

**TO:** Governor Mike DeWine  
**FROM:** Benjamin Manning  
**SUBJECT:** Food Insecurity, SNAP, and potential improvements

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Currently, Ohio has 1.75 million food insecure citizens, yet the application in Ohio for SNAP is time consuming, difficult to navigate, and requires joint applications with cash and medical assistance<sup>i</sup>. Maintaining the SNAP benefits is challenging because of inconvenient account accessibility and inefficient re-enrollment. Additionally, the federal government is instituting new requirements for SNAP (see analysis) that reduce the number of people eligible for the benefit – many of whom still need it. **How can the state of Ohio continue to help provide for its food insecure residents given the limitations with funding from the federal government?**

### **Interests**

#### **You, Mr. Governor**

Feeding people who are hungry is an optimal way to improve your favorability ratings with them. Additionally, if you do nothing to change the program now, estimates of Trump's new requirements could reduce benefits to as many as 40% of the 1.3 million Ohioans enrolled in SNAP. You will have to decide what programs are most effective for your re-election.

#### **Ohio residents currently enrolled in SNAP, who aren't at risk for removal**

These citizens will not care about an easier application process, but they can only benefit from simpler re-enrollment programs and easier access to benefit balances and locations.

#### **Ohio residents eligible for, but not enrolled in SNAP**

Citizens may not enroll because of the application, challenges with re-enrollment, or difficulty using benefits. Citizens are only better off if they have access to SNAP and maintain eligibility.

#### **Ohio residents who could get removed from SNAP**

Although there are stigmas against receiving SNAP benefits, they are optional and can only make one better off. Economically, these citizens should prefer to keep access to their benefits.

#### **Ohio based health organizations (hospitals foodbanks, etc.)**

SNAP is paid for by federal dollars (\$168 million per month), not from Ohio's budget. However, any costs resulting from Ohioans not receiving SNAP are likely at the state-level<sup>ii</sup>.

#### **The Political Parties – Opposition Between**

Generally Republican voters are likely to oppose expanded welfare programs and Democrats are likely to support them. Recent governor, senate, and congressional elections have had split results between the parties in Ohio<sup>iii</sup>.

### **Analysis**

#### **Federal changes to SNAP**

- Starting April 1<sup>st</sup>, new federal rules will require that there be at least a 6% unemployment rate in a county for a citizen to receive SNAP and not work.
- Only 3 out of 88 counties have a 6% unemployment rate or higher. Currently the bar is at 2.5% - covering nearly half of Ohio's counties<sup>iv</sup>.

- The federal law allows states to wave this 6% bar, keeping thousands enrolled.

### **Where is the money going?**

- Currently, SNAP users often lose money to ATM fees and end up paying at grocery stores because they don't know where their benefits are accepted
- Sub-optimally using SNAP is a cost to the Ohio state government and private Ohio – based industry. Federal dollars are supplied independently of Ohio's budget. By decreasing SNAP usage, costs are born upon health and food organizations in state

### **Even with SNAP, people are hungry**

- 1.3 million Ohioans are currently enrolled in SNAP. However, it is estimated that roughly 1.75 million Ohioans are food insecure – they don't know where their next meal will be<sup>v</sup>.
- Ohio currently ranks 9<sup>th</sup> nationally in states with the most food-insecure citizens<sup>vi</sup>.
  - Roughly 1 in 5 Ohio children is in a food-insecure family.

### **Look at CalFresh!**

- They have simplified the application for SNAP and created more efficient re-enrollment.
- Many features such as Fee-free ATMS have the potential to save millions of dollars for Ohio's most vulnerable citizens.
- Based on a user-centered experience, they have increased California SNAP enrollment per those eligible and thusly saved the state money through federal dollars.

### **Corona, Panic, and Economic Decline**

- With the recent market decline and impending public health crisis, Ohio is likely to see a massive uptick in unemployment and subsequent rise in SNAP demand.
- Citizens are buying out grocery stores across the country. People are panicking over food even though supply chains remain intact.
  - It is important to manage panic even if it is somewhat unfounded.

## **Objectives & Criteria for Evaluation**

**Wasted Money:** Reduce superfluous losses (such as ATM fees) of SNAP benefits by 20%.

**Food Insecurity Overall:** Lower the percentage of food insecure Ohioans by 10%.

**Food Insecurity versus SNAP:** Given the current economic downturn, maintain the current proportion of food insecure Ohioans on SNAP (don't let people become worse off).

**Food Panic:** Although it is subjective and amorphous, monitor the level of food panic during the Coronavirus (and beyond) amongst SNAP users via surveys and questionnaires at grocers.

**Food Banks:** Monitor usage of food banks to see if changes in SNAP lead to less need.

## **Policy Options**

**1. Maintain and Accept** – Accept the federal government's new requirements for SNAP eligibility and maintain the current SNAP program in all capacities – it currently works.

- **Pro:** Appeals to Republican base and theoretically encourages people to work harder.
- **Pro:** Saves federal dollars that can hopefully be used for other purposes in Ohio.
- **Con:** Thousands of people will lose access to SNAP or have their benefits decreased.

- **Con:** As people panic over the Coronavirus, this panic will likely be magnified.
- **Con:** Ohio-based health/food organizations will bear the costs of citizens losing SNAP

**2. The Happy Medium** – Reject the new federal government threshold for SNAP eligibility, but maintain all of the current SNAP program in all capacities. This is basically the status quo, but requires action.

- **Pro:** In a time of great national unrest, this appears to be the calm status quo to citizens.
- **Pro:** SNAP currently works for 1.3 million Ohioans – don't fix what ain't broke.
- **Con:** Given the increase in SNAP demand due to Coronavirus, the number of food-insecure people will increase, which will be made worse without SNAP improvements.
- **Con:** Ohio health organizations will bear the costs of those who could enroll in SNAP.

**3. O-say can you see, O-Fresh O-hi-o?** – Reject the new federal government threshold for SNAP eligibility. Then, with assistance from the CalFresh team, implement improvements to the SNAP application and increase ease with which benefits are accessed for Ohioans.

- **Pro:** Improve SNAP in a time of panic when people will need more access to the system.
- **Pro:** Save Ohio-based health/food organizations money through SNAP usage efficiency of federal dollars.
- **Pro:** Save Ohioans large amounts of time and money through improved application and reduced financial drain through costs such as ATM fees.
- **Con:** The possibility of administrative problems whenever a system is changed.

### **Recommendation**

**Improvement in the time of need** – Politically and morally, improving SNAP and maintaining its current users in the time of a public health crisis is the optimal decision. By implementing option 3, you Mr. Governor, will help food insecure Americans get the resources they need and provide comfort during panic. Additionally, implementing CalFresh's platforms should reduce resources used by Ohio health and food organizations because more citizens will be effectively using federal dollar SNAP benefits.

**Long Term Monitoring** – For any technology or public policy, it is important to understand that there is no end date. People keep living, and needs keep changing. Any implementation requires intermittent and continuous assessment to see if it is effective.

### **Implementation**

1. Publicly announce how you as the governor support hungry citizens – especially in times of a pandemic – and will be enhancing SNAP accessibility and efficiency.
2. Waive the 6% employment work requirement.
3. Bring in CalFresh as they already want to scale up their program.
4. Have the CalFresh team work in conjunction with Ohio policy workers in order to learn and potentially apply the CalFresh model to other programs.
5. Publicly roll out the improved and simplified features of SNAP and its application.
6. Create a small task force that will continue to monitor the Ohio SNAP program beyond your tenure as governor.

**I attest that I did not give or receive unauthorized assistance while working on this paper.**

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- <sup>i</sup> “Applying for Food, Cash and Medical Assistance.” *Ohio Department of Job and Family Services*, 2020, [jfs.ohio.gov/ocomm/applyforbenefits.stm](https://jfs.ohio.gov/ocomm/applyforbenefits.stm).
- <sup>ii</sup> Ludlow, Randy. “Thousands of Ohioans Will Lose Food Stamps under Change by Trump Administration.” *The Columbus Dispatch*, The Columbus Dispatch, 4 Dec. 2019, [www.dispatch.com/news/20191204/thousands-of-ohioans-will-lose-food-stamps-under-change-by-trump-administration](https://www.dispatch.com/news/20191204/thousands-of-ohioans-will-lose-food-stamps-under-change-by-trump-administration).
- <sup>iii</sup> “Ohio Election Results 2018: Live Midterm Map by County & Analysis.” *POLITICO*, Politico LLC, Nov. 2019, [www.politico.com/election-results/2018/ohio/](https://www.politico.com/election-results/2018/ohio/).
- <sup>iv</sup> “Applying for Food, Cash and Medical Assistance.” *Ohio Department of Job and Family Services*, 2020, [jfs.ohio.gov/ocomm/applyforbenefits.stm](https://jfs.ohio.gov/ocomm/applyforbenefits.stm).
- <sup>v</sup> Dodd, Adam. “Ohio Food Insecurity Is Prevalent, Especially among Children.” *Herald*, The News-Herald, 29 May 2019, [www.news-herald.com/news/lake-county/ohio-food-insecurity-is-prevalent-especially-among-children/article\\_b5297010-8175-11e9-98b3-3fb268bb8d32.html](https://www.news-herald.com/news/lake-county/ohio-food-insecurity-is-prevalent-especially-among-children/article_b5297010-8175-11e9-98b3-3fb268bb8d32.html).
- <sup>vi</sup> Dodd, Adam. “Ohio Food Insecurity Is Prevalent, Especially among Children.” *Herald*, The News-Herald, 29 May 2019, [www.news-herald.com/news/lake-county/ohio-food-insecurity-is-prevalent-especially-among-children/article\\_b5297010-8175-11e9-98b3-3fb268bb8d32.html](https://www.news-herald.com/news/lake-county/ohio-food-insecurity-is-prevalent-especially-among-children/article_b5297010-8175-11e9-98b3-3fb268bb8d32.html).