

SNAP and the 2018 Farm Bill

What is the farm bill?

The farm bill is a package of agriculture and nutrition legislation passed by Congress roughly every five years, which includes a nutrition title (Title IV) that authorizes most federal food programs. The nutrition title comprises nearly 80% of the budget for the farm bill, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) accounts for most of Title IV spending.¹

How did the 2018 Farm Bill impact the SNAP program?

Following months of contentious negotiations, the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 Farm Bill) preserved SNAP eligibility and benefit levels for the greater than 40 million individuals who rely on the program.^{2, 3} The final legislation also enhanced some SNAP initiatives and introduced several innovative programs:

SNAP Benefits

- Protected the structure and funding of SNAP. Rejected all measures included in the House version to cut benefits and eligibility.⁴
- Required USDA, by 2022 and in 5-year intervals, to re-evaluate and publish market baskets of the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP)—the basis for SNAP benefit allotments—based on current food prices, food composition data, USDA dietary guidelines, and consumption patterns.
 - USDA announced the results of this update in August 2021, which found that the cost of a nutritious, practical, cost-effective diet is 21 percent higher than the current Thrifty Food Plan.⁵

Incentives

- Reauthorized the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP, formerly the Food Insecurity Nutrition Initiative or FINI) and established mandatory baseline funding of \$250 million over five years (\$50 million per year). GusNIP funds nutrition incentives, produce prescriptions, and technical assistance and evaluation support.
- Established a \$20 million incentive pilot for milk (discretionary funding).

¹ 2018 Farm Bill Primer: Snap and Nutrition Title Programs. Congressional Research Service. 2019. <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/IF11087.pdf>.

² Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018. P.L. 115-334, 132 Stat. 4490.

³ Fleischhacker S, Moran A, Bleich S. Legislative and Executive Branch Developments Affecting the United States Department of Agriculture Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Journal of Food Law & Policy. 2019; 15.

⁴ Bolen E, et al. House Farm Bill Would Increase Food Insecurity and Hardship. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. 2018. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/house-farm-bill-would-increase-food-insecurity-and-hardship>.

⁵ Thrifty Food Plan - 2021. U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/resource/thrifty-food-plan-2021>.

Additional Initiatives and Programs

- SNAP-Ed: protected funding for evidence-based nutrition education interventions and required an electronic reporting system, technical assistance, and annual reports to USDA. Established an online information clearinghouse to share best practices.
- Public-Private Partnerships: Authorized \$5 million for up to ten pilot projects to test public-private partnerships that improve the effectiveness and impact of SNAP, develop contextualized solutions to poverty, and strengthen the capacity for communities to mitigate food insecurity and poverty.
- Mobile pilot projects: Created mobile pilot projects to leverage technology to verify applicant identities and income.
- Online SNAP: Required nationwide implementation of online acceptance of SNAP benefits following completion of the pilots created in the 2014 Farm Bill and removed the requirement for USDA to report to Congress on the pilot results.
- SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T): expanded SNAP E&T operations and slightly increased funding.
- Child support cooperation requirements: Directed USDA and HHS to evaluate state policies on SNAP child support cooperation requirements.

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