

# New Haven Register

## SNAP cuts mean less food for Connecticut residents in need

By [Brian Charles](#)

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Michele Foye has learned how to stretch her tight food budget over the last decade.

The 47-year-old Middletown resident looks for deals, never makes a large meal and makes monthly visits to the [Amazing Grace Food Pantry](#) in her hometown to stock up on canned goods and bread.

“I’ve learned how to stretch my food budget really far, I have to,” she said before she shopped at the Middletown pantry.

Foye will have to learn to squeeze a little more from her limited resources. She is one of nearly 424,000 Connecticut residents whose [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#), or SNAP, benefits [were cut on Nov. 1](#).

“The politicians don’t seem to care about lower-income people,” Foye said.

SNAP, formerly the food stamp program, pays for Foye’s food. She is disabled and receives assistance with her rent and utilities, and doesn’t have family capable of helping.

“My daughter lives in the South and has a child to raise; the rest of my family is struggling just like me,” Foye said. “Where do I go now to see someone who is sincere and willing to help?”

SNAP had benefited from additional money allocated to the program in 2009 during the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, also known as the stimulus. The rationale for bolstering the program was simple: millions of Americans were losing jobs and needed to continue to put food on their tables. The additional funding to SNAP was not renewed in the most recent version of the Farm Bill, as congressional Republicans have been focusing on spending cuts since 2010.

More cuts could come, as well, as both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives have bills calling for additional cuts to SNAP benefits.

“I have been in the Senate two and a half years, but these cuts are the most tragic part of the partisan gridlock,” said U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn. “The congressman arguing for

these cuts may understand abstractly that their constituents may be affected by these cuts, but they are not heeding the calls for compassion and protection.”

And talks over increased cuts to the Farm Bill are marked by the game of chicken that has become familiar in Washington, D.C. The GOP either refuses to budge on the issue or threatens to filibuster any proposal to maintain current funding levels to SNAP, according to Blumenthal.

“The right wing has taken the Farm Bill hostage,” he said.

Under the recent cuts, households in Connecticut lost an average of \$17 per month. A family of four saw \$36 cut from their monthly SNAP benefits. The cuts vary based on household size and income.

The average SNAP recipient receives \$133.85 per month, or roughly \$1.50 per meal per person, according to Feeding America, the country’s largest hunger relief charity. SNAP benefits leave little wiggle room for those participating in the program.

Families that relied on SNAP will be forced “to dig deeper into their already limited resources to feed their families,” said Ron Krom, executive director at Amazing Grace Food Pantry in Middletown.

Connecticut Food Bank President Nancy Carrington said the cuts to SNAP likely will push those dependent on SNAP to the state’s food pantries.

“Food banks are going to see more people at their doors and that means cutting the pie into more pieces,” Carrington said.

Neither Carrington nor Krom believe the state’s pantries will be able to keep up with demand. In the end, meals will be lost.

“Over the course of the next year, Connecticut will lose 17 million meals due to this reduction in SNAP,” Carrington said.

Connecticut Food Bank serves more than 650 member agencies in Fairfield, Litchfield, Middlesex, New Haven, New London and Windham counties. Connecticut previously was hit by cuts caused by the federal sequester, and [a report by the Food Research and Action Center](#) found that in 2012 one in seven state residents could not afford food for themselves or their families.

At Amazing Grace Food Pantry Friday, dozens of needy families waited for their turn to comb through the loaves of bread, boxes of graham crackers and produce that lines the shelves.

Among the shoppers was a 33-year-old Middletown woman who collects SNAP benefits and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

“I’ve benefited from SNAP for 10 years,” the mother of five said. “It’s very scary to see your benefit cut.”

Like all SNAP recipients, she received a letter in October detailing the cuts in benefits.

SNAP has helped feed her and her five children, who range in age from 8 to 14, while she attended nursing school. She graduated this year, but hasn't landed a job and is anxious about the additional cuts threatening the program.

"Losing \$15 or \$20 a month doesn't scare me as much as does a bigger cut that could come later," she said.

The House bill under consideration would slash an additional \$4 billion from SNAP. The Senate's bill would cut about \$400 million from the program.

Blumenthal opposes both proposals.

The CATO Institute, a conservative think tank, has called for additional cuts to the program, citing the rapid growth in the number of people using SNAP and its ballooning cost.

In 2000, 17 million people used SNAP, with the program putting taxpayers on the hook for \$18 billion. This year, more than 48 million Americans used the program at a cost of nearly \$80 billion, according to CATO.

Blumenthal said the growth in SNAP is to be expected given the economy.

"The recession has affected many people, but its affected poor and vulnerable people the most," Blumenthal said. "The people who benefit from this program are not benefitting from the stock market."

The labor market has been brutal for many of the same families that have relied on SNAP.

Nearly 60 percent of the jobs lost in recession paid middle-income wages, according to a study by [National Employment Law Project](#), a progressive low-wage worker advocacy group.

The National Employment Law Project's study, which used U.S. Department of Labor figures from 2008 to 2012, showed a 58 percent surge in lower-income jobs.

In short, the job market has put downward pressure on less educated, less skilled and lower-income workers.

"People who were in the middle class are now in the lower class, and lower-class workers are being displaced by former middle-class workers, many of whom often have the advantage of a college education," Carrington said.

That downward pressure on the job market leaves Foye and other needy residents with few options, and the impending cuts are a source of anger.

"It seems like the politicians just want to take away anything we have," she said.

