



Arizona Community Action Association

THE ARIZONA SNAP EXPERIENCE

What is the Arizona SNAP Experience?

In July 2011, over 1.1 MILLION households in Arizona received SNAP, known in Arizona as Nutrition Assistance (food stamps). SNAP is meant to supplement a household's food budget to help families put nutritious food on the table. Unfortunately, many families struggle to stretch their benefits to the end of the month, and some are forced to visit food pantries or experience food insecurity.

ACAA's Arizona SNAP Experience is a 7-day period, September 12 – 18, 2011, during which participants will limit their total food purchases to the weekly budget of a typical SNAP participant. The goal of the Experience is to increase awareness around poverty and hunger in Arizona by facilitating a meaningful personal experience for participants and drawing media attention to the hardships faced by food stamp users. While this Experience cannot give participants a true sense of living in deep or prolonged poverty, it can provide insight into some of the challenges families confront while receiving Nutrition Assistance in Arizona.

What is the amount of the SNAP Experience food budget and how did you decide on that amount?

In July 2011, the average individual on SNAP in Arizona received \$29.24 in SNAP benefits per week, amounting to \$4.18 per day or \$1.39 per meal. For simplicity, participants in the Experience are allowed a food budget of **\$29** for the week of the Experience.

In many cases, competing priorities of utilities, rent, child care and medical expenses prevent Arizonans from spending out-of-pocket monies on additional food. For these SNAP participants, \$29.24 a week for food is the often insufficient reality. The SNAP Experience aims to provide as accurate a portrayal of the experience of living with SNAP benefits as possible. We recognize that SNAP is intended to supplement the monthly food budget (thus the federal name *Supplemental* Nutrition Assistance Program). Although we know that many households rely solely on their SNAP benefits to purchase food, calculations of food costs and average food consumption per person show us that SNAP benefits could only reasonably cover about 70% of the average person's food costs each month.

We encourage all participants in the Experience to **use only the \$29** allotted to pay for all their food costs for the week of the Experience. However, Experience participants can choose to supplement the \$29 budget with a **maximum of \$12** more to use as they please for food purchases not typically permitted on SNAP (hot and prepared meals or disallowed purchases such as alcohol products, for example). Experience participants who choose this option are asked to **not exceed \$41** in total weekly expenses, and to track how the additional \$12 is spent.

How can I participate in the Arizona SNAP Experience?

1. **Register** for the SNAP Experience by sending a completed copy of the registration form to kkahle@azcaa.org by Friday, September 9, 2011. Then check your e-mail for blogging information and resources to help you budget your week and stretch your food dollar!
2. **Purchase food and beverages** using your Experience budget during the week of September 12 – 18, 2011. See our blog (<http://arizonasnapexperience.wordpress.com>) for food buying guidelines and My Plate requirements.
3. **Record spending** on the Budget Sheet. All food purchased and eaten during the Experience, including food not permitted to be purchased with your benefit and dining out, must be included in the total spending.
4. **Eat only** food you purchase for the project:
 - a. Avoid consuming food that you already own (this does not include spices or condiments).
 - b. Avoid accepting free food from family, friends, or at work or social gatherings.
5. **Contribute to the blog** by sending entries to kkahle@azcaa.org. See the Blog Prompts for ideas on how you can contribute. Follow the blog at <http://arizonasnapexperience.wordpress.com>
6. **Spread the word** about your experience on your Twitter and Facebook accounts!



Arizona Community Action Association

REGISTRATION & CONTRACT

THE ARIZONA SNAP EXPERIENCE

Participant Name: _____

Company Affiliation (if applicable): _____

Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

E-mail Address: _____

I, _____, register for the ACAA Arizona SNAP Experience and commit to living on a food budget of \$29 from September 12 – 18, 2011.

Check this box if you plan to utilize the optional \$12 supplemental funds for purchases not allowed on a SNAP budget. Choosing this option raises your maximum weekly budget to \$41.

Signature

Date



THE ARIZONA SNAP EXPERIENCE

What items can I purchase with my \$29 during the SNAP Experience?

Experience participants should spend their SNAP budget of \$29 only on items eligible for purchase through the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. As per USDA guidelines:

Households **CAN** use the SNAP benefits to buy:

- Foods for the household to eat, such as:
 - breads and cereals;
 - fruits and vegetables;
 - meats, fish and poultry; and
 - dairy products.
- Seeds and plants which produce food for the household to eat (NOT recommended for the Experience unless it's a plant which is ready to harvest, such as fresh basil).

Households **CANNOT** use the SNAP benefits to buy:

- Beer, wine, liquor, cigarettes or tobacco;
- Any nonfood items, such as:
 - Pet foods;
 - Soaps, paper products; and
 - Household supplies.
- Vitamins and medicines.
- Foods that are hot/prepared at the point of purchase.

What can the optional additional \$12 purchase?

The SNAP Experience is based on a budget of \$29 for one week, which amounts to the average benefit an individual in Arizona received in July 2011 (\$126.71/month * 12 months /52weeks, rounded). Experience participants, however, are permitted to use an additional \$12 throughout the week to help supplement their SNAP budget. This amounts to an additional 30% of the week's budget (rounded). This additional money can be used for any purchase you wish, including purchases that are not allowed on the SNAP budget (see above). You may opt to use this money, or you may opt not to use it to experience what it's like to rely solely on SNAP for your week's food budget.

How can I stretch my SNAP budget?

The USDA recommends that SNAP recipients buy raw ingredients whenever possible, to maximize their benefits. However, you can plan your meals however you choose: buying food for the week, shopping multiple times during the week, buying in bulk where affordable, and buying produce frozen, canned, or fresh. SNAP benefits can be combined with coupons and store discount cards, but if you don't already get a newspaper you may wish to consider whether you could afford to buy one for the coupons while living on a SNAP budget.

If I don't have enough money for the week, can I go get a food box?

While many SNAP participants stretch their budget through the assistance of food co-operatives, food pantries, and food banks, we respectfully request that Experience participants not do so. Our reason for this is simple: your need is temporary for one week and done for the purposes of the SNAP Experience, but for thousands of individuals and families, those resources are a life line. Using a food box or other food donation during your Experience makes it more difficult for a household truly in need to get assistance. We do, however, encourage you to seek out a food bank, food pantry, or other meal provider and volunteer during the week of the Experience to gain first-hand perspective on the amazing work done by these providers and the process of getting assistance that those in need face.

To find a location to volunteer, please visit

<http://www.azfoodbanks.org/images/uploads/Complete%20Directory%20001-11.pdf>

How do the *MyPlate* recommendations from the USDA play into this Experience?

In the past, Arizona and many other states have hosted the Food Stamp Challenge (see more about that here: <http://frac.org/federal-foodnutrition-programs/snapfood-stamps/snapfood-stamp-challenges/>). Times are rapidly changing, and while we see sharp increases in Arizona in SNAP enrollment (23% more individuals received SNAP in July 2011 than in July 2009) we also see increasing obesity in our state. The USDA recently replaced the old Food Pyramid with the new *MyPlate* icon in an effort to more clearly illustrate a healthy approach to food. Since its release in June of 2011, many have debated whether the *MyPlate* recommendations are obtainable for low-income households. We asked this question:

Can an individual or family eat what could be considered a healthy and balanced diet on a SNAP budget?

The Arizona SNAP Experience was born from this conversation. We invite participants to experience what 1.1 MILLION Arizonans deal with every month: Trying to eat a healthy, balanced diet on a SNAP budget.

We hope that SNAP Experience participants will follow the *MyPlate* guidelines as closely as possible throughout the week of the Experience. As you plan your week and incorporate the *MyPlate* recommendations into meal planning, shopping, and your daily intake, reflect on the experience. Is it easy or difficult to follow the USDA's recommendations with your SNAP budget? How well are you able to adhere to the recommendations? Does your diet tend to fall in line with the *MyPlate* recommendations when you're not participating in the SNAP Experience?

For more on *MyPlate*, please see the *MyPlate* Information Sheet or go to <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/>

Where can I find more resources?

There are several resources for healthy eating on a budget. You may wish to start with these:

- The Arizona Nutrition Network's Resources

<http://www.eatwellbewell.org/parents/resources>

- USDA's Recipes and Tips for Healthy, Thrifty Meals

<http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/Publications/FoodPlans/MiscPubs/FoodPlansRecipeBook.pdf>

THE ARIZONA SNAP EXPERIENCE

Based on the *2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, the United States Department of Agriculture released the *MyPlate* icon to replace the food pyramid on June 2, 2011.

Participants in the Arizona SNAP Experience are encouraged to adhere to these new standards when making food purchases for the week. This aspect of the experience will help participants get a sense of whether it is realistic for low-income families and individuals to follow these nutritional guidelines.



GRAINS

This group contains any food made from wheat, oats, rice, cornmeal, barley or other cereal grain. *MyPlate* guidelines recommend that at least half of your grains are whole grains. Some common grain products are:

- Oatmeal
- Popcorn
- Bread
- Pasta
- Rice
- Tortillas
- Breakfast cereals
- Crackers

VEGETABLES

Any vegetable or 100% vegetable juice fits into this food group. According to *MyPlate* standards, half of your plate should be comprised of fruits and vegetables. Some common vegetables are:

- Broccoli
- Spinach
- Carrots
- Beans & Peas
- Corn
- Potatoes
- Cauliflower
- Onions
- Zucchini

FRUITS

This group contains any fruit or 100% fruit juices. According to *MyPlate* standards, nearly half of your plate should be comprised of fruits and vegetables. Some common fruits that may be included are:

- Apples
- Bananas
- Grapes
- Oranges
- Pears
- Grapefruit

DAIRY

All fluid milk products and foods made from milk that retain their calcium content are part of this group. According to *MyPlate* standards, you should use fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk. Some common dairy choices are:

- Fat-free or low fat milk
- Pudding
- Frozen yogurt
- Hard natural cheeses (cheddar, swiss)
- Soft cheeses (cottage cheese, ricotta)
- Yogurt

PROTEIN

This group contains all food made from meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, nuts, seeds, soy products, beans and peas. *MyPlate* guidelines recommend that you choose a variety of lean proteins, with at least 8 ounces of cooked seafood per week. Some suggestions for this food group are:

- Lean cuts of beef or pork
- Chicken
- Eggs
- Black beans
- Chickpeas
- Almonds, cashews, and peanuts
- Tofu
- Salmon, halibut, or tuna



THE ARIZONA SNAP EXPERIENCE

Please share your experience as an ACAA SNAP Experience participant with others by emailing them to us at kkahle@azcaa.org ! Read the Arizona SNAP Experience Blog at <http://arizonasnapexperience.wordpress.com/>

REFLECT ON FOOD SHOPPING

How did your shopping experience on a SNAP budget compare to a typical food shopping experience for your family?

- Did you shop at your normal grocery store? How far did you travel to get there?
- Were you surprised by the prices of any foods you bought/chose not to buy?
- Did you take advantage of sales/coupons?
- What are some favorite foods you had to leave off your shopping list this week?

How did what you purchased for the week differ from your usual grocery list because of the *MyPlate* requirements?

- Did you buy more or less of particular kinds of foods?
- Did you have to do more preparation than usual for the week?
- Was there anything you left out of the cart because it didn't fit onto your 'Plate'?

👉 Save your receipts from food shopping and share them with us!

REFLECT ON FOOD PREPARATION

How has your food preparation this week differed from typical food prep for your family?

- Do you take more or less time preparing meals? Conventional cooking or microwave?
- Are your meals simpler or more complex than the meals you would typically prepare?
- How is the experience of planning meals around the *MyPlate* specifications?

👉 Share a photo of a meal you prepared!

👉 Share a successful recipe!

REFLECT ON STICKING TO THE BUDGET

How have food temptations this week differed from a typical week?

- In what situations do you find sticking to the SNAP budget difficult?
- Have you been able to eat out this week? If so, how did this affect your food budget?
- Have you found any creative ways to stick to your budget?
- Did you have any difficulty purchasing foods that met the *MyPlate* rules using the SNAP budget?

👉 Share strategies for coping with food temptations!

REFLECT ON THE REALITY FOR FAMILIES/INDIVIDUALS ON SNAP

How has participating in the Experience supported or challenged your perceptions of SNAP participants in your community?

- What are some challenges faced by low-budget shoppers in your area?
- What are some additional challenges to low-budget shoppers looking to buy *healthy* foods in your area?
- What are some important differences between participating in the week-long Challenge and living on a SNAP budget in the longer term?

REFLECT ON YOUR EXPERIENCE

Do you think \$29 per week is enough? Why or why not? Did you use the optional \$12 in additional money? If so, why and on what purchases? If not, why not?

- What have you learned through participation in the SNAP Experience?
- What surprised you most during your experience?
- If you had to spend another week on a SNAP budget, what would you do differently?
- How easy or difficult was it to meet the *MyPlate* recommendations while sticking to your SNAP budget?