



HEALTHY FOOD. HEALTHY MOVES. HEALTHY YOU.

## Nutrition News Nibbles

August 2020

### Food Policy Updates

#### **SNAP Benefits to Increase in FY2021: USDA Releases New Cost of Food Report**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) released its June 2020 Cost of Food Report. The report shows the average cost of foods in the marketplace to adjust maximum Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits each year. In this report, there is a more than 5% increase in the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan from last year. As a result, SNAP participants' maximum monthly benefit will be the highest level in the history of the program. [Learn more.](#)

#### **USDA Ensures Food & Funding During Pandemic**

U.S. Department of Agriculture is supporting food bank efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic by providing over \$6 billion worth of food and administrative resources. The image below gives an overview of USDA's efforts during the pandemic. [Read more here.](#)

## USDA Support for Food Banks

USDA is providing significant resources to food banks, supplementing the supplies they receive through donations and fundraising, to help them keep communities fed, healthy, and strong during COVID-19.



Food Banks are private, non-profits that receive funds and donations from a number of different sources, in addition to USDA.



To learn more about FNS response to COVID-19, visit [www.fns.usda.gov/coronavirus](http://www.fns.usda.gov/coronavirus) and follow us on Twitter at @USDANutrition

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### **USDA Meals-to-You Partnership Delivers Nearly 30 Million Meals**

Meals-to-You program is where eligible families get a food box delivered to their home for each of their students during school closure periods and over the summer. Most boxes will include 10 breakfasts and 10 lunches/suppers. USDA has partnered with Meals-to-You to reach more low-income families during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the partnership, 28.5 million meals have been delivered. [Read more.](#)

### **New Aid for Food Retailers who Ensured Access to Meals During the Pandemic**

Through the federal CARES Act, \$10 million is available to food sellers who have remained open during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Fresh Food Financing Initiative COVID-19 Relief Fund is made available to for-profit, nonprofit, or cooperative entities that have been impacted during the pandemic. To be eligible, 50% of the sales must be foods, and the

retailer should serve low-to-moderate income populations. Retailers must also accept SNAP and WIC vouchers. [Read more.](#)

### **Senate GOP Won't Extend Pandemic Food Stamps**

Senate Republicans' coronavirus relief bill will not be extending funding for food assistance programs. Despite the increased need for food assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Health, Economic Assistance, Liability Protection, and Schools Act (Heals Act) will not expand SNAP benefits or the Pandemic EBT program, which expired at the end of June. [Read more.](#)

### **USDA Announces Award for New Milk Incentive Program**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced an award of nearly \$1 million for a pilot program designed to incentivize Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants to consume more milk as part of a healthy diet. Through a cooperative agreement with the Baylor University Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty, they will pilot the program for SNAP participants at select grocery stores in Texas. [Learn more.](#)

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## **Research:**

### **Healthier Food and Beverage Interventions in Schools: Four Community Guide Systematic Reviews**

A study in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine investigates school-based interventions to improve healthy food and beverage consumption to reduce the risk of childhood obesity. It was found that interventions that improve school meals or offer fruits and vegetables are the most effective. Interventions supporting healthy snack foods and beverages outside of school meal programs revealed insufficient evidence. [Read the study here.](#)

### **COVID-19 and Disparities in Nutrition and Obesity**

The implications of COVID-19 are shining a light on the ethnic and racial disparities in the United States when it comes to nutrition and obesity. Health inequities are becoming more evident as Black, Latinx, and Native Americans are being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. About 11% of these households are food insecure and the prevalence of

obesity is also higher among these groups. The U.S. healthcare system needs to increase their focus on health inequities and offer inclusive care to address social determinants of health in vulnerable communities. [Read more.](#)

### **Americans are Consuming Less Sugar but Nonnutritive Sweeteners**

In a new study from the Journal Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, U.S. households between 2002 and 2018 purchased less food and beverages containing caloric sweeteners (i.e. sugar) and purchased more foods containing both caloric sweeteners and nonnutritive sweeteners (i.e. sugar substitutes) increased. Nonnutritive sweeteners include aspartame, saccharin, rebaudioside A (reb-A), and sucralose. [Read more about the study here.](#)

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### **Other News:**

#### **Systems Approaches for Healthy Communities Statewide Training**

PA NEN, in partnership with [Adagio Health](#), [The Food Trust](#), and [Vetri Community Partnership](#), has been leading a statewide training this summer for over 200 Pennsylvania SNAP-Ed (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education) educators. Curriculum for the training came from the University of Minnesota Extension and was developed by SNAP-Ed educators. This web-based training promotes the integration of policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change approaches with educational strategies.

#### **College Pantries are Reinventing Ways to Feed Students**

Food insecurity among college students ranged from 42-56% at two-year schools and from 33-42% at four-year schools. When the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the U.S. in March, college students' food insecurity has grown as students were sent home losing their meal plans and jobs. Campus pantries are now innovating new ways to feed their students by offering grab-n-go food baskets, expanding pantry hours, offering delivery services, and virtual pick-up scheduling. [Learn more.](#)



### **As Schools Shut Down, a New Federal Program Eased Child Hunger, Study Finds**

Pandemic-EBT was an emergency federal program aimed to reduce child hunger as schools closed in March due to COVID-19. Around 30 million children rely on school meals through the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Program. According to a new analysis of census data by the Brookings Institution, the Pandemic-EBT payment card helped reduce child hunger by 30%. [Read more.](#)

### **Wolf Administration: Farmers Market Nutrition Program Connects Hungry Pennsylvanians with Fresh, Local Food**

WIC and the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program offer vouchers for low-income seniors and eligible participants in the WIC program to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables from approved farmers markets and farm stands throughout Pennsylvania. These food assistance programs are supporting vulnerable individuals who need access to nutritious foods to maintain a healthy lifestyle. In addition, the Tri County Community Action (TCCA) is excited to introduce the new Allison Hill Farmers Market to improve food security in Harrisburg. [Learn more.](#)

### **COVID Brought SNAP Users Online. Advocates Say Mega-Retailers are Selling Them Junk Food.**

The SNAP online purchasing program is operational in 39 states and the District of Columbia where 90% of SNAP's 43 million users can now purchase groceries online. However, in 33 states, Amazon and Walmart are the only approved retailers. With a lack of diversity in vendors that offer fresh, nutritious foods, SNAP participants are more prone to purchase unhealthy foods. This is also a result of food marketing and online privacy issues that make

these individuals more vulnerable to big soda and processed food advertisements based on their personalized data. [Read more here.](#)

## Resources:

### **Visit PA NEN's Food & Nutrition Resources Page**

We are working to keep our resource page current. Thank you to everyone who contributed resources. If you know of any additional resources or food programs in your area, please send us an email at [pa\\_nen@phmc.org](mailto:pa_nen@phmc.org). [Access the resource page here.](#)



### **Penn State Extension COVID-19 Information**

Penn State Extension offers many resources, online courses, and webinars around COVID-19. [Check out their webpage to learn more information.](#)

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