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ISSUE BRIEF | Health & Harvest

STATES CAN REDUCE FRAUD IN SNAP BY SHARING DATA

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TOPLINE POINTS

- ★ The SNAP program has suffered from a lack of national oversight for decades.
- ★ Because of the program consistently costing more than \$100 billion per year, gaps in oversight lead to costs adding up rapidly.
- ★ SNAP data transparency ensures compliance with the law & available food assistance for those truly in need.
- ★ States sharing this recipient data with USDA is a first step in stemming the rising tide of overpayments and fraud.
- ★ These actions are foundational to other reforms being made to run the government in a manner that puts Americans first.
- ★ Beyond baseline requirements from USDA, states enacting stronger oversight, audit functions, and transparency to the public in their administration of SNAP will help bring real improvements to the program.

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) administers the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) alongside a variety of other federal nutrition programs ([Congressional Research Service, 2025](#)). Formerly known as food stamps, SNAP is the nation's largest nutrition assistance program, providing monthly benefits averaging a total of \$8 billion per month to low-income households to supplement their grocery budgets.

Due to COVID-19-related flexibilities and subsequent policy changes that affected benefit levels and program administration over the last six years, SNAP has expanded from nearly 36 million people to almost 42 million people monthly, and from costing taxpayers \$60 billion to nearly \$100 billion annually ([U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.](#)). SNAP's rapid expansion has been accompanied by an



increase in erroneous SNAP payments over the past decade ([USDA, 2025d](#)). The most recent national SNAP payment error rate was 10.93% in FY 2024, compared to 3.66% in FY 2014.

The Trump Administration has emphasized oversight of SNAP payments and the Department of Agriculture has been navigating the structural limitations of how SNAP data is recorded. According to USDA, the absence of timely recipient-level data at the federal level constrains the Department's ability to detect fraud, identify duplicative participation, and prevent improper payments before benefits are issued. The Administration is right to take steps to prevent further exploitation of SNAP programs. For example, the Department of Agriculture is requiring submission of 2025 SNAP Program Data (the recipient data) by each state's chief administrative agency in charge of benefits. This will allow the Department to exercise greater oversight of federal SNAP allocations and recipient expenditures. Going forward, all data submitted to the National SNAP Information Database will be subject to applicable federal, privacy, cybersecurity, and use-restriction requirements, and may be used solely for authorized program integrity, oversight, audit, and enforcement purposes ([USDA, 2025c](#)).

As discussed, the lack of real-time visibility impairs the Department's ability to intervene before benefits are issued, thereby increasing reliance on post-payment corrections that are administratively burdensome and often ineffective at recovering funds. Over time, these structural gaps weaken deterrence, allow duplicative participation to persist, and elevate the risk of improper payments, consequently placing additional strain on program resources and limiting the Department's capacity to ensure consistent administration of SNAP nationwide.

LACK OF STATE DATA-SHARING WEAKENS THE SNAP PROGRAM

More than \$100 billion per year is delivered through SNAP program benefits. The taxpayers funding this program deserve transparency. The law's requirement that USDA maintain partial sample records is insufficient oversight.

In addition to the law's plain language allowing USDA to require the records it needs to make determinations of compliance, having one system of record for SNAP is a key program oversight mechanism, and represents minimal, basic governance and foundational financial controls that should be in place for any program, let alone one like SNAP with more than \$100 billion per year in program payments ([USDA, 2026](#)).

While small samples of data have occasionally been shared by states with USDA in the past, they have only been shared periodically in the form of samples of cases for quality control reviews that are conducted after benefits are received. While this past oversight mechanism was positive, when taken alone, it was sorely lacking. Without data from non-compliant states, the federal agency tasked with overseeing the program is unable to provide the safeguards needed to help ensure that taxpayers are only footing the bill for those who truly need SNAP benefits. Greater data oversight coordinated between states and USDA can help minimize the number of recipients who are improperly receiving assistance.

The extremely large number of entities receiving benefits and the large amount of different types of government and non-government entities delivering services should simply have much



more rigorous and timely oversight that can find fraud effectively and find it before the bulk of benefits are made available to someone who is defrauding the government. When data is not available, larger trends cannot be identified, which leads to less fraud being flagged and not stopped early in the act. Unfortunately, when fraud is not detected before funds are loaded onto states' EBT cards, the funds are wasted rapidly with little likelihood of recovery.

RECENT STATE REFUSALS TO SHARE DATA

In May 2025, USDA announced that it would require states to provide records on SNAP benefits for program integrity purposes ([USDA, 2025b](#)).¹ Following issuance of the guidance, several organizations filed a pre-enforcement lawsuit challenging the anticipated data-sharing requirements for pre-emptively arguing violations of the Privacy Act and other protections. On June 23, 2025, the USDA published a System of Records Notice (SORN) in the Federal Register as required by the Privacy Act of 1974 requiring states submit specific SNAP recipient data for inclusion in the National SNAP Information Database ([USDA, 2025c](#)).

In July 2025, President Trump signed the Working Family Tax Cuts (WFTC) into law, which, among other SNAP reforms, created requirements tied to addressing fraud ([WFTC, 2025](#)). The bill tightened work requirements for SNAP recipients, narrowed exemptions, and required greater accountability from states for costs and program administration. In the same month as the WFTC passing, USDA sent multiple letters to state agencies requiring SNAP recipient data be submitted by states no later than July 30, 2025, for the National SNAP Information Database for oversight and fraud detection ([USDA, 2025e](#)).

That same month, 21 states and the District of Columbia filed a lawsuit ([State of California et al. v. United States Department of Agriculture, 2025](#)) to avoid having to share SNAP data from their state. By August, only 29 states had complied with USDA's request, sharing data on only a portion of SNAP enrollment. USDA then extended the compliance deadline for the remaining states to September 19, 2025. These states, including California, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, and Illinois, have refused to share SNAP recipient data with USDA ([The White House, 2025c](#)).

In September of 2025, the USDA released an informational memo detailing SNAP aspects of WFTC, including implications for data sharing ([USDA, 2025f](#)). Later that month, a U.S. District Judge issued a Temporary Restraining Order blocking the USDA from enforcing data submission requirements, inexplicably giving states judicial protection from national oversight. On October 15, 2025, the court in the Northern District of California went even further and granted a sweeping preliminary injunction further blocking the USDA from enforcing data submission requirements. This did not end the effort to provide consistent oversight and transparency; however, as in November 2025, Secretary Rollins announced that all SNAP recipients would be re-verified for eligibility to ensure fraud detection ([Fox Business, 2025](#)).

In a separate action not connected to previous lawsuits or the October 2025 ruling, USDA then sent a letter to 21 states demanding full datasets. After this, Secretary Rollins announced that 28 states

¹ See [Palleck v. Rollins](#), 1:25-cv-01650 (D.D.C.).



(plus Guam) complied with data requests ([NewsNation, 2025](#)). Finally, on December 2025 during a publicly broadcast cabinet meeting at the White House, Secretary Rollins announced that USDA would stop moving federal funds into states not submitting data until they complied and partnered with USDA in true national oversight and fraud detection work to root out fraud and protect the American taxpayer ([The White House, 2025c](#)).

In accordance with its authority in the plain language of the statute for SNAP in 7 U.S.C. § 2020(a)(3)(A), USDA can mandate that states make available “such records as may be necessary to determine whether the program is being conducted in compliance with this [The SNAP Act] ([United States, title 7, sec. 2020\(a\)\(3\)](#)).” Submitting SNAP recipient data to USDA for this determination to enable ongoing, real-time analysis of data, which according to USDA’s analysis of data that was submitted, has already shown more than 226,000 fraudulent benefit claims and 691,000 fraudulent transactions received approval in the first quarter of 2025, costing the government more than \$102 million in the first quarter of fiscal year 2025 ([Fox Business, 2025](#)). The data from the states that submitted in compliance with USDA’s system of record requirement (to USDA’s National SNAP Information Database) are now being analyzed in a transparent, secure, lawful manner, with similar standards being applied across all states.

States sharing their data with USDA for inclusion in the National SNAP Information Database serves taxpayers with much more than just earlier fraud detection. Another major benefit of having national data is that fraudulent activity from criminal networks acting across state lines can be rooted out. Complex schemes cannot be identified and analyzed efficiently enough to be stopped when 50 separate state governments are applying 50 separate methodologies to at least 50 separate data sets. Because complete recipient data for the 21 states yet to submit are not visible to USDA, it is impossible for any one of these states to be performing complete fraud detection and oversight for their enrollments. This is due to these states only having access to their own data, and not the data from multiple states that could allow them to make the type of cross-linkages to other states’ datasets that only USDA can do once it holds all states’ data. These cross-linkages must be made nationally to effectively detect and stop fraud. If these states submit their data, USDA’s National SNAP Information Database will be fully functional, adding sensible and necessary program-wide oversight and fraud control capabilities that have not existed in the history of the program.

STATE OPPORTUNITIES TO PREVENT FRAUD

Consistent with the March 20, 2025, Executive Order, “Stopping Waste, Fraud, and Abuse by Eliminating Information Silos,” on June 23, 2025, USDA created a new System of Records (SOR) through Notice USDA/FNS-15, also known as the National SNAP Information Database ([USDA, 2025c](#)). This system is owned, administered, and secured by FNS and serves the purpose of validating states’ accuracy of eligibility determinations and strengthening SNAP program integrity. Through a follow-on directive to states, data submission requirements were outlined for all states to ensure that USDA had a complete and accurate database ([USDA, 2025e](#)). Submissions were first required to be made by July 30, 2025, and then the deadline was extended to September 19, 2025, in subsequent formal warning letters to governors of unresponsive states. Since that time, additional clarifying demands have been made to said states. As a part of the SNAP SOR directive, from the period of January 1, 2020, to the time of submission, states currently collect and are required to submit the following data to USDA:



- 1) Names, Social Security Numbers, dates of birth, residential addresses, EBT card numbers, and other identifiers for SNAP applicants and recipients.
- 2) Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) transaction records leading to total dollar value of SNAP benefits received by participants, including applied benefit amounts and availability date ranges.

CONCLUSION

Recent federal initiatives have focused on reducing improper payments and improving program integrity through more consistent data collection and cross-agency coordination. Sharing data helps ensure that Americans who truly need assistance receive it, and that those who would defraud their fellow Americans are not able to do so. The SNAP program has suffered from a lack of national oversight for decades, and because of the program consistently costing more than \$100 billion per year, a continued lack of oversight and recent fraud findings, there is now a dire threat of the program being overrun and of insufficient funding being available in the future to serve those truly in need. SNAP data transparency from states to USDA is a first step in stemming the rising tide of overpayments and fraud, and is foundational to other reforms needed in government being run in a manner that puts Americans first.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Going forward, state lawmakers have real options to ensure their state complies with national SNAP transparency and oversight requirements, and that SNAP funding remains available to those in need in their state. State policymakers can take action to eliminate SNAP recipient fraud by:

1. Through administrative action, submitting SNAP Program Data to USDA's National SNAP Information Database.
2. Passing SNAP Program Data sharing laws like those in [AFPI's model policy on this subject](#) that:
 - a. Define SNAP Program Data to include recipient-level data including case file information, and any other program data necessary for the administration of the program.
 - b. Require the development and maintenance of information systems necessary to collect and transmit Program Data to the USDA's National SNAP Information Database.
 - c. Ensure that SNAP Program Data is maintained and transferred consistent with all State and Federal laws and safeguards governing the data privacy and security.
 - d. Mandate relevant state agencies to transmit SNAP Program Data in such form, manner, frequency, and within such time frame as the USDA, a federal law enforcement or investigative agency, or a state law enforcement and investigative agency may request.
3. Enacting stronger oversight, audit functions, and transparency to the public in their state's administration of SNAP beyond baseline requirements from USDA.



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