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Gov. Evers Reaches Deal with USDA, Preserves More Than \$70 Million a Month in Food Assistance for Wisconsin Families

More than 400,000 Wisconsin households to continue seeing emergency food assistance as state COVID-19 cases trend in wrong direction

MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers today announced his administration has reached a deal with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to ensure the state will continue receiving more than \$70 million in food assistance benefits for more than 400,000 Wisconsin households.

“More than \$70 million a month means we can get support to a lot of folks across our state who are still struggling in the midst of a pandemic and need help putting food on the table,” said Gov. Evers. “I’m proud we were able to work with our federal partners to come to an agreement that will ensure we can keep providing these critical resources to Wisconsinites across our state.”

Under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2020, the USDA may provide additional emergency food assistance allotments to requesting states for which an emergency or disaster declaration has been issued due to an outbreak of COVID-19. In Wisconsin, these emergency allotment benefits, which are entirely federally funded, now total more than \$70 million per month. In its decision in *Fabick v. Evers*, the Supreme Court of Wisconsin struck down Gov. Evers’ public health emergency and effectively barred the governor from declaring a new public health emergency relating to the coronavirus pandemic, leaving Wisconsin under no emergency or disaster declaration and rendering the state ineligible to receive these additional funds under the federal requirements.

After the Court’s decision in *Fabick*, Gov. Evers and members of the Evers Administration worked with the USDA/FNS to reach an agreement ensuring Wisconsin will continue to receive the funds in the absence of the governor being able to declare a public health emergency. Today, the USDA/FNS agreed to accept an Evers Administration [declaration](#) that will preserve these critical benefits.

“We have been working tirelessly with the federal government to make sure Wisconsin families don’t lose out on needed benefits due to the global pandemic,” said Department of Health Services Secretary-designee Karen Timberlake. “This action will not only benefit thousands of Wisconsin families with needed money for food but also all Wisconsin communities from grocery stores to farmers to truckers, this money will benefit Wisconsin businesses and communities.”

In January, as Republicans in the Wisconsin State Legislature were set to pass a legislative resolution ending the governor’s public health emergency, the nonpartisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau [published a memo stating](#), “Without a state emergency or disaster declaration FoodShare recipients are not eligible for these additional benefits.” Days later, Republicans in the Legislature voted to end the governor’s public health emergency and jeopardizing these critical supports even as the coronavirus pandemic continued. Gov. Evers responded shortly after, declaring a new public health emergency, [Executive Order #105](#), to

ensure the state would continue to receive more than \$50 million in funding to help provide food security to an estimated more than 240,000 Wisconsin households.

The Evers Administration has been working with the USDA/FNS to navigate a path to ongoing FoodShare emergency allotments as the state awaited resolution in the *Fabick* case. In addition to exploring approaches to change federal law removing the statewide public health emergency declaration requirement to receive these benefits, the DHS came to agreement with USDA/FNS who agreed to allow states to gain approval for two months, rather than a single month, of emergency SNAP allotments.

On March 31, 2021, the Supreme Court of Wisconsin issued a decision in *Fabick v. Evers*, striking down Executive Order #105 immediately and effectively barring the governor from issuing future orders relating to the coronavirus pandemic and in so doing jeopardized the now more than \$70 million a month in federal emergency food assistance only available to states with COVID-19 emergencies or disaster declarations in effect.

Following the *Fabick* decision, the Evers Administration worked directly with the USDA's Office of General Counsel, which is responsible for interpreting federal law for the agency, and FNS to identify a different path to meet the statewide declaration of emergency requirement. The Evers Administration worked to develop an agreement with the USDA/FNS, which has determined it will accept a declaration by DHS Secretary-designee Timberlake to obtain federal approval and secure these continued benefits.

Under Gov. Evers' previous public health emergencies, Wisconsin received \$57.5 million in increased benefits for approximately 255,000 households each month. This means that since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, these benefits have brought well over \$500 million into the state, supporting nutrition for Wisconsin's hardest hit families.

The Evers Administration's agreement with the USDA/FNS ensures the state will continue receiving these funds, benefitting grocers, farmers, and truckers who work in the food industry. Without this agreement, the effects would have been immediate and devastating for individuals, families, and entire communities, especially as the USDA recently announced even more funding for this emergency food program, increasing the loss that Wisconsin families are experiencing in terms of healthy food.

Benefits of FoodShare

- FoodShare is Wisconsin's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance program (known as SNAP in other states), providing nutrition support for working families, low-income seniors and people with disabilities living on fixed incomes, and other people and households with low incomes.
- In Wisconsin, 400,000+ households— more than 770,000 people—receive nutrition support through FoodShare.
- 34.5% of participating households have kids in them, almost 43% of households include seniors or people with disabilities.
- Currently, our FoodShare households spend their benefits at more than 5,000 retailers across the state. Many of our businesses count on that revenue: not only local grocery stores, but also farms and companies that supply, transport, and market the food purchased.
- The federal government estimates that every dollar of FoodShare benefits spent generates up to \$1.5 in additional economic activity and increases jobs. And research shows that this money is spent

quickly, meaning that our local businesses – grocers, farmers, and truckers – will also feel the impact to any change, both positive or negative, quickly.

FoodShare during the Pandemic

- The number of people and families receiving FoodShare benefits in Wisconsin has been increasingly rapidly over the past year in response to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic with an increase of 140,000 people enrolled in the program over the past year.
- In December 2019, FoodShare households spent an average of \$2 million each day on food in Wisconsin over approximately 80,000 transactions. A year later, that figure increased 220%, with households spending \$4.5 million at their local retailers across more than 153,000 transactions.

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