

Background

The Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) is the lowest cost of the four food plans (thrifty, low-cost, moderate-cost, and liberal) produced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA); it represents the cost of a nutritious, practical, cost-effective diet prepared at home for a family of four, which is defined in law as an adult male and female, ages 20-50, and two children, ages 6-8 and 9-11.

Section 4002 of the 2018 Farm Bill mandated that “by 2022 and at five-year intervals thereafter, the Secretary shall reevaluate and publish the market baskets of the Thrifty Food Plan based on current food prices, food composition data, consumption patterns, and dietary guidance.” Before this statutory mandate, the TFP had not been updated since 2006, and before that 1999 and 1983. The premise of the 2018 provision was simple: an exercise in good governance to ensure these market baskets were updated with regularity. Most importantly, this provision, based on more than 40 years of precedent, was expected to remain cost neutral, affirmed by both the Congressional Budget Office and via U.S. Department of Agriculture bipartisan technical assistance.

In January 2021, President Biden issued an Executive Order requiring all executive agencies to “promptly identify actions they can take within existing authorities to address the economic crisis resulting from the pandemic,” which ensured the execution and implementation of the TFP review by USDA. The reevaluation resulted in a \$256 billion increase to the farm bill baseline over the ten-year period, violated the Congressional Review Act, and brought about the first ever trillion-dollar farm bill.

The 2024 Farm Bill

The 2024 Farm Bill reasserts Congressional intent by prescribing a cost neutral process by which future thrifty food plan updates are to be conducted. All updates will continue to reflect food prices and composition, consumption patterns, and dietary guidance, and will include annual cost-of-living adjustments. To be clear, this proposal:

- Does not cut, decrease, nor impact SNAP benefits, rather benefits will continue to increase due to annual inflationary adjustments.
- Prevents a future administration from upending the TFP methodology and decimating the SNAP benefit for over 41 million families who rely on them.
- Disallows any future administration from artificially inflating SNAP benefits.
- Maintains regular re-evaluations of the market baskets.
- Allows all stakeholders to engage in a public notice-and-comment period for no fewer than 60 days, guaranteeing transparency not had since the TFP’s creation in 1975.
- Corrects the law to ensure Hawaii’s market basket reflects both urban and rural areas.

Savings and Expenditures

While the proposal to neutralize the cost of ongoing market basket updates will garner savings on the official scorecard, it allows the Committee to reinvest in a suite of bipartisan priorities that promote access, program integrity, financial independence, and health.

Simply, without cutting benefits and by capitalizing on Congressional Budget Office methodologies, the TFP proposal permits the Committee to invest in families, including through:

- Policies that expand access to families formerly disallowed to receive benefits.
- Updates to work programs that support individuals in building career pathways without fear of losing benefits.
- Investment and modernization of commodity distribution programs, including targeted approaches for rural communities.
- Updates and investment in programs that promote healthy eating, healthy behaviors, and healthy outcomes.