

Statement on Preserving Food Choice in SNAP

The White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health will take a look at critical issues impacting our nation. It is vital that every American have the basic resources necessary to help purchase foods and prepare a nutritionally adequate diet. For many in the U.S. who live in households that face a constant struggle against hunger, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), provides vital assistance in meeting that goal. Over the years, organizations have proposed limiting food choices for SNAP consumers. As supporters of preserving consumer food choice in SNAP, we believe mandating such limitations would be at cross-purposes with the basic intent of SNAP to reduce hunger and support people in difficult times.

As the White House considers a national strategy to eliminate hunger and improve nutrition and health, we urge the Administration to maintain the integrity of SNAP and oppose program changes that would limit consumer food choice.

SNAP responds quickly and effectively to increased need for nutrition assistance due to economic downturns or natural disasters, as millions across this country experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. SNAP participation and costs expand and contract with the overall economic conditions. Participation in SNAP is an important part of strategies to address both hunger and obesity. Too often, families lack adequate resources to afford a healthy diet on a consistent basis, which can exacerbate obesity as well as hunger. SNAP provides households with vital benefits toward their overall food budgets that can help them obtain the foods they need. The data is clear that reduces food insecurity and improves diet-related health outcomes in adults who had access to SNAP during childhood.¹

The 2018 Farm Bill wisely continued to allow recipients choice among food purchases. The long-standing clear distinction in the program between food items that can be purchased with SNAP benefits and non-food items that cannot be purchased maintains the fundamental purpose of the program and provides consumers and retailers with a simple test for determining product eligibility.

Much of the stigma that used to be attached to participation in SNAP stemmed from the visibility participants received when redeeming paper “food stamp” coupons in a supermarket line. Implementation of EBT technology and online SNAP have enhanced the dignity experienced by SNAP customers.

Our nation should not lose ground on the efficiencies and dignity that have been added to the SNAP transaction. At a time when many Americans need the temporary assistance available through SNAP, it is more important than ever that policies promote benefit adequacy and access, not introduce unwise complexity or stigma. Additionally, parsing SNAP food items into variable, government-administered lists would increase the cost to retailers that accept SNAP benefits, creating particular burdens on smaller retailers. This contrasts with direction taken by the federal dietary guidelines, which focuses on a total diet approach that promotes moderation and consumption of a variety of foods without singling out individual foods as “good” or “bad.”

There are positive approaches to tackling the challenge of healthier outcomes for Americans, including making sure families have access to resources to obtain a wide variety of foods. In recent years,

¹ Hoynes H, Schanzenbach DW, Almond D. *Long-Run Impacts of Childhood Access to the Safety Net*. Am Econ Rev. 2016;106(4):903-934 (n.d.)

Congress also supported healthy choices by providing low-income consumers with SNAP resources to purchase food, by reauthorizing nutrition education targeted to SNAP-eligible people, and by funding incentives to encourage nutritious SNAP consumer choices.

Rather than limiting food choice and layering over an already complex program with additional hurdles for participants that may cause stigma and result in confusion and nonparticipation, efforts should focus on nutritional education, access and outreach. In addition to connecting eligible Americans with SNAP and providing them with adequate resources to purchase food, policies should promote good nutrition by: supporting nutrition education; ensuring low-income areas have retail outlets for obtaining nutritious foods like fruits, vegetables and whole grains; and promoting after school and summer programs that offer healthy food and safe recreational activities.

American Bakers Association
American Beverage Association
American Frozen Food Institute
Can Manufacturers Institute
Consumer Brands Association
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
Congressional Hunger Center
Feeding America

FMI - The Food Industry Association
Food Research & Action Center
National Confectioners Association
National Council of Farmer Cooperatives
National Grocers Association
North American Meat Institute
North American Millers Association
SNAC International