



Commodity Supplemental Food Program

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) serves about 595,000 low-income people each month, and is the only USDA nutrition program that provides monthly food assistance specially targeted at low-income seniors.ⁱ The program is designed to meet the unique nutritional needs of participants, supplementing diets with a monthly package of healthy, nutritious USDA commodities. With one in 12 households with seniors at risk of hunger nationwide,ⁱⁱ CSFP prevents vulnerable seniors from having to choose between food and other basic needs.

WHO QUALIFIES

CSFP has eligibility requirements for both income and age. CSFP serves individuals age 60 and over with incomes of less than 130% of the Federal Poverty Guideline (\$14,937 for a senior living alone in 2013).ⁱⁱⁱ While nearly 97% of participants are seniors^{iv}, the program also serves a small number of women, infants, and children up to age six living at or below 185% of poverty, reflecting the fact that CSFP was the precursor to WIC.^v

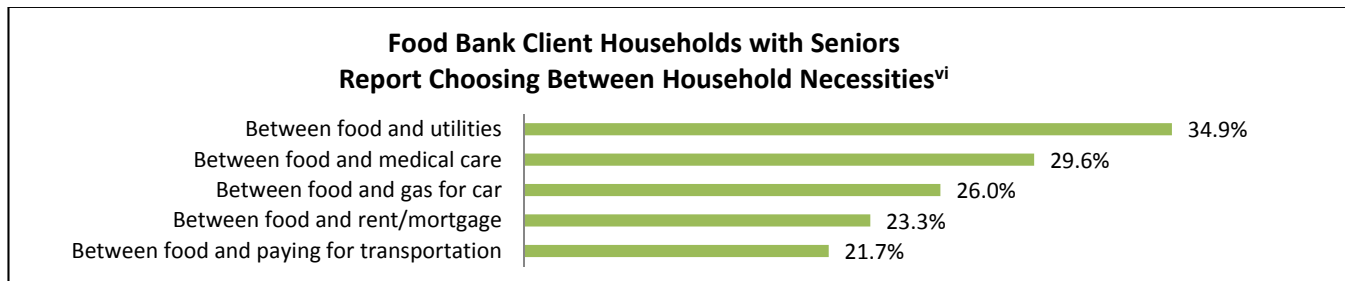


EFFICIENTLY LEVERAGES GOVERNMENT BUYING POWER

CSFP leverages government buying power to maximize the impact of the monthly food package. The USDA commodity foods included in the package are all U.S. grown and produced products. While the cost to USDA to provide the food package is about \$20 per month, the average retail value is \$50, making it a highly efficient use of federal dollars.^{vi}

TARGETS VULNERABLE SENIORS

Seniors – regardless of income – have different nutritional needs and are more likely to have difficulty preparing or consuming food due to limited mobility, cognitive impairments, and other age-related conditions.^{vii} These challenges are amplified for low-income seniors trying to get by on a limited food budget. According to Feeding America’s study *Hunger in America 2010*, food bank client households with seniors are often forced to make difficult choices between food and other basic needs.^{viii}



Nearly half of seniors between the age of 60 and 90 will encounter at least one year of poverty or near poverty, putting them at greater risk of food insecurity.^{ix} Unlike home-delivered meals and congregate feeding programs in senior centers, CSFP is means tested, meaning that it focuses specifically on the low-income senior population.

PROVIDES TAILORED NUTRITION

While CSFP does not provide a complete diet, the senior food package is designed to provide nutrients typically lacking in the diet of that population, including protein, calcium, potassium, magnesium, several vitamins, and fiber.^x A 2012 USDA study rated CSFP’s senior food package at 76.6 on the Healthy Eating Index (HEI), significantly higher than the HEI score of 57.5 for the average American diet.^{xi} The report further found that the CSFP senior food package provides 23% of seniors’ total energy needs and contained a third or more of the recommended daily reference intake (DRI)^{xii} for protein, calcium, vitamins A and C, and several B vitamins.^{xiii} Protein is provided through foods like peanut butter, dry beans, and tuna, and milk and cheese provide calcium. Canned low-sugar fruits, low-sodium vegetables, and juice deliver essential vitamins. USDA made several nutritional improvements to the CSFP food package in 2011 to reduce sugar, salt, and fat content and increase whole grains.^{xiv}

IMPROVES HEALTH

CSFP helps to combat the poor health conditions often found in food insecure seniors. According to National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey data, food insecure seniors over the age of 60 are significantly more likely to have lower intakes of major vitamins, to be in poor or fair health, and to have limitations in activities of daily living.^{xv}

Without proper nutrients, seniors are at risk for:

- Increased disability
- Decreased resistance to infections
- Deteriorating mental health
- Lengthening of hospital stays
- Diabetes

Sample CSFP Senior Food Package

Product	Units	Size
Cereal Dry	2 units	18 oz pkg
Juice	5 cans	46 oz
Tuna Fish	2 cans	12.5 oz
Evaporated Milk	3 cans	12 oz
Instant Non Fat	1 box*	25.6 oz
Peanut Butter	1 can	18 oz
Macaroni	2 pkg	2 lb
Processed American	1 pkg	2 lb
Fruits	2 cans	15-16 oz
Fruit juice	2 cans	46 oz
Vegetables	4 cans	15-16 oz

* provided every other month

Figure 1



HOW CSFP WORKS

CSFP is a discretionary program funded each year through the federal appropriations process so the program may only serve as many eligible participants as funding allows. CSFP provides food and administrative funds to States, which in turn store and transport the food to local agencies for distribution to low-income clients. Local distribution agencies are non-profits, and Feeding America food banks are a primary provider in 22 states.

While most participants either pick up their monthly CSFP food package at a food bank or other local sponsor or have a designee who is authorized to pick up their food package pick it up for them, some communities deliver the food package directly to the participant's home, an important program feature for seniors with limited mobility.

PROGRAM ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION

Because the program can only serve as many communities and seniors as funding allows, CSFP currently operates in only in 39 states, plus the District of Columbia and two Indian reservations. States not operating CSFP at all are AL, CT, FL, HI, ID, MD, MA, RI, VA, WV, and WY. Six of these states (CT, HI, ID, MD, MA, and RI) have been approved by USDA to start CSFP programs but have not yet been appropriated funding allowing them to do so.

Even in states where CSFP is available, the program is only available in limited geographic areas. As a result, program operators have waiting lists of low-income elderly individuals who would like to participate but cannot because of insufficient funds and caseload availability.

POLICY ASKS

- The FY2013 Agriculture Appropriations bill should provide enough funding for CSFP to maintain current program caseloads and expand CSFP to serve the six additional states with USDA-approved state plans.
- The 2012 Farm Bill should make CSFP a seniors-only program to eliminate duplication with the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), grandfathering in current participants.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

CSFP Website: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/csfp/>

CSFP Fact Sheets: http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/csfp/csfp_faqfacts.htm

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REFERENCES

- ⁱ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Tentative CSFP Caseload and Administrative Funding 2013. December 2012.
[http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/csf/CSFP_Tentative_Caseload_Assignments_Memorandum_and_Worksheet-2013\(2\).pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/csf/CSFP_Tentative_Caseload_Assignments_Memorandum_and_Worksheet-2013(2).pdf)
- ⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. *Household Food Security in the United States in 2011*. Table 2. September 2012. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/884525/err141.pdf>
- ⁱⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013 Poverty Guidelines, *Federal Register Notice*, January 24, 2013.
<http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/13poverty.cfm#guidelines> Note: The 2013 federal poverty guideline is \$11,490 for a one-person household living at 100% of the poverty guideline and \$14,937 for a one-person household living at 130% of the poverty guideline.
- ^{iv} U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Annual Program Data for FY2013 (data as of March 8, 2013).
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/fdpart.htm>
- ^v CSFP also serves pregnant and breastfeeding women; other new mothers up to one year postpartum; infants; and children up to age six living at or below 185% of poverty (about \$36,131 for a family of three in 2013). The food assistance needs of this vulnerable population are increasingly met by the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). Eligible people may not participate in both WIC and CSFP at the same time. Farm bill legislation considered in both the House of Representatives and the Senate in 2012 would have made CSFP a seniors-only program.
- ^{vi} Feeding America analysis of U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Program Information Report (keydata), U.S. Summary FY2011. Extracted January 2012. http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/key_data/october-2011.pdf
- ^{vii} Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, *The Role of the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) in Nutritional Assistance to Mothers, Infants, Children, and Seniors*, August 2008.
<http://naldc.nal.usda.gov/download/32850/PDF>
- ^{viii} Rhoda Cohen, J. Mabli, F. Potter, Z. Zhao, *Hunger in America 2010*, Feeding America, February 2010.
<http://feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/hunger-studies/hunger-study-2010.aspx>
- ^{ix} Rank, Mark and James Williams. *A Life Course Approach to Understanding Poverty Among Older American Adults*. Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services, 2010, v. 91, no. 4.
<http://www.familiesinsociety.org/ShowdoiAbstract.asp?docid=4032>
- ^x Weimer J. *Factors Affecting Nutrient Intake of the Elderly*. Food and Rural Economics Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Agricultural Economic Report No. 769; page iii.
<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/aer769/aer769.pdf>
- ^{xi} U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, *Nutrient and MyPyramid Analysis of USDA Foods in Five of Its Food and Nutrition Programs*, Table 3-17. January 2012.
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/MENU/Published/CNP/FILES/NutrientMyPyramid.pdf>
- ^{xii} The DRI is a group of standards developed by the Institute of Medicine's Food and Nutrition Board to assess the adequacy and quality of nutrient intakes. The DRI is the most recent set of dietary recommendations and they replace previous Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA). RDA is now one of several standards included in the DRI group of standards.
- ^{xiii} U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, *Nutrient and MyPyramid Analysis of USDA Foods in Five of Its Food and Nutrition Programs*. January 2012.
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/MENU/Published/CNP/FILES/NutrientMyPyramid.pdf>
- ^{xiv} National CSFP Association. http://www.ncsfpa.org/_assets/2012/03/Improvements-to-USDA-Commodities-issued-by-the-CSFP-Program.pdf
- ^{xv} Seligman, H., Bindman, A., Vittinghoff, E., Kanaya, A., Kushel, M. *Food Insecurity is Associated with Diabetes Mellitus: Results from the National Health Examination and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) 1999-2002*. Journal of General Internal Medicine, July 2007. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17436030>

Figure 1 This list is a sample of the Maximum Food Package for seniors compiled by the National CSFP Association. <http://www.ncsfpa.org/>. There are many substitutes for these items. For a full list of CSFP approved foods available for 2013 visit <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/foods/FY2013-CSFP.pdf>.