



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on October 19, 2012

Report: \$4.5 Billion in Food Stamps Benefits Improperly Spent

According to a report published earlier this  week, some \$4.5 billion has been inappropriately applied to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), commonly known as food stamps, including benefits that were administered to [2,000 dead people](#) in New York and Massachusetts.

Sen. Tom Coburn's (R-Okla.) new archive of government waste, entitled the 2012 "[Waste Book](#)," found that "7,236 people in these states are receiving duplicate benefits, while 286 are on state lists that should exclude them from receiving food stamps." This translates into \$1.4 million in improper payments per month, or \$147.03 for each beneficiary — whether they're dead or alive.

Detailed under the section "More money for the marijuana munchies," Coburn reported that in three states some recipients collected SNAP benefits simply because they smoke marijuana. "Marijuana has been linked to an increased appetite, known as getting the 'munchies,' so perhaps it is no surprise the states of Maine, New Mexico, and Oregon gave extra food stamp benefits to users of the illegal drug," the report affirms. It continues:

These states allowed some marijuana users to deduct the cost of the drug from their income when determining the amount of the benefits provided for which they are eligible. In Oregon, the deduction "[i]ncluded ... fees for obtaining a state-issued medical marijuana card, expenses incurred while cultivating marijuana and the costs of purchasing it from a third-party grower." It is not known how many recipients claimed the deduction. The director of the Maine Office of Family Independence does not know how many individuals received extra food stamp benefits as a result of marijuana use.

Seeming to disregard First Lady Michelle Obama's so-called "War on Poverty," the food stamps program has doled out billions of dollars to individuals who are using their benefits on Taco Bell, Kentucky Fried Chicken, gas station junk food, and even alcohol. In fact, in Tennessee, food stamps subsidies — intended, of course, for *food* — actually paid for beer, diapers, and condoms.

Approximately \$80 billion in SNAP benefits are expected to provide more than 46 million Americans with federal assistance this year, in a program intended to ensure that impoverished children receive healthy meals. But billions of dollars in improper SNAP payments are estimated to be made this year, while millions of dollars more will be improperly spent on imprudent promotional material and food and activities with little or no nutritional value.

While the food stamps program was recently rebranded as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the government remains lax in its requirements over nutritious foods. "Soft drinks, candy, cookies, snack crackers, and ice cream are food items and are therefore eligible items," the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) acknowledges on its [website](#). "Seafood, steak, and bakery cakes are also food items and are therefore eligible items."

In California, many SNAP recipients use their government assistance benefits to buy fast food at Taco



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Bell, Burger King, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Pizza Hut, and Domino's Pizza — the precise foods Mrs. Obama claims to detest. In Los Angeles alone, more than 140,000 people may use their benefits at fast food restaurants and at other places that sell less-than-nutritious foods. The city Social Services Director conceded that "his department lacks the resources to decide whether restaurants offer enough healthful choices, and would need another agency to monitor that."

Even most energy drinks, which have become more controversial as they contain large amounts of caffeine and are marketed to children, are considered eligible foods under the USDA guidelines. According to a [study](#) by the Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity, and published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, "58 percent of all refreshment beverages purchased by SNAP participants were for sugar-sweetened beverages such as regular soda, fruit drinks, and sports drinks."

"[T]he annual use of billions of dollars in SNAP benefits to purchase products at the core of public health concerns about obesity and chronic illnesses is misaligned with the goal of helping economically vulnerable families live active, healthy lives," notes the study's lead author, Tatiana Andreyeva. "Anti-hunger and public health advocates should work together to ensure that all government food assistance programs are implemented in a way that is consistent with helping Americans meet government dietary recommendations."

Potentially the most damning aspect of Coburn's report on misapplied food stamps benefits is the unprecedented amount of taxpayer money spent on alcohol and other un-allowable items. The Senator's government-waste handbook explains:

Undercover reporters "witnessed customers leaving with beer, diapers and condoms" paid for with SNAP Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards at a Food Land store in Memphis, Tennessee. Technically, the purchase of these items is not permitted, but the practice goes on. In Ohio, another local television station reported in February that food stamps paid not only for beer and cigarettes, but also guns and cars.

In Florida, an exotic dancer who made more than \$85,000 a year in tips also collected about \$1,000 in food stamps a month between March 2010 and June 2012. During that time, she spent more than \$9,000 on "cosmetic enhancements." She has pled guilty to food stamp fraud but claims the plastic surgery and "other splurges were all gifts from men she met working as a dancer at adult entertainment clubs."

And despite these startling findings, the Obama administration has pursued marketing campaigns to promote the government welfare program, with advertisements contending that SNAP spending is a tremendous contributor to economic growth. Of course, if there's something to be said, the programs may be boosting sales numbers for energy drink companies, fast food giants, and even the alcohol industry.



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