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OVERSIGHT REPORT

FROM THE OFFICE OF SENATOR ADAM SCHIFF

HIGHER PRICES, HUNGRIER FAMILIES:

How the "Big Beautiful Bill" and Trump Administration Policies are Making Food Insecurity Worse for California Families

U.S. Senator Adam Schiff (D-Calif.) distributes food at the Kheir Clinic in downtown Los Angeles in November 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the cost of food in the United States soars, the Trump Administration's continued attacks on proven federal food assistance programs are putting the health and prosperity of American families across the country in jeopardy.

By purging millions of people from the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps and known as CalFresh in California, and other nutrition programs, the legacy of the Trump Administration and this Republican Congress will be one of increased hunger and more families struggling to make ends meet to keep food on their tables. **Thanks to the so-called *One Big Beautiful Bill Act*, signed by President Trump last summer, federal data shows that SNAP participation fell by more than *4.5 million people* between January 2025 and April 2026 (the last month with data on all states).**

Over 97 percent of CalFresh households will experience a reduction or elimination of monthly benefits through new eligibility restrictions and state financing constraints. **So far, more than 330,000 Californians fell off SNAP from January 2025 to May 2026, including more than 156,000 children.**

At the same time, global market instability, the Iran War, and President Trump's ongoing trade wars have driven food prices higher. Food price indexes measured a 3.0 percent increase from June 2025 to June 2026, and the overall price index increased 3.5 percent in that same period before seasonal adjustment.

Heard from a California Constituent

"I am a parent in Tulare County, in a little town called Strathmore. It's very small. I am a SNAP recipient, so losing funding is very scary for me, myself, and my family. I have two daughters, so everything's very expensive alone, you know. And then getting SNAP cut is going to be very bad. . . . There's months where I can only pay a certain amount of my bills because it's so expensive, and we're all struggling. My community is struggling."

To understand the impact of food prices in California, Senator Schiff and his staff visited and interviewed dozens of employees and volunteers at foods banks and their partners across the state. Their message was clear and concerning: more people need food assistance, and higher food prices coupled with regressive federal policies are squeezing families already struggling to put food on the table.

Findings

Reports from food banks, food pantries, and other nonprofits across California resulted in six findings:

- **Finding 1**: Under the Trump Administration, federal actions led to increased food insecurity for more than five million people in communities across California.
- **Finding 2**: Food banks and partners observed increased need by employed, middle-class families.
- **Finding 3**: Many people are frightened to seek food assistance because of the Trump Administration's broad efforts to detain and remove immigrants.
- **Finding 4**: Higher food prices affected the purchasing power of both families and the food banks that serve them.
- **Finding 5**: Food prices are driving people and food banks toward less healthy options.
- **Finding 6:** The impacts of food insecurity are not partisan.

Recommendations

- Congress should restore the nearly $187 billion made in cuts to SNAP through 2034 in the *One Big Beautiful Bill Act*.
- Congress should provide relief to states and families by imposing, at a minimum, a two-year delay in the benefit cost-shift to states.
- USDA must restore its local food programs. Congress should make these programs permanent and provide them with mandatory funding.
- Congress should increase investments to make healthy foods, such as fruits and vegetables, more widely available to schools, food banks, and other institutions. This can be done through improving federal procurement and increasing funding for nutrition incentive programs.

HOW TRUMP ADMINISTRATION POLICIES ARE MAKING FOOD INSECURITY WORSE

On the ground reports from food banks, food pantries, and partner organizations across California document a worrying trend of increasing food insecurity since the beginning of the Trump Administration. These real-life reports are in sharp contrast to the Administration's portrayal of the state of hunger in the United States.

The primary source reporting of increased need is also supported by independent policy analysis and federal data on food prices and assistance. As food prices increase and nutrition programs are cut, more people seek and need assistance. To understand the impact of higher food prices and federal policies on Californians, Senator Schiff's office contacted food banks and pantries across the state. These nonprofit and faith-based organizations shared their experiences in providing food to local communities through interviews and written responses. Some food bank employees requested anonymity to avoid politicization of their work supporting local communities and potential retaliation. Their responses are identified by the region of California in which they work. Taken together, these first-person reports paint a picture of drastically increased need for food assistance at the same time that President Trump's policies are eroding the food safety net.

PART ONE: POLICIES AND CONSEQUENCES

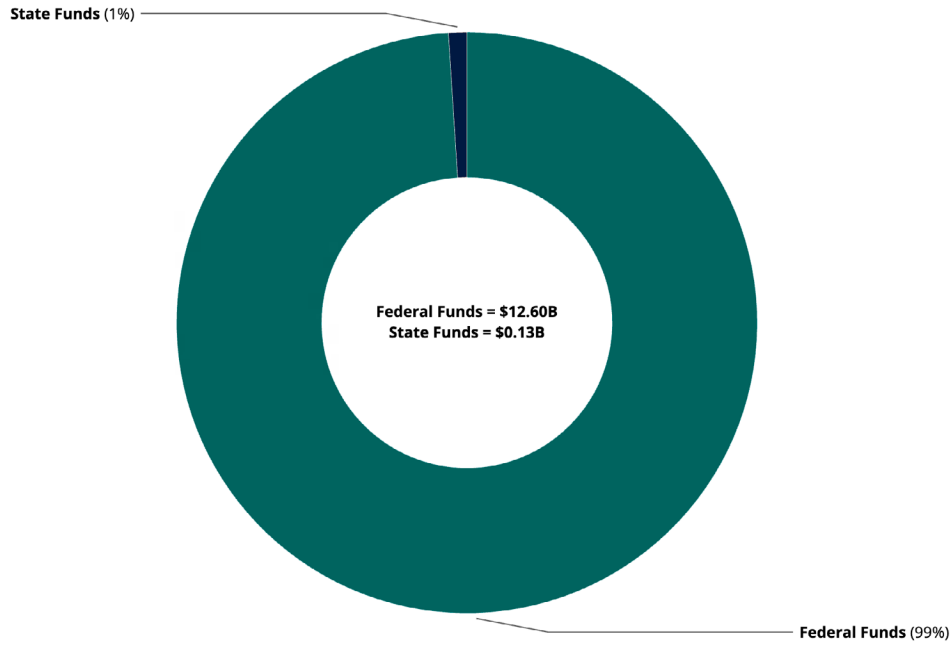
NUTRITION CUTS TARGET THE MOST VULNERABLE

The Trump Administration and Republicans in Congress have made food access increasingly difficult for the most vulnerable Americans. Republicans' H.R. 1, the *One Big Beautiful Bill Act*, made historic cuts to the nation's most widely-used food assistance program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), known in California as CalFresh.[1] SNAP "provides food benefits to low-income families to supplement their grocery budget so they can afford the nutritious food essential to health and well-being."[2] The California Budget Center estimated that, due to H.R. 1, over 97 percent of CalFresh households will experience a reduction or elimination of monthly benefits through new eligibility restrictions and state financing constraints.[3] H.R. 1 cuts SNAP by nearly $187 billion through 2034, the largest cut to the program in history. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimated that H.R. 1 would result in more than 2.4 million people in a typical month being cut from SNAP nationally.[4] When also including people losing a substantial amount, but not all, of their SNAP benefits, it is estimated that four million people in a typical month will no longer receive SNAP once these changes are fully implemented.[5] These changes will only exacerbate the 24 percent of all adults in California who experienced food insecurity in 2025.[6]

The most drastic change made to SNAP through H.R. 1 is shifting a significant portion of funding for the program from the federal level to state governments. This change is already having a profound impact and will continue to negatively impact the more than five million Californians who need assistance to consistently put food on the table.

Federal Dollars Fund 99% of Food Assistance Benefits in California

2024-25 Federal and State Spending on Food Assistance Benefits = $12.73 Billion



Note: Spending levels only capture CalFresh (federally funded) and California Food Assistance Program (state funded) benefits, not administrative and other similar costs.

Source: California Department of Social Services, Local Assistance Estimates (January 2025).

California Budget & Policy Center

As a predictable result of these cuts and current economic conditions, demand at food banks across California and the nation has been especially high.[7] Yet the Administration has made it more difficult for food banks to meet families' needs. For example, in March 2025, the Trump Administration halted $500 million in deliveries to food banks, cutting off food to those most in need.[8] A ProPublica investigation found that the cancellation equated to nearly 100 million pounds of food not arriving to food banks that were expecting such deliveries.[9]

A note from Senator Schiff

From the beginning of this Administration's attacks on nutrition, I have been committed to pushing back on these dangerous policies. In March 2025, I organized an effort of more than 25 Senators in confronting the Trump Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, calling on them to explain and reverse the cancellation of $1 billion in local food purchases for food banks and schools.[10] As of August 2026, the Trump Administration still had not responded to the countless American producers and consumers advocating for restoration of these programs.

In 2026, SNAP participation experienced steeper declines than ever before. SNAP participation nationwide fell by more than 4.5 million people (11 percent) between H.R. 1's July 2025 enactment and April 2026, based on recent data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).[11] Overall, more than 330,000 Californians fell off SNAP, including more than 156,000 children. Participation in California between July 2025 and May 2026 declined by 6 percent, and 70,000 fewer Californians participated in SNAP in January and February 2026 alone.

The Trump Administration is working to hide changes in food insecurity

In September 2025, the Trump Administration terminated an annual study on hunger by the U.S. Department of Agriculture that had been used to support SNAP eligibility nationwide.[12] The study had for years "provided a consistent, national assessment of domestic food security that helped policymakers understand the drivers of food insecurity—and respond to them."[13] As one policy expert concluded, "Ending the annual Household Food Security Report will make it easier for the Trump Administration to obscure the harmful effects of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, making it much harder for policymakers, researchers, and advocates to understand the full impact of these SNAP cuts."[14]

The Trump Administration claims that these reductions in SNAP benefits are positive for Americans and the economy. In May 2026, Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins framed these cuts as part of her efforts to combat fraud in food programs, stating in a television interview:

"Now, the good news. In just one year alone, we've already moved 4.5 million people off of SNAP, so this idea that once a government program's in place you can never roll it back, President Trump has proven that to be wrong, with the Vice President leading the way. And that's just the beginning, so we're going to be pulling more and more people off that shouldn't be on the program[.]"[15]

Secretary Rollins argued that the removal of millions from SNAP was supporting "the dignity of work" and described it as "a great American biblical foundational principle,"[16] although the U.S. unemployment rate has consistently been historically low at around 4.3 percent since July 2025, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data.[17]

In May 2026, President Trump similarly boasted of huge reductions in SNAP recipients, stating, "More than five million people have been lifted off of the food stamps – think of that under – just in a short period of time."[18] In reality, many, if not most, of these individuals and families are still experiencing food insecurity, just without government assistance.

Zooming In: The Largest County in America

A report published by the University of Southern California (USC) in October 2025 concluded that, in Los Angeles County, the largest county in the U.S., 1 in 4 county households experienced food insecurity in the past year.[19] Among lower-income households, 1 in 3 (35 percent) experienced food insecurity. [20]
The overall rate of food insecurity was unchanged from 2024, but higher-income households (those making more than 300 percent of the federal poverty line) made up a larger percentage of Angelenos experiencing food insecurity.[21] Alarmingly, these challenges are affecting many households with children. Forty percent of all food-insecure households in LA County were households with children. The USC report concluded, "Food insecurity also appears to be increasingly impacting middle-class Angelenos, who don't qualify for safety net programs and are struggling with the affordability of basic needs like food."[22]

Meanwhile, President Trump continues to make false statements that food prices are going down when in fact prices are going up.[23]

President Trump regularly makes false public claims that food prices are down, something that contradicts both federal economic data and the lived experience of Americans across the country. In January 2025, Trump told the Detroit Economic Club, "Grocery prices are starting to go rapidly down."[24]

On November 10, 2025, he again falsely claimed "Food prices are way down."[25] On November 17, 2025, Trump falsely stated, "I think you'll see food prices, they've come down very substantially since Biden."[26] At the February 2026 State of the Union address, President Trump again claimed that the prices of eggs, chicken and beef fell, when data in fact shows that chicken and beef prices have increased since he took office in January 2025.[27] On May 29, 2026, Trump posted on Truth Social that food prices were down, with unsourced claims about particular foods being cheaper.[28] These untrue claims are just a few examples of the Trump Administration denying the reality of food prices.

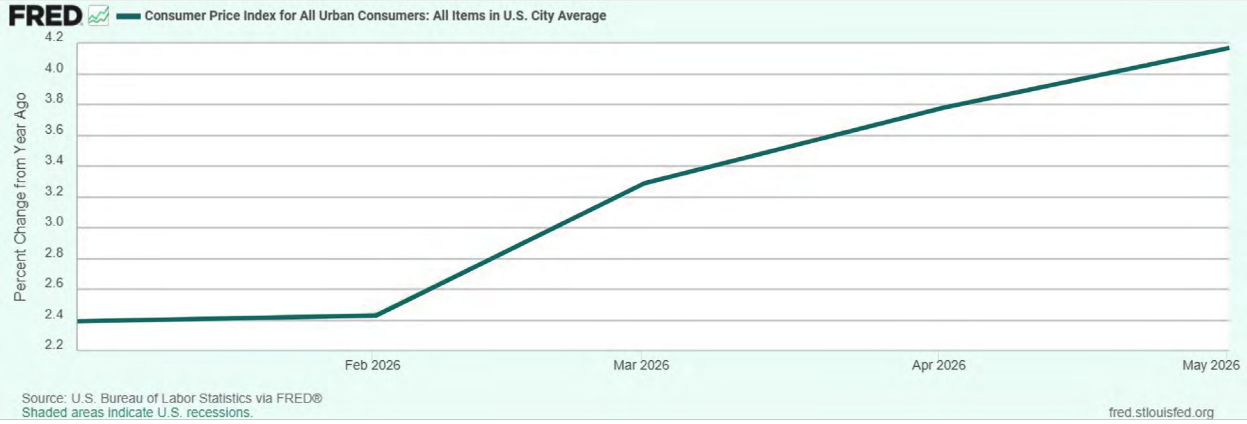
TRUMP YEAR ONE: INCREASED FOOD PRICES

In February 2026, BLS's Consumer Price Index (CPI) report, a key measure of inflation, provided a snapshot of how food prices were trending one year after President Trump's 2025 inauguration.[29] Overall, BLS concluded that food prices were up 2.9 percent from a year prior, while the costs of food "away from home" was up 3.9 percent.[30] (Food "away from home" is defined as all meals including tips at fast food, take-out, delivery, concession stands, buffet and cafeteria, at full-service restaurants, and at vending machines and mobile vendors.)

BLS data also shows how particular food groups rose in price since December 2024.

> **The index for food at home rose 2.4 percent over the 12 months ending in December. The meats, poultry, fish, and eggs index rose 3.9 percent over the last 12 months. The index for other food at home increased 2.7 percent over the same period and the index for nonalcoholic beverages rose 5.1 percent. The cereals and bakery products index increased 1.5 percent over the 12 months ending in December. The index for fruits and vegetables rose 0.5 percent over the year. In contrast, the dairy and related products index decreased 0.9 percent over the same period.**

12-Month Percent Change in Consumer Price Index, January - May 2026

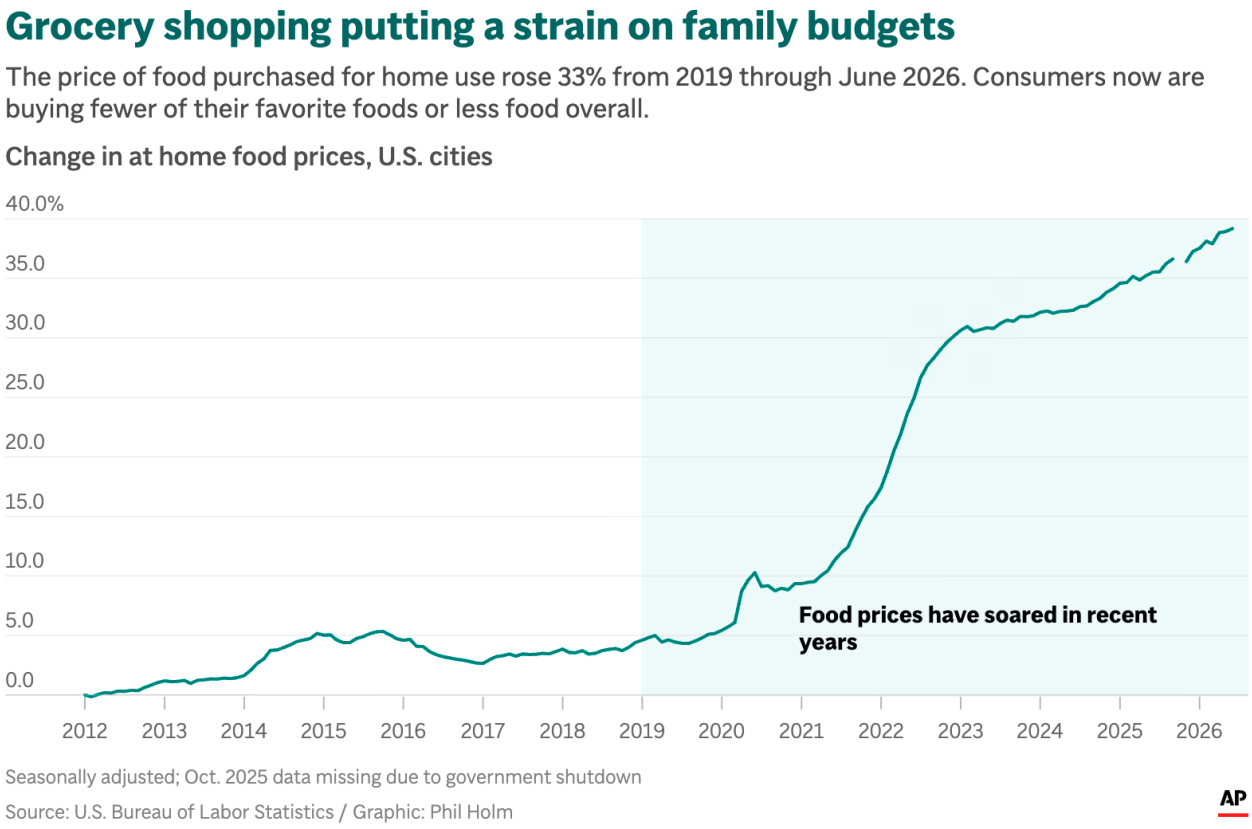


As demonstrated by the chart above, CPI has increased significantly year-on-year since the start of 2026.

The 0.7 percent jump in food prices from November to December 2025 was the largest one-month increase in grocery prices since October 2022.[31] In that one-month period, fruit and vegetables, cereal and bakery products, beef, and coffee all went up in price.[32] The persistent high prices have also impacted people's ability to afford healthy options. In a May 2025 study, Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan research organization, found that nearly 70 percent of Americans reported that rising food prices made it more difficult to eat healthy.[33] Among lower-income adults, 77 percent reported that food costs were a challenge to healthy eating, with 46 percent saying that increased costs made it a lot more difficult. Another nonpartisan study published in August 2025 found that 55 percent of adults under age 45 found the cost of groceries to be a major source of stress.[34]

Food price data from 2026 shows an increasingly dire picture. In May 2026, the BLS CPI report showed that consumer prices were up 4.2 percent from May 2025.[35] This was the largest 12-month increase since April 2023.[36] **Federal data shows that food prices specifically rose 3.1 percent from May 2025 to May 2026.**[37]

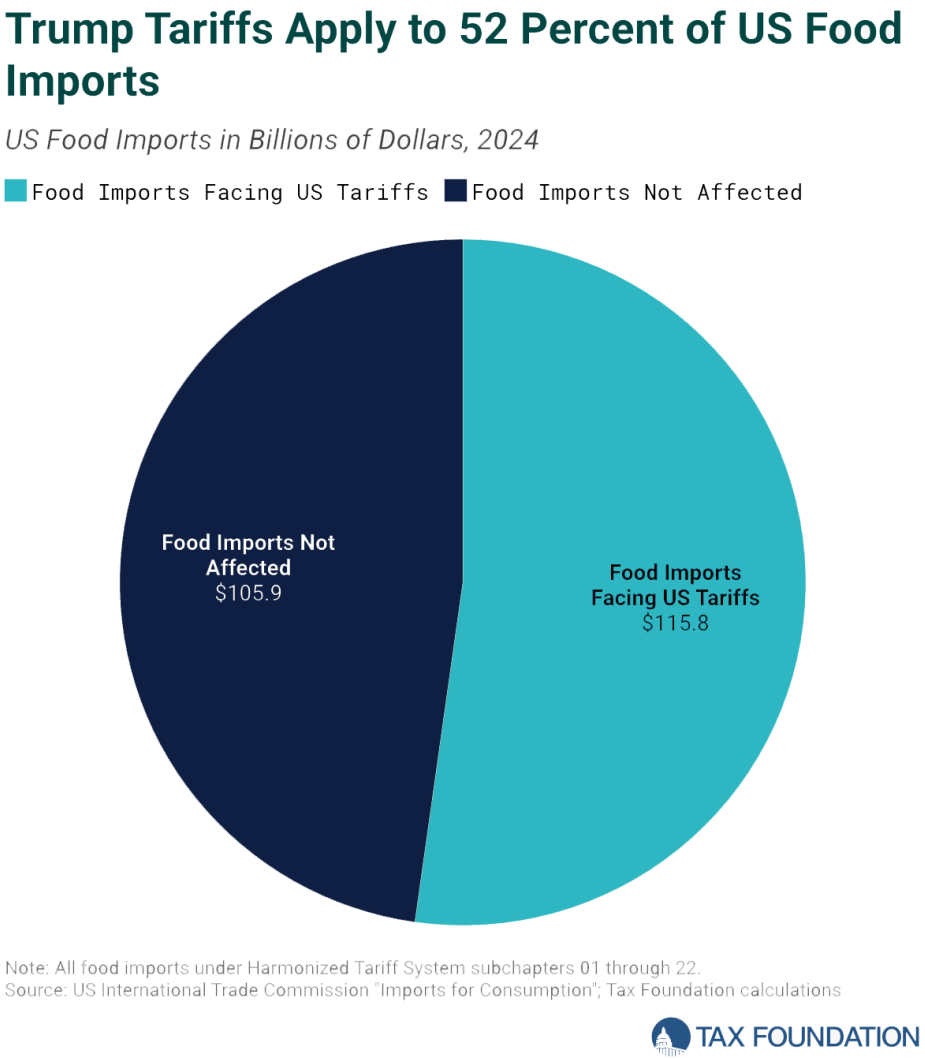
Change in At Home Food Prices Since 2012



[38] Food prices have increased notably since January 2025, and if the current trajectory continues, will keep rising.[39]

The Trump Tariffs

Starting February 1, 2025, President Trump imposed sweeping tariffs on imports. The unilateral decisions, which were repeatedly and haphazardly modified, included at least 10 percent tariffs on imports from almost all U.S. trading partners. A 2025 estimate from the Tax Foundation concluded that the Trump tariffs would affect nearly 75 percent of U.S. food imports. In February 2026, after numerous changes and exemptions, tariffs still applied to more than 50% of U.S. food imports.[40]



The Trump Administration placed tariffs on everyday goods like bananas and coffee, and these tariffs increased prices for American families at the grocery store. Trade experts agree that, ever since the trade war started by President Trump during his first term in 2018, the Trump tariffs were and continue to be passed to final consumers.[41] Since President Trump imposed new sweeping tariffs in his second term, several lawsuits challenged the Trump Administration tariffs. On February 20, 2026, the Supreme Court concluded that these global tariffs were illegal.[42]

PEOPLE'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCES SHOW THE DISASTROUS IMPACT OF INCREASED FOOD PRICES AND NEW FEDERAL POLICIES

Food banks and pantries across California met with Senator Schiff and his staff to share their expert knowledge and firsthand experience in supporting constituents facing food insecurity. The organizations were primarily nonprofit and faith-based organizations, ranging from small volunteer organizations to large food banks serving large urban areas. The organizations included rural, urban, and suburban communities and several different service models. Overall, these organizations served more than 2 million people across California in 2025. The specific identities of food banks, pantries, their leaders and employees have been anonymized to avoid politicization of their work supporting local communities and potential relaliation. Collectively, their contributions led to six key findings about food insecurity in California.

FINDINGS

Finding 1. Under the Trump Administration, federal actions led to increased food insecurity for more than five million people in communities across California.

Food bank and pantry leaders across California reported that SNAP cuts, delays in federal support, and intentional uncertainty caused significant increases in food insecurity. Analysis from Feeding America, a nationwide network of food banks, food pantries, and meal programs, showed that 5,915,050 people in California were already facing food insecurity in 2024.[43] Now, the organizations that provide support are seeing an unprecedented increase in need.

A nonprofit network based in Los Angeles that runs food pantries reported that concerns surrounding reduced or delayed federal benefits caused immediate spikes in demand for emergency food and basic assistance, which has strained their distribution capacity and case management services. In Northern California, one food bank saw nearly four times as many families sign up for food assistance in October and November 2025, when the government shutdown threatened SNAP benefits and their delivery to families in need. In Fresno, over 30 percent of clients are accessing a large church-based food bank for the first time, signaling new economic strain rather than long-term or chronic poverty. A food bank in San Diego reported a jump in families in need from 175 families visiting per week up to 210 families per week since SNAP benefit delays began. Overall, that facility observed a 20 percent increase in demand over one year.

The impacts of federal cuts are not just felt by families in need – they also hinder the ability of food banks and providers to meet the needs of their communities. For example, 20 percent of the food provided by a Northern California food bank for community members is received free-of-cost through USDA's Commodity Supplemental Food Program. Proposed eliminations, partial funding cuts, and temporary pauses in the program have forced food banks like this one to purchase more food — at increasingly higher costs — to meet the increasing needs of the communities they serve. At a food bank near the southern border, USDA program cuts resulted in distributing 21 percent less food than usual. A large regional food bank that serves more than 300,000 people monthly experienced similarly increased demand with less government support.

Finding 2. Food banks and partners observed increased need by employed, middle-class participants.

Multiple food banks reported that the increased need for food assistance is impacting middle-class families, who do not typically qualify for social safety net programs and are struggling with the affordability of food and basic needs. **More middle-class households are visiting local food banks for emergency food, requiring extra assistance to keep up with the rising cost of food**.

For a food pantry in the Los Angeles area that typically serves 300,000 people annually, these new members have typically been individuals and families who had not previously needed assistance. The new members come from middle-income households with good jobs and who should be able to make ends meet but are no longer able to do so due to increased costs of living. A resident in Davis, California shared, "It becomes clear that most attendees are working people who just need some extra help to get by." One regional religious organization in Fresno that hosts food pantries reported that 95 percent of their visitors are from income-producing households. Another Los Angeles area food bank reported an increase in multigenerational families seeking food support, along with more seniors and middle-class families.

A large food bank in Central California reported commonly seeing families with both parents working full-time still needing to access a school pantry for support. The parents attributed this new need to reduced work hours and inflation costs as they struggle to make ends meet. The church-based food bank in Fresno reported similar stories: families with both parents working hourly jobs recently having to seek food assistance because grocery prices are rising faster than wages. Their incomes no longer stretch far enough to cover rent, utilities, and a full month of groceries. Balancing the rising cost of living means many families have been forced to consume smaller food portions and forego other basic needs like health care.

Finding 3. Many people are frightened to seek food assistance because of the Trump Administration's broad efforts to detain and remove immigrants.

While some food banks are reporting decreased rates of participation, these numbers were not seen as an accurate reflection of need. **The decreases in attendance were because many community members, particularly amongst immigrant households, have been increasingly hesitant to seek assistance due to fears of indiscriminate immigration enforcement according to food assistance staff and partners**. One rural food bank described the impacts of the Trump Administration's immigration enforcement as immediate: if immigration enforcement actions in the community or captured on social media happened over the weekend, Mondays were "ghost towns." Participation would then slowly resume, demonstrating the ongoing need. Even for those with documentation of their immigration status, a fear of being swept up by overly aggressive immigration arrests meant many families in need were not able to receive food. One large urban food bank noticed that SNAP participation was trending downwards because people, especially in the Latino community, were afraid to apply for anything connected to the federal government. Many food banks found visitors picking food up for households who were frightened to visit their local food pantry. **While these reports showcase the strength of local communities in supporting each other in the face of unprecedented harassment and intimidation, they also highlight the extreme negative impacts of the Administration's immigration policies.**

Immigration enforcement

Farmworkers are essential to California's abundant, indispensable, and diverse food production. California is home to more agricultural workers than any other state; they toil day after day in extreme weather conditions to ensure American families can put food on the table in a timely fashion.

The Trump Administration's immigration enforcement actions on and near California farms and rural communities have destabilized food production in California and nationwide. These widespread enforcement actions create fear amongst farmworkers, reflected in produce and food production delays and higher costs for all Americans at grocery stores. In October 2025, the Administration itself admitted that disruption of the food system's labor force threatens stable food production and consumer prices.[44] One study concluded that the 2025 ICE raids in Oxnard, California disrupted the state's $49 billion agricultural industry and caused a 20–40 percent reduction in the agricultural workforce, $3–7 billion in crop losses, and 5–12 percent increase in produce prices.[45]

Finding 4. Higher food prices affected the purchasing power of both families and the food banks that serve them.

While higher food prices are driving families to food banks, food distributors have been affected, too. **Most food banks purchase some of their food, so increased prices simply mean less food is available for those in need. Food banks tend to purchase items, such as fresh produce, that do not consistently get donated and are important to providing balanced nutrition.**

After USDA suspended millions of dollars for food banks, the food banks were forced to purchase more food. For example, a food bank in the Sacramento Valley reported that they purchased 5-10 percent of their food in 2024. By January 2026, the same organization was forced to purchase 33 percent of their food. These challenges were compounded by the slow timeline of grant funding. Because grant funding typically arrives long after an application, rapid food price increases mean that grant awards cover less food than originally requested.

At one rural North Coast food bank, **an average food "basket" used to be 40 pounds of food. In early 2026, the basket was approximately 33 pounds of food, showing how food banks, just like consumers, are trying to do more with less.**

Food pantries also typically purchase extra food supplies through wholesalers. At one pantry in North Hollywood, they noted that their wholesalers' prices have gone up because of supply chain issues and tariffs, which were a direct result of the Trump Administration's tariff policies. Some food banks manage this reality by rotating through certain foods each week, or by purchasing smaller versions of needed supplies. **These higher prices have hit food banks particularly hard because they have occurred at the same time that more people are showing up for support.**

Finding 5. Food prices are driving people and food banks toward less healthy options.

Another recurrent theme was that increased food prices are pushing both individuals and food banks to less healthy food options. Multiple food banks reported that they prioritize fresh produce in food distributions so households can access healthier food despite rising costs. A survey conducted by a large regional food bank in California showed that the rising cost of food was highlighted as a reason for families having to choose between the quantity and quality of food they may be able to purchase. A key reason that many families visit food banks is to be able to eat better quality, healthier food.

As a result, families with limited incomes have been increasingly relying on low-cost, fast-food, and shelf-stable items, which can impact overall health and nutrition. At a North Coast food bank, the higher costs have led to an increased proportion of shelf-stable goods, instead of fresh products.

Finding 6. The impacts of food insecurity are not partisan.

Although the food insecurity challenges outlined in this report directly link to Trump Administration policies, the impacts are felt by families regardless of their political beliefs. Food banks in rural and politically conservative areas of California reported similar increases in food insecurity as urban and politically liberal areas. **Food banks also shared that the agricultural community has consistently responded with food donations to help feed hungry families.** One Northern California food bank noted that Republican-leaning farmers in their area naturally understand the importance of fighting hunger because their business is literally to feed people. These farmers want to help food-insecure people and have responded to increasing needs by donating thousands of pounds of local produce to help families and food banks despite facing their own challenges.

PART THREE: MOVING FORWARD

Looking ahead, elected officials in Washington, D.C. should adopt the following policies to lower rates of food insecurity and enable families in California and across the United States to access healthy and affordable food.

- Congress should restore the nearly $187 billion made in cuts to SNAP through 2034 in the *One Big Beautiful Bill Act*.
- Congress should provide relief to states and families by imposing, at a minimum, a two-year delay in the benefit cost-shift to states.
- USDA should restore its local food programs. Congress should make these programs permanent and provide them with mandatory funding.
- Congress should increase investments to make healthy foods (such as fruits and vegetables) more widely available to schools, food banks, and other institutions. This can be done through improving federal procurement and increasing funding for nutrition incentive programs.

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