

Food stamp cuts take effect for about 1.8 million Ohioans

By Sabrina Eaton

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - Starting Friday, about 1.8 million Ohio food stamp recipients will have to make do with lower monthly benefits because a temporary boost in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program has expired.

The decrease means Ohio will lose \$193 million yearly in extra money that was approved as part of 2009's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. State SNAP participation tables show the cuts will affect 21.6 percent of Cuyahoga County residents.

The average per meal subsidy for SNAP recipients will be cut from \$1.50 to \$1.40, resulting an average loss of \$29 in monthly benefits, according to **a report** by the Policy Matters Ohio think tank.

"The economy is still weak in many Ohio counties," Policy Matters Ohio's Wendy Patton said in a press release. "Many people cannot get work or do not earn enough to feed their families. These cuts to food aid are going to hurt many children, families and communities."

An additional \$40 billion cut that the House of Representatives approved in September will make the situation worse if it becomes law, anti-poverty advocates say.

"I have heard from families who struggle to put food on the table at the end of the month because of insufficient SNAP benefits," said **Warrensville Heights Democratic Rep. Marcia Fudge**, who is striving to overturn the September cuts and has cosponsored legislation that would extend the Recovery Act's SNAP benefit boost for another year. "I dread the reality they will face next month when their food runs out even sooner because of this automatic cut."

Critics of the program, such as the libertarian Cato Institute think tank, say it breeds government dependence, has significant fraud and abuse levels, and has become "bloated and inefficient."

"The time has come to reform the food stamp program by reducing its spending and enrollment and, ultimately, by returning responsibility for its operation to the states," the organization said in an **Oct. 16 report**.

Arkansas Republican Rep. Rick Crawford said the SNAP program has grown exponentially because states exploited loopholes to increase eligibility, “such as artificially making people eligible simply by mailing a TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) brochure, or substantially increasing benefits by sending a nominal LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program) check.” He said the legislation to impose further cuts on food stamps would also keep states from waiving work requirements established by 1996 welfare reform legislation.

“We can't expect to continue to provide assistance to the poor if we allow abuse to bankrupt the food stamp system,” Crawford argued on the House of Representatives floor.

Fudge replied to Crawford's speech by observing that 18.2 percent of his constituents are SNAP recipients. She said that in 2011, SNAP kept 4.7 million people out of poverty, including 2.1 million children, and said Moody's Analytics estimates every \$1 increase in SNAP benefits generates about \$1.70 in economic activity.

Lisa Hamler-Fugitt, who heads the **Ohio Association of Foodbanks**, says the state's charities and food pantries – which distributed \$227 million in food to needy residents last year – won't be able to come up with another \$190 million in food to replace today's cut in federal aid.

“We will have to do what low-income people do, which is reduce the amount of food we hand out and ration,” she said, predicting the cuts will increase hunger, forcing more school children to attend school without eating, and worsening the health of senior citizens and people with disabilities.

She said food stamp recipients in Ohio have received notice of the amounts their benefits will be cut, and that she has already heard complaints.

“It is too bad we have come to this in our country,” said Hamler-Fugitt. “It is OK to give major tax credits and welfare to major corporations and agribusiness yet say to 47 million Americans, you have too much to eat so we will cut your benefits.”