



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on October 26, 2017

## Food Stamp Use Down Under Trump

Participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), popularly known as the “food stamp” program, has been dropping since its peak in 2013 at 47.6 million, but the decline has accelerated under President Trump. Over one-half million people fell off the food stamp rolls in April of this year.

Overall, nearly 1.5 million Americans are no longer receiving food stamps since Trump took office on January 20.



The numbers have fallen every month that Trump has been president, and the president’s budget for FY 2018 is proposing cuts to SNAP. His budget would trim \$193 billion from the program over 10 years. Trump has asked states to expand work requirements for able-bodied adults receiving food stamps. Some states have already done so, and indications are that this is contributing to the decline in the numbers of food stamp recipients. In Kansas, for example, the number of recipients is down 75 percent in the two years after work requirements were reinstated.

The improvement in the economy, especially since Trump has been president, has also been cited as a reason for the decline in usage.

“We need people to go to work,” insisted Mick Mulvaney, director of the Office of Management and Budget. “If you’re on food stamps and you’re able-bodied, we need you to go to work. If you’re on disability insurance and you’re not supposed to be — if you’re not truly disabled — we need you to go back to work.”

Since Mulvaney’s remarks in May, the participation in the food stamp program has continued to fall, with 137,131 falling off in June, and 236,417 in July (the last month figures are available).

Not everyone is enthused about this decline. While Melissa Boteach, vice president for the Poverty to Prosperity Program at the Center for American Progress, conceded that the food stamp participation decline is “a good thing” if more people “are finding jobs and finding higher wages,” she lamented, “It’s a bad thing if people are living in areas where there’s no jobs or they have barriers to work and they’re not able to access nutrition assistance.”

The truth is that participation in the food stamp program has fallen before, such as from 1981-1988, when Ronald Reagan was president, with 3.8 million people dropping out of the program. But, as Reagan once quipped, the closest thing to eternal life on this planet is a federal program.

The problem is that every federal program will always have those who are benefitting from it, and they don’t want to lose those benefits — and the beneficiaries of the food stamp program are not just those receiving food stamps. In addition to the employment of federal bureaucrats to administer the program, agribusiness favors the program, as well.

In fact, the idea for the program did not come from among Americans suffering from a personal food shortage during the Great Depression. Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace (later the presidential nominee of the Progressive Party in 1948) was, if not the first, among the first, to promote the idea. His



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first administrator, Milo Perkins, explained why he and Wallace thought using taxpayer dollars to feed Americans was such a great idea. “We got a picture of a gorge, with farm surpluses on one cliff and under-nourished city folks with outstretched hands on the other. We set out to find a practical way to build a bridge across that chasm.”

At least it made more sense than Franklin Roosevelt’s earlier idea of pouring “surplus” milk out onto the ground, and killing “surplus” pigs in order to drive up prices. But, still, the idea behind food stamps was to help the producers of food to get higher prices.

Not surprisingly, two farm-state senators, George McGovern of South Dakota and Robert Dole of Kansas, teamed up in support of the food stamp program. Earlier, President John F. Kennedy issued an executive order for the implementation of a “pilot” food stamp program in February 1961, and later, President Lyndon Johnson called for a permanent program in early 1964 as part of his “War on Poverty.”

We have come a long way since President Grover Cleveland vetoed a bill in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that would have provided a mere \$10,000 for some drought-stricken farmers. Cleveland cautioned such a policy would set a precedent that it was the role of the government to support individuals.



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