



Food and Nutrition Service  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services

# Equity Action Plan

July 2023

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[www.usda.gov/equity/action-plan](https://www.usda.gov/equity/action-plan)

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## Message from the Deputy Under Secretary

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is committed to promoting equity and inclusion through its 16 Federal nutrition assistance programs. We have been working closely with our partners to ensure these nutrition assistance programs address health disparities and increase food and nutrition security in underserved communities.

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*“FNS is committed to operating our programs in a way that begins to break down the systemic barriers that have long hindered underserved communities from obtaining the healthy, safe, and affordable foods they need and deserve.”*

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*Deputy Under Secretary Stacy Dean*

Over the last 2 years, FNS has transformed policies, programs, and practices in ways that have the greatest potential to ensure equitable access to healthy, safe, and affordable foods. We have also worked to build awareness about the sizable body of research indicating that structural racism harms health in ways that can be described, measured, and dismantled.

We are proud to share some of the results of our efforts thus far, but know we have more work ahead. Community partners, States and U.S. territories, Tribal organizations, and local program operators are central to these efforts, and we appreciate their time and commitment.

- Stacy Dean, Deputy Under Secretary  
USDA Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services

## Introduction

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) works to end hunger and improve food and nutrition security through a suite of [16 nutrition assistance programs](#), including the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program; the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); and the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR). Together, these programs serve 1-in-4 Americans over the course of a year, promoting consistent and equitable access to healthy, safe, and affordable foods essential to optimal health and well-being. FNS also provides science-based nutrition recommendations through the co-development of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. FNS's report, "[Leveraging the White House Conference to Promote and Elevate Nutrition Security: The Role of the USDA Food and Nutrition Service](#)," highlights ways the Agency will support the Biden-Harris Administration's [National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health](#).

## Equity Actions

Promote nutrition security and health equity through USDA nutrition assistance programs to ensure all Americans have access to the nutrition they need.

1. Strengthen all program participants' ability to embrace healthy eating patterns.

### Accomplishments:

- **Updated SNAP Benefit Calculation.** To reflect the true price of a cost-conscious, healthy diet in today's marketplace, FNS re-evaluated the [Thrifty Food Plan](#), which forms the basis of SNAP benefits. As a result, starting in fiscal year 2022, SNAP benefits increased by about 21 percent on average—about \$1.19 per person, per day, helping put healthy food within reach for more than 40 million SNAP participants. According to the Urban Institute, the increase to SNAP benefits kept 2.3 million people out of poverty, reducing overall poverty by 4.7 percent and child poverty by 8.6 percent.
- **Proposed Greater Flexibility in WIC Foods.** In November 2022, FNS announced a [proposed rule](#) for WIC that supports greater State flexibility in prescribing and tailoring food packages to accommodate participants' special dietary needs and personal and cultural food preferences. The proposed changes align the food packages with the latest nutrition science to provide greater variety and a better balance of foods and nutrients and support equitable access to nutritious foods during critical life stages.
- **Proposed More Culturally Appropriate Foods in School Meals.** FNS recognizes the importance of cultural and traditional foods and is working to ensure that school meals nutrition standards are inclusive. In February 2023, FNS proposed updated, [science-based standards](#), which were developed based upon the latest edition of the [Dietary Guidelines](#) and informed by public comments on transitional standards and over 50 listening sessions with parents, school nutrition professionals, partners from Tribal Nations, and others. Among other updates, the proposed rule supports schools in using more locally grown foods and seeks input on how to include more culturally appropriate foods in meals served to American Indian and Alaskan Native students.
- **Supporting Health Equity in Dietary Guidelines.** FNS is supporting the work of the [2025 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee](#), a group of 20 nationally recognized public health experts who will develop a scientific report to inform the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025-2030*. The 2025 Committee is using a health equity lens across its evidence review to ensure that the resulting guidance in the *Dietary Guidelines* is relevant to people with diverse racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds.



**Actions:**

- Engage with Tribal stakeholders to enhance the food package for the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR).
- Work toward updating and implementing the nutrition standards for school meals and the WIC food packages to align with scientific recommendations, including the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, and in consideration of cultural and traditional foods consumed by program participants. This will include finalizing rulemaking as well as efforts to support implementation (e.g., training, technical assistance).
- Implement several activities to facilitate fresh fruit and vegetable consumption by program participants.
- Work toward publishing the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025-2030* jointly with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to provide science-based advice on what to eat and drink to promote health, reduce risk of chronic disease, and meet nutrient needs.
- Work toward conducting research to ensure the Thrifty Food Plan reflects current food prices, food composition data, consumption patterns, and dietary guidance.

2. Bridge language barriers to increase equal access and opportunity to participate in nutrition assistance programs and educational resources.

**Accomplishments:**

- **Translated Key FNS Materials.** Language access is a key part of ensuring communities are aware of and can utilize USDA's programs and services. FNS has been working to translate its website and public-facing nutrition assistance program and nondiscrimination materials into Spanish and 54 other languages. Materials translated include the SNAP eligibility page, a prototype school meals application, the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) meal benefit eligibility form, and WIC breastfeeding support resources.

**Actions:**

- By December 31, 2023, provide at least 50 nutrition resources for individuals with limited English proficiency.
- By December 31, 2023, provide training and technical assistance for agency staff on limited English proficiency requirements, strategies, and the FNS Language Access Plan to improve language accessibility.
- By December 31, 2023, conduct 21 reviews of State agencies administering USDA nutrition assistance programs to monitor nutrition assistance program compliance with limited English proficiency requirements.

3. Partner with others to address nutrition security equity issues and to reach underserved communities.

**Accomplishments:**

- **Invested in Connecting More Families to WIC's Proven Benefits.** Through a cooperative agreement with the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), FNS has awarded \$16 million in funding from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 to 36 projects aimed at testing innovative outreach strategies to increase participation and equity in WIC. The WIC Community Innovation and Outreach Project, or [WIC CIAO](#), subgrantees include WIC State and local agencies and community-based organizations, including four subgrants led by Tribal Nations or entities.
- **Supporting Emergency Food Providers in Offering More Kosher and Halal Foods.** FNS is providing technical assistance for State agencies that administer The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) to assist them in identifying and offering [kosher](#) and [halal](#) appropriate foods to observant communities. [Efforts](#) included new fact sheets and a [webinar](#) for State agencies and foodbanks.
- **Increasing Tribal Food Sovereignty in FDPIR.** To further increase Tribal food sovereignty, FNS will soon announce additional Indian Tribal Organizations (ITO) participation in the [Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations \(FDPIR\) Self-Determination Demonstration Project](#). Eight ITOs are currently participating in the project which allows ITOs to directly select and purchase foods for the FDPIR food package, instead of USDA selecting and purchasing similar foods. Over the coming years, ITOs will share feedback about their projects that will help FNS understand impacts on program access, participation, and Tribal procurement and together will ensure successful implementation of FDPIR self-determination efforts.
- **Expanding and Strengthening the Emergency Food System.** FNS awarded nearly \$100 million in [TEFAP Reach & Resiliency Grants](#) to 42 TEFAP State agencies to expand program operations in underserved areas, including remote, rural, and Tribal communities. The grants are supporting a variety of activities, including professional studies and assessments of TEFAP's reach, cultural competency training for eligible recipient agency staff, mobile distribution of TEFAP foods, critical freezing and cooling investments, and targeted outreach activities to reach underserved areas.
- **Strengthening Employment and Training Programs for SNAP Participants.** SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) programs are primed to be leaders in promoting equitable access to good jobs and sustained family-supporting wages in high-demand career fields. In April 2023, FNS announced the availability of [SNAP E&T Data and Technical Assistance Grants](#) to assist State and local SNAP agencies in assessing ways policy and operational decisions impact SNAP participants' access to training programs that build skills, education, and experience. These grants will also increase understanding of the environment in which SNAP E&T programs operate, and how they may contribute to inequitable outcomes for participants of various identities, backgrounds, and geographic locations.
- **Connecting Producers to School Meal Programs.** In the 2023 Farm to School Census, FNS will include new questions to identify characteristics of the producers that School Food Authorities

(SFAs) purchase from, including whether they are minority- or women-owned businesses. Additionally, FNS worked with the National Center for Appropriate Technology and the National Farm to School Network to develop and disseminate a producer-focused farm to school training curriculum designed to help agricultural producers build their capacity to launch or expand sales of their products to Child Nutrition Programs.

- **Increasing Access to Summer Feeding in Rural Areas.** Starting in summer 2023, FNS will allow certain rural areas to distribute summer meals to kids outside of the typically required group (congregate) settings through the Summer Food Service Program and National School Lunch Program Seamless Summer Option. This action will help close the summer hunger gap and ensure equitable access to nutritious food for children in all parts of the country during the summer months.

#### **Actions:**

- By December 31, 2023, implement a campaign to facilitate use of MyPlate nutrition education messages and tools by diverse consumers and stakeholders.
- Through December 31, 2023, implement three strategies, identified through Tribal consultations, to increase access to USDA nutrition assistance programs and culturally competent nutrition education.
- Through December 31, 2023, support at least two funding opportunities to support State and/or local partnerships to increase the reach of WIC and TEFAP in underserved communities.
- Work toward nationwide implementation of the permanent Summer Food Service Program rural non-congregate option, as well as Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT), both of which were authorized by Congress in December 2022.

4. Ensure equitable, consistent, and accurate access and opportunity to participate in FNS nutrition assistance programs for eligible populations.

#### **Accomplishments:**

- **Advanced Online Shopping in SNAP and WIC.**
  - For SNAP, FNS expanded [online shopping](#) to 50 States and the District of Columbia in 2023, enabling 99 percent of SNAP recipients to use their benefits to purchase food online. Over 210 retailer chains, representing thousands of storefronts, are participating as SNAP online retailers. In addition, through a grant awarded to the National Grocers Association Foundation, FNS is assisting independent, small, and rural retailers with adoption of SNAP online purchasing.
  - For WIC, FNS is partnering with the Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition (GSCN) to pilot online shopping in eight WIC State agencies. FNS is also making available waivers and funding to support other States in moving toward online shopping. On February 23, 2023, FNS published a [proposed rule](#) to remove regulatory barriers to online shopping in WIC and support a modern food delivery experience.

- **Developed Technology to Support Tribal Food Distribution.** In 2023, FNS added a mobile application to the Integrated Food Management System to facilitate ITO distribution of FDPIR food packages at tailgate sites where Wi-Fi or cellular service is not available. As of May 2023, six ITOs are using the application.
- **Expanding Access to Healthy School Meals.** On March 23, 2023, FNS published a [proposed rule](#) to lower the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) participation threshold and give more high-need schools the option to offer all students healthy school meals at no cost when it is financially viable for them to do so.
- **Partnered with Cross-Agency Teams to Improve the Experience of Applying to Benefit Programs.** FNS has participated in the cross-agency [Facing Financial Shock](#) life experience project, which aims to reduce the burden for enrolling in benefit programs by promoting expanded access to automated eligibility verifications and increased data sharing for direct certification. Through this effort, FNS and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services have also provided joint technical assistance to State agencies to coordinate efforts between Medicaid and SNAP during the Public Health Emergency unwinding and facilitated a webinar with the Federal Communications Commission for nutrition benefit program staff on text message outreach to program participants. FNS has also participated in the [Having a Child and Early Childhood](#) life experience project, which seeks new ways to connect parents of infants and young children with information about benefit programs for which they may be eligible.

#### **Actions:**

- By December 31, 2023, implement three strategies to expand online shopping options for SNAP and WIC participants.
- By December 31, 2023, propose regulations to increase access to free school meals in under resourced communities by lowering the eligibility threshold for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).
- Work toward reducing the summer hunger gap for children eligible for free and reduced-price school meals through the implementation of Summer EBT.
- As needed, provide technical assistance to Congress on possible Farm Bill provisions regarding SNAP eligibility.

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For more information on equity at FNS, and all of USDA, see [usda.gov/equity](https://usda.gov/equity).



## Selected Equity Resources and Information

### USDA Equity-Related Summary Reports and Guidance

- Programmatic Equity at USDA:
  - [Equity Website](#)
  - [Equity Accomplishments](#)
  - Equity Action Plan: [Full Plan | Summary](#) (February 2022)
- Equity Commission
  - [Equity Commission Website](#)
  - [2023 Interim Report | USDA Response](#) (February 2023)
  - [Informe Interino 2023 | Respuesta al Informe Interino de la Comisión de Equidad del USDA](#) (Febrero 2023)
- [USDA Environmental Justice Scorecard](#)
- [USDA Advisory Committees](#)
- [Get Started! A Guide to USDA Resources for Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers](#) (July 2022)

### Selected Equity-Related Executive Orders and White House Resources

- [White House Equity Page](#)
- [Executive Order 13985, Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#) (January 2021)
- [Executive Order 14091, Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#) (February 2023)
- [Executive Order 14096, Revitalizing our Nation's Commitment to Environmental Justice for All](#) (April 2023)
- [Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments](#)
- [Presidential Memorandum on Tribal Consultation and Strengthening Nation-to-Nation Relationships](#)
- [The Path to Achieving Justice](#)<sup>40</sup>

### FNS Equity-Related Resources

- FNS and Nutrition Security
  - [Webpage](#)
  - [Leveraging the White House Conference to Promote and Elevate Nutrition Security: The Role of the USDA Food and Nutrition Service](#)
  - [USDA Actions on Nutrition Security \(report\)](#)
  - [USDA Actions on Nutrition Security \(infographic\)](#)
- FNS Nutrition Assistance Programs: [Webpage](#)

## USDA Mission Statement

“To serve all Americans by providing effective, innovative, science-based public policy leadership in agriculture, food and nutrition, natural resource protection and management, rural development, and related issues with a commitment to delivering equitable and climate-smart opportunities that inspire and help America thrive.”

## Department Equity Action Plan Goals

### 1. Reducing Barriers to USDA Programs

USDA is reducing barriers to programs and improving support to underserved farmers, ranchers, landowners, businesses, and communities, including by providing ways for stakeholders to share their experiences, insights, and needs and by incorporating that input into policy development and implementation improvement.

### 2. Partnering With Trusted Technical Assistance Providers

USDA is partnering with trusted technical assistance providers to ensure that underserved producers and communities have the support they need to access USDA programs.

### 3. Directing USDA Programs to Those Who Need Them the Most

USDA programs are targeting those who need them the most, including by increasing infrastructure investments that benefit underserved communities.

### 4. Expanding Equitable Access to USDA Nutrition Assistance Programs

USDA is expanding equitable access to USDA nutrition assistance programs to ensure that those who qualify are able to participate, those who participate get benefits that are meaningful, and those who receive those benefits can use them conveniently and in ways that promote improvements in their health and well-being.

### 5. Advancing Equity in Federal Procurement

USDA is advancing equity in Federal procurement, by providing underserved and disadvantaged businesses, tools, and resources to increase access to funding opportunities and expand their network to develop critical local, State, regional, and National relationships.

### 6. Upholding Federal Trust and Treaty Responsibilities to Indian Tribes

USDA is upholding general Federal trust and treaty responsibilities to Indian Tribes, removing barriers to access USDA programs, embracing Tribal self-determination principles, and incorporating Indigenous values and perspectives in program design and delivery.

### 7. Committing Unwaveringly to Civil Rights

USDA has committed unwaveringly to civil rights, working to equip its civil rights offices with the tools, skills, capacity, and processes essential to enforce and uphold civil rights effectively and efficiently.

### 8. Operating With Transparency and Accountability

USDA is operating transparently and accountably, providing information on Department programs that Congress, stakeholders, and the general public need to hold us to account on our equity agenda, and working systematically to collect and take account of public feedback.



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USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

<https://www.fns.usda.gov>