



The USDA Online Purchasing Program

A Study of SNAP families' perceptions, attitudes, and purchasing behaviors of groceries online

KEY FINDINGS



2020–2021: Rapid uptake of online grocery shopping among SNAP-eligible families since the SNAP OPP

- 58% of SNAP-participants shopped for groceries online.¹

“[It appeals to me] because the kids, the corona, taking kids to the store, walking up and down the aisles, **I forget stuff when in the store...** if I’m in the house, I know what I need, I can just **click and order.**”

SNAP-participant, shopped online



Online Grocery Service Paradox: Online grocery shopping is convenient and reduces transportation barriers, but introduces other challenges such as additional cost



Positive Attitudes

- Saves time
- Convenient
- Helps with meal planning

“Online [is easier], ‘cuz I don’t have to sit there and clip all these little paper coupons and worry about the expiration date. Online it’s right there, plain as day and all I have to do is **click the button.**”



Perceived Barriers

- Mistrust of shoppers hired to select food
- Poor food selection (especially fresh food)
- Costs and fees

“**Prices online are actually way more [than in store].** We’re all budget shopping and you compare the prices every week, different stores have different deals, so some of this stuff you’re overpaying.”



Fewer online purchases of fresh produce and sweets compared to in-store

- Concerns about being unable to personally check the quality of fresh items online.
- Online shopping had fewer impulse purchases of sweet snacks due to lack of in store nudges and distractions.

“[In-store] when they look at you, with their little beady eyes and really want that chocolate bar or the, you know [laughs], they cleaned their room, and they did this... **It’s hard to say no.**”

SNAP-participant, never shopped online

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SNAP-ELIGIBLE FAMILIES



Improve trust of online hired shoppers

- Develop a SNAP-Ed approved curricula to aid in training of online hired shoppers.
- Share information on how hired shoppers are selected and trained.
- Widely implement features online already in place at some retailers:
 - Transparent return and exchange policies.
 - Ability to pre-select substitutions.
 - Communication with online hired shopper (e.g., live web chats, messenger, call).
 - Rating of hired shoppers.
 - Tracking of groceries being delivered.



Expand SNAP online to more retailers

- Select retailers in locations that serve SNAP-eligible families.
- Standardize procedures related to item exchange, replacement, and delivery available to SNAP families.



Improve uptake of online grocery services by emphasizing positives

- Reduces costs associated with transportation.
- Ease of calculating total grocery spending before checking out.
- Less stigma associated with using a SNAP card at check out.



Reduce costs associated to online grocery shopping

- Allow physical coupons to be redeemed online.
- Implement same deals online and in-store.
- Increase online payment options (e.g., split Payments across multiple cards, use of WIC benefits, and pay in cash at delivery or pickup).
- Retailers to waive delivery fees.
- Offer in-store pickup as an alternative to delivery.

“Even if you’re on EBT or food stamps, **do you have the extra money to tip these drivers when they come to you with the food?** Probably not, you know.”

SNAP-participant, never shopped online

The SNAP Online Purchasing Program

- The USDA Online Purchasing Program tests the feasibility of using SNAP benefits for online grocery shopping.
- This program could be especially beneficial for families who live in areas with few grocery stores, do not own a vehicle, and who are at highest risk for poor diet or habits.
- To learn more check <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/online-purchasing-pilot>

¹Methodology

- This study was conducted between November 2020 and March 2021.
- We enrolled families with young children who were SNAP-eligible and either participating in SNAP (81%) or not enrolled in SNAP (19%).
- 310 families in Maryland answered a 20-minute online survey; 44 provided additional insight in qualitative interviews.
- We conducted surveys and interviews with the household’s main grocery shopper, primarily females aged 30-39.