



## Soon You Might Be Able To Receive Food Stamps Over The Phone

Connor D. Wolf

May 15, 2015

Soon it could be possible to apply for food stamps over the phone, with proponents arguing that in-person interviews add too much extra administrative cost.

[A report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture \(USDA\)](#) looked at whether it should get rid of in-person interviews for those who apply to receive benefits under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which is commonly known as food stamps. The program is the nation's largest food-assistance program.

“Regulations require that states conduct face-to-face interviews, unless the state determines that a telephone interview is acceptable due to a hardship on the client,” [the report details](#). “However, over the last decade, most states applied for and received waivers that allow for telephone interviews in all cases, without the need to document a hardship.”

Noting the time requirements and the administration costs, the USDA with the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) conducted a limited real-world test to see if the in-person interviews are needed.

“To assess whether states’ requests to eliminate the eligibility interview would have adverse effects on client and worker outcomes, FNS awarded grants to two states — Oregon and Utah — to conduct demonstrations in which the eligibility interviews at certification and recertification were completely eliminated,” the report states.

The report says that the increase of participants from 17 million in 2000 to nearly 47 million recipients in 2014 is one reason why the application process should be made easier and less costly, but others have argued that more relaxed entry requirements into the program are the very reason it has expanded so much.

“The evidence suggests that much of the increase was due not to the economy[,] but to deliberate policy choices by both federal and state governments, which loosened eligibility standards and

actively sought new participants,” [a report from the libertarian Cato Institute detailed](#). “At the same time, evidence that the expansion of SNAP has significantly reduced hunger or improved nutrition among low-income Americans is scant at best.”

The results of the study were mixed, but the report also noted some clear benefits that may result from eliminating in-person interviews.

“Interviews may improve application timeliness and increase the likelihood that applicants will report earnings,” the report states. “However, the interview does not necessarily improve approval or denial rates or accuracy of benefit payments. In fact, eliminating the interview may reduce error rates and decrease program churning.”