

Wolf Administration Receives Approval to Launch Online Grocery Purchasing for SNAP Recipients During COVID-19 Crisis

Harrisburg, PA – The Wolf Administration received approval from the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to allow Pennsylvania to join the pilot program that lets recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, purchase groceries online through participating retailers.

"Many people have been purchasing groceries online to facilitate social distancing, but SNAP recipients were not able to do so due to federal restrictions on SNAP and ecommerce. In most cases, SNAP recipients do not have flexibility to use online purchasing for grocery delivery or curbside pick-up, potentially putting health and safety at risk during this health crisis," said DHS Secretary Teresa Miller. "We are grateful that FNS has approved Pennsylvania to join this pilot program to allow us to expand flexibility to SNAP recipients looking to utilize online grocery purchasing to support social distancing and COVID-19 mitigation efforts."

Now that approval has been received, DHS is working with its EBT vendor and approved retailers to implement system changes necessary to implement online payment for PA's SNAP recipients. These system changes have an approximately two-week testing and validation implementation timeline that could not begin without FNS' approval, so DHS expects to have online grocery purchasing activated for SNAP recipients by the beginning of June.

Once active, only eligible food items normally paid for by SNAP will be able to be purchased online with SNAP benefits; delivery fees, driver tips, and other associated charges may not be paid for with SNAP benefits. Due to the expedited timeframe to implement, this initiative does not include the ability to transact Cash Assistance benefits using the EBT card. Therefore, individuals will need to use another method of payment to cover the non-allowable fees such as a pre-paid debit card. The pilot program currently includes three approved retailers: Amazon, Walmart, and ShopRite. Retailers that are interested in participating must [contact FNS](#) to review the requirements to be added to the program.

Retailers that do not wish to join the pilot program can still offer delivery or pick-up flexibility options for SNAP recipients by using mobile EBT processing equipment that would allow customers to pay with SNAP when groceries are delivered or picked up. Farmers markets may be able to receive this processing equipment at no cost through [a grant opportunity](#) provided by DHS.

"We are in the midst of both a public-health crisis and an economic crisis, but DHS is here to offer financial support to make sure that everyone gets through. I encourage any Pennsylvanian who is now in a difficult financial situation because of this pandemic to apply to see if they are eligible for assistance," said Secretary Miller. "Help is always available for Pennsylvanians who are having trouble accessing food during this public health crisis, and help will be available in the recovery period to follow."

DHS is continuing to process applications for SNAP and encourages people and families who need assistance to apply online at www.compass.state.pa.us. All SNAP applications are screened for expedited services criteria which can accelerate processing time for those with emergency needs. Pennsylvanians who need help feeding themselves or their family can also

find and contact their local food bank or pantry through [Feeding Pennsylvania](#) and [Hunger-Free Pennsylvania](#) to access food resources in their community.

Visit pa.gov for a [“Responding to COVID-19” guide](#) or the Pennsylvania Department of Health’s dedicated [Coronavirus webpage](#) for the most up-to-date information regarding COVID-19.