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Trump's SNAP Overhaul Threatens Small-Town Grocery Stores

July 29, 2025
— Categories: Economics

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Wright's Market, a family-owned grocery store operating in Opelika since the 1970s, on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for nearly one—third of its revenue. Owner Jimmy Wright, who has run the store for nearly three decades, emphasized that SNAP is not only vital for his business but also for working families who use it to make ends meet.

SNAP is the nation's largest anti-hunger program, providing recipients with an average of about $6.16 per day, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Beyond addressing food insecurity, the program has long served as an economic driver for grocers, farmers, and food manufacturers, especially in underserved rural communities. However, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, signed by President Trump on July 4, 2025, proposes cuts to SNAP amounting to approximately $187 billion over the next decade, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

While major chains like Walmart and Kroger can absorb the blow, smaller, independent stores may face devastating consequences. Food experts warn that many rural communities could lose their only full-service grocery store, creating new "food deserts" in both urban and rural areas.

Jimmy Wright explained that SNAP users provide a reliable customer base, influencing the store's product selection and pricing strategy. Wright's Market also participates in U.S. Department of Agriculture programs that promote access to fresh produce and dairy for SNAP recipients. Reduced funding could force such businesses to raise prices, reduce staff, or shut down entirely.

The impact of SNAP extends far beyond store owners. A 2020 study from the University of California, Davis, found that every $5 in SNAP spending generates roughly $9 in local economic activity.

Furthermore, the Commonwealth Fund estimates that these cuts could result in the loss of as many as 143,000 food—related jobs nationally.

Despite these warnings, supporters of the legislation argue that reforms are necessary to restore the program's integrity and incentivize work. The legislation expands SNAP work requirements to non-disabled adults aged 55–64 and parents with children over age 14, per Congressional Budget Office estimates and legislative text. House Agriculture Committee Chair G.T. Thompson, a Republican from Pennsylvania and key architect of the plan, claims these provisions will help individuals gain employment and ultimately benefit grocers by increasing purchasing power.

However, Economists such as Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach of Northwestern University dispute that the expanded work requirements will significantly boost employment. She notes that studies show work requirements do not significantly boost employment and instead risk pushing vulnerable populations off the program without addressing underlying barriers to work, such as addiction and mental health issues.

Moreover, the legislation transfers a portion of the program's cost burden to states, which lack the federal government's borrowing capacity. Schanzenbach further cautions that shifting program costs to states may weaken SNAP's effectiveness during economic downturns, when it has historically acted as a stabilizing force for both low-income families and local businesses.

John Ross, CEO of the Independent Grocers Alliance (IGA), predicts that SNAP funding reductions between 5 percent and 9 percent over time could force many independent grocers to close.

Although the legislation aims to promote self-sufficiency, critics argue the consequences may be far-reaching, not only for individuals in need but for the economic ecosystems that rely on SNAP as a cornerstone of local commerce.