

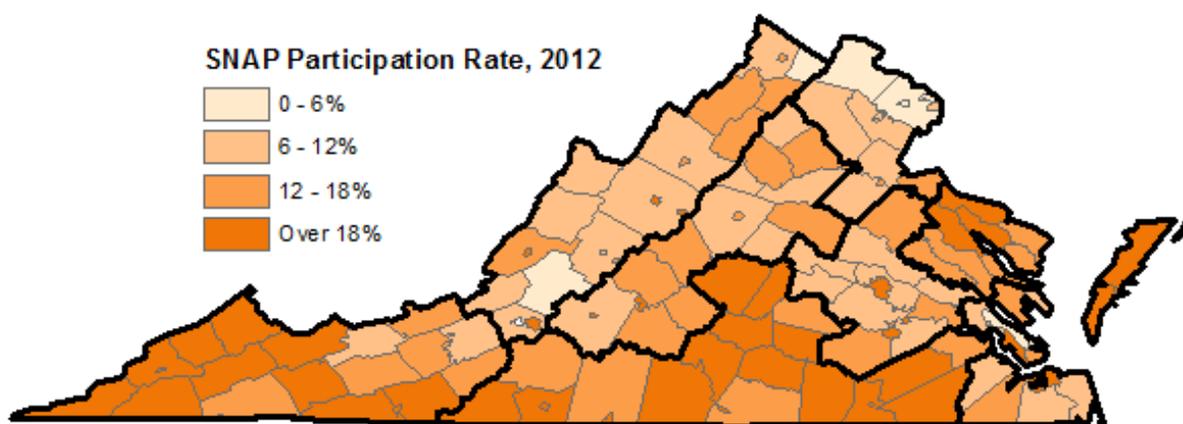
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in Virginia

In 2012, **11.6 percent of Virginians received benefits every month from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program**. In three out of every four Virginia families¹ receiving benefits, at least one person was employed, and in three out of ten SNAP recipient families, at least two people were employed².

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), commonly referred to as the Food Stamp

Program, provides monthly subsidies specifically for the purchase of food. The value of the monthly benefit is calculated based on income and number of individuals living in the household.

In this brief, we summarize facts about this program, provide a quick look at 2012 SNAP participation in Virginia, and review ways in which the program is changing.



Who is eligible for SNAP?

In general, a household may qualify for SNAP benefits if the household's *gross* monthly income is less than 130 percent and *net* monthly income is less than 100 percent of the Federal poverty line (\$2,552 and \$1,963, respectively, for a family of four)³. Households with elderly or disabled members need only meet the gross monthly income standard. Individuals who become unemployed are eligible for benefits for three months over three years (if childless) and for six months (with children). Time limits exceptions are

made in areas where unemployment exceeds ten percent.

Where are SNAP recipients?

Seven of Virginia's eight regions⁴ have SNAP participation rates exceeding the state average (11.6%), with Northern Virginia the only exception at 5% participation. However, because of the large population concentrated in Northern Virginia, the region's SNAP cases account for a large *share* of the total Virginia caseload. In 2012, **nearly one sixth of all SNAP transfers went to Northern Virginia**.

¹ A family is at least two people related by birth, marriage, or adoption living together in the same household.

² Based on analysis using *Characteristics of SNAP Households*. USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support. July, 2013. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/Ora/SNAPCharacteristics/Virginia/Virginia.htm>

³ Net income is equal to gross income less certain deductions reflecting earned income, child support, dependent care, etc. Eligibility is assumed for households that qualify for certain other programs such as Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF) and WIC.

⁴ As defined by the Demographics Research Group at University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service: <http://www.coopercenter.org/demographics/interactive-map/regions>

Are all SNAP recipients poor?

In general, higher participation rates are expected in counties with higher poverty rates. While this trend largely holds in the Commonwealth, **the poverty rate is at least double the SNAP participation rate in some Virginia localities⁵:**

Locality	Poverty Rate	Participation Rate
Highland	15.0	7.4
Williamsburg	23.0	10.2
Arlington	8.0	3.5
Montgomery	23.3	9.3
Lexington	24.0	9.4
Radford	34.2	12.8
Harrisonburg	37.5	12.4
Fairfax City	6.8	1.2
Falls Church	3.1	0.2

This disproportion serves as a reminder that **not all individuals in poverty qualify for SNAP**. Since non-working adults without dependents are eligible to receive food stamps for only three months out of every three years, they may be counted in the population that is poor but not receiving benefits. Furthermore, it is evident that university towns confound these numbers. While university students may have low incomes, they may also benefit from parents' resources, and are likely not SNAP recipients.

Conversely, **in several localities, the SNAP participation rate well exceeds the poverty rate:**

Locality	Poverty Rate	Participation Rate
Hopewell	18.9	31.9
King George	7.4	12.1
Franklin City	20.8	32.9
Emporia	25.6	39.4
Essex	15.7	23.7
Norton	18.1	27.0
King William	8.4	12.4
Caroline	12.1	17.9

In these counties, there is likely to be strong participation among individuals living *above* the poverty line. This group may include individuals over the age of 60, or those with work-limiting disabilities. It may also include the **working** poor, those families with gross income above, but less than 130 percent of, the Federal poverty line. These families may use the SNAP to supplement—not replace—earned income.

How is SNAP changing?

SNAP benefits have been reduced for all recipients as of November 1, 2013. Virginia's SNAP budget will be cut by an estimated \$99 million for FY2014⁶. This reduction in benefits reflects the loss of limited-term American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding. The current maximum monthly award for a household of four people is \$632, about 5 percent lower than the same household's October 2013 award of \$668.

This effect will be felt most keenly in Southside, where about 1 in 5 residents will face a reduced food budget. However, all Virginia SNAP recipients will be affected by cuts to this program.

⁵ Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, 2012. <http://www.census.gov/did/www/saie/data/statecounty/data/2012.html>

⁶ Dean, S. & Rosenbaum, D. *SNAP Benefits Will Be Cut for All Participants in November 2013*. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. August, 2013. <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/?fa=view&id=3899>