



Advocacy Action Sheet - Federal: SNAP

Background: The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ('SNAP' aka 'Food Stamps') is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). SNAP is part of the Farm Bill, which expires every five years. The current Farm Bill, The Agricultural Act of 2014, was signed into law February 2014.

In America, economically disadvantaged people are 70% more likely to have type 2 diabetes, and 19% more likely to have high blood pressure, compared to higher-income peers. Indeed, economically disadvantaged people have higher rates of food borne diseases than the general public, and SNAP participants, specifically, are worse off. According to a 2015 USDA report, SNAP participants are much less likely to consume adequate fresh fruits and vegetables than other Americans, and they are also more likely to be obese (USDA, 2015; Leung and Villamor, 2010). According to a study published in the American Journal of Public Health, individuals participating in SNAP exhibited higher total and cardiovascular disease mortality than both SNAP-eligible nonparticipants and SNAP-ineligible individuals, as well as higher diabetes mortality (Conrad, et al., 2017). Moreover, half of SNAP recipients are children and teens.

SNAP benefits cost \$70.9 billion in [fiscal year](#) 2016 and supplied roughly 44 million Americans with an average monthly benefit of \$125 per person/\$254 per household in food assistance. These SNAP benefits are not enough to meet US Dietary Guidelines, which is estimated to cost upwards of \$1,000 per month (Sept 2017 Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior). Periodically, proposals have been made to restrict SNAP benefits from being used to purchase various categories of food which have been criticized as "junk food" or "luxury items. However, Congress and the USDA have repeatedly rejected such proposals on the grounds of both administrative burden and equity/patronizing food policy – in the face of lobbying by companies that sell junk food.

Issue/Opportunity: A [2016 SNAP summary report](#) released by the USDA, reveals that SNAP households spent \$608.7 million on sweetened beverages, \$1.26 billion on meat, poultry and seafood, \$427.8 million on high fat dairy/cheeses, and \$138.2 million on candy, in the year 2011. According to Dr. Neal Barnard at the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM), "If retailers provided vegetables, fruits, grains and legumes and no meat, dairy products, candy, or sodas at all, SNAP participants would be healthier. And the program would be cheaper; it could deliver far more food to far more people." *PPC supports PCRM's efforts to improve SNAP so that it prioritizes healthful foods to address both hunger and malnutrition while saving both money and lives. SNAP should empower economically disadvantaged Americans to be healthy while also improving the national food market, rather than continue to subsidize the junk food profits of massive companies.*

There appears to be a related local 'soda tax' issue. Because SNAP benefits are often used to purchase soda, localities that pass 'soda taxes' may be flouting the federal statute that bans state or local sales taxes from being collected on items purchased with SNAP benefits. For example, on Aug. 7, 2017, the USDA warned Illinois it may lose SNAP administration funding due to Cook County's new soda tax. If legislation required that SNAP benefits must be used to purchase healthy food, it would not jeopardize local legislative efforts to pass soda taxes.

Timeframe: The Farm Bill reauthorization is due September 2018. Discussions and groundwork for what will be in that legislation are now underway.

Key Stakeholders:

- Key Leaders on this issue: PCRM
- Impacted Population: poor people across America

Call to Action: PPC will implement a two-pronged strategy to support PCRM's efforts:

- Pods and Pod members can support this effort by i) getting up to speed on the key issues, challenges and the timeframe for decision-making about SNAP; and ii) committing to write cards and letters and make phone calls to elected officials when activated; and
- Via PPC's Oasis program, PPC will support PCRM by sharing data, testimonials and other information about the Oasis program in general and Oasis Pilot communities, in particular.

Resources:

- This link to the National Sustainable Agriculture Association provides information and history about the Farm Bill - <http://sustainableagriculture.net/our-work/campaigns/fbcampaign/what-is-the-farm-bill/> -
- Here is a link to the June 15, 2017 press release issued by the American Medical Association which calls on the US government to improve access to healthful foods for SNAP recipients. <https://www.ama-assn.org/ama-adopts-new-public-health-policies-improve-health-nation-0>
- Here is a link to a report issued by Voice of the People in April 2017, that surveyed Americans' opinions about SNAP benefits: http://vop.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/SNAP_Report.pdf

Please send updates and/or suggestions on this Advocacy Action Sheet to info@plantpurecommunities.org.

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