



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on October 3, 2012

## U.S., Mexico Conspire to Get Mexicans in U.S. on Food Stamps

As part of an effort to encourage Mexicans living in the United States to enroll in the federal food stamp program, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) employees have met with Mexican officials over 150 times in the last eight years, the [Daily Caller](#) reports. The result: an enormous increase in the number of noncitizens participating in the program and a concomitant rise in federal spending and debt.



As [The New American](#) reported in July, the USDA and the government of Mexico entered into a partnership in 2004, under President George W. Bush, “to help educate eligible Mexican nationals living in the United States about available nutrition assistance.” Among the available assistance is the food stamp program, formally known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

“The government of the United States is asking the government of Mexico to spread the word to its ex-pats living in America (legally or otherwise) that there is plenty of money in the welfare trough and they’d better hurry or they might miss getting a prime spot,” observed *TNA’s* Joe Wolverton, II.

Seeking to determine just how extensive the U.S.-Mexico partnership had become, Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.), ranking member of the Senate Budget Committee, sent a [letter](#) to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack on July 18. Sessions requested a variety of documents related to the partnership, including “a list of all programs, meetings, or other activities involving USDA and the Mexican Government to increase enrollment” in SNAP. He also asked for statistics regarding the number of noncitizen immigrants who have been enrolled in SNAP over the last decade and for the USDA’s position regarding implementation of the Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) program, which allows states to determine quickly whether non-citizen applicants are eligible for benefits.

According to the Daily Caller:

“The Mexico-U.S. Partnership for Nutrition Assistance Initiative is just one of a wide range of USDA partnership activities intended to promote awareness of nutrition assistance among those who need benefits and meet all program requirements under current law,” Vilsack wrote to Sessions in a letter obtained by The Daily Caller.

Since the partnership began, Vilsack wrote, USDA personnel have met at least 151 times with officials from the Mexican government “to discuss nutrition assistance programs as well as to provide program updates.” Those instances included 91 meetings with embassy and consulate staff in 25 U.S. cities; 29 health fairs in 19 U.S. cities; and 31 roundtable discussions, conferences and forums in 20 U.S. cities.

Roughly 30 of these meetings and activities occurred under the Obama administration, Vilsack’s letter revealed.

The partnership has paid off for both Mexicans who live in the United States and politicians who benefit



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from having a large segment of the population on the dole, writes the conservative website:

Statistics in Vilsack's letter indicate that the number of legal non-citizens participating in SNAP increased approximately 190 percent from 2001 to 2010, from 425,000 to 1.23 million legal non-citizen participants. That number rose 77 percent since the program's inception in 2004, when it served 693,000 non-citizen participants.

USDA did not offer data for 2011 and 2012, but a Republican Budget Committee staffer told TheDC that based on the growth rate, the number of legal non-citizens participating in the food stamp program today is about 1.63 million. That's more than double the number of legal non-citizens who participated in 2008.

None of this accounts for the *illegal* noncitizens participating in SNAP. The number of illegal aliens receiving such benefits is unknown; but as Sessions pointed out in his letter, "Applicants need only attest that they are citizens of the United States, and the state must accept that attestation as conclusive." (The SAVE program, already in use in some states, helps reduce the likelihood of fraud; Vilsack said the USDA supports implementing SAVE in all states.) In addition, Sessions wrote, "illegal immigrants may obtain food stamp benefits for their household if other members of the household are deemed eligible," meaning that illegals who bear children in the United States may be able to obtain SNAP benefits through those children.

Given the enormous increase in noncitizen participation in SNAP since the U.S.-Mexico partnership began, it is difficult to take seriously Vilsack's assertions in his letter that the USDA is not "simply" interested in "increas[ing] the number of program participants" but also wants "to help people move toward gainful employment and financial independence." It is, after all, well known that the department has been doing everything in its power to ensure that as many eligible — and, in the case of illegal aliens, not-so-eligible — individuals as possible are obtaining SNAP benefits. "The agency has been engaged in aggressive advertising campaigns and issuing guidance to state and local offices about how to enroll more beneficiaries," the Daily Caller notes. It has even encouraged senior citizens to [throw parties to promote SNAP](#).

Moreover, Vilsack is clearly engaging in games of semantics when he writes that the USDA "do[es] not pressure any eligible person to accept benefits." The department may not do so directly, but it certainly encourages others to pressure their peers into enrolling. The seniors' "tool kit," for instance, provides "mini-scripts" to help recruiters "overcome the word 'No' when trying to convince seniors to sign up for food stamps." And as Sessions recalled in his letter:

A character in a USDA-produced Spanish-language "radio novela" tries to convince a friend to enroll in food stamps even though that individual says, "I don't need anyone's help. My husband earns enough to take care of us." The first individual responds: "When are you going to learn?"

The vast increase in SNAP beneficiaries, naturally, translates into higher federal spending. "Spending on SNAP has doubled in the last four years and represents USDA's single biggest annual expenditure," according to the Daily Caller. That, in turn, means more debt.

"Our nation is nearing a debt crisis and yet the Obama Administration has conducted thirty activities and meetings with the Mexican government to place even more foreign nationals on American welfare," Sessions told the Daily Caller. "The number of non-citizens receiving food stamp support has doubled since the president took office. Such a policy defies rational thinking during a time of weak growth, high debt, and increasing welfare dependency. President Obama will have to defend this alarming



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partnership to the American people.”

Sessions’ attempt to score political points over the Mexican outreach program rings somewhat hollow given that the Bush administration initiated the program and met with the Mexican government about it four times as much as the Obama administration, but his point about the program’s irresponsibility is well taken. It would be bad enough if the government were encouraging foreign nationals to obtain welfare benefits during good economic and budgetary times; to do so when many Americans are out of work and the government is deeply in debt is unconscionable.

The USDA-Mexico partnership is, in Wolverton’s words, “immoral, illegal, and unconstitutional.” Voters and their elected representatives would be wise to put a stop to it — pronto.



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