



Food and Nutrition Service

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Alexander Hertel-Fernandez
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Dear Dr. Hertel-Fernandez,

Thank you for your comments in response to the 30-day notice regarding Office of Management and Budget (OMB) collection 0584-0064, "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Forms: Applications, Periodic Reporting, and Notices." You shared several recommendations for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to improve SNAP forms and the SNAP application experience.

First, you recommended USDA encourage State agencies to simplify and streamline application materials. These efforts include introducing mobile-friendly applications and improving online application portals. The USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is prioritizing customer service through technical assistance and increased funding for State agency technology improvements. For example, FNS provides no-cost technical help to State agencies for eligibility system modernization and online application enhancements, both of which impact public portal offerings and the application experience. FNS issued guidance on [best practices for online SNAP applications](#) and will continue encouraging State agencies to use this guidance to improve the SNAP client experience. Additionally, to increase awareness of automation efforts that modernize the application process, FNS released a policy memo, [Use of Advanced Automation in SNAP](#), which shares examples of technology improvements States can make to assist with caseworker workload and streamline customer service for clients.

Additionally, FNS awards State agencies \$5 million in [Process and Technology Improvement Grants \(or PTIGs\)](#) each year to fund process and technology improvements that simplify application and determination processes. These projects help reduce administrative burden, with several States using PTIGs to develop mobile applications or upgrade their online application platforms. Additional projects include: designing a mobile-enabled State SNAP website using human-centered design; creating a system for real-time Social Security Number validation to reduce manual validation by caseworkers and provide real-time electronic SNAP case notifications for clients; and implementing text message reminders that prompt households to fill out SNAP recertification forms and submit verification documents before their recertification interviews.

In your comment, you also recommended USDA work with State agencies to expand communication options and ensure access to application assistance for communities that

experience higher levels of administrative burden. In addition to the continued option to provide households telephonic interviews, FNS recently approved two State agencies for administrative waivers to provide videoconference interviews. These waivers provide households with an additional method for completing the interview, with the goal of increasing program access.

Additionally, State agencies have the option to provide SNAP outreach, which FNS strongly recommends. Through SNAP outreach, States can leverage community partners, such as food banks and other community organizations, to conduct application assistance, translate materials to convey eligibility requirements and assist persons with limited English proficiency during the application process, and more. In Fiscal Year 2024, 48 States implemented SNAP outreach plans.

To help target outreach to underserved populations and reduce barriers to SNAP participation, FNS issues an annual [SNAP Outreach Priorities memo](#) highlighting populations for which FNS encourages State agencies to strengthen partnerships. Although State agencies' outreach plans vary, older adults are a common focus for many States. Other common target populations include families with children, college students, immigrants/mixed status families, non-English speaking/limited English proficiency households, homeless households, veterans, and formerly incarcerated individuals.

Lastly, you encouraged USDA to incorporate the lived experiences of SNAP applicants to inform program improvements and develop better measures of psychological burden on SNAP applicants. FNS appreciates the findings you shared from your own research, which capture barriers and challenges experienced during the SNAP application process and will consider your suggestions, such as conducting interviews with SNAP participants, partnerships with community-based organizations, user testing, and participant observation, as we develop studies in the future.

FNS is committed to improving measures of administrative burden and continuing to work with States to better serve SNAP applicants. Thank you again for your comments and recommendations.

Sincerely,

Catrina Kamau
Chief
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Program Development Division