

# More Americans are hungry in the face of federal cuts, rising grocery prices

Kevin Hardy  
Kentucky Lantern

The days of ground beef and chicken legs are long gone at the Ritenour Co-Care Food Pantry just outside of St. Louis. The nonprofit has swapped out those staple proteins for cheaper ground chicken and hot dogs as it faces higher food costs and surging demand.

"We have to adapt just like everybody else," Executive Director Angela Gabel said about rising grocery prices.

Last year, Ritenour spent about \$120,000 on food. The pantry budgeted \$180,000 for this year, though Gabel said that may not be sufficient.

And the number of people looking for food has increased: The pantry signed up seven new families on a recent weekday morning and expected to add 15 by the end of the day. Gabel said more people are traveling further to visit multiple food pantries each month to stock their shelves.

Families are facing rising grocery prices at the same time that many of the most vulnerable are losing access to the nation's largest food assistance program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP. More than 4 million Americans lost SNAP benefits between February 2025 and this February, according to analyses of the most recent federal data. The numbers are expected to increase as states whittle the rolls further as required by the broad tax and spending law President Donald Trump signed last summer, known as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act.

"I'm absolutely terrified," Gabel said. "We will absolutely do our best, but I think we were meant to supplement SNAP or to help in emergency situations. I just don't think we can replace the government."

After One Big Beautiful Bill Act, 100,000 Tennesseans' lose SNAP food aid

Since the fall, states and counties that administer SNAP have been notifying residents who rely on food stamps that they must meet new work requirements or lose their food assistance. The federal tax and spending law ended exemptions to work requirements for older adults, homeless people, veterans and some rural residents, among others. The changes will put more pressure on states, likely leading to further benefit cuts as they reevaluate eligibility and begin paying for more program costs. The new rules also will further stress the already-stretched charitable food system.

Gina Plata-Nino, SNAP director at the Food Research & Action Center, a nonprofit working to combat hunger, noted that children, older adults and people with disabilities are most reliant on the program. The left-leaning Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimated the average benefit per person this year would be \$188 per month, or \$6.17 per day.

"And a majority of them are making less than \$1,100 a month," she said. "So when you lose your SNAP benefit, it really does exacerbate your situation of having to choose between shelter, food, and other basic needs."

Rising need for food National data on hunger is limited since the Trump administration terminated the annual Household Food Security report last year. But other measures indicate that more people are missing regular meals.

In May, the federal Reserve Bank of New York found a "remarkable" increase in food insecurity across the country, with more people struggling than during the peak of the pandemic. Its national surveys last October and this February found more households dipped into savings accounts, relied

on food donations or had trouble finding enough food to eat or had kids who missed meals.

Democrats and anti-hunger advocates have been urging Congress to rescind SNAP cuts for months. Current negotiations over reauthorizing the federal farm bill, which includes SNAP, have put the issue front and center in Congress. The House has passed a version of that legislation that won't reverse the cuts.

Republicans have downplayed the effect of the changes and defended the SNAP cuts, arguing they are aimed at rooting out fraud and abuse.

U.S. Rep. Derrick Van Orden, a Wisconsin Republican, said he was raised in "abject, rural poverty," by a single mother who relied on food stamps, subsidized lunches and government cheese.

But in late April, he urged support of the farm bill that cements cuts to the food stamp program.

"We do have to know that there is a tremendous amount of fraud that takes place in SNAP," he said on the House floor, "and we want to make sure that every single dollar that is allocated to go to a hungry child or a veteran or one of our senior citizens goes to them."

Last week, 23 state attorneys general wrote to Senate leaders who are now considering the farm bill, saying the Senate has an opportunity to "reverse course and reaffirm a bipartisan commitment that no American should go hungry because they cannot afford food."

In Nebraska, where SNAP participation has dropped by about 11%, state lawmakers this year proposed legislation to ask the federal government for waivers from some of the new restrictions. Those bills, which did not advance, sought to protect benefits for veterans, former foster youth, homeless people and refugees.

But the problem demands a federal response, said Megan Hamann, the senior community organizer for food and nutrition access at Nebraska Appleseed, an advocacy nonprofit that works against poverty and discrimination.

"We're going to be working with patchwork solutions in the meantime," Hamann said. She described "a real reckoning as a result of loss of federal support and programming that has for a long time in our state and others offered stability and consistency that is no longer present."

She said putting food on the table has become a widespread challenge for many in Nebraska as the price of housing, utilities and other everyday necessities squeezes household budgets.

"I talk to people on the daily who say, 'I'm worried about the price of groceries, I'm worried about the price of gas, I feel like everything except for my wage is going up,'" she said.

Though generally focused on housing, the Omaha organization Restoring Dignity has launched a new food assistance program to help refugees who lost SNAP benefits late last year.

"A big chunk of what we do now revolves around food," said founder and executive director Hannah Vlach.

Community donations allow Restoring Dignity to provide grocery store gift cards to those refugees. But the organization, which generally serves about 5,000 refugees per year, is helping only about 200 of the most vulnerable.

"Right now we're just focused on the families who absolutely will be evicted and will be on the streets if they don't get any assistance," she said, "and I have no idea how those other families are surviving."

Vlach emphasized that the federal govern-

ment has specifically sanctioned the arrival of refugees her organization serves, many of whom served with U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

"This can't become our new normal — this just can't," she said. "It's unethical, it's immoral."

States triaging needs West Virginian Raine Gibbons said she relies more on cheap staples such as pasta and pasta sauce, trimming the amount of meat and treats she buys.

She said her family of five recently saw a reduction in monthly SNAP benefits, which now provide just over \$300 per month.

Gibbons supervises an in-home education program for parents at one of the state-run Family Support Centers, which provide parenting classes, baby supplies such as diapers and emergency food aid.

Aside from grappling with higher prices and reduced SNAP eligibility among clients, the West Virginians who rely on those 57 federally funded centers face an uncertain future because of unresolved state contracting issues.

"It's really, really stressful," Gibbons said. "It's so hard to stay present and be the parent that you want to be when you're worried about those daily struggles of just how to feed your family."

Gibbons said SNAP is not a luxury, but an essential support for many families.

"It's really what's keeping families like mine — who do work outside of the home, who do have a full-time job — afloat to be able to feed our families and our babies, and try to just get through this economy."

California lawmakers are trying to help fill some of the federal void in their state. Democratic Assemblymember Alex Lee is pushing to add \$100 million to a state program that doubles the purchasing power

of SNAP when used for fresh fruits and vegetables. Separate pending legislation would petition the federal government for a waiver, allowing California to maintain an exemption from work requirements for former foster youth.

In California, nearly one-third of all families with young children struggled to put food on the table between July 2024 and January 2026, according to survey results from the Stanford University Center on Early Childhood.

"States are in a position of trying to triage what is the most important need for families, when really families have all of these needs that are considered pretty basic," said Abigail Stewart-Kahn, managing director of the center. "It puts states in an untenable position to try to make decisions of which gaps to fill and for whom."

Stewart-Kahn said many families face immediate decisions of which bills to pay and which needs to forgo, but that the parental stress and childhood distress will have long-term consequences for society.

"Every time we make a policy change that potentially increases stress in the lives of a child, we are deciding as a society that we're okay with harming their healthy development, so that the next generation will struggle further with everything from educational attainment to mental health challenges," she said.

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<https://www.kentucky-lantern.com>

## Looking back to June 18, 2018

Written by Jonathan Wright

The following information was entered into the June 18, 2018, edi-

tion of The Ledger Independent:

**KET's Farmer visits CNP event**  
Food, fun and a celeb-

rity greeted visitors of Culinary Day at the Cummins Nature Preserve in Mason County Saturday.

The community was invited to learn about outdoor cooking and watch a demonstration for dutch oven baking from KET's own Tim Farmer. Culinary Day is one of many monthly activities to draw people in to experience the nature preserve.

"We do one event every month, and they differ," said Park Coordinator Grant Felice. "Last summer, I was approached by some folks that were interested in me doing some-

thing out here about cooking, and this is a great place to do it."

Felice is always trying to find new ways to bring people to the preserve for their own well being and to show off the beauty of the park to those who may not even realize it exists.

"(We try) to get people out here for their own fitness, for their own mental fitness, physical, emotional — it's just a great place to come," Felice said, "and it's a gem and a jewel."

Anita Boyd who works for the Mason County Extension Service teaching nutrition

was grilling fruits and vegetables for attendees with Brenda Williams, master gardener and food volunteer. The two were offering grilled sweet potatoes, zucchini and pineapples to visitors.

"Fruit on the grill is great, and it brings out the natural sweetness in the fruit," Boyd said. "It tastes wonderful."

Boyd has worked for the office for almost 15 years, and focuses on teaching food and nutrition to low resource families. Once she and Williams were invited for the events and found out grills were provided, they knew exactly what to make.

Visitors were waiting in anticipation for Tim Farmer of "Tim Farmer's Country Kitchen" on KET to begin his presentation of dutch oven cooking. When he asked the crowd who watched his show, nearly 75-80 people's hand rose.

Farmer is a Mason

County native from Orangeburg, which drew a great crowd to watch the hometown celebrity. As he started his presentation, Farmer began to talk about how he started cooking, which began when he met a French chef who sparked his interest in the culinary arts.

"It wasn't just a whim," Farmer said.

Farmer said he created Country Kitchen as a way to preserve the old recipes of his and his wife's families, and keep up some of the traditions of old in this ever-changing society. Watching Farmer's demonstration gave some viewers encouragement and ideas for their own culinary pursuits.

"I think he does a really good job," said Letha Orme of Mason County. "You feel like he's one of us, and he makes you feel like a part of it — that you can do it, it's not hard."

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