FOOD STAMPS

Putting SNAP Online Could Help Food Deserts Bloom

Americans are growing quite fond of buying groceries online and having them delivered to their front doors. So, expanding the service to those on food stamps—especially the elderly and disabled—seems like a logical next step.

New York is starting with a two-year pilot program. Food stamp recipients with state electronic benefit transfer cards will be allowed to buy groceries online through Amazon, Walmart or ShopRite. They can have them delivered but may not use their benefits to pay for service or delivery charges. ShopRite and Amazon will deliver to the New York City area, and Walmart will deliver in upstate New York.

Retailers will be added in the next several months, allowing the program to expand into other parts of New York state, as well as into Alabama, Iowa, Maryland, Nebraska, New Jersey, Oregon and Washington.

Expanding the service, however, raises some concerns. Will staying home and having fewer social interactions and less physical activity affect participants’ health? Will the increased traffic from delivery trucks and greater use of plastic packaging do more harm to the environment? Will participants fully understand the health effects of their online purchases? And, finally, how much money will local economies lose when food stamp dollars go to large national retailers?

The U.S. Department of Agriculture oversees the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, known as SNAP. The agency will measure whether the pilot program increases access to food for SNAP beneficiaries who do not have nearby grocery stores and will assess whether ordering and paying online are safe and secure.

—Haley Nicholson

39.7 million
Average number of people using SNAP program in FY 2018
**Red Flag Laws Draw Fans, Fire**

Red flag gun laws, also known as extreme risk protection orders, are aimed at people who are in crisis and at a dangerously high risk of harming themselves or others. The laws allow law enforcement and certain other people—family members, romantic partners and, in Maryland, mental health providers—to petition courts to issue orders allowing law enforcement to remove people’s access to guns if they appear to be in imminent danger.

Connecticut and Indiana were the first states to enact red flag laws, in 1999 and 2005, respectively. Both states allow only law enforcement to petition the courts. This year, 15 states have enacted similar laws, though they vary in their definitions of “dangerous” people, burden-of-proof requirements and processes for confiscating firearms. Proponents argue the laws can save lives by helping to prevent tragedies before they occur. A study on Connecticut’s law found that one suicide was averted for every 10 to 20 guns seized under the law.

The laws are not without critics, however. Colorado’s law raises “serious concerns about due process, in that a person can have their guns taken away and their rights violated, all without ever having a chance to appear in an initial court hearing and cross examine accusers and witnesses in person,” says Weld County Sherriff Steve Reams. Once a judge hears from a respondent, about 30% of petitions are reversed, according to reports from Connecticut and Indiana.

The ACLU of Rhode Island has expressed concern over “the breadth of this legislation, its impact on civil liberties and the precedent it sets for the use of coercive measures against individuals not because they are alleged to have committed any crime, but because somebody believes they might, someday, commit one.”

About 50 red flag measures have been introduced in 21 states this year.

—Anne Teigen

**Housing**

**Oregon Is First to Enact Statewide Rent Control Protections**

Oregon lawmakers recently passed legislation that limits landlords across the state from raising rents more than 7% annually, plus any increase in the cost of living. It exempts landlords of buildings with fewer than five units or whose properties have had renters for less than 15 years.

The law also requires landlords to have a valid reason for evicting tenants. However, when a tenant chooses to leave, landlords may raise the rent above the limit for the next tenant.

California, Maryland, New Jersey and New York also have rent control laws, but Oregon is the first to go statewide with the regulations. At least 10 states have considered new controls this year.

Thirty-two states prohibit such measures. Most states bar cities from capping rent increases, though New York City, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles and San Francisco have had limits for several years.

Supporters say rent controls help address the growing costs of housing. Oregon’s median rent is up more than 14% since 2011; in Portland, it’s more like 30%, when adjusted for inflation.

“This groundbreaking tenant protection bill will make a real difference for Oregon renters,” House Speaker Tina Kotek (D) said after it passed the House.

Opponents disagree. The laws may assist lower-income renters initially, they say, but experience shows that rent controls only worsen problems in the long run. If landlords are limited in what they can charge, they are more likely to take properties off the market or raise rents disproportionately for new renters. In addition, there’s little consensus on the bill’s effect on rural areas.

“Studies have shown that rent control policies will reduce the quantity and quality of housing available,” Representative Jack Zika (R) said in a tweet.

Even supporters acknowledge the bill is no magic bullet. “This will not solve Oregon’s housing crisis — it is one of the tools in the toolbox,” Governor Kate Brown (D) said.

—Julie Lays and Sarah Hill
**WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP**

**Indiana’s POWER Caucus Puts Focus on Women**

To celebrate the ratification of the 19th Amendment, giving women the right to vote, NCSL’s Women’s Legislative Network is launching the Suffrage Amendment State History (SASH) Campaign.

Aug. 18, 2020, marks the 100th anniversary of the amendment’s approval by three-fourths of the states and its guarantee that the right to vote shall not be denied on the basis of sex. The SASH Campaign will celebrate the accomplishments of female legislators.

The campaign is currently highlighting Indiana’s POWER Caucus—or Political Organization for Women’s Education and Representation.

The POWER Caucus does not produce legislation but serves as a forum for women legislators to discuss legislative issues that could improve the quality of life for the women—and all citizens—of Indiana. Beyond legislative matters, it provides scholarships for non-traditional women students, especially those who demonstrate a passion for giving back to their communities. This may include women who are returning to school, changing careers, seeking advancement in their career, or entering the workplace after being stay-at-home moms.

Every other year, the POWER Caucus hosts a silent auction to raise funds for the scholarships. This year there will be at least 18 scholarships awarded to nontraditional women, each for $750. Indiana’s nine congressional districts will each get two.

Aug. 18, 2020

The date marks the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment’s approval by three-fourths of the states.

One will be awarded to a woman enrolled in any college courses. The second will be awarded to a woman majoring in a science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM) program. Both must attend a state higher education institution.

“Here in Indiana, whenever we can promote women in leadership by helping other women, I am all for it,” says Representative Holli Sullivan (R), the caucus president. “When we tackle problems together in a united, civil approach, we make an impact that affects women all across the state. That’s what the Indiana POWER Caucus has done since its creation, and I am beyond proud to serve as president of this bipartisan, problem-solving group.”

—Erin Smith
A ‘Good Boy’ Tennessee Lawmaker and His Mother Make Voting History

Every so often a national history-making decision comes down to a single state legislative vote. That’s what happened in ratifying the 19th Amendment giving women the right to vote. After Congress passed the amendment in 1919 it had to be ratified by at least 36 states. In 1920, Tennessee became that deciding 36th state, but not without some drama.

The story goes like this, according to Jennie Cohen with History.com.

The Tennessee Senate passed the amendment easily, but it stalled in the House. Thousands of pro- and anti-suffrage activists filled Nashville to voice their opinions. Tension was high, and debates were fierce.

Many lawmakers chose to show which side they were on by the color of the rose in their lapel. Red signified they were against giving women the right to vote. Yellow reflected support. Representative Harry Burn, who at 24 was one of the youngest legislators, wore a red rose. After a motion to table the amendment was defeated in a 48-48 tie, the speaker called for a ratification vote on Aug. 18, 1920. With an evenly divided House, it looked like Tennessee would not become the final state needed to ratify the amendment.

Except that young Burn had received a note from his mother that morning that proved providential. Phoebe “Febb” Ensminger Burn, according to Cohen, had written this to her son: “Hurrah, and vote for suffrage! Don’t keep them in doubt. I notice some of the speeches against. They were bitter. I have been watching to see how you stood but have not noticed anything yet.” She ended by imploring her son to “be a good boy” and help the great suffragist leader Carrie Chapman Catt put the “rat” in ratification.

On Aug. 18, when it was his turn to vote, holding his mother’s letter in one hand and still wearing his red rose, Burn said “aye” so quickly that it took his fellow legislators a few moments to register this unexpected response. After tensions died down a bit, Burns came out of hiding and told his fellow lawmakers, “I believe we had a moral and legal right to ratify. ... I know that a mother’s advice is always safest for her boy to follow, and my mother wanted me to vote for ratification.”

With Burn’s vote, Tennessee became the needed 36th state, enabling the 19th Amendment to become law half a century after suffragists began their campaign.

—Julie Lays

Suffrage Amendment State History

Announcing the SASH Campaign to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the 19th amendment. The Women’s Network will celebrate, state by state, the women who have contributed to American democracy in so many significant ways.

Join us at the Legislative Summit in Nashville on Aug. 6 for our program about Tennessee suffrage history.

Learn more and share state stories at www.ncsl.org/wln.
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- Blue Cross Blue Shield Association
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ANNIVERSARIES

400 Years and Counting

In 1619 a group of 22 men met in Jamestown, Va., to begin what would become a legacy of representative democracy in the British colonies and eventually, the United States.

“Virginia’s significant impact on American history and culture can be traced back to the beginning of our ongoing experiment in representative self-government. Four centuries later, it continues to motivate and empower us to take an active role in shaping the commonwealth’s future,” says G. Paul Nardo, clerk of the House.

In 1617, the Virginia Company of London received word of much unrest among the exhausted colonists. To appease them, the British monarchy via the Virginia Company gave 22 burgesses a chance to sit at the table. Their first meeting—the first such gathering in the Western Hemisphere—was a unicameral session on Friday, July 30, 1619. In later years, they separated into two chambers, the lower of them being the House of Burgesses. Their world was very different from ours, of course, but the issues they discussed in that brief first session are still debated today: taxes, race relations, what qualifications a burgess must have.

“What began during that blisteringly hot summer in 1619 with little fanfare or formality was actually the forerunner of all our American representative government institutions,” Virginia House Speaker M. Kirkland Cox (R) says.

In what some call a paradox of American history, the same year those men were seeking freedom, the first documented African slaves—Kimbundu-speaking people from current-day Angola—were brought to Virginia’s shores. Twenty or so arrived on the English ship White Lion followed a few days later by another 25 or so on the Treasurer. Both groups were captured from the Spanish slave ship San Juan Bautista, which departed Angola with 350 enslaved Africans, some 150 of whom died. The survivors were traded for supplies, and thus began their long struggle for freedom from slavery.

Both events of 1619 will be commemorated this year. NCSL is working with American Evolution, an organization created by Virginia to observe the first assembly of 1619. A series of activities throughout the year will culminate with the Forum on the Future of Representative Democracy, where attendees from across the globe will reflect on democracy and offer new visions for what it may hold in the future.

—Megan McClure