



April 7, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

Our organizations are concerned that the current COVID-19 pandemic is causing new challenges to food access for vulnerable populations, including participants in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The necessary and urgent measures taken by the Federal, state and local governments to curtail the spread of COVID-19 have forced people to remain in their homes and shut down nearly all businesses except those deemed essential. This has dramatically changed the way that all people, but especially low-income Americans, are purchasing and preparing meals.

At this time when everything is difficult, especially preventing hunger and ensuring safety, our government should be doing everything possible to remove barriers and improve access to SNAP.

As the number of unemployed Americans skyrockets and families struggle with the challenges of the COVID-19 virus, SNAP will be an essential government benefit to a growing number of people. These SNAP recipient households will not only need the extra food help that SNAP can deliver, but they will also need these benefits to be available at more food access points due to the unique circumstances of the pandemic. Specifically, we believe our nation's restaurants, many of which have converted to efficient carryout operations in this crisis, should be allowed to serve as additional points of food access for program beneficiaries. This will not only help families struggling to prepare meals at home while also caring for sick loved-ones or struggling with the virus themselves, it will also relieve grocery stores from long-lines and keep restaurant workers employed during the pandemic, at work and maintaining their income.

The Restaurant Meals Program has been serving SNAP participants in a few states and counties for many years, but despite the value that this program has to the people it serves, its reach has been limited. Expanding food access to meet the urgent need is possible, but will require action by the Department, and quickly. We ask that you take the following steps:

- Issue guidance on the existence of the Restaurant Meals Program (RMP) to states and post publicly, including a template of an approved memo of understanding (MOUs) for states to participate in RMP;
- Clarify how restaurants that have point of sale devices that currently accept Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash benefits as a form of payment through electronic benefits transfer (EBT) can also accept SNAP EBT, and issue guidance to instruct states and their EBT processors how to do so during this crisis;
- Provide expedited authorization of any new outlets, including restaurants, looking to serve prepared food through either the RMP or hot meal waivers;
- Allow national restaurant franchises that have MOUs in any state or county to easily participate in another state or county if that state chooses to operate RMP;
- Temporarily allow all populations to utilize the RMP even if they are not currently in the eligible categories of people who are elderly, disabled, and homeless; and
- Take whatever other actions are necessary to maximize the ability of RMP to reduce hunger and improve the safety of SNAP recipients until end of the COVID-19 emergency; and,
- Commit to supporting the expansion of the RMP to address hunger among vulnerable populations beyond the pandemic.

Thank you for your consideration and thank you for all you are doing to help steer our nation through this current crisis.

Sincerely,

Food Research & Action Center  
International Foodservice Distributors Association  
National Council of Chain Restaurants  
National Restaurant Association  
Western Center on Law & Poverty