



** This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/snap-gap-in-kansas>

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K-State program increases efforts to fill ‘SNAP-Gap’

Nearly 3 in 10 Kansans not taking advantage of food benefits, officials say

By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – Representatives of a program that provides nutrition education to low-resource families say that nearly 3 in 10 Kansans eligible for food assistance are not taking advantage of those benefits.

Chuckie Hessong, a regional specialist for the [Kansas Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education](#) (commonly referred to as SNAP-Ed), said 71% of eligible Kansas families participate in the program, which is well below the national rate of 82%.

“That means that 29% of Kansans eligible for this program are leaving available food resources on the table,” said Hessong, noting the difference is what’s commonly known as the SNAP-Gap.

SNAP-Ed is a federally funded grant program that, in 2023, helped approximately 42 million people in nearly 22 million U.S. households, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

“Our program hopes to bring awareness to the SNAP-Gap in Kansas and offer assistance to communities through programming that helps people access SNAP benefits and other local food resources,” Hessong said.

In Kansas, the program is administered through K-State Research and Extension in partnership with the Kansas Department for Children and Families. At the community level, staff members work with health departments, senior centers, childcare centers, churches, hospitals, food banks, shelters, schools, libraries and more.

Nationally, the U.S. government spent \$112.8 billion on SNAP benefits in 2023. Kansas participants received about \$183 in benefits per month last year.

“Every dollar invested in SNAP generates between \$1.50 to \$1.80 in economic activity,” said Stephanie Boone, an evaluation specialist for Kansas SNAP-Ed. “The economic multiplier has significant impacts on Kansas communities, including locally owned grocery stores and farmers markets where SNAP-Ed teams work with local partners to navigate the SNAP retail system to make those benefits a reality for Kansans.”

Receiving SNAP benefits also aids in reducing food insecurity, which affects about 351,090 people in Kansas – more than 120,000 of whom are children.

“Food insecurity is more than just not having enough household income, but it’s also a lack of access to places providing healthy foods,” said Lisa Ross, coordinator of the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) and SNAP-Ed in Kansas.

Hessong notes that a multi-pronged approach by SNAP-Ed staff across the state helps to bring awareness to the SNAP-Gap in Kansas and “builds healthy food systems for our low-resource Kansans by assisting food pantries, and ensuring that local grocery stores and farmers markets accept SNAP benefits.”

Other educational efforts available to those eligible for SNAP benefits include food budgeting, cooking, nutrition and physical activity classes for adults and older adults; and nutrition and physical activity programs in schools where 50% or more of the students receive free or reduced-cost meals.

“Good nutrition and access to healthy food is essential at all ages,” Hessong said. “Our children need it for growing and learning; adults need healthy foods to be productive at work and at home, and older adults need it to enjoy healthy lives as they age.”

More information about Kansas SNAP-Ed and benefits available to the state’s residents is available online at <https://www.k-state.edu/ks-snaped>.

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
Kansas SNAP-Ed, <https://www.k-state.edu/ks-snaped>

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