproportionate harm this policy inflicts on Ohio’s minority communities.

Maximizing SNAP to bring food to hungry Ohio households

Governor Kasich should carefully consider all of the USDA's rules around the SNAP program and use them to maximize food for hungry Ohioans. Conditions under which a waiver of SNAP time limits may be granted include:

1. Places with a recent three-month average unemployment rate higher than 10 percent;
2. Places with a recent 12-month average unemployment rate that is higher than 10 percent.
3. Places with an unemployment rate averaging 20 percent higher than the national average over a recent 24-month period,
4. Places with insufficient jobs as evidenced by a Department of Labor designation as a Labor Surplus Area.

States are also allowed to group together counties that share geographic borders or that share other economic factors, as long as the entire group of counties taken together meets the thresholds listed in items 1 and 2, above.

At present, 19 Ohio counties should be included in the request for a waiver of SNAP time limits in 2017. This is because their unemployment rates from April 2014 through March 2016 averaged at least 20 percent higher than the national average unemployment rate over that 20-month period.

- Adams
- Belmont
- Clinton*
- Coshocton
- Gallia
- Highland
- Huron
- Jackson
- Jefferson
- Meigs
- Monroe
- Morgan
- Noble
- Ottawa
- Perry
- Pike
- Scioto
- Trumbull
- Vinton

* Clinton County's 24-month average over this time-period was 6.57, which rounds to 6.6, which is 20 percent higher than the national average. The USDA requires rounding to one decimal point, so Clinton County is eligible for the waiver.

In addition there are as many as nine cities outside of any eligible counties that are eligible or potentially eligible for a waiver.

Six cities are eligible based on having unemployment rates 20 percent above the national average for April 2014-March 2016:

- Cleveland
- Lorain
- Mansfield
- Maple Heights
- Youngstown
- Zanesville

Three additional cities are eligible based on designation as Labor Surplus Areas in 2016. The state is allowed to request a 2017 waiver for places found to have a labor surplus in 2016 until the federal Department of Labor publishes a new list for 2017, generally in August or September:

- Dayton
- Lima
- Trotwood

Ohio should include all eligible cities and counties in its request for a federal waiver or SNAP time limits in 2017. This would help tens of thousands to have an adequate and nutritious diet, which supports health, productivity, and success in the labor market.