

One in Eight Oregonians Needs Congress to Halt the Erosion in Food Stamps

by Janet Bauer and Michael Leachman

The purchasing power of food stamps has declined because Congress has not updated the value of food stamp benefits to keep up with the rising cost of food. The U.S. House of Representatives will soon decide whether to put a stop to this erosion of food stamp benefits when they vote on the 2007 Farm Bill.

The erosion in food stamps is happening for a number of reasons:

- The program's "standard deduction" has been frozen since 1995. In 2008, a typical working parent with two children will receive about \$37 less in food stamps each month than they would have received if the standard deduction were allowed to reflect inflation.
- The \$10 food stamp minimum benefit has not been adjusted for inflation in 30 years. Two thirds of the value of the minimum benefit has been eroded by inflation during this time.
- The amount that working parents are allowed to deduct from their income for child care expenses also has not kept pace with inflation. Since 1986, child care costs have doubled, but the cap on the allowable child care deduction has increased only from \$160 to \$175 or \$200 a month, depending on the age of the child.

Table 1: Food stamp recipients are a significant share of the total population in each Oregon congressional district

Congressional District	Estimated total population, 2007	Total food stamp recipients, May 2007	Share of population receiving food stamps	Share of all food stamp recipients
1 – Rep. David Wu	777,787	65,819	8.5%	14.9%
2 – Rep. Greg Walden	758,972	101,437	13.4%	22.9%
3 – Rep. Earl Blumenauer	733,194	85,110	11.6%	19.2%
4 – Rep. Peter DeFazio	730,934	104,834	14.3%	23.7%
5 – Rep. Darlene Hooley	746,012	85,247	11.4%	19.3%
Total	3,746,899	442,447	11.8%	100.0%

Source: Population estimates from 2005 American Community Survey adjusted to 2007 using May 2007 Economic & Revenue Forecast. Food stamp recipient figures from Oregon Department of Human Services. The May 2007 data is the latest data currently available.

Congress's decision on whether to halt the erosion of food stamp benefits will directly affect the grocery carts of over 440,000 Oregonians – one in every eight Oregonians. Oregonians in the state's most rural congressional districts – the districts of U.S. Representatives Greg Walden and Peter DeFazio – have the most at stake. Over 100,000 Oregonians in each of these districts rely on food stamps to feed their families (Table 1).

Hungry families needing assistance will be worse off tomorrow than they are today if Congress fails to stop the erosion in food stamps in the 2007 Farm Bill.

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