

The SNAP Nutrition Security Act of 2023

Diet-related chronic diseases such as diabetes, obesity, heart disease, stroke, and certain cancers are the leading causes of death and disability in the United States. At present, half of U.S. adults have prediabetes or type 2 diabetes, and 3 in 4 have overweight or obesity. These conditions create a heavy burden for individuals and society, negatively impacting quality of life, health care costs, productivity, and military readiness. The leading risk factor for chronic disease development is poor nutrition. People experiencing food insecurity and people with low incomes are disproportionately impacted by diet-related chronic diseases. All told, the economic cost of nutrition-related chronic diseases has been estimated at \$16 trillion over the period 2011 to 2020.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a powerful food safety net program that helps to reduce poverty and food insecurity. Further strengthening SNAP so it also advances nutrition and reduces diet-related chronic diseases is important to support health and reduce healthcare costs among Americans who rely on this program. “Nutrition security” is an emerging concept, and as such the impact of SNAP on nutrition security is not yet known. In 2022 the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released a working definition of nutrition security as “consistent and equitable access to healthy, safe, affordable foods essential to optimal health and well-being.”

The need to measure and improve both food and nutrition security

The term “nutrition security” is related yet distinct from food security. Nutrition security builds on food security by emphasizing the coexistence of hunger and diet-related chronic disease that disproportionately impacts Americans with low incomes. Nutrition security focuses on access to more *nutritious* food, where food security focuses on access to *all* foods and is currently defined as, “access by all people at all times to *enough* food for an active, healthy life.” Both food and nutrition security are critical, complementary measures for understanding SNAP’s impact, identifying ways to mitigate hunger and malnutrition, and improving access to healthy food to mitigate chronic disease disparities.

USDA currently 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). This legislation would add nutrition security to USDA’s existing and annual reporting which will generate, for the first time, data needed to determine how SNAP impacts nutrition security, and therefore could improve access to nutritious food and the health and wellbeing of SNAP recipients. In addition, the bill defines and requires reporting on “diet quality,” which is a key component of nutrition security referring to meeting key recommendations of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Collecting de-identified data to better understand the impact of SNAP on nutrition security

Understanding and strengthening the positive impact of SNAP also requires more regular data collection. The bill requires a nationally- and state-representative SNAP sales report every four years. Sales data would be de-identified and reported in the aggregate to protect the identity of both SNAP participants and retailers. This report would give insight into affordability of foods, the timing of purchases within a monthly benefit issuance cycle, and the types of products typically purchased. Knowing when certain foods are purchased and what type of food is being purchased will help improve ways that SNAP can advance food and nutrition security. For example, data on fruit and vegetable purchases may be used to bolster support for incentive programs.

The SNAP Nutrition Security Act of 2023 would:

- Measure and annually report on nutrition security and diet quality, as USDA currently does for food security
- Add food and nutrition security reporting to annual state SNAP-Ed reports, which will help states determine how they can improve food and nutrition security.
- Collect and report aggregate (de-identified) nationally- and state-representative product sales data
- Add improving nutrition security and diet quality to Congress’s declaration of policy for SNAP, which provides Congressional rationale for the program