
Past, Present, and Future of SNAP A Look at the First Year of Review

Under Chairman Conaway's leadership, the House Agriculture Committee is using the 114th Congress to do a top-to-bottom review the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP, and the other nutrition programs in its jurisdiction. The *Past, Present, and Future of SNAP* hearing series has been conducted without preconceived notions and eye towards strengthening the program so that it does not become a trap but rather a tool to help individuals move up the economic ladder. The series has shown that SNAP does not operate in a vacuum, and it plays an important role in the lives of nearly 46 million individuals.

During the first session of the 114th Congress, this series has included nine hearings covering a range of topics and perspectives, ranging from policy experts, hunger advocates, practitioners, researchers, to current and former SNAP recipients. The Committee intends to continue this series into the next year and the purpose will remain the same: to explore where this program has been, where it is now, and what it could be for recipients and taxpayers in the future.

Past, Present, and Future of SNAP (February 25, 2015)

The first hearing in the series *Past, Present, and Future of SNAP* provided Members of the Committee with the justification for reviewing the SNAP program by providing the following: a brief history of the program, the current state of the program, and a potential vision for the future.

SNAP Recipient Characteristics and Dynamics (Subcommittee February 26, 2015)

This hearing provided Members of the Committee with facts and figures from credible, published researchers on the characteristics and dynamics of SNAP recipients. The many different subpopulations—children, elderly, disabled, able-bodied—need different types of support and assistance, this hearing focused on learning more about these different subpopulations and what those needs are.

The World of Nutrition and the Role of the Charitable Sector (April 15, 2015)

This hearing emphasized the fact that SNAP does not operate in a vacuum; it is augmented by the extraordinary efforts of the charitable sector. Neither the charitable sector nor the Federal government can solve hunger alone; it must be a collaborative effort. Both taxpayers and recipients deserve a thoughtful and thorough review of SNAP and how it interacts with the charitable sector without preconceived notions about the process or the contents of any future policy changes.

“Many people call SNAP a safety net, but for me it was like a trampoline – bouncing my family back into work and a brighter future.” - Keleigh Green-Patterson, Former Recipient

The World of Nutrition, Government Duplication and Unmet Needs (May 20, 2015)

Members of the Committee learned there are 18 nutrition assistance programs stacked on top of one another and SNAP is not alone in addressing the nutritional needs of low-income Americans. The main

takeaway was the need to understand how SNAP interacts with other nutrition programs without preconceived notions about the process or the contents of any future policy changes.

“I saw many of my friends who were coming to school hungry get stigmatized and labeled as having behavioral problems, which may be been alleviated by daily, nutritious breakfast and lunch.” – Joe Nader, Former Recipient

The Means to Climbing the Economic Ladder (June 10, 2015)

This hearing provided a realistic view of what it takes to help individuals enter, re-enter, and remain in the workforce and experience the dignity of work. Focus was on the point that incentives to participate in the SNAP program are causing individuals to use the program as income support, rather than as a nutrition program.

How Our Welfare System Can Discourage Work (Joint Subcommittee June 25, 2015)

This was a joint hearing with the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources to review how the welfare system can discourage work. It explored the point that welfare programs designed to assist the poor also create significant disincentives to work, limiting the ability of families to rise out poverty.

“After I lost my job I applied for Temporary Cash Assistance through the Department of Social Services. Thirty days after I applied I was granted cash assistance, and immediately received daycare vouchers and an increase in food stamp assistance. The daycare vouchers I so desperately needed while I was working were finally granted to me after it cost me my job.” –Chanel McCorkle, Former Recipient

Developing and Using Evidence-Based Solutions (Subcommittee July 15, 2015)

This hearing explored why research is needed, what can be done to improve the quality and quantity of it, and how it is currently being used in SNAP to improve the program. The focus of SNAP research lately has been on process and recipient characteristics, rather than outcomes. Providing additional flexibility and promoting innovation at state and local levels must include appropriate methods for accountability.

Breaking the Cycle (Subcommittee October 27, 2015)

This hearing looked at the challenges adolescents and young adults face as they try to break the cycle of poverty as we try to prevent today’s child SNAP recipients from becoming tomorrow’s adult SNAP recipients. Emphasis was placed on SNAP being a support program as individuals improve their financial situation, rather than as something that potentially hinders their efforts to climb the economic ladder.

“I often joke that growing up I was tall, lanky and uncoordinated. Looking back, I can’t imagine what my path would have been if I’d been tall, lanky, uncoordinated...and hungry.” –Ruth Riley, Former Recipient

National Commission on Hunger (November 18, 2015)

The final hearing of the year was to review the progress of the National Commission on Hunger in developing policy recommendations to more effectively address domestic hunger. This bipartisan commission reported the importance of public-private partnerships, improved evaluation methods, and better coordination between Federal, State, and local agencies.