

POLICY BRIEF

HSB 216 Would Increase SNAP Stigma



House Study Bill 216 would direct the state to request a waiver from USDA to enact sweeping food restrictions for lowans participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

This is a harmful, unnecessary bill that would increase stigma for the 260,000 lowans enrolled in SNAP.

- **SNAP is highly effective at reducing food insecurity, and there is no evidence food restrictions would improve nutrition for program participants.** A randomized trial found that restricting soda and candy failed to improve SNAP participant nutrition.¹ Some research even suggests the negative psychological stigma associated with SNAP participation can counteract any positive nutritional and health benefits that would otherwise be gained from the program.²
- **The number one reason SNAP participants struggle to improve their diets is the high cost of healthy food.** Over 60% of SNAP participants report the affordability of healthy foods as a barrier to achieving a healthy diet throughout the month.³ A recent report from Iowa HHS found that SNAP participants want more fruits and vegetables, but struggle to afford them.⁴ This bill ignores the root causes of food insecurity—low wages and lack of access to affordable nutritious food, child care, housing, health care, transportation, and other basic essentials.
- **While HSB 216 does include a \$1 million appropriation for Double Up Food Bucks, Section 3 of the bill holds these funds hostage unless USDA grants the food restriction waiver.** Double Up Food Bucks is currently available at less than 1% of SNAP retailers statewide.^{5,6} We should not be pushing massive food restrictions for lowans on SNAP, especially when nutrition incentives are so limited.
- **Low-income lowans should be trusted to make the best food choices for their families.** This bill has little regard for religious and medical dietary requirements, food allergies, and cultural preferences. The state should not be policing lowans' grocery carts.
- **SNAP participants have similar consumption patterns as non-SNAP participants.** A 2016 USDA study found that household food expenditures were not significantly different when comparing SNAP households and non-SNAP households. SNAP households spent slightly more on soft drinks than non-SNAP households (5% versus 4%), and both groups were equally likely to purchase salty snacks, cookies, and other sweets.⁷
- **This policy would increase administrative costs for the state and retailers alike,** who would need to go through their entire inventory to classify banned foods and update their point-of-sale systems to restrict the redemption of those products.

HSB 216 would increase stigma for hundreds of thousands of lowans struggling with food insecurity.

Increased program stigma could negatively harm participants' mental health and lead to less people feeling comfortable participating in the program. Lowans with low access to full-service grocery stores, including many rural lowans, would be disproportionately impacted by this law.

Which Food Items Would Be Banned Under HSB 216?

SNAP benefits could only be used to purchase foods on Iowa's WIC-approved food list, as well as "real meat," "real dairy," "real eggs," bread, grains, fruits, vegetables, cereal, peanut butter, nuts, pasta, rice, and legumes. These food items could be fresh, frozen, canned, preserved, made into spreads, or juiced.

So, what food items would be banned from SNAP? Everything else, including:

- Bottled water, seltzer, coffee, tea, and any other beverage that is not milk or specific varieties of juice and soy milk included on the WIC-approved food list
- Spices, seasonings, condiments, pasta sauce, and salad dressings
- Olive oil, vegetable oil, and other cooking oils, including animal-based oils
- Granola bars, protein bars, fruit and grain bars, and trail mix
- Infant formulas and baby food varieties not included on the WIC-approved food list
- Macaroni and cheese, hamburger helper, ramen noodles, and other packaged goods
- Chips, crackers, and cookies
- Frozen prepared foods
- Pumpkin, sunflower, and other seeds, including food-producing plant seeds and starter plants for people to grow their own food
- And much, much more

¹ "Effects of Inclusion of Food Purchase Restrictions and Incentives in a Food Benefit Program on Diet Quality and Food Purchasing: Results From a Randomized Trial," Harnack et al., May 2024. [https://www.jandonline.org/article/S2212-2672\(23\)01713-6/abstract](https://www.jandonline.org/article/S2212-2672(23)01713-6/abstract).

² "Welfare Stigma and Children's Behavior," Robinson and Dhar, 2016. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11294-016-9581-0>.

³ "Barriers that Constrain the Adequacy of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) Allotments," USDA FNS, June 2021. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/research/snap/barriers-constrain-adequacy-allotments>.

⁴ "Iowa State Nutrition Action Council (SNAC) Focus Group Report." Iowa Department of Health and Human Services and Altarum Institute, September 2024.

⁵ "Annual Report 2024." Iowa Healthiest State Initiative, February 2025.

⁶ "SNAP Retailer Locator." USDA FNS, accessed February 21, 2025. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/retailer-locator>.

⁷ "Foods Typically Purchased by Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) Households." USDA FNS, November 2016. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/ops/SNAPFoodsTypicallyPurchased.pdf>.