

# Advancing Hunger-Relief in Massachusetts: The Greater Boston Food Bank's Farm Bill Recommendations

## What is the Farm Bill and how does it advance food security in Eastern Massachusetts?

In Massachusetts, one of the wealthiest states in the nation, food insecurity persists at a staggering rate. The Greater Boston Food Bank (GBFB)'s 2024 statewide study revealed that **one in three individuals** reported running out of food or not having enough money to purchase food in 2023. Amid high inflation and rising food and housing costs, the Farm Bill and hunger-relief programs play a crucial role in alleviating food insecurity.

The Farm Bill includes critical federal nutrition programs that support GBFB's mission to end hunger across Eastern Massachusetts, such as the **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**, **The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)**, and the **Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)**. Currently, some lawmakers are proposing cuts to SNAP benefits and eligibility limitations that would restrict access to nutrition benefits for millions of Americans. Following the 2024 presidential election, Congress may resume negotiations to re-authorize the Farm Bill, last updated in 2018, and in doing so must consider, how exactly does the Farm Bill impact their constituents facing food insecurity?

This policy brief incorporates information from GBFB's SNAP Outreach and Enrollment team, GBFB's network of 600 community food assistance partners across Eastern Massachusetts, policy recommendations for the upcoming Farm Bill informed by Feeding America, and data from GBFB and Mass General Brigham Hospital's 2024 Food Equity and Access Report.

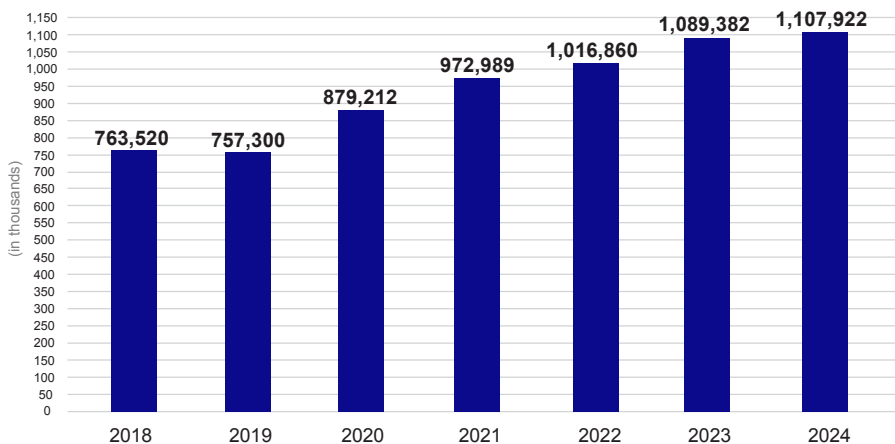


# Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SNAP, our nation's largest hunger-relief program, is a vital tool in combating food insecurity. The growing need for food assistance in Massachusetts that the four food banks have experienced is underscored by a significant rise in SNAP participants in the Bay State, from around 760,000 in September 2019 to more than 1.1 million by September 2024.<sup>1</sup> During the COVID-19 pandemic, a short-term increase in SNAP benefits, coupled with expansions of other social support services, was associated with a reduction in the prevalence of food insecurity.<sup>2</sup> Predictably, once these additional SNAP benefits ended, food insecurity levels exceeded pre-pandemic levels<sup>2</sup>, demonstrating the crucial role that SNAP plays in empowering families and individuals to keep food on the table.

In September and October 2024, GBFB's SNAP Outreach team spoke with over 400 households that expressed interest in applying for SNAP. Of those households, 24% were not eligible to participate in SNAP due to their immigration status or income—despite expressing difficulty affording groceries every month.

**FIGURE 1**  
SNAP Participation in Massachusetts



\* Data from September of each year  
\*\* This figure demonstrates the number of people enrolled in SNAP benefits in September of each year. Enrollment data sourced from the MA Department of Transitional Assistance website.

## Farm Bill advocacy goals: SNAP

- ✔ Align SNAP benefits with the current dietary guidelines and rising food prices to ensure SNAP purchasing power remains strong
- ✔ Protect SNAP participants' freedom to make their own decisions about the food they purchase, promoting dignity and autonomy
- ✔ Streamline eligibility and enrollment processes by improving SNAP access for older adults, college students, veterans, working families, immigrants, and others who face eligibility and enrollment barriers
- ✔ Exclude the Basic Allowance for Housing from the gross income calculation for SNAP eligibility to increase access to military families

**Q: What would an increase in SNAP funding mean for you and your family?**

**“There would be less worry and stress about food. With an increase, I could eat the way my doctor has suggested.”**

—Black senior woman and SNAP participant from Suffolk County

<sup>1</sup> Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance. (n.d.). Department of Transitional Assistance caseload by ZIP code reports. Massachusetts Government. Retrieved November 12, 2024, from <https://www.mass.gov/lists/departement-of-transitional-assistance-caseload-by-zip-code-reports>

<sup>2</sup> Food Research & Action Center (FRAC). (2024). SNAP Leave Behind 2024. <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/SNAP-Leave-Behind-2024.pdf>



## The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

TEFAP enables food banks across the country to purchase food from American farmers through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and provide nutritious food to families and individuals. About 15-20% of GBFB's food distribution is purchased through TEFAP, which is essential as demand rises; GBFB's 2024 survey shows that 42% of respondents use food pantries monthly, up from 35% the previous year.<sup>3</sup> Despite increased SNAP participation<sup>4</sup>, two-thirds of SNAP participants still struggle to make ends meet and turn to food pantries. Additionally, many facing food insecurity are ineligible for SNAP due to immigration status, employment, or income restrictions and rely on food secured by GBFB through TEFAP.

### Farm Bill advocacy goals: TEFAP

- ✔ Increase mandatory funding for TEFAP food purchases to \$500 million per year, adjusted for inflation
- ✔ Increase discretionary funding for TEFAP storage and distribution to \$200 million per year
- ✔ Reauthorize \$15 million per year in discretionary funding for TEFAP infrastructure grants

<sup>3</sup> Cara F. Ruggiero, Man Luo, Catherine Lynn, Kate Adams, Rachel Burgun, Christina Peretti, Daniel Taitelbaum, and Lauren Fiechtner. Food Equity and Access in Massachusetts: Voices and Solutions from Lived Experience. The Greater Boston Food Bank, 2024.

<sup>4</sup> Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance. (n.d.). Department of Transitional Assistance caseload by ZIP code reports. Massachusetts Government. Retrieved November 12, 2024, from <https://www.mass.gov/lists/departement-of-transitional-assistance-caseload-by-zip-code-reports>

## Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)

CSFP enables low-income seniors to access healthy food, minimizing health problems associated with food insecurity through providing a monthly box of commodity foods. GBFB is the state's administrator of this federal program which operates at 35 sites across Massachusetts. Addressing food insecurity for seniors is crucial to maintaining good health, managing chronic conditions, and improving emotional well-being, especially as many senior citizens face physical limitations and live on fixed incomes. Providing consistent access to nutritious food can prevent costly healthcare outcomes<sup>5</sup> and enhance their dignity and quality of life.

### Farm Bill advocacy goals: CSFP

- ✔ Reauthorize CSFP
- ✔ Extend the cheese and nonfat dry milk provision
- ✔ Exclude Medicare payments from reportable income to protect eligibility for seniors facing hunger
- ✔ Provide sufficient funding for CSFP to ensure the program can maintain its current caseload

<sup>5</sup> National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD). (n.d.). Food accessibility, insecurity, and health outcomes. National Institutes of Health. Retrieved November 12, 2024, from <https://www.nimhd.nih.gov/resources/understanding-health-disparities/food-accessibility-insecurity-and-health-outcomes.html>

## How you can help

Your members of Congress need to hear from you. Find your U.S. Senator and U.S. Representative [here](#) and urge them to share in our mission to end hunger in Massachusetts by strengthening current hunger-relief programs in the next Farm Bill. Evidence shows that increased investments in federal nutrition programs reduces food insecurity. Join us in advocating to ensure our neighbors can access the resources they need to thrive.



Learn more about GBFB's public policy and advocacy strategy by scanning the QR code or visiting: <https://www.gbfb.org/what-we-do/advocate/>



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