

## Increasing Access to Fruits and Vegetables Among SNAP Participants Through Financial Incentives

Social, economic, environmental, and cultural factors strongly influence what people eat. Research has found that food insecurity can be associated with poor diet quality, obesity, and reduced fruit and vegetable intake.<sup>i</sup> The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) supports giving participants of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) financial incentives to purchase fruits and vegetables.

### What is SNAP?

Created in 1939 as a pilot program and made permanent in 1964, SNAP is the largest nutrition assistance program in the United States. SNAP is intended to support agricultural economies and provide nutritious food for people with limited incomes through subsidies for purchasing food.<sup>ii</sup> SNAP serves an average of 41.2 million individuals in 21.6 million households monthly.<sup>iii</sup> To qualify for SNAP, a household must meet gross monthly income under 130% of the federal poverty line, as well as meet specific household net income and other asset and work requirements to receive access to the program. SNAP benefits are distributed monthly and in 2023, the average monthly maximum benefit for a family of four is \$973 in the contiguous 48 states and Washington, D.C.<sup>iv,v</sup> SNAP benefits are issued through electronic benefits transfer cards (EBT) and can be used in many authorized food retail and farmers' markets. More than 260,000 retailers currently accept SNAP, and 80% of SNAP benefits are redeemed in supermarkets or superstores.<sup>vi</sup> SNAP benefits must be used to purchase food and exclude tobacco, alcohol, paper products, and “ready to eat” foods (i.e., convenience store hot pizza or grocery store rotisserie chicken).<sup>vii</sup>

The Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDIPR) provides, in lieu of SNAP benefits, food commodities to income-eligible households on federal Indian reservations and to Native American families residing in Oklahoma or designated areas near Oklahoma. Individuals in these tribal areas can choose between receiving SNAP or FDIPR benefits.<sup>viii</sup>



### What are Fruit and Vegetable Incentives in SNAP?

Access to, affordability of, and consumption of nutritious food, specifically fruit and vegetables, is a social determinant of health that plays an important role in preventing, managing, and treating chronic diseases, including cancer. For SNAP participants, it has been demonstrated that the cost of food is a barrier to consuming healthy foods, and providing financial incentives to SNAP participants to purchase fruits and vegetables increases their consumption of nutritious food.<sup>ix</sup> Making fruits and vegetables more affordable for SNAP participants by providing them financial incentives improves the quality of their diets and reduces their food and nutrition insecurity.

The federal government provides fruit and vegetable incentives to SNAP participants through the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP)<sup>x</sup> Grantees are required to provide a 1:1 financial match for federal dollars, which can be cost prohibitive for some jurisdictions to participate in the program. While approximately 260,000 retailers currently accept SNAP, including a majority of supermarkets or superstores, only about 1% of all SNAP retailers (2,928) redeemed fruit and vegetable incentives for SNAP participants in 2022.<sup>xi</sup> Various factors can impact a retailer's decision and willingness to offer fruit and vegetable incentives to SNAP participants, including:

- establishing the incentive amount;
- determining the type of fruits and vegetables offered (fresh, frozen, or canned);
- identifying how benefit incentives are redeemed (token or electronic); and
- training staff to implement and administer the program.

In addition, since GusNIP is a grant-funded program, the funding is limited to areas where grantees live and is time-limited to the life of the grant, which can also impact the number of retailers participating in the program. The best-known example of GusNIP grant-funded programs are the Double UP Food Bucks programs administered in over 27 states that allow SNAP participants to receive twice as much of a financial incentive or dollar amount to purchase fruits and vegetables at participating retailers or farmers' markets.



Several states also have state-funded programs to provide fruit and vegetable incentives for SNAP participants. Missouri, Hawaii, Arizona, and Minnesota are examples of states that have passed laws to provide financial incentives for SNAP participants to purchase fruits and vegetables.<sup>xii</sup>

### **ACS CAN's Position: Advocating for Fruit and Vegetable Incentives in SNAP**

ACS CAN strongly advocates for policies that increase fruit and vegetable incentives in SNAP to reduce food and nutrition insecurity, which may reduce the risk of chronic diseases, including cancer. SNAP provides incentives for fruit and vegetables through its extensive retail and farmers' markets network. It supports individuals, families, and communities in addressing health-related disparities in food and nutrition insecurity and chronic diseases like cancer.

ACS CAN advocates for fruit and vegetable incentives in the SNAP program by supporting:

- ❖ Increases in funding for GusNIP fruit and vegetable incentive grants and GusNIP technical assistance and evaluation.
- ❖ Decreasing or eliminating the GusNIP federal requirement for grantee match.
- ❖ State and local legislative and regulatory action to develop and fund fruit and vegetable incentives for SNAP participants.

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For more information on ACS CAN's advocacy work around healthy eating and active living environments, please visit <https://www.fightcancer.org/what-we-do/healthy-eating-and-active-living>.

<sup>i</sup> Morales ME, Berkowitz SA. The Relationship between Food Insecurity, Dietary Patterns, and Obesity. *Curr Nutr Rep*. 2016 Mar;5(1):54-60. doi: 10.1007/s13668-016-0153-y. Epub 2016 Jan 25. PMID: 29955440; PMCID: PMC6019322.

<sup>ii</sup> Agriculture, U. S. D. o. (2023). *A Short History of SNAP*. Retrieved November 11 from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/short-history-snap#:~:text=Among%20the%20official%20purposes%20of,enact%20the%20regulations%20into%20law>

<sup>iii</sup> Congressional Research Service, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): A Primer on Eligibility and Benefits, updated September 8, 2023, accessed December 8, 2023, retrieved from

<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R42505#:~:text=In%20FY2022%2C%20an%20average%20of,the%20COVID%2D19%20pandemic>).

<sup>iv</sup> Falk, R. A. A. G. (2023). *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): A Primer on Eligibility and Benefits*. (R42505). Retrieved from <https://crsreports.congress.gov/>.

<sup>v</sup> *Snap eligibility*. Food and Nutrition Service U.S. Department of Agriculture. (n.d.). <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recipient/eligibility>

<sup>vi</sup> USDA. (2023, December 16). *Where Can I Use SNAP EBT?* Retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/retailer-locator>.

<sup>vii</sup> Falk, R. A. A. G. (2023). *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): A Primer on Eligibility and Benefits*. (R42505). Retrieved from <https://crsreports.congress.gov/>.

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>ix</sup> ngel, K., & Ruder, E. H. (2020). Fruit and Vegetable Incentive Programs for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participants: A Scoping Review of Program Structure. *Nutrients*, 12(6), 1676. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu12061676>.

<sup>x</sup> *Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (gusnip)*. National Institute of Food and Agriculture. (n.d.).

<https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/programs/hunger-food-security-programs/gus-schumacher-nutrition-incentive-program>.

<sup>xi</sup> *GUSNIP Ntae Y3 impact findings*. Nutrition Incentive Hub. (n.d.). <https://nutritionincentivehub.org/gusnip-ntae-y3-impact-findings>.

<sup>xii</sup> *Report supplemental nutrition assistance program*. National Conference of State Legislatures. (n.d.). <https://www.ncsl.org/human-services/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program>.