

MAKING IT SNAPPY: A POLICY ANALYSIS OF THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

LANSON HOOPAI

Abstract

This paper seeks to present a policy analysis of the United States Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, otherwise known as SNAP. This program, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is the largest federal food aid program by cost and scope. It seeks to provide food security and economic stability to low-income families and individuals. This paper will address the modern policy debate that surrounds the program, which introduces expert policy analysis, scholarly critiques of its implementation on both the state and federal level, unintended consequences that have resulted from the program, and arguments levied against SNAP. This paper concludes by conducting a survey of suggested improvements to the program, drawing from a wide range on the political spectrum, and highlighting the suggestions that are most prevalent among policy experts.

Introduction

Barbara Haywood, a single mother of two, stands in line at a food bank in Iowa to select the food items that she wants her family to have for the week. Her children stand beside her, arguing over whether canned meatballs or ravioli should be on the menu that evening. It is a bittersweet moment. Sweet, because Barbara knows that the argument means her family will be able to eat that night. Bitter, because this argument might not be possible in a couple of weeks, maybe even days. Since she lost her previous job, she has been unable to find consistent employment. She must find a way to feed her family on a budget that does not allow for any of the luxuries of modern American life. Her young son, Tyler, mows lawns for cash in an effort to help his family, and her young daughter, Kaylie, tries to be brave. Even so, multiple antidepressants, physician visits, and job searches do nothing to cure Barbara's shame or fill her motel room's pantry (BBC News, 2013). Hunger, a phenomenon that is a foreign concept for 84% of Americans, is an all-too-sour reality for her family (Ziliak and Gunderson, 2015).

Food Banks and private charities do all they can to eliminate hunger. Yet most people believe that these local organizations are limited in their ability to save families from starvation. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, otherwise known as SNAP, is the Federal Government's response to this deficiency. Through SNAP, Barbara is able to receive vouchers in the form of EBT plastic cards that she can exchange for food and groceries. It is a welcome form of assistance, and a prominent feature of the American welfare system.

Aid from SNAP is certainly helpful. However, SNAP is often not enough. Barbara and her family struggle even with the presence of SNAP and private organizations that seek to help her. SNAP, despite its noble mission, cannot alleviate the hunger of all those suffering. Even worse, the horizon looks bleak for these families and individuals. SNAP contains a work provision that only allows recipients to receive the benefits of the program for three months out of a three-year period, unless the recipient is actively working, or participating in education and training activities. After the 2008 recession, most states qualified for waivers from these time limits, allowing unemployed recipients more time to receive benefits from SNAP. This was done under the recognition that the economy placed a substantial amount of pressure on the job market, which left many individuals chronically unemployed, even if they actively searched for a job. Eight years later, many of these states no longer qualify for these waivers. This prompts individuals to either find employment or risk losing their SNAP benefits (New York Times, 2016).

Experts speculate that the reversion back to pre-recession work requirements will come with consequences that range far beyond hunger. Studies have suggested

links between birth defects and insufficient nutrient intake, which might be worsened with the enforced work provisions (Carmichael, Yang, Herring, Abrams, and Shaw, 2007). Educational performance and the cognitive abilities of students have seen correlations with the food security (Howard, 2011). Barbara's experiences with panic attacks and depression are not unique. Studies have suggested that these symptoms are exacerbated by a lack of food security, on both a physical and psychological level (Heflin, Siefert, and Williams, 2005). Proponents of SNAP worry that the re-introduction of work provision time limits could also re-introduce these and other external effects on a large scale (Washington Post, 2016).

Given the significance of food security on physical, mental, and emotional health, and the re-emerging salience of the policy discussion, this paper will seek to answer the following question: What is the history and impact of SNAP, and what are its prospects moving forward? In approaching this question, this paper will present a broad history of the legislation, an overview of its original and modern forms, and its specific implementation in certain states. Additionally, critiques of the policy from academic scholars and policy experts will be presented, along with proposed reforms to improve SNAP's efficiency and effectiveness.

Literature Review

SNAP is a federal program overseen by the national Food and Nutrition Service which is a branch of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Its predecessor, the Food Stamps program, was replaced by the new “coupon” system that SNAP currently utilizes. Its purpose, according to the USDA’s website, is to “offer nutrition service to millions of eligible, low-income individuals and families.” In terms of size and scope, it is the largest food-related safety net in the United States of America (Wilde, 2012). This makes it a larger target for budget hawks. In 2015, Congress proposed major cuts to the program, along with such programs as Medicaid, Medicare, and health care subsidies. However, this budget did not proceed without significant opposition. In his testimony before the House Committee on Agriculture, Robert Greenstein, President of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, argued that “SNAP can respond immediately to help families bridge temporary periods of unemployment or a family crisis. If a parent loses her job, SNAP can help her feed her children until she is able to improve her circumstances” (Greenstein, 2015). Other significant political figures echoed similar sentiments (Pianin, 2015).

Dottie Rosenbaum has argued that the program has boosted economic progress in the US economy, and has acted as a buffer against economic hardship for low-income families (Rosenbaum, 2013). She argues that, out of all welfare programs, SNAP is the most efficient and effective in “assisting families and communities during economic downturns.” Other writers have supported Professor

Rosenbaum's analysis: SNAP is commonly seen as a "fiscal stabilizer" for families when the economy is in recession (Ziliak, 2015; Caswell, 2013). On the other hand, the Berkeley Food Institute, in conjunction with the Haas Institute and the Goldman School of Public Policy, has pointed out that some individuals eligible for SNAP benefits do not partake accordingly. The hesitation is often due to elements such as misinformation, a time-intensive application process, or social stigma (Matters, 2015). Other scholars have suggested that SNAP, while effective at accomplishing its goals, is inefficient in doing so (Rachidi, 2016). On a more theoretical level, economists have suggested methods to incentivize efficient behavior among SNAP participants, in order to minimize the wastefulness of the program itself (Richards and Sindelar, 2013).

Definitions

SNAP is primarily aimed at decreasing food insecurity among low-to no-income families. Food insecurity, in this context, is defined as "reduced food intake or disrupted eating patterns in a household due to a lack of money or other resources" (Mabli, Ohls, Dragoset, Castner, and Santos, 2013). The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has offered another, internationally accepted definition of Food Security: "Food security [is] a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (FAO, 2002). Two immediate observations must be made regarding these definitions: Though they seem to adequately distinguish between food security and food insecurity, they do not account for the wide disparity that can exist between those who do not have enough to eat. In other words, there can be levels of food insecurity that call for more drastic measures than others. As a result, the USDA has attempted to delineate between individuals and families who are food insecure, and those who are very food insecure (Coleman-Jensen, Gregory, and Singh, 2014). Differences between the two classifications included the frequency in which one could not afford a balanced meal and whether a person cut the size of or skipped a meal, ate less than he or she felt they should, or even did not eat for a whole day. Indeed, those who were very food insecure reported skipping a day's worth of meals 25% of the time, while those who were only food insecure almost never reported skipping a day's worth of meals.

Distinguishing between food insecure and very food insecure classes has bearing upon one other definitional point: the importance of safe food acquisition. When presented with the prospect of hunger or starvation, food insecure families and individuals demonstrated a tendency to engage in risky behaviors for the sake of food acquisition. The types of and the danger posed by these behaviors varied

proportionally to the severity of the food insecurity (Anater and Latkin, 2011). The types of behaviors varied from diluting baby formula in order to extend its use, to purposely committing crimes in order to benefit from prison food, to scavenging and eating road kill. Again, the more food insecure the individual in question, the more prevalent this sort of dangerous behavior became.

SNAP and Food Security

Though scholars agree that SNAP's mission—increasing food security—is noble, they disagree on whether or not SNAP successfully achieve this goal. On some accounts, SNAP has been beneficial. Estimates suggest that SNAP has reduced the likelihood of a household being food insecure by roughly 30%, and the likelihood of being very food insecure by roughly 20% (Ratcliffe, McKernan, and Zhang, 2011). Scholars have even argued that SNAP has reduced the probability of very low food security by 45%, using a 2-year panel study as a reference (Nord, 2011). Other studies are more conservative in their analysis, but nonetheless still optimistic, arguing that SNAP has reduced the likelihood of food insecurity by about 18% across the board (Mykerezi and Mills, 2010). Mark Nord and Anne Marie Golla, working on behalf of the USDA, conducted a study that concluded that SNAP has reduced the likelihood of being very food insecure by about one third (Nord and Golla, 2009). While positive, these authors also point out that, on average, self-reporting from households grew from 8% a year before they signed up for SNAP, to 20% reporting 4 months prior to their registration. To Nord and Golla, this is clear evidence of the self-selection bias at work. Households are more likely to report their food security status if they perceive themselves to either be food insecure or at risk of food insecurity. Since household surveys are one of the only ways that researchers can collect this sort of data, the self-selection bias has the potential to skew the results of any research, perhaps to a statistically significant degree.

Other researchers are much less optimistic. A 2008 study on the relationship between SNAP, participation in SNAP, and participation in the labor force yielded three main results (Huffman and Jensen, 2008). First, that there was strong evidence to indicate a correlation between participation in SNAP, and participation in the labor force. In other words, if a household participates in SNAP, it is likely that the same household will also have at least one member actively working or actively looking for work. In 2011, empirical evidence surfaced to corroborate this claim, with over four times as many SNAP households participating in the labor force as those households that did not (Rosenbaum, 2013). Second, though there was a positive correlation between food security and participation in SNAP, in contrast to studies referenced previously, this paper did not find the relationship to be statistically significant. This conclusion is striking, especially in light of its third

finding: The lack of clear evidence that SNAP reduces food insecurity is most likely due to the prevalence of self-selection into household surveys. According to this study, the self-selection bias is so significant that it almost completely distorts the data available to researchers.

Of course, this claim has not gone ignored by proponents of SNAP, who wish to maintain its effectiveness against opposing views. Mabli, Ohls, Dragoset, Castner, and Santos argue that their 2013 study accounts for this research problem by purposefully employing two research tactics (Mabli et al., 2013). First, they devalued the responses of those families perceived to be at their worst point of food insecurity, under the empirical assumption that the worse their food security is, the more responsive families will be to surveys asking as such. Second, in the longitudinal study model adopted in this particular study, only those families who did not receive SNAP benefits at the time of their initial responses were included in the initial data analysis. Both of these measures were undertaken to mitigate the effects of self-selection bias upon the research. Even with these anti-bias methods in place, this particular 2013 study concluded that a 14% to 18% reduction of very low food security was observable over a six-month period. Kreider, Pepper, Gunderson, and Joliffe (2012) also recognized the challenge that the self-selection bias poses, and therefore introduced a new study method to measure SNAP's effectiveness on child poverty: The Average Treatment Effect (ATE). Using sophisticated economic measurements, Kreider et al. identified the two opposing theses: first, that SNAP leads to increased food security among food-insecure households, and second, that SNAP has led to no observable increase in food security. Utilizing the strongest data and measurements from studies conducted under both assumptions, this study ultimately suggests a positive relationship between SNAP participation and food security.

Other, more moderate critiques of SNAP's effectiveness exist. Some studies suggest that, while SNAP does not meet its main goal of lessening the probability of food insecurity per se, it does lessen the severity of the effects on the food insecure (Gibson-Davis and Foster, 2006). To put it in other terms: the probability of food security dropping into food insecurity is statistically unaffected, while the probability of food insecure recipients dropping into the realm of very food insecure is statistically lessened. SNAP therefore meets a secondary criterion for its success, though it does not meet its initial objective. Other studies seek to point out alternative causality. On some accounts, a major contributing factor to food insecurity is the fact that average American families are unable to deal with the income shock of recession, unemployment, or asset failures (Gunderson and Gruber, 2001). When food insecurity does occur on these accounts, families do not know how to deal with its sudden onset. They are not sufficiently knowledgeable in terms of available remedies and responses. Gunderson and Gruber, therefore, argue

that increased access to financial borrowing should be made available to American families experiencing food insecurity, to lessen the income shock that comes about from catastrophic and unexpected economic failure.

State SNAP Policies

In the constant effort to increase the program's efficiency and participation levels, and to modernize the way in which the program is operated, each state has found several methods to administrate SNAP (Rowe, Hall, O'Brien, Pindus, and Koralek, 2010). For example, several states have introduced measures to make enrollment in the program more convenient for potential applicants. These measures include comprehensive application forms, which can be used to apply for Medicare, Medicaid, SNAP, and other major federal programs that minimize the time needed to take advantage of welfare benefits. Fax submissions eliminate the necessity for applicants to travel to SNAP governmental centers. Additionally, for those who *do* need to travel to SNAP centers, many states have increased the flexibility of their office hours for SNAP applicants. Some states even offer transportation to potential signees, if needed.

Several technological innovations have further improved the effectiveness of SNAP recruitment efforts. States have established call centers, online application forms, and biometric identification systems in an effort to modernize the technical aspect of their campaign. Indeed, all these efforts were done in response to certain perceived barriers to participation, which Rowe et al. primarily identified as wait times, stigmatization, transportation issues, and confusing applications.

Husley et al. conducted a survey of five states—Florida, Georgia, Massachusetts, Utah, and Washington—in order to estimate the overall effect of modernization efforts. According to these studies, the improvements in technology and enrollment methods have significantly increased the number of caseloads pending approval (Husley, Conway, Gothro, Kleinman, Reilly, Cody, and Sama-Miller, 2013). In general, approvals and official enrollments into SNAP also increased, but this figure was contingent upon the application method used. Approval rates were lowest for online applications, as compared to in-person and fax applications. There were also lowered administrative costs as a result of the modernization efforts. This is partly attributed to the new technological framework which bore a good deal of the labor costs.

In 2011, New York attempted to take a step beyond the federal policy, and requested that New York City be allowed to deny SNAP benefits for sugar-sweetened beverages (Brownell and Ludwig, 2011). California, Nebraska, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Michigan, Vermont, and Texas have all made similar requests to this effect, or at least requested that states be allowed greater flexibility as to the

parameters of SNAP benefits. However, like these other states, New York was denied this request by the USDA. New York's attempt to limit the consumption of unhealthy drinks is not unprecedented, as SNAP already prohibits benefits from being used to obtain harmful substances (e.g. tobacco and alcohol) (Shenkin and Jacobson, 2010). However, as Shenkin and Jacobson point out, there are some crucial differences between the two efforts to discourage unhealthy consumption. Manufacturers of soda and sugary drinks would most likely lobby, to great effect, against the exclusion of sugary drinks from SNAP benefits, just as they lobbied against the soda excise tax in 2009. Economists argue that a SNAP restriction on sugary drinks would have little effect. Recipients could easily use the cash they have on hand to buy sugary drinks, due to its low cost compared to alcohol or tobacco. Additionally, grocery stores may argue that separating eligible and non-eligible SNAP products would prove costly and inconvenient.

Shenkin and Jacobson, for their part, offer a solution to mitigate soda and sugary beverage consumption. This solution, which may prove more palatable to the soda industry and grocery stores, adds a given amount, such as 30 cents, back to the EBT account for every SNAP dollar used to purchase healthier foods. Behavioral economists Michael Richards and Jody Sindelar also recommend a "rewards system," contingent upon the recipient's choice to buy healthy foods, like fruits or vegetables (Richards and Sindelar, 2013). In addition to this proposal, they also suggest that SNAP recipients win "prizes" based on whether or not their purchases are healthy. This would simplify the purchasing process.

SNAP and Concurrent Programs

Though SNAP is the largest food-based welfare program in the United States by scope and cost, it is certainly not the only program of its kind. Medicaid, the social health care program for individuals and families in low-income situations, is aimed at the same constituency as SNAP. Indeed, some researchers have argued that enrollment in Medicaid is tied to subsequent enrollment in SNAP, if not causally linked (Meyerhoefer and Pylypczuk, 2014). In this way, it is a sort of "gateway program." So, on some level, federal welfare programs seem to operate in partnership with one another.

This "partnership" is also observable with other, smaller programs. For example, the Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a program that grants federal aid to states. This is done for the purposes of ensuring that pregnant and postpartum mothers, infants, and children up to 5 years of age receive adequate nutrition and calories. Basiotis, Kramer-LeBlanc, and Kennedy conducted a study in 1998 with SNAP's predecessor, the Food Stamp Program, and determined that the success of SNAP and the WIC mirrored each other, insofar as the

implantation of both programs tended to raise mutual enrollment, and lower health risks in both participating groups (Basiotis, Kramer-LeBlanc, and Kennedy, 1998). Other, smaller programs have been created to work explicitly under the auspices of SNAP. The American Diabetic Association mentioned one such program in their 2010 publication on Child and Adolescent Nutrition Assistance Programs (Stang, 2010). SNAP Ed is a nutrition *education* program that states may apply for on an individual basis, in hopes of receiving funding for education efforts. These efforts, primarily aimed at women, will have healthful food education and awareness as its main objective. SNAP does not operate alone; far from it. Other, equally prominent federal programs, as well as independent and subsidiary programs operate in conjunction with it as well.

Challenges and Obstacles to SNAP

One of the most widely-cited obstacles to SNAP participation is the social stigma associated with the program. No one wants to be publicly identified as a dependent upon a federal program for assistance, especially in an activity as fundamental as buying groceries (Moffitt, 1983). In large part, some studies suggest, this stigma is tied to what the public perception of welfare *per se* happens to be in a given area (Stuber and Kronebusch, 2004). For example, if a state is more restrictive with its welfare enrollment policies in general, the resulting public perception of welfare will be negative, and SNAP enrollment figures drop. On the other hand, more lenient government welfare policies result in more positive views of welfare participation among the general public, and SNAP enrollment therefore rises. It is therefore encouraging for proponents of SNAP that, in recent years, governments have taken active steps to combat stigma among potential and current participants.

Two of these solutions can be identified very clearly. The first was a change in the vocabulary used to describe SNAP and similar programs. Instead of the term “welfare,” SNAP and its cohorts are called “nutritional aid” making the term easier to apply to more programs, and more palatable to participants (DeParle and Gebeloff, 2009). Another significant change was the shift from paper coupons to the EBT debit card system. It is much easier for onlookers to identify the paper coupons of the Food Stamp and Supplemental Nutrition programs. On the other hand, an EBT card appears similar to a debit card (Zekeri, 2004). Both the rhetorical change and the policy change allow for a more publicly acceptable SNAP program, which has naturally led to higher participation rates.

The EBT system has not only worked to reduce the social stigma issue implicated in the Food Stamp system and the SNAP program. It has also reduced fraud. It has been well documented that participants in the old Food Stamp system would sell their paper stamps to willing buyers at slightly reduced costs. They would

then use the money to buy goods prohibited under the program, such as drugs and alcohol (Ziotnick, 1996). This process becomes much more difficult under an EBT system, where identification can be requested in order to verify original ownership of the plastic card. This, in addition to updated technology allowing for biometric fingerprint scanning and ID, has worked to great effect against the tendency to sell SNAP privileges to willing, off-the-record buyers (Ratcliffe, McKernan, and Finegold, 2008). It simply becomes more inconvenient and riskier to attempt SNAP fraud.

Arguments Against SNAP

A recent study conducted under the purview of the USDA concluded that 40% of active participants in SNAP are clinically obese (Condon, Drilea, Jowers, Lichtenstein, Mabli, Madden, and Niland, 2015). According to the data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey between 2007 and 2010, 29% of all Americans nationwide are clinically obese, which suggests that participation in SNAP contributes in a notable manner to personal clinical obesity. Critics of the measure have noted this trend across time, and some therefore argue that SNAP, at least in its current iteration, ultimately does more harm than good to participants (Leung, Willett, and Ding, 2012). Leung et al., in their analysis, point out that household SNAP participation is positively correlated with Body Mass Index, waist circumference, and metabolic risk factors among low-income adults. Dr. Douglas J. Besharov, before the Senate Committee on Agriculture, testified in 2003 that the central problem facing the SNAP program is “not too little food but, rather too much—or at least too many calories.”

However, according to defenders of SNAP’s effectiveness, the evidence against the program is far from conclusive. Some studies suggest that, rather than being a causal factor towards obesity, SNAP is only a correlative factor (DeBono, Ross, and Berrang-Ford, 2012). Though research has shown that clinical obesity is more prevalent among SNAP participants, there has been no clearly demonstrated causal link between the two elements. DeBono et al. argue that this is because not enough research has been undertaken towards understanding SNAP’s exact role in “obesogenic environments.” Other studies have gone farther in their conclusions: the reason why researchers find correlations between obesity and SNAP participation is because participants, due to socio-economic and environmental influences, already tend to make poor nutritional choices (Zagorsky and Smith, 2009).

Other arguments against the program point to factors outside of health. Some researchers suggest that SNAP is cost-inefficient, and that other public entities can bear the cost and burden of this sort of welfare more effectively and efficiently (Tanner, 2013). On this view, SNAP suffers from two distinct problems. First, the

cost of SNAP (which Tanner cites to be \$78 billion per year) fails to completely account for the problem of food insecurity, as nearly 18 million Americans in 2013 remained in this state. Furthermore, opponents suggest that the SNAP program has been plagued by fraud and financial mismanagement, crippling the program at the administrative level (Briquetel, 2013).

In response to these critiques, some studies have suggested that though SNAP may not operate at maximum efficiency, the cost that would occur by removing SNAP would be incalculable. It would inflict undesirable fiscal damage on the national economy (Horton, 2008). Furthermore, the USDA has sought to curb the perceived corruption that surrounds SNAP by introducing the “SNAP Stewardship Solutions Project” (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2016). They have established set goals for the program, such as cracking down on new forms of fraud, strengthening state partnerships, and establishing stiffer penalties for those who traffic SNAP benefits. Given the relatively recent establishment of this program, the exact effects of the policy remain yet to be seen.

Social critiques also pervade the debate surrounding this program. Studies have suggested a wide disparity in food security between those who live in Native American reservations and the rest of the American population. This suggests that SNAP does not adequately aid this population (Bauer, Widome, Himes, Smyth, Rock, Hannan, and Story, 2012). Gender-based criticisms have also been levied at the program, pointing out the greater tendency for female-headed households to be more food insecure. The efforts of SNAP and other similar programs to treat all households equally fails to take this tendency into account, and therefore functionally discriminates against women (Ribar and Hamrick, 2003). By way of response to these critiques, some researchers have identified certain trends in relation to health and education for racial minorities and females. First, the SNAP program has led to marked increases in maternal health, especially amongst racial minorities (Almond, Hoynes, and Schanzenbach, 2011). Other studies have sought to demonstrate that these same groups, as a result of the increased nutritional intake, have increased academic achievement for applicable individuals (Hoynes, Schanzenbach, and Almond, 2012).

Suggestions and Alternatives to SNAP

In the ongoing effort to improve and modernize SNAP’s implementation, several scholars have suggested both minor and major changes to the program. For example, some studies have suggested that households with more proficient financial management abilities are far less likely to experience food insecurity. Concurrently, individuals with lesser knowledge or practice of sound financial management techniques are at a higher risk of food insecurity. Therefore, one suggestion has been

to incorporate educational programs directed towards participants in SNAP, aimed at giving them the financial skills necessary to stabilize their own economic situation (Gundersen and Garasky, 2012).

In a joint workshop aimed at addressing food insecurity, the Berkeley Food Institute, the Haas Institute, and the Goldman School of Public Policy suggested that those policymakers who work to change or modernize SNAP ought to work closely with those who have experienced, or are experiencing, food insecurity (Berkeley Food Institute, 2015). This is intended to give policymakers first-hand, empirical experience as to the nuances that impact the administration of SNAP's benefits.

Others have suggested cuts, rather than elaborations upon, the current iteration of SNAP. Studies from the American Enterprise Institute have suggested reforms that would tailor individual benefits to local regions in order to ensure financial efficiency (Rachidi, 2016). Because local food costs and local housing costs vary from region-to-region, the amount of SNAP benefits should also vary according to these costs. This would establish the equality of real benefits. The Heritage Foundation has proposed a seven-prong plan to reform the program and make SNAP more cost-effective. Suggestions include capping future spending, transferring control of SNAP from the USDA to the HHS, and prohibiting SNAP payments to undocumented immigrant families (Rector and Bradley, 2012). In the wake of these proposals to reduce SNAP spending, several scholars have emphasized the primacy of reducing food insecurity. They argue that the reduction in low-income hunger, and not the economic efficiency of the program, should take priority when making policy decisions (Gundersen, 2013).

Others have suggested a change to the philosophy behind the distribution of SNAP benefits. The correct national philosophy, these scholars suggest, would be an similar to the United Nation's "right-to-food" approach (Dowler and O'Connor, 2012). The shift in philosophy from "welfare" language to "rights" language would imply many concrete policy changes. These changes include increased government accountability and oversight, increased public participation, a greater focus on discrimination, and a de-emphasis on the monetary cost of the program, with a renewed emphasis on the good that the program accomplishes. This sort of rhetorical change, Dowler and O'Connor argue, would go a long way to how the United States approaches food welfare programs.

Conclusion

Though controversial, the SNAP program has contributed to the wellbeing of thousands of Americans in terms of food security and poverty alleviation. States have undertaken substantial efforts to maintain the program, keep it up to date with modern technological innovations, and to respond to new issues when they arise.

However, SNAP is not without its detractors. Some even bemoan the creation of the SNAP program in the first place (Rogers, 2012; Carter, 2009). In their view, it is the responsibility of the religious sphere to alleviate poverty. Civil government is intervening because they have not been adequately fulfilling this duty. This government intervention necessitates inefficiencies in distribution. However, this is a necessary evil towards the good of bringing people food. Siding with Rogers, it seems right to say that the church's failure is the primary impetus of the government's actions. In order for SNAP to be reformed, the attitude of the church towards the poor, as well as towards government action, also requires reformation.

Moving forward, more research ought to be done as to feasible solutions to increase the health benefits of the food that SNAP provides, perhaps through the suggestions of Richards and Sindelar, and also what can be done to further tailor the program to local communities. Furthermore, given the recent changes to USDA policies regarding fraud and abuse within SNAP's participatory and administrative ranks, future studies ought to be undertaken with an eye to evaluating the effectiveness of these policies.

References

- Almond, D., Hoynes, H. W., & Schanzenbach, D. W. (2011). Inside the war on poverty: 'The impact of food stamps on birth outcomes. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 93(2), 387-403
- Anater, A. S., McWilliams, R., & Latkin, C. A. (2011). Food acquisition practices used by food-insecure individuals when they are concerned about having sufficient food for themselves and their households. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*, 6(1), 27-44
- Aussenberg, R., and Falk, G. (2013). Background on the Scheduled Reduction to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Benefits. *Congressional Research Service*
- Basiotis, P. P., Kramer-LeBlanc, C., & Kennedy, E. T. (1998). Maintaining nutrition security and diet quality: The role of the food stamp program and WIC. *Family Economics and Nutrition Review*, 11(1), 4-16. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/219400012?accountid=13113>
- Bauer, K. W., Widome, R., Himes, J. H., Smyth, M., Rock, B. H., Hannan, P. J., & Story, M. (2012). High food insecurity and its correlates among families living on a rural American Indian reservation. *American journal of public health*, 102(7), 1346-1352
- Berkeley Food Institute. (2015). *The Future of SNAP? Improving Nutrition Policy to Ensure Health and Food Equity*. Retrieved from http://diversity.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/snapbrief_final.pdf
- Briquelet, Kate (2013). "Welfare Recipients Take Out Cash at Strip Clubs, Liquor Stores, and X-Rated Shops," *New York Post*
- Brownell, K. D., & Ludwig, D. S. (2011). The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, soda, and USDA policy: who benefits? *Jama*, 306(12), 1370-1371
- Carter, J. (2009, December 8). How the Church Created the Welfare State. Retrieved April 25, 2016, from <http://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2009/12/how-the-church-created-the-welfare-state>

- Caswell, J. A., Yaktine, A. L., & Council, N. R. (2013). History, Background, and Goals of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
- Civic Impulse. (2016). H.R. 10222 — 88th Congress: An Act to strengthen the agricultural economy to help to achieve a fuller and more Retrieved from <https://www.govtrack.us/Congress/bills/88/hr10222>
- Civic Impulse. (2016). H.R. 2264 — 103rd Congress: Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993. Retrieved from <https://www.govtrack.us/Congress/bills/103/hr2264>
- Coleman-Jensen, A., Gregory, C., & Singh, A. (2014). Household food security in the United States in 2013. *USDA-ERS Economic Research Report*, (173)
- Computerworld : The newsweekly for the computer community.* (1988). Framington, Mass: CW Pub./Inc
- Condon, Elizabeth, Susan Drilea, Keri Jowers, Carolyn Lichtenstein, James Mabli, Emily Madden, and Katherine Niland. (2015). Diet Quality of Americans by SNAP Participation Status: Data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 2007–2010. Prepared by Walter R. McDonald & Associates, Inc. and Mathematica Policy Research for the Food and Nutrition Service
- Dean, S., & Rosenbaum, D. (2013). SNAP benefits will be cut for nearly all participants in November 2013. *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Washington DC*
- DeBono, N. L., Ross, N. A., & Berrang-Ford, L. (2012). Does the Food Stamp Program cause obesity? A realist review and a call for place-based research. *Health & place*, 18(4), 747-756
- DeParle, J., & Gebeloff, R. (2009). Food stamp use soars, and stigma fades. *New York Times*, 29
- Dowler, E. A., & O'Connor, D. (2012). Rights-based approaches to addressing food poverty and food insecurity in Ireland and UK. *Social science & medicine*, 74(1), 44-51
- FAO. 2002. *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2001*. Rome

- Gibson--Davis, C. M., & Foster, E. M. (2006). A cautionary tale: Using propensity scores to estimate the effect of food stamps on food insecurity. *Social Service Review*, 80(1), 93-126
- GOP cuts Medicare, food stamps in new budget blueprint. (2015, March 16). Retrieved March 22, 2016, from <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/gop-cuts-medicare-food-stamps-in-new-budget-blueprint/>
- Growing Overweight and Obesity in America: Hearings before the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, Senate, 108th Cong. 2 (2003) (Testimony of Douglas J. Besharov)
- Gundersen, C. (2013). Food insecurity is an ongoing national concern. *Advances in Nutrition: An International Review Journal*, 4(1), 36-41
- Gundersen, C. G., & Garasky, S. B. (2012). Financial management skills are associated with food insecurity in a sample of households with children in the United States. *The Journal of nutrition*, 142(10), 1865-1870
- Gundersen, C., & Gruber, J. (2001). The dynamic determinants of food insufficiency. In *Second food security measurement and research conference* (Vol. 2, pp. 11-2). Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Report
- Hall, S., O'Brien, C., Pindus, N., & Koralek, R. (2010). *Enhancing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Certification: SNAP Modernization Efforts, Interim Report*. US Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Research and Analysis
- Horton, S. (2008). The economics of nutritional interventions. In *Nutrition and Health in Developing Countries* (pp. 859-871). Humana Press
- Hoynes, H. W., Schanzenbach, D. W., & Almond, D. (2012). *Long run impacts of childhood access to the safety net* (No. w18535). National Bureau of Economic Research
- Huffman, S. K., & Jensen, H. H. (2008). Food Assistance Programs and Outcomes in the Context of Welfare Reform*. *Social Science Quarterly*, 89(1), 95-115

- Hulsey, L., Conway, K., Gothro, A., Kleinman, R., Reilly, M., Cody, S., & Samamiller, E. (2013). *The Evolution of SNAP Modernization Initiatives in Five States*. Mathematica Policy Research
- Kennedy, John F. Executive Order 10914 - Providing for an Expanded Program of Food Distribution to Needy Families. (1961, January 21). Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. Retrieved April 14th, 2016. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=58853>
- Klerman, J. A., & Danielson, C. (2011). The transformation of the supplemental nutrition assistance program. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 30(4), 863-888
- Kreider, B., Pepper, J. V., Gundersen, C., & Jolliffe, D. (2012). Identifying the effects of SNAP (food stamps) on child health outcomes when participation is endogenous and misreported. *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 107(499), 958-975
- Leung, C. W., Willett, W. C., & Ding, E. L. (2012). Low-income Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program participation is related to adiposity and metabolic risk factors. *The American journal of clinical nutrition*, 95(1), 17-24
- Mabli, J., Ohls, J., Dragoset, L., Castner, L., & Santos, B. (2013). *Measuring the effect of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participation on food security* (No. 69d901432c7a46779666a240a0974a5d). Mathematica Policy Research
- Matters, W. S. The Future of SNAP?. (2015, May). Retrieved March 25, 2016, from http://diversity.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/snapbrief_final.pdf
- Meyerhoefer, C. D., & Pylypchuk, Y. (2014). For those states that expand it, Medicaid may be a gateway to enrollment in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for those in poor health. *LSE American Politics and Policy*
- Moffitt, R.. (1983). An Economic Model of Welfare Stigma. *The American Economic Review*, 73(5), 1023–1035. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1814669>
- Mykerezi, E., & Mills, B. (2010). The impact of food stamp program participation on household food insecurity. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, aaq072

- Nord, M. (2012). How much does the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program alleviate food insecurity? Evidence from recent programme leavers. *Public health nutrition*, 15(05), 811-817
- Pianin, Eric. \$74 Billion Food Stamp Program In Budget Crosshairs. (2015, February 26). Retrieved March 22, 2016, from <http://www.thefiscaltimes.com/2015/02/26/74-Billion-Food-Stamp-Program-Budget-Crosshairs>
- Rachidi, A. (2016, January 20). Are SNAP Benefits Really Too Low? Retrieved March 25, 2016, from <https://www.aei.org/publication/are-snap-benefits-really-too-low/>
- Ratcliffe, C., McKernan, S., & Finegold, K.. (2008). Effects of Food Stamp and TANF Policies on Food Stamp Receipt. *Social Service Review*, 82(2), 291–334. <http://doi.org/10.1086/589707>
- Ratcliffe, C., McKernan, S. M., & Zhang, S. (2011). How much does the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program reduce food insecurity?. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, aar026
- Rector, R., & Bradley, K. (2007, August). Reforming the Food Stamp Program. Retrieved April 25, 2016, from <http://www.heritage.org/home/research/reports/2012/07/reforming-the-food-stamp-program?nomobile>
- Ribar, D. C., & Hamrick, K. S. (2003). Dynamics of poverty and food sufficiency
- Richards, M. R., & Sindelar, J. L. (2013). Rewarding Healthy Food Choices in SNAP: Behavioral Economic Applications. *The Milbank Quarterly*, 91(2), 395–412. <http://doi.org/10.1111/milq.12017>
- Rogers, J. R. (2012, May 22). Welfare State as Spiritual Temptation. Retrieved April 25, 2016, from <http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2012/05/welfare-state-as-spiritual-temptation>
- Rosenbaum, D. (n.d.). SNAP Is Effective and Efficient. Retrieved March 23, 2016, from <http://www.cbpp.org/research/snap-is-effective-and-efficient>
- Rosenbaum, D. (2013). The Relationship Between SNAP and Work Among Low-Income Households. *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*

- Shenkin, J. D., & Jacobson, M. F. (2010). Using the Food Stamp Program and other methods to promote healthy diets for low-income consumers. *American Journal of Public Health*, 100(9), 1562-1564
- Stang, J. (2010). Position of the American Dietetic Association: Child and adolescent nutrition assistance programs. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 110(5), 791-799
- Stuber, J., & Kronebusch, K. (2004). Stigma and other determinants of participation in TANF and Medicaid. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 23(3), 509-530
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). (16, January 29). Retrieved March 22, 2016, from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>
- Tanner, M. (2013). SNAP Failure: The Food Stamp Program Needs Reform. *Policy Analysis*, (738)
- Testimony of Robert Greenstein President, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities Before the House Committee on Agriculture*, House Committee on Agriculture Cong., 20 (2015) (testimony of Robert Greenstein)
- To Amend the Food Stamp Act of 1964, As Amended, Pub. L. 91-671, 84 Stat. 2048-2052
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (2016). USDA Releases New Report on Trafficking and Announces Additional Measures to Improve Integrity in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
- Wilde, Parke (May 2012). "The New Normal: The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)". *Am. J. Agr. Econ.* 95(2): 325-331
- Zagorsky, Jay L., and Patricia K. Smith. "Does the US Food Stamp Program contribute to adult weight gain?" *Economics & Human Biology* 7, no. 2 (2009): 246-258
- Zekeri, A. A. (2004). The adoption of electronic benefit transfer card for delivering food stamp benefits in Alabama: Perceptions of college students participating in the food stamp program. *College Student Journal*, 38(4), 602

- Ziotnick, C. (1996). Sources of Income Among Homeless Adults With Major Mental Disorders or Substance Use Disorders. *Psychiatric Services*, 47(2), 147-151