

Wolf Administration: No One Should Go Hungry, Pennsylvanians Should Apply for Programs Designed for ‘Times Like These’

Harrisburg, PA – First Lady Frances Wolf, Department of Human Services Secretary Teresa Miller, and Department of Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding today outlined food assistance programs available for Pennsylvanians to enroll in to get them through current COVID-19-induced tough times. They said Pennsylvanians should feel no shame in accepting state and federal food benefits that were, in fact, designed for unprecedented times like the coronavirus pandemic.

“The stigma that exists around accessing food programs is a huge detriment to the health, wellness, and overall safety of Pennsylvanians,” said First Lady Frances Wolf. “While the need for these programs continues to grow during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial that we encourage our fellow Pennsylvanians to use these benefits available to them. Benefits they invested in. Benefits that will keep them nourished and their families whole. We must refrain from shaming them for needing help. If we do, we shame ourselves. The last thing that the Wolf Administration wants to see is a Pennsylvania going hungry because we were shamed and embarrassed to reach out for the help we so desperately need.”

While most eligibility verifications for food assistance have been waived to reduce barriers to access during COVID-19 mitigation in Pennsylvania, there are several state programs that still require individuals to seek out and enroll in individually to qualify and receive benefit. These programs include:

- [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#): Formerly known as food stamps, SNAP provides assistance to low-income and working Pennsylvanians, allowing them to purchase produce and groceries for themselves and their family. SNAP helps more than 1.8 million Pennsylvanians, including about 700,000 children, about 690,000 people with disabilities, and about 300,000 older adults, expand purchasing power to ensure their household has enough food to avoid going hungry. SNAP is issued through a monthly payment to an electronic benefit transfer card, and benefits are based off income and household size. People can apply for SNAP online at www.compass.state.pa.us online at any time.
- [Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program](#): This program runs from June 1 through November 30 each year. Seniors must be 60 or older by December 31 of the program year and have income at or below 185% of the U.S. poverty level. Eligible seniors should call their county Aging office for information on distribution of vouchers. Vouchers are distributed on a first come, first serve basis.
- [WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program](#): This program runs from June 1 through November 30 each year, and recipients must be on the WIC program to receive this benefit. Children 1-year and older, and pregnant/post-partum women will receive vouchers for the program during their quarterly WIC visit (May through September).
- [Commodity Supplemental Food Program](#): Eligible participants include individuals who are at least 60 years old and whose household income is at or below 130% of the U.S. poverty level. To qualify, individuals must complete an application with proof of income. Questions about where/how to access this program can be directed to the Department of Agriculture’s Bureau of Food Assistance by calling 1-800-468-2433 or emailing ra_fooddist@pa.gov.

- [Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children \(WIC\)](#): Women who are pregnant or have had a baby in the past six months, or twelve if breastfeeding; infants and children under the age of five; and fathers, grandparents, and foster parents who are the legal guardian of a child under age five, may apply for WIC. WIC applicants must reside in Pennsylvania, have a medical or nutritional risk, and have a gross household income that does not exceed 185% of the U.S. poverty level.

In addition to applying for the benefits above, Pennsylvanians can receive immediate access to food resources by visiting a Feeding Pennsylvania or Hunger-Free Pennsylvania member food bank. Pennsylvanians out of work and without pay as a result of COVID-19 are [eligible to receive](#) state and federally sourced foods from Pennsylvania's food banks and pantries.

"Programs and support networks like these exist to help all of us in the moments we cannot plan for -- the times that an injury or an accident changes our life and sense of security as individuals, and the times that a global pandemic alters our daily life as a society," said Secretary Miller. "These programs are needed for many in the best of times, and they are critical in the worst. We cannot forget this when this moment passes, and I urge anyone who knows someone who is struggling to make ends meet or needs assistance themselves to remember that help is always available."

Lifesaving COVID-19 mitigation efforts led to more than 1.6 million Pennsylvanians applying for unemployment benefits and placed many of those in a position of worrying about feeding themselves and their families. The administration has [worked hard](#) to remove barriers to access, advocate for, and invest in Pennsylvania's charitable food system and raise statewide awareness of availability of resources. In addition to working with the charitable food system, the Department of Agriculture has encouraged food production and processing operations to continue and provided [comprehensive guidance](#) to the agriculture and food supply chain to ensure food continues to be available and accessible.

"COVID-19 has created a broad community of need, but Pennsylvania's charitable food system was designed for times like these. The system was designed to alleviate questions of paying for utilities or food, designed to help people stay on their feet," said Agriculture Secretary Redding. "Food does more than feed our bodies. It has the power to lift spirits and provide comfort. This nutrition and comfort is a right for all of us. These times will pass; don't spend them worrying about food. Pennsylvania's food system is here for you."

For more information on food security in Pennsylvania including information about resources and actions taken by the Wolf Administration, visit agriculture.pa.gov/foodsecurity. For the most accurate and timely information related to Health in Pennsylvania, visit on.pa.gov/coronavirus.