



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on September 6, 2012

Obama Admin. Boosts Food-Stamp Participation by Targeting Seniors

Despite already having record-breaking numbers of Americans on food stamps, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) continues to campaign for more, as the agency has been espousing the government welfare program through parties featuring games like Bingo and crossword puzzles. Targeting the nation's seniors, the effort was touted in a pamphlet released on the [USDA website](#) earlier this summer, which provides tips for recruiting potential recipients to the program.



"Forget Tupperware bashes and toga soirees — the latest rage is food stamp parties," Fox News quipped in a [June article](#). "The USDA is encouraging the nation's food stamp program to promote the elderly using parties and games."

The number of recipients drawing benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), commonly known as food stamps, has hit an all-time high, with a record 46.7 million Americans now benefiting from the program. Participation in SNAP has been greater than 46 million all year, as unemployment remains persistently above the 8-percent mark.

"Too many middle-class families who have fallen on hard times are still struggling," Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack [said](#) Tuesday in a statement. "Our goal is to get these families the temporary assistance they need so they are able to get through these tough times and back on their feet as soon as possible."

Food-stamp spending has more than doubled during President Obama's tenure to a record \$75.7 billion in the fiscal year that ended September 2011. Spending on SNAP totaled \$6.2 billion this June, nearly half a percent higher than May and 2.8 percent more than in June 2011.

Still, despite these record-setting numbers, the USDA has rolled out numerous campaigns to further inflate the food-stamp rolls. The agency's tool kit for promoting SNAP benefits to seniors does not mince its words, as it explicitly [states](#), "The primary goals of the campaign are to increase enrollment in SNAP and to reinforce its role as a nutrition assistance program."

Some tips include strategies to recruit seniors who are "potentially too proud to ask for government assistance." In turn, recruiters should "Throw a Great Party," advice given under the heading, "The Right Mix for Reaching Seniors." The tool kit emphasizes ways of "Addressing Barriers and Challenges" by using "mini-scripts" to help recruiters "overcome the word 'No' when trying to convince seniors to sign up for food stamps."

"For many in the Silent Generation, relying on 'welfare' or any type of public assistance is not acceptable," one mini-script asserts. "This generation of 'self-sacrifice' was raised to be independent and self-reliant. They don't want to 'lose face' in front of their peers."



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“Host social events where people mix and mingle. Make it fun by having activities, games, food, and entertainment, and provide information about SNAP,” the pamphlet continues. “Putting SNAP information in a game format like BINGO, crossword puzzles, or even a “true/false” quiz is fun and helps get your message across in a memorable way.”

Other tips the USDA offers to food-stamp recruiters are guides included in SNAP’s community tip sheets, including “Tips to get an Op-Ed Published” and “Event Planning for Senior Audiences.”

“Every \$5 in new SNAP benefits generates \$9.20 in an additional community spending,” the agency explains. “If the national participation rate rose five percentage points, 1.9 million more low-income people would have an additional \$1.3 billion in benefits per year to use to purchase healthy food and \$2.5 billion total in new economic activity would be generated nationwide.”

In rolling out the campaign, the USDA targeted states such as California, Ohio, Texas, New York, North Carolina, and South Carolina with a flurry of radio ads. According to [CNN Money](#), the effort cost taxpayers somewhere between \$2.5 million and \$3 million.

Despite a significant increase in food-stamp use during President George W. Bush’s tenure, the Obama administration continues to bolster participation in the program to unprecedented levels. Another example of such promotion was a 2009 [State Outreach Plan Guidance](#), which explained why the SNAP program is so critical to the welfare of American society:

Outreach Can Help Increase Participation in SNAP Resulting in Multiple Benefits for Participants, States, and Communities: SNAP is the cornerstone of the nation’s nutrition safety net and an investment in our future. SNAP offers the opportunity for improved nutrition and progress toward economic self-sufficiency for participants who become stronger members of the community. However, too many low income people, especially seniors, working people, and legal immigrants, who are eligible for SNAP do not participate and thus forego assistance that could stretch their food dollars and help improve their nutrition.

All in all, spending on the welfare program has boosted 100 percent since Obama took office, and now a startling one in seven Americans receives the benefits. Comparatively, in the 1970s, only [one out of every 50 Americans](#) was benefiting from the program.



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