

The drastic increase in unemployment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic will contribute to rising demand for food assistance as an increasing number of Missourians struggle to make ends meet.

To meet this surge in demand, the federal government is providing an additional \$26.8 billion in funding for food assistance programs, and the state has also taken steps to address the need.

This paper summarizes what policies have already been put in place, and actions policymakers could take to further reduce food insecurity at this time of economic strife.

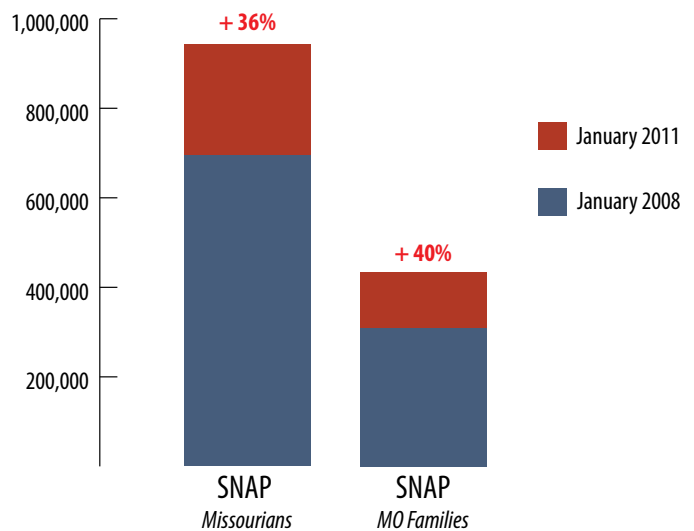
The drastic increase in unemployment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic will be compounded by a rising demand for food assistance as an increasing number of Missourians struggle to make ends meet.

Economists predict the national unemployment rate could increase to between 9 and 20 percent this year.ⁱ

- A 9 percent unemployment rate is similar to what was faced during the Great Recession.ⁱⁱ
- Between 2008 and 2011, the number of Missourians accessing the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as food stamps, increased by 249,000.ⁱⁱⁱ

The number of people needing food assistance during the COVID-19 crisis will likely equal, or surpass, the quarter of a million increase seen during the Great Recession.

Missourians Will Need Nutrition Assistance More Than Ever
Enrollment in SNAP Increased Greatly After the Great Recession



Federal & State Policy Responses

To meet this surge in demand, the federal government is providing an additional \$26.8 billion in funding for food assistance programs (see appendix).

The Missouri Department of Social Services - Family Support Division (FSD), the Missouri Department of Health (DOH), and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) have already taken steps to address some of the urgent needs related to COVID-19, including:

Work Requirements: FSD has waived work requirements tied to SNAP eligibility for adults without children until the end of the COVID-19 emergency declaration.

Application Process: FSD has extended their hours of operation. Applicants can apply for SNAP online, or they can email or fax completed applications to FSD. To expedite processing, interviews are temporarily suspended.

Certification Period: FSD has received a waiver to suspend redeterminations of SNAP eligibility. SNAP recipients due for eligibility redetermination in March, April, and May will receive a 6 month extension of benefits without having to verify their eligibility.

School-Based and Summer Meals:

- The State has received waivers from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to operate the School Lunch and Summer Meals Programs through non-congregate settings and at school sites, even when schools are closed and during the health emergency.
- FSD is working with DESE to implement **Pandemic EBT (P-EBT)**. Children eligible for free or reduced-price school lunch will receive SNAP benefits if their schools are closed for 5 consecutive days or longer. Families who currently receive SNAP will find the additional benefit automatically loaded onto their SNAP electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card. Families who do not receive SNAP will need to apply for P-EBT.

Pandemic SNAP (P-SNAP): FSD received waiver approval to give all SNAP-participating households the maximum monthly benefit amount allowed for a household of its size for March and April. For reference, the maximum monthly benefit amount for a household of four is \$646.^{iv} Households who already receive the maximum amount will not receive additional benefits.

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC): DOH has waived the presence of a WIC participant for certification, lab tests to determine nutritional risk, and in-person issuance of benefits through May 31, 2020.

Disaster Food Packages: The U.S. Department of Agriculture approved an FSD request to operate Disaster Household Distribution to provide food packages at over 200 distribution sites through May 7, 2020. The distribution sites will be managed by six Missouri food banks.

Further Ways Policymakers Can Reduce Hunger

Additional state and federal measures to reduce hunger and food insecurity at this time of economic strife should be implemented, including:

Extend P-SNAP to the maximum time period allowed by the federal government. As previously stated, Missouri has received approval to provide the maximum SNAP benefit through April. The state should seek additional waiver approval to continue P-SNAP benefits as long as allowable.

Increase the SNAP maximum benefit amount 15% until the economy recovers. An increase of this size is about \$25 a person per month.^v A similar temporary provision in the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act proved to be effective.^{vi} Studies have shown increasing SNAP benefits improves food and economic security, as well as health and nutrition, and is linked to reduced health care utilization

and costs.^{vii} Additionally, SNAP boosts local economies because SNAP benefits households receive are quickly redeemed at local businesses.^{viii}

Suspend work and training requirements and sanctions for an extended period. The federal government should allow these requirements to be suspended beyond the immediate health emergency to include the duration of the economic crisis while workers continue to struggle to find steady employment, and the state faces high rates of unemployment. Should the federal government allow the suspension for a longer period, the Missouri Department of Social Services could seek waiver authority for that extended period and/or utilize the discretionary exemptions available to extend access to food assistance during the recovery period.

Allow for telephone applications, and ease paper verification requirements. Taking applications over the phone can better serve applicants who do not have access to online services. Individuals with low incomes, and people living in rural communities, are the least likely to have access to online services.^{ix,x} Additionally, the USDA should temporarily ease paper documentation requirements (e.g., pay stubs and utility bills). Easing eligibility verification requirements can speed up application processing.



Additional Federal Food Assistance Funds

Authorized by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (H.R. 6201) and
Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (H.R. 748)

Families First Coronavirus Response Act H.R. 6201	
Department of Agriculture:	
Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	\$500,000,000
Commodity Assistance Program (for emergency food assistance)	\$400,000,000
U.S. Territories	\$100,000,000
Total	\$1,000,000,000
Ageing and Disability Services Programs:	
Home-Delivered Nutrition Services	\$160,000,000
Congregate Nutrition Services	\$80,000,000
Nutrition Services for Native Americans	\$10,000,000
Total	\$250,000,000
Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act H.R. 748	
Food And Nutrition Service:	
Child Nutrition Programs	\$8,800,000,000
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	\$15,810,000,000
Commodity Assistance Program	\$450,000,000
Total	\$25,060,000,000
Ageing and Disability Services Programs:	
Home-Delivered and Congregate Nutrition Services	\$480,000,000
Native American Nutrition Services	\$20,000,000
Total	\$500,000,000
Grand Total	\$26,810,000,000

Notes

- i. Nine percent estimate from Goldman Sachs Research, “US Daily, A Sudden Stop for the US Economy,” March 20, 2020; downloaded on 3/23/20 at <https://www.goldmansachs.com/insights/pages/us-daily-20-march-2020.html>. Twenty percent estimate from “Mnuchin Warns Virus Could Yield 20% Jobless Rate Without Action,” Bloomberg News, March 17, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-17/mnuchin-warns-virus-could-yield-20-jobless-rate-without-action-k7wheob8>.
- ii. Historical data from the United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- iii. Increase is based on the years between 2008 and 2011. Data Source: Missouri Department of Social Services Caseload Counter Historical Data, available at <https://dss.mo.gov/mis/clcounter/counter.xlsx>.
- iv. Missouri Department of Social Services press release, March 24, 2020, “Missouri Food Stamp Benefits Increase and Get Extension.” Available at <https://dss.mo.gov/press/03-24-2020-mo-food-stamp.htm>.
- v. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (March 2020). “Latest Coronavirus Response Package Doesn’t Boost SNAP—The Next One Should.” Available at <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/latest-coronavirus-response-package-doesnt-boost-snap-the-next-one-should>.
- vi. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (March 2016). “Preparing for the Next Recession: Lessons from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.” Available at <https://www.cbpp.org/research/economy/preparing-for-the-next-recession-lessons-from-the-american-recovery-and>.
- vii. Food Research and Action Center. (February 2019). “Initiatives to Make SNAP Benefits More Adequate Significantly Improve Food Security, Nutrition, and Health.” Available at <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/snap-initiatives-to-make-snap-benefits-more-adequate.pdf>.
- viii. Missouri Budget Project. (February 2019). “SNAP Provides Critical Boost to Local Economies Throughout Missouri.” Available at <http://www.mobudget.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/SNAP-Provides-Critical-Boost-to-Local-Economies.pdf>.
- ix. Anderson, M. and Kumar, M. (May 2019). “Digital divide persists even as lower-income Americans make gains in tech adoption.” Available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/07/digital-divide-persists-even-as-lower-income-americans-make-gains-in-tech-adoption>.
- x. Perrin, A. (May 2019). “Digital gap between rural and nonrural America persists.” Available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/31/digital-gap-between-rural-and-nonrural-america-persists/>.