

Research is Needed to Strengthen Food and Nutrition Security in the 2023 Farm Bill

The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) urges the following recommendations be implemented in the 2023 Farm Bill to mitigate hunger in the U.S., while simultaneously improving nutrition security.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a powerful food safety net program and has many positive public health impacts. The program helps to reduce poverty, food insecurity, health care expenditures, and the risk of chronic conditions later in life.¹ Yet eligibility criteria exclude many people experiencing food insecurity, and six out of ten SNAP participants point to cost as a major barrier to healthy eating.² Testing additional strategies through demonstration projects and establishing nutrition security measurements could further strengthen the nutritional and broader public health impacts of SNAP.



Food And Nutrition Security Demonstration Projects

Recommendation: Continue the momentum, first established in The Food, Nutrition and Conservation Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill), by investing \$100 million in state-based food and nutrition security demonstration projects to test:

- The allowance of hot prepared foods
- Increasing the value of benefit allotments at 150%, 175%, and 200% of the Thrifty Food Plan, first authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill
- Stronger stocking requirements, first authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill
- Increasing the frequency of benefit allotment distribution to participating households
- Innovative marketing strategies such as product placement and promotions to increase purchases of nutritious foods
- A fruit and vegetable incentive combined with a sugary beverage reduction strategy at the point of purchase, building off of the 2008 Farm Bill
- Integrating SNAP nutrition education (SNAP-Ed) into research projects, first authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill
- Improving the enrollment process, such as through integrated benefits applications across multiple programs

Pilots will inform each strategy's health potential, technical feasibility, cost-effectiveness, and possible unintended consequences.

- The 2008 Farm Bill authorized SNAP demonstration projects to evaluate strategies that could promote health and nutrition while not limiting benefits.³
 - Strategies included: **increasing purchasing power**; increasing access to farmers markets; retailer incentives to increase availability of healthy food; **testing stronger stocking requirements**; improving coordination of communication and SNAP-Ed efforts; and **providing fruit and vegetable incentives at the point of purchase**.
- Congress mandated \$20 million in funding for the fruit and vegetable incentives pilot (also known as the Healthy Incentives Pilot, the results of which led to the Food Insecurity and Nutrition Incentive grant program, now known as the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program⁴).⁵
 - The other pilots were given discretionary funding that expired in 2012 and were never funded.⁶
- CSPI asks that Congress build on investments in the 2008 Farm Bill and provide \$100 million in mandatory funding to test a range of demonstration projects that are likely to lead to food and nutrition security gains while not limiting access or benefits.
 - The Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) and the bipartisan congressionally-mandated National Commission on Hunger have similarly recommended demonstration projects.^{7,8}
 - CSPI and BPC recommend \$100 million in mandatory funding, which could fund 5 projects, estimating that each would cost about \$20 million, based on the cost of the Healthy Incentives Pilot in the 2008 Farm Bill.
- Demonstration projects are only for testing new strategies that could improve food and nutrition security and are unrelated to policy changes. Demonstration projects also are typically limited to one state or locality.

Measurement and Reporting on Nutrition Security

Recommendation: Formalize a valid measure of nutrition security to allow researchers and practitioners to adequately assess barriers to having consistent access to foods that promote wellbeing. Require the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to regularly report on the impacts of SNAP on nutrition security.

- It is well known that SNAP is effective at reducing food insecurity, because food insecurity metrics are well-established and annually reported.
- While the USDA has released a working definition of nutrition security,⁹ there are no established or agreed-upon metrics for evaluating nutrition security which are needed for assessing program effectiveness and overall trends.

- Requiring the establishment of metrics and annual reporting will ensure parity with food security.
 - For example, currently there are no metrics to assess equitable access, availability, and affordability of nutritious food (the working definition of *nutrition* security) whereas there are well-established metrics for *food* insecurity.¹⁰
- The USDA monitors the extent and severity of food insecurity in U.S. households through an annual, nationally representative survey sponsored and analyzed by the USDA’s Economic Research Service (ERS).¹¹
 - Once established, we urge ERS to add nutrition security metrics to this survey.

Metrics should evaluate **diet quality** and **alignment with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*** as measured by the USDA’s Healthy Eating Index (HEI) score.

For more than 50 years, the Center for Science in the Public Interest has been an influential force in the fight for a better food system. CSPI leverages our unique expertise to support passing policies that increase access to nutritious food, support healthy food and beverage choices, and ensure a healthy diet for all consumers.

For more information, please contact the Center for Science in the Public Interest at policy@cspinet.org.

¹ Bleich S, et al. *Strengthening the Public Health Impacts of SNAP: Key Opportunities for the Next Farm Bill*. Healthy Eating Research. 2021. <https://healthyeatingresearch.org/wpcontent/uploads/2021/05/her-snap-farm-bill-3.pdf>. Accessed August 8, 2022

² *Barriers That Constrain the Adequacy of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Allotments*. U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. 2021. <https://fnsprod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNAP-Barriers-Summary.pdf>. Accessed December 1, 2021.

³ 7 U.S.C. §2026 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

⁴ Voices for Healthy Kids. SNAP Series: Making Nutritious Produce Available in Hawaii. <https://archived.voicesforhealthykids.org/success-stories/snapserieshi/>. Accessed July 29, 2022.

⁵ Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008. P.L. 110-2419

⁶ Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008. P.L. 110-2419

⁷ Bipartisan Policy Center. *Leading with Nutrition: Leveraging Federal Programs for Better Health*. 2018. <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/download/?file=/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/BPC-Health-Leading-With-Nutrition.pdf>. Accessed July 29, 2022.

⁸ National Commission on Hunger. *Freedom from Hunger: An Achievable Goal for the United States of America*. 2015. https://cybercemetery.unt.edu/archive/hungercommission/20151216222324/https://hungercommission.rti.org/Portals/0/SiteHtml/Activities/FinalReport/Hunger_Commission_Final_Report.pdf. Accessed July 29, 2022.

⁹ U.S. Department of Agriculture. *Food and Nutrition Security*. n.d. <https://www.usda.gov/nutrition-security>. Accessed July 29, 2022.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Agriculture. *Measurement*. Economic Research Service. April 22, 2022. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/measurement/>. Accessed July 29, 2022.

¹¹ Coleman-Jensen A, et al. *Household Food Security in the United States in 2020*. Economic Research Service. 2021. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=102075>. Accessed July 29, 2022.