



America's Food Stamp Use Is Finally Falling Instead of Going Up

By: John Morgan
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Food stamp use in the United States is finally on the decline, possibly a sign of a strengthening economy, according to [Department of Agriculture](#) data.

The latest government data show 46.1 million Americans are on food stamps, down about 4 percent from the peak in December 2012 of 47.8 million

North Carolina, Georgia and Utah saw the largest drop-offs in usage from March 2013.

As a percentage of the population, Wyoming, North Dakota and Utah have the smallest percentages of their populations on food stamps, while Mississippi, Washington D.C., Oregon, Tennessee and New Mexico all have more than 20 percent using the benefit. The national average is 14.5 percent, according to [MarketWatch](#).

The lingering bad news in the data is the fact there were only 26.3 million people in the U.S. receiving food stamps as recently as 2007, MarketWatch noted.

Cullen Roche, an author and founder of the Orcam Financial Group, believes the seeds of future problems are contained in the recent drop-off in food stamp usage.

"This might seem like good news, but it's more likely a sign of a late-cycle recovery trend. You see, food stamps are a countercyclical event. And those benefits are most in demand when the economy is at its worst," [Roche wrote on his Pragmatic Capitalism blog](#).

"The fact that this trend is now sharply improving means that the economy is on the mend. But it also means that the economy is late in the cycle of expansion. And so what looks like a positive trend could actually be a sign of something negative developing."

Michael Tanner of the CATO Institute noted the Congressional Budget Office predicts food stamp spending will still be an expensive federal item – about \$71 billion annually – a decade from now.

"I think we shouldn't get too excited over short-term trends, up or down. What we need to do is look at the long-term projections," [Tanner told NPR](#). "The problem is, we don't go back to pre-

recession levels."

Another economic barometer, the number of people using jobless benefits, may also be falling.

The number of Americans collecting unemployment shrank to a seasonally adjusted 312,000 for the week ended June 14 — its lowest level in more than six years, [The Associated Press](#) reported.

"Applications are a proxy for layoffs, so the relatively low number of people seeking benefits shows that employers are letting go of fewer workers. When businesses are confident enough to keep staff, they may also hire more workers," the AP said.