

Policy Brief

All CalFresh Households to Receive a Permanent Benefit Increase



Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Thrifty Food Plan

What is SNAP/CalFresh?

SNAP, previously known as Food Stamps, is a federal program that provides monthly assistance to low-income individuals and families to purchase healthy food. CalFresh is California's SNAP program. The CalFresh program issues monthly benefits onto an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card, similar to an ATM card, to purchase food at retail stores and farmers markets.

CalFresh in Alameda County

CalFresh is a critical program that addresses food insecurity in Alameda County, where approximately 19% of households are food insecure.¹ More than 130,000 individuals receive support through CalFresh in Alameda County, including 41,000 children and 25,000 older adults.² Before the upcoming Thrifty Food Plan benefit increase, the average monthly CalFresh benefit was \$161 per person.

How to Apply for CalFresh

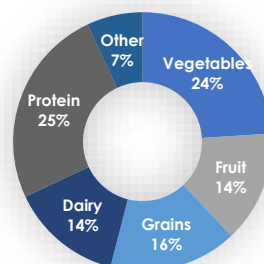
To apply for CalFresh and other programs, visit [MyBenefitsCalWIN.org](https://www.mybenefitscalwin.org), [GetCalFresh.org](https://www.getcalfresh.org) or call 510-272-3663.

On October 1, 2021, CalFresh benefits will increase by an average of 21%

What is the Thrifty Food Plan?

The Thrifty Food Plan has guided the level of SNAP benefits since 1975. The plan considers the cost of various food and beverage categories needed to support a healthy diet. The chart shows how much of the total food budget goes to each category in the newly updated plan. While this informs the total amount of assistance each family receives each month, households can choose how to spend their SNAP benefits according to their own needs. Since 1975, previous updates to the Thrifty Food Plan had been required to be 'cost neutral,' meaning they increased only slightly year to year, losing the Plan's connection to the real cost of food over time.

COST SHARE PERCENTAGES BY CATEGORY



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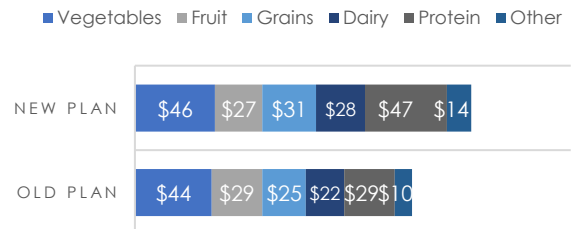
The Real Cost of Food

Financial: The 2018 Farm Bill allowed for a reevaluation of the Thrifty Food Plan, starting with assessing the foods necessary to make up a healthy, practical diet. Average monthly benefits will increase by \$36. The update means that the Thrifty Food Plan – and SNAP/CalFresh's financial support to individuals and families – is a more realistic reflection of households' food and nutrition needs. The updated Plan is the **first significant update in 45 years**. The Farm Bill now instructs USDA to update the Plan every five years.

Nutrition Security, Health & Equity: The Thrifty Food Plan update intends to address some of the physical health consequences that come as a result of food/nutrition insecurity. Nutrition security “means having consistent access, availability, and affordability of foods that promote well-being and prevent (and, if needed, treat) disease, particularly among our nation's most socially disadvantaged populations.”³ The new plan recognizes that “racial and ethnic minority groups are disproportionately affected by food insecurity, experience higher rates of some diet-related chronic diseases, and have higher rates of death and serious health effects due to living with these diseases.”⁴ Latinx and Black households with children were more likely than children in other households to lack enough food during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵ Being food insecure is correlated with a nearly 50% increased likelihood of being in the top 5% of health care users.⁶ One way the Plan addresses equity and nutrition goals is through assuming that food selections are lower price, and also have lower amounts of added sugars, saturated fats, and sodium than other food choices that could be made. This consideration of nutrition is new to the updated Thrifty Food Plan.

Regional?: Unfortunately, due to requirements by federal law, the Thrifty Food Plan does not account for regional differences in the cost of food, with the exception of Alaska and Hawaii.

WEEKLY COST



In California, 28.8% of children receive assistance for food⁷

COVID-19 Pandemic Emergency Allotments

Since March 2020, CalFresh recipients have been eligible to receive emergency allotments (EAs) that raise their CalFresh benefit to the highest allowable benefit for their household size, which will continue on a month-to-month basis until the public health emergency ends. All CalFresh households will receive a minimum EA of \$95 per month. Households also received a separate and temporary 15% increase January 2021 through September 30, 2021. The Thrifty Food Plan update and benefit increase occur independent from the emergency allotments and temporary benefit increase, and will permanently increase benefits for households beginning October 1, 2021.

References:

1. California Association of Food Banks, October 2020.
2. Alameda County Social Services Agency Monthly Report, July 2021.
- 3, 4. USDA Food and Nutrition Service: Thrifty Food Plan, 2021.

5. California Budget & Policy Center 2021 analysis of Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey.
6. Bread for the World Institute, “The 2016 Hunger Report by the Numbers, 2016.
7. U.S. Census Bureau (2021). Household Pulse Survey: Food Scarcity, Week 34.