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# Fact Sheet: USDA Support for Older Americans

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# Factsheet

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## Fact Sheet: USDA Support for Older Americans

USDA is committed to improving the health and wellbeing of older adults, ensuring that all older Americans have access to healthy food, and that older adults in rural America have access to housing. Low-income older Americans continue to be an underserved and vulnerable population, due in part to administrative complexities associated with participating in federal assistance programs. USDA is working with state and federal partners to reduce participation barriers and increase access for seniors.

**Nutrition Assistance:** Seniors represent a particularly vulnerable demographic to food insecurity, with unique health, social, and [nutrition challenges](#) that can include decreased mobility, limited shopping and cooking ability, and health challenges related to food insecurity. USDA works to positively impact the nutritional and health outcomes of these low-income seniors through seven nutrition assistance programs that are available support the health and nutrition of older Americans. Three of USDA's nutrition assistance

programs are exclusively for seniors; the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program, and the [Nutrition Services Incentive Program](#) which is run in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Community Living.

The [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#) serves more than 4 million seniors. Only 42 percent of eligible elderly individuals participate in SNAP, compared to 83 percent for all eligible people. USDA has worked to [decrease participation barriers for older Americans](#) by simplifying the application and recertification processes and providing additional accommodations for elderly and disabled participants.

- [Access to Purchase and Delivery Services](#): In July of 2015, USDA issued a proposed rule that would allow homebound, older Americans and disabled persons to use their SNAP benefits to purchase groceries through purchase and delivery services run by government agencies and non-profit organizations. This will provide greater access to healthy food for those who cannot get to the grocery store.
- **Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 Budget Proposal**: USDA's Food and Nutrition Service FY 2016 budget proposal would authorize a state option to reduce the administrative and application burden in SNAP for low-income elderly households with no earned income by extending the certification period to 36-months with no annual interim contact, and allowing data matching for verification of information.
- **Pilots to Better Serve Older Americans**: In 2009, USDA launched pilot projects in three states (Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania) to [test strategies in selected communities to increase access for low-income elderly people](#). The projects included simplified application processes that streamlined requirements for documenting income and expenses, and provided application assistance directly to clients. Two of the three projects successfully increased access to SNAP.
- **Increased Access to Fruits and Vegetables**: In April, 2015, USDA awarded [\\$31.5 million in funding to local, state, and national organizations](#) to support programs that help SNAP participants increase their purchase of fruits and vegetables. The AARP Foundation was awarded \$3.3 million as part of this effort to implement and develop replicable incentive programs for SNAP shoppers to purchase more fresh produce from farmers markets and Kroger grocery stores in Mississippi and Tennessee.
- **Established Recertification Interview Waiver**: The elderly and disabled recertification interview waiver allows the state to waive the recertification interview for households in which all adult members are elderly or disabled and have no earned income. This waiver was established in 2009 and since that time has been implemented in 11 states: California, Connecticut, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Texas.
- **Expanded Elderly Simplified Application Projects (ESAPs)**: ESAPs are demonstration projects that support participation among the elderly and disabled population by waiving the interview requirement, utilizing a shorter SNAP application, and allowing longer certification periods. Since 2009, projects in Alabama, Florida, and South Carolina have been renewed. New projects began in Georgia, Mississippi, and Washington.
- **Expanded Longer Certification Periods for the Elderly and Disabled**: Current legislation establishes 24 months as the maximum certification period for elderly and/or disabled households. Through its demonstration authority, FNS waived this section of the Act for Texas (initial request extended in 2010) and Arkansas (2011) allowing them to provide 36 month certification periods for households with only elderly or disabled members. These projects also waive the recertification interview requirement for participating households.
- **Expanded Standard Medical Deduction Projects**: Standard Medical Deduction demonstration projects ease verification requirements for senior and disabled households with out-of-pocket medical expenses over \$35 per month. Since 2009, FNS has approved renewals or projects in Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, South Dakota, Texas, Vermont, and Wyoming. New projects were approved and implemented in Alabama, Arkansas, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, North Dakota, Rhode Island, and Virginia. A project in South Carolina has been approved and will be implemented October 1, 2015.

- **Renewed Combined Application Projects:** Federal law requires that certain applicants for or recipients of SSI must be given the opportunity to file a SNAP application at the SSA office when applying for SSI. CAPs make it easier for SSI recipients to receive SNAP. CAPs in 17 states have been reauthorized since 2009: Arizona, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Virginia, and Washington.

More than 120,000 adults receive meals and snacks each day as part of the [Child and Adult Care Food Program](#). In January, USDA issued a proposed rule to update the meal standards to provide more nutritious food for this population.

- Under the cost neutral proposed meal patterns, meals served in nearly 3,000 adults day care centers would include a greater variety of fruits and vegetables, more whole grains, and less sugar and fat.
- The science-based standards were developed after consultation with the National Adult Day Services Association, the National Council on Aging, the HHS Administration on Aging, and the Florida Adult Care Food Programs.

Over 600,000 older Americans receive nutritious USDA Food packages through the [Commodity Supplemental Food Program](#). CSFP is designed to supplement the diets of low-income seniors age 60 years and older.

- In fiscal year 2015, CSFP received an appropriation of \$211.5 million through the Farm Bill to support a national caseload of 604,000 participants, including slots for an additional 16,000 participants in seven new states, including Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island.
- The program is now available in 46 states, two Indian reservations, and the District of Columbia.

At least 800,000 older Americans in 43 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and seven Tribal nations are currently served by the [Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program](#), which provides fresh, nutritious, locally grown fruits and vegetables, as well as herbs and honey from farmers markets, roadside farm stands, and community supported agriculture (CSA) programs.

- In FY2014, the program provided over \$20.58 million in assistance to elderly Americans.
- In partnership with other local organizations, the program provides nutrition education to encourage recipients to improve and expand their diets by adding fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as educate them on how to select, store and prepare the fresh fruits and vegetables they buy with their SFMNP coupons.

**Rural Development:** [USDA Rural Development](#) provides loans, grants and technical assistance to develop housing, community facilities, businesses, infrastructure, and renewable energy ventures in rural areas. USDA Rural Development also partners with private sector lenders and development organizations to carry out local community development projects.

Rural Development's more than 40 financial assistance programs, in addition to its ability to leverage private sector resources, give USDA the flexibility to invest in a wide range of projects that are reinvigorating rural communities. With a total portfolio of more than \$200 billion and investments upwards of \$28 billion in 2014 alone, Rural Development is making lasting investments in rural communities to provide essential services.

### *Single-Family Housing Investments for Seniors*

- USDA Rural Development's Rural Housing Service provides safe, decent, affordable homeownership

opportunities for families, the elderly, people with disabilities, and veterans in rural America through its suite of single-family housing direct loans and guaranteed loans.

In Fiscal Year 2014, through the Rural Housing Service's Single-Family Housing Repair Program, the agency provided more than \$28.2 million in grants to help 4,670 very low-income, elderly rural residents remove health and safety hazards from their homes. The agency also provided about 1,190 combination direct loan and grant awards in 2014 through its single-family housing repair program. More than 98 percent of these combination awards were made to senior citizens, and the age of the average recipient was 72 years old.

- For example, USDA provided Leon Boucher and his wife Priscille with a \$7,500 Single-Family Housing Repair Grant for a new roof. The Bouchers have lived in their Berlin, N.H. family home for 47 years. Over time, their home fell into disrepair but, as senior citizens on a fixed income, they didn't have the resources for repairs. The grant from USDA was the beginning of an outpouring of assistance for these seniors: USDA connected the Bouchers with local providers and businesses which helped the couple install insulation in the home, update the wiring, rebuild the front and back porch, put on new paint, and even plant a vegetable garden on the property.

### ***Multi-Family Housing Investments for Seniors***

The Rural Housing Service has more than 5,000 existing multi-family housing complexes in its portfolio for senior citizens living in rural areas. These complexes are providing elderly residents with more than 146,400 safe, affordable apartments. In 2014 alone, the Rural Housing Service invested more than \$33 million into 33 rental housing complexes for senior citizens.

- USDA Rural Development partnered with the Federal Home Loan Bank of Topeka to provide a \$705,000 Guaranteed Rural Rental Housing loan for East Ward Village Apartments, a multi-family housing complex for seniors and disabled individuals in McCook, Neb. Low-income housing tax credits, city funds, and equity from the McCook Housing Authority also supported the project. A former elementary school was converted into 15 apartments and 6 new duplexes. Today, this new complex is 100-percent occupied and residents are enjoying their new, safe affordable apartments.

### ***Community Investments for Seniors***

- The Rural Housing Service's Community Facilities direct loans, guaranteed loans, and grants finance essential facilities in rural areas. Priority for funding is given for health care, education and public safety projects. Community Facilities assistance supports hospitals, health care clinics, schools, police and fire stations, food banks, community centers and many other community based initiatives. From FY 2009 through FY 2014, through the Community Facilities Program, USDA has invested more than \$329.4 million in 71 rural nursing homes, and \$274.9 million for 72 rural assisted living facilities.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has made access to quality health care for rural Americans a top priority at USDA. Through the Rural Housing Service Community Facilities program, the agency helped provide health care services for nearly 4 million rural residents in FY 2014 in facilities ranging from mental health clinics to hospitals. In 2014, the Rural Housing Service invested more than \$176 million in 33 assisted living and nursing home facilities through the Community Facilities program.

- USDA Rural Development helped the Hancock County Senior Services Association build Maple Grove Apartments, a "memory care" facility in Carthage, Ill., to serve patients with dementia or other cognitive issues. Rural Development provided a \$1 million Rural Economic Development loan, a \$300,000 Rural Economic Development grant and a \$2.2 million Community Facilities loan to help

complete the project. Maple Grove uses a "small house" design, a new concept in assisted living to make facilities more home-like and family-oriented. Maple Grove provides a safe environment for seniors whose cognitive issues could make them vulnerable in a larger, institutional venue. Also, small home care is less expensive than traditional nursing home care. Maple Grove residents Connie and Harold Becker have been married for almost 40 years. She has ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis) and he has progressive dementia, but they are able to stay together as a couple thanks to the USDA funding for this innovative complex.

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