



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on July 24, 2017

## Disincentives Cut Food Stamp Use

The latest report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) over SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) reveals a sharp drop in participation in the program, touching lows not seen since before 2010. In 2016, 44 million Americans and immigrants (legal and illegal) took advantage of taxpayers' largesse, costing \$71 billion. In 2010, there were 47 million receiving SNAP benefits, costing taxpayers closer to \$80 billion.



The program, which began in 1969, has virtually exploded, from just two million that year (costing taxpayers a paltry \$250 million) to a peak of 47.6 million in 2013, which cost taxpayers \$79.9 billion.

Part of the decline is fueled by illegal immigrants fearing deportation if they disclose, as they are required to on their application for benefits, that they are here in the United States illegally. Raven Clabough reported in *The New American* that the decline in SNAP should be even greater than it is because while "illegal aliens are not eligible to receive food stamps ... their children are, so illegals can apply for benefits for their children who automatically qualify regardless of how they came to the United States."

Part of the decline is due to the establishment (or re-establishment) of work requirements in order to receive benefits at the state level. Notable is the state of Maine, which saw a drop in the number of ABAWDs (able-bodied adults without dependents) once work requirements kicked in. More than 12,000 ABAWDs were receiving benefits in January. They were notified that under the state's new rules they would receive only another three months of benefits unless they worked at a job for at least 20 hours a week, participated in a job-training program, or volunteered for at least 24 hours a month at a qualified charity.

The work requirements were effective April 1. By the end of March, the number of those receiving SNAP benefits dropped to 2,680, a decline of almost 80 percent!

The *Patriot Chronicle* noted sarcastically,

Liberals have sold government dependence so deliberately well that even doing 24 hours of approved volunteer work a month for a capable adult became too much for more than 9,000 people.

It added that there was a side benefit to the reduction of couch-sitters being dropped from Maine's SNAP program: "The taxpayers who work hard for their paychecks can feel some satisfaction at knowing they won't have to support as much mediocrity as they used to."

Similar results of installing work requirements to get a check happened in Alabama and Georgia. The decline in Alabama was astonishing. In January 2016, the number of ABAWDs receiving benefits was 49,000. By May of this year when work requirements were reestablished (the Obama administration suspended the state's work requirements during the recovery from the Great Recession), the number of ABAWDs receiving benefits fell to 7,483, a drop of 85 percent.



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Similarly Georgia experienced a 62-percent decline in SNAP participants when its April 1 deadline passed. In Georgia, however, the work requirements are being staged in and won't apply to all of the state's 159 counties until 2019. Said Georgia Republican state representative Greg Morris: "This is about protecting taxpayer dollars from abuse, [as well as] taking people off the cycle of dependency." The big drop in numbers, he added, "shows how tax dollars are abused when it comes to entitlements." Morris can be forgiven for failing to note that it's not "taxpayer dollars" that are being abused, but the taxpayers that earned them who are being abused by the federally mandated SNAP program.

Further declines in SNAP are coming. In President Trump's budget, he is pressing for even more stringent work requirements to be applied across the states, hoping that it would save taxpayers an estimated \$200 billion or so over the next 10 years. His Budget Director Mick Mulvaney warned:

If you are on food stamps and you are able-bodied, we need you to go to work. There is dignity to work and there's a necessity to work to help the country succeed.

Loyalty to country and appeals to patriotism aren't likely to count as much as the simple removal of the incentives to collect a check without working. Which raises another question no one is asking: an estimated 20 million Americans have been subsidized to purchase their health insurance. How many of them would purchase the coverage on their own without taxpayer assistance? Couldn't the same work requirement concept serve the same purpose: no subsidy unless you really need it?

Of course, such a question begs the foundational question: What in the world is the federal government, under the Constitution, doing taking money from people who earned it and giving it to people who didn't? Somehow, people managed to survive and even prosper prior to 1969 when SNAP was mandated by the federal government.

Those "good old days" of self-reliance and independence are looking awfully attractive.

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