

Adams' Work on Hunger Means Increased Benefits for NC Families



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Date 2021-09-13 12:05



Rep. Adams' Work on Hunger Means Increased Benefits for American Families

In North Carolina, SNAP recipients will receive an average of \$1,179 more in benefits each year

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Congresswoman Alma Adams (NC-12) is celebrating the announcement made by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) on August 16th, which will increase support for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) beneficiaries. Due in part to Rep. Adams' work, the average monthly SNAP benefit will increase by 27 percent per person.

“Ending hunger in the United States is one of my most important

priorities. I was proud to vote in support of the bipartisan 2018 Farm Bill, which included a critical provision to reevaluate the Thrifty Food Plan by 2022 so that American families receive SNAP benefits that accurately reflect their needs,” **said Congresswoman Alma Adams, Vice Chair of the House Committee on Agriculture.** “Thanks to this Farm Bill provision and the tireless work of USDA, the maximum SNAP benefit will see an average increase of 27 percent. The average monthly benefits will go from about \$121 per person, pre-pandemic, to about \$157 per person. This increase will allow families to better afford a balanced, nutritious diet.”

“Since 2016, I have championed the Closing the Meal Gap Act, which strengthens SNAP adequacy by increasing benefits by about 30 percent and eliminates unrealistic barriers for millions of people affected by food insecurity. I am so proud to see much of that work be realized this week”

“As food insecurity remains **30 percent** above pre-pandemic levels, particularly among households with children, ending all forms of hunger continues to be one of my top priorities in Congress. USDA’s announcement is an essential building block in the fight to end hunger and food insecurity. In the wealthiest nation in the world, there is no reason for a child or their family to ever go hungry.”

Hunger – along with Housing, Higher Education, and Healthcare – is one of Rep. Adams’ “4H” policy priorities, **enumerated in the Constitutional amendment she introduced** “recognizing and securing the fundamental right to life, liberty, and property, which includes housing, health care, education, and nutrition.” In February, when Adams was reelected as Vice Chair of the House Committee on Agriculture in the 117th Congress, **Chairman David Scott remarked**, “She has a proven track record of being a strong advocate for ending hunger.”

Adams has consistently lobbied for increasing SNAP benefits and solutions to end the hunger crisis, **most recently in a letter to**

Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack on August 11. Soon after joining Congress, Rep. Adams **founded the Adams Hunger Initiative**. The Initiative “works to promote public-private partnerships, create dialogues between elected officials and key stakeholders, draft bipartisan legislation aimed at addressing hunger and food insecurity, and promote and protect critical food programs and food banks.” The AHI meets quarterly and participating organizations include Charlotte-based Loaves & Fishes/Friendship Trays.

“In 2020, over 120,000 individuals relied on our network of mobile food pantries at Loaves & Fishes to put food around their tables,” said Tina Postel, Chief Executive Officer of Loaves & Fishes/Friendship Trays. “Nearly half of who we served were children and seniors! An increase in SNAP benefits not only lightens our heavy load at Loaves & Fishes but enables food insecure families to select fresh and healthier food options that are often more expensive than processed food.”

Adams’ signature legislation concerning hunger and food security is the **Closing the Meal Gap Act**, which **she originally introduced in 2017**. According to the **American Prospect**, the **Closing the Meal Gap Act** would “switch the SNAP calculation from using the Thrifty Food Plan to the more adequate Low-Cost Food Plan,” and it “represents one way to raise SNAP benefit levels to an amount that more accurately reflects what Americans actually need to eat. The price difference in the two plans is approximately \$195 per month, which roughly meets what families report they need to spend beyond their SNAP benefits to keep food on the table. The Low-Cost Food Plan is already used by bankruptcy courts to determine how much a person needs to spend on food, and should Congress act, it could be used by USDA to draw up SNAP benefit levels too.”

Background: Increase in SNAP Benefits

- In March 2021, the Biden Administration announced that they were reevaluating the Thrifty Food Plan, which is the basis for the

benefit levels in SNAP.

- This critical update – the first in fifteen years – was required by Congress in the 2018 Farm Bill, which passed with strong bipartisan support.
- USDA has been communicative with Congress throughout this process and has rigorously followed the science-based methodology outlined in the 2018 Farm Bill and used in previous Thrifty Food Plan updates.

Justification for the Increase

- SNAP is our largest and most successful federal anti-hunger program and is proven to improve food security for the more than 42 million Americans participating in the program.
- However, evidence has increasingly shown that SNAP benefits, while intended to supplement a household's food budget, are still too low to meet the nutritional needs of Americans participating in the program. **A fact sheet on the importance of increasing benefits is available here.**
- Research has found:
 - Americans participating in SNAP eat less nutritious diets towards the end of their benefit cycle, when they are most likely to run out of assistance;
 - SNAP does not cover the cost of a low-income meal in 96 percent of U.S. counties; and
 - Nearly 50 percent of SNAP households are still food insecure, despite the crucial support SNAP benefits provide.
- The inadequacy of SNAP benefits is largely due to the antiquated previous version of the Thrifty Food Plan, which had been held cost-neutral for more than sixty years and had not been updated to reflect the latest dietary patterns or guidance in more than fifteen years.

- Americans in need deserve better. That is why Congress mandated more regular updates to the Thrifty Food Plan in the bipartisan 2018 Farm Bill.
- USDA's updated Thrifty Food Plan now better reflects the cost of a nutritious diet in 2021.
- Low-income Americans receiving SNAP benefits, on average, will receive \$36.24 more per person per month – or about 40¢ more per person per meal.
- Previously, the average SNAP benefits were a mere \$1.39 per person per meal.
- In North Carolina, SNAP recipients will receive an average of \$1,179 more in benefits each year.

About The Thrifty Food Plan

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits are based on the cost of the “Thrifty Food Plan” (TFP), an estimate of the minimal cost of a market-priced basket of food, or “market basket,” that is intended to provide an adequately nutritious diet. USDA determines the content of the TFP market baskets using mathematical modeling to create baskets tailored to the nutritional needs of different age and gender groups.

The TFP was created in 1975 to replace USDA's 1961 Economy Food Plan (EFP), a food plan intended for short-term or emergency use. When the TFP replaced the EFP, its content – the types and quantities of food included in the baskets – was updated to reflect the latest food price data, consumption patterns, and dietary recommendations, but it was required to maintain the same minimal cost as the EFP.

Since then, the content of the TFP market baskets has only been updated three times – in 1983, 1999, and 2006 – to reflect the latest data and science. Each time, USDA required the overall cost of the plan to remain cost-neutral (adjusted for inflation). To address the irregularity and cost-neutrality of TFP updates, the

bipartisan 2018 Farm Bill required USDA to reevaluate the TFP by 2022 and every 5 years thereafter.

Congresswoman Alma S. Adams, Ph.D. represents North Carolina's 12th Congressional District (Charlotte, Mecklenburg County). She serves on the House Financial Services Committee, on the House Committee on Education and Labor as the chair of the Workforce Protections subcommittee, and on the House Agriculture Committee as Vice Chair. In 2015, she founded the Adams Hunger Initiative, which brings together local stakeholders on a quarterly basis to empower agencies and organizations fighting hunger in our community.

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