



THE THRIFTY FOOD PLAN

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) creates sample meal plans and estimates the cost of meals at four different budget levels: Thrifty, Low Cost, Moderate, and Liberal. The Thrifty Food Plan (TFP), the lowest budget level, is the USDA's outline for a nutritious diet at a minimal cost. In other words, it's the cheapest way to eat while meeting a family's nutrition needs. The TFP is used to calculate the cost of budget-conscious groceries needed to provide enough healthy food for a family of four.¹

Before the 2018 Farm Bill, updates to the TFP were made at the Secretary of Agriculture's discretion. Prior to the new TFP release in 2021, the most recent update was in 2006. All updates had to use criteria set more than 45 years ago, and the overall value of the TFP could only change according to inflation. Because of the constraint in overall value, this largely made previous updates an exercise in assessing whether a nutritious diet was possible at the predetermined cost.

THE THRIFTY FOOD PLAN AND SNAP

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefit levels are based on the TFP. SNAP assumes households are able to spend 30% of their gross income on groceries. The monthly benefits fill the gap between the household income contribution and the cost of food established by the TFP.

The 2021 Thrifty Food Plan Update

The bipartisan 2018 Farm Bill required the USDA to reevaluate the TFP every five years, starting no later than 2022, using new criteria. The reevaluation must be data-driven and based on current food prices, nutrition, consumption patterns, and dietary guidance.²

The 2021 reevaluation in response to the 2018 Farm Bill relied entirely on data on the lowest cost for which resource-constrained households can purchase an adequate amount of nutritious, practical foods.

On October 1, 2022, the new TFP raised the maximum benefit level by \$53 a month for a family of four, or about \$.40 per person, per meal.³ This represents an increase of more than 20% over the previous criteria set decades ago.

The Impact of the Updated Thrifty Food Plan

The reevaluated TFP

- kept nearly 2.3 million people out of poverty in the fourth quarter of 2021,
- reduced overall poverty by 4.7 percent, and
- lowered child poverty by 8.6 percent with the greatest decline (12.2 percent) among Black non-Hispanic children.⁴

It is critical to maintain the language included in the 2018 Farm Bill so that families continue to receive SNAP benefits that more accurately reflect the cost of a nutritious diet.



The TFP estimates that a family of four (two adults and two school-aged children) would need to spend about \$940 per month on balanced yet cost-conscious groceries. If this family has a gross monthly income of \$2,000, it is assumed they will be able to spend 30 percent or \$600 on food. SNAP would provide \$340 per month to make up the difference.

¹ <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/thriftyfoodplan>

² U.S. Department of Agriculture. Thrifty Food Plan, 2021. August 2021. FNS-916. Available at <https://FNS.usda.gov/TFP>

³ <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/benefit-changes-2021>

⁴ [Effect of the Reevaluated Thrifty Food Plan and Emergency Allotments on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Benefits and Poverty.pdf](#) (urban.org)