

We SNAP'd
***Taking the SNAP Challenge Highlights Precarious Situations of People with
Low Food Security***

My husband, teenage daughter and I took the SNAP Challenge in September to gain a better understanding of what it's like to live with very little to spend on food. We spent \$4.25 per day, the average a person receiving food stamps, or SNAP, received in North Dakota at that time.

SNAP is short for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. SNAP benefits are there for people who earn at or below 130 percent of the poverty line. For a three-person family that is \$2,116 a month, or about \$25,400 a year. The "Supplemental" means that economists figured you should be able to spend about 30% of your income on food plus SNAP Benefits to feed your family by following a "Thrifty Food Plan." In reality, when you make this little, SNAP benefits may be all that's left to spend on food after rent, lights, heat, car, childcare...

Many of us take food-related decisions and resources for granted - a well-stocked pantry, cooking tools, pots and pans, a working stove and refrigerator. Many in our country come to the table with much less.

My husband and I found ourselves preoccupied by thoughts of food. I woke up in the middle of the night wondering if there would be enough food, especially for our growing daughter. Each morning I'd count the slices of bread remaining, and together my husband and I would decide how much to eat to ensure we wouldn't run out.

We did run out of milk, and I opened another carton in the fridge for our daughter. But what do parents do who don't have more milk or bread in the bread box? Eat less? Not pay a bill? Ask a neighbor? Visit a food pantry? When the home pantry is empty, and wallets are empty, food pantries can help fill the gap. Here in North Dakota, one in 10 of us accessed the Great Plains Food Bank and their feeding network partners in 2012.

Come November 1, even more might turn to food pantries, as a decrease in SNAP benefits goes into effect, reducing by about a dollar a day the amount a family of 3 receives. For North Dakota this means that 57,000 people will have fewer resources with which to purchase food, including 29,000 children and 13,000 seniors and people with disabilities. This also means that there will be \$6 million fewer dollars spent on retail food purchases in the state. Given that the Farm Bill conference committee in Congress is looking at even more substantial SNAP cuts, the situation of hunger and food insecurity is bound to get worse in our state and in our country.

To anyone who says that accessing food through SNAP is "taking the easy way out," I encourage you to try it yourself. I encourage anyone who helps others make decisions about food to buy or eat and any elected official who makes decisions about spending on food and nutrition programs to step up to take the Challenge. It will change how you think about how people access what is necessary for all human life: food.

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