

Advocacy Update 04.09.2021



Grab yourselves a cup of coffee or a snack because there is a lot to update here.

We will focus on SNAP & TEFAP for this update

ACTIONS will be coming next week, please take a few moments on Monday and help advocate for anti-hunger policy...stay tuned.

SNAP

So much is going on with SNAP. Our SNAP team at North Texas Food Bank has had a lot of changes to navigate so please allow me to give them a hardy round of applause as they connect our community members with benefits that help put groceries into their homes from their local markets. The few items I'll mention below are nowhere near inclusive of all the work happening around SNAP, but we will hit some highlights here.

Federal

College Hunger and SNAP

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 (CAA) temporarily expanded SNAP benefits to college students who have a family contribution of \$0 on their FAFSA forms (meaning their families are not financially supporting them in their college education). Texas will be contacting all College Students that this applies to, to let them know that they could be eligible for SNAP benefits. Currently, college students who are not working are not eligible to participate in SNAP. This temporarily allows them to do so.

SNAP Provisions in the American Rescue Plan Act (the fifth relief package...the one after the CAA, the fourth relief package)

As a review, these items were signed into law

- Extension of the 15% boost in individual monthly SNAP benefits for 3 additional months from June until September 2021
- \$25M provided in support the expansion of using SNAP at online retailers
- \$1B provided to States for SNAP administrative expenses

USDA increases SNAP Emergency Allotments Explained (fixing the FFCRA, the second relief package)

Back in March 2020, the USDA raised all the monthly SNAP benefits up to the highest amount a family could receive.

Background: When households apply for SNAP, they start at a maximum benefit and then deductions are taken for various reasons. Let's say your maximum benefit is \$300 for the household. Due to information in your application (income received, assets) that \$300 may be reduced leaving your household benefits down to \$145 dollars a month. Pre-pandemic, that is what would be put on your SNAP card each month.

The FFCRA allowed all households to bump up and receive that maximum benefit regardless of any deductions they were supposed to have. So that \$145 was bumped up to \$300 giving you and your family an extra \$155 a month in SNAP benefits since March 2020. However...what happens if you had no deductions and were receiving the maximum benefits prior to the pandemic? Your family therefore received no extra emergency allotment, like other families did. Even though these households are the lowest-income households.

What this does is give those families (25 million people), already at the maximum, an extra \$95 per month.

With this new policy, households that had not received at least \$95 per month in increased benefits through emergency allotments are now eligible for an additional \$95 added to their monthly benefits.

State

HB 2126

This bill will have a committee hearing at the State Legislature on Tuesday April 13th and North Texas Food Bank will be testifying for this bill. It instructs the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (the administrators of SNAP in Texas) to use federal matching funds, available to all states, to contract with third-party workforce training providers to bring in a larger offering of services for people who wish to use SNAP's Employment and Training Program. Additionally, this bill will allow students who are in work programs (vocational training) to use that as their Employment and Training requirements. This will further strengthen the link between SNAP and work.

HB 701

This bill will be heard in committee at the State Legislature on Tuesday April 13th and the North Texas Food Bank will be testifying for this bill. This bill simplifies the SNAP application for seniors and persons with disabilities. It does not make any changes to eligibility and only applies to seniors and persons with disabilities who have no income. It shortens the 18-page application down to 2 pages and helps connect a difficult to reach population with benefits they already qualify for, reducing administrative burden and helps more seniors get food they need from their local grocery store.

HB 1230

This bill will be heard in committee at the State Legislature on Tuesday April 13th. This bill (after a substitute is offered) will raise the vehicle asset limit to \$25,000 per household car. The current car asset limits are \$15,000 for the first car (set in 2001) and \$4,650 (set in 1973) for the second car. Meaning, if your family owns a car that is worth too much, you could be disqualified from SNAP. Texans need reliable cars to get to work and it's time that the car values were modernized and reflect actual blue book values of reliable cars in Texas. Having a car should not prevent your family from accessing food benefits. All food bankers and food pantry workers saw lines and lines of cars who needed food but couldn't get approved for SNAP because of a 20-year-old policy, and one that 35 states have abolished completely.

Coming up - Build Back Better Package (the tbd sixth relief package)

The next piece of major legislation from the Biden Administration will be the Build Back Better package which seeks to decrease unemployment resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Feeding America Network will be asking for the continued extension of the 15% boost in SNAP benefits from September 2021 into the end of the economic downturn (likely 2024).

TEFAP

TEFAP Explained

Is TEFAP confusing sometimes? (YES!) To help with this Feeding America has put together this one-pager that helps explain the program. [Please feel free to click HERE](#) to access the flyer. Use it as a reference or teaching tool

TEFAP Produce Boxes

The USDA announced that Produce Boxes, like the Farmers to Family Food Boxes, seen in the first rounds of the program last May, will be available for State Agencies (and then food banks) to order using their TEFAP entitlement money. The hope is to put these boxes as permanent items into the TEFAP ordering catalogue as the Farmers to Family Food Box program sunsets this month. The North Texas Food Bank is still working with the Texas Department of Agriculture to see how and when and if this new option will start and advising on what works best for food banks and our partners.

Coming up - Build Back Better Package

In the new rescue package, the Feeding America network will be asking for the following items for TEFAP.

- \$900M for additional TEFAP purchases, available until September 30, 2022.
- Use the \$3.6B made available in the American Rescue Plan to purchase additional food from commodity growers
- \$543M in funding to increase and improve the cold storage and transportation capacity of the feeding network

Cool Ag Thing

I know I've contributed [a lot to this story](#) (and maybe to the grape industry as well) but here is a National Geographic article on how coffee pulp (what's left over after the growing process) is helping rainforests come back to life. By spreading the pulp over barren land, it prevents invasive grasses from taking over and trees can push through to regenerate.

On days when you think you've accomplished nothing but drinking copious amounts of coffee, know that YOU have helped regrow the rainforest. Pat on your back.

Have a great weekend everyone!

Questions? Comments? Hit Reply!

Did you know that coffee is the second highest traded commodity on Earth? Right behind oil

Save that for your trivia night

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No longer want to receive these emails, no biggie, hit reply and I'll wave bye