

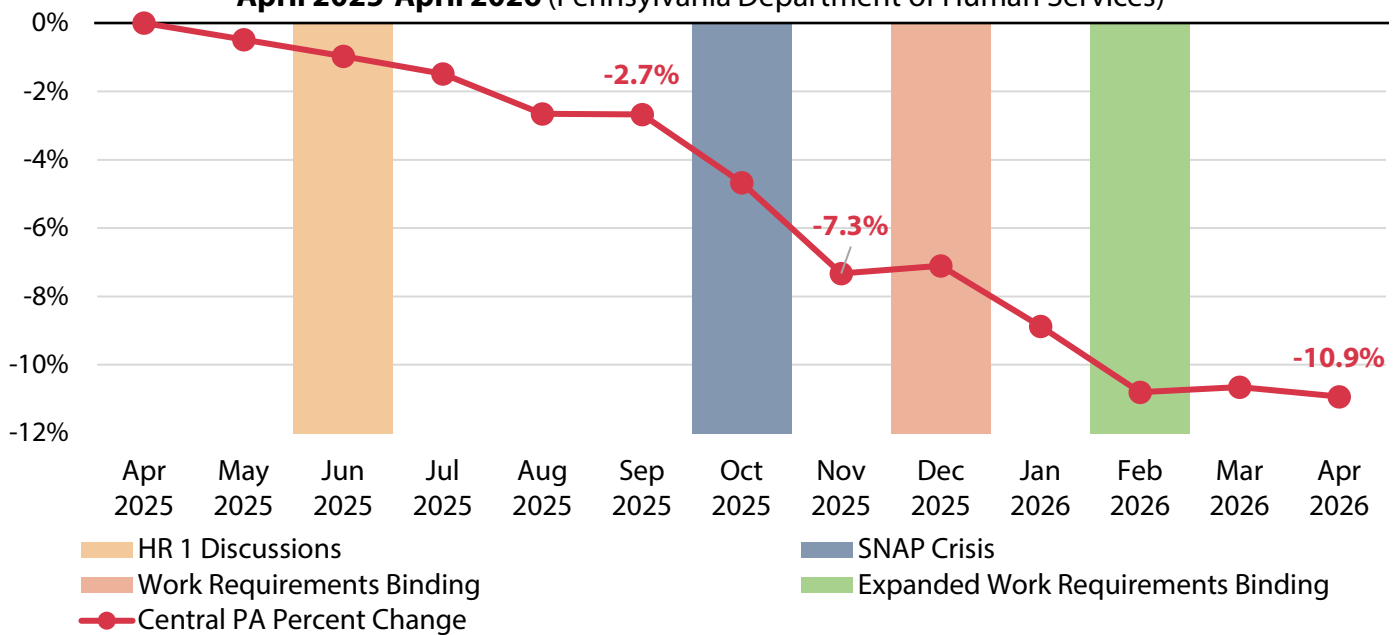


Policy Blog: Evolution of SNAP Participation and Charitable Food Demand in Central Pennsylvania

By Zach Zook, Chief Strategy Officer

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as food stamps, is the nation’s largest food assistance program and is a critical support for low-income individuals and families at risk of food insecurity. SNAP provides nine meals for each one the Feeding America network shares with our neighbors, showing the tremendous scale and impact of the program. However, **SNAP participation has fallen by 10.9% in central Pennsylvania over the last year.** In this policy blog, CPFBI PR assesses how changes to SNAP have driven a rising need for charitable food in central Pennsylvania.

Percent Change in SNAP Participation in Central Pennsylvania, April 2025-April 2026 (Pennsylvania Department of Human Services)

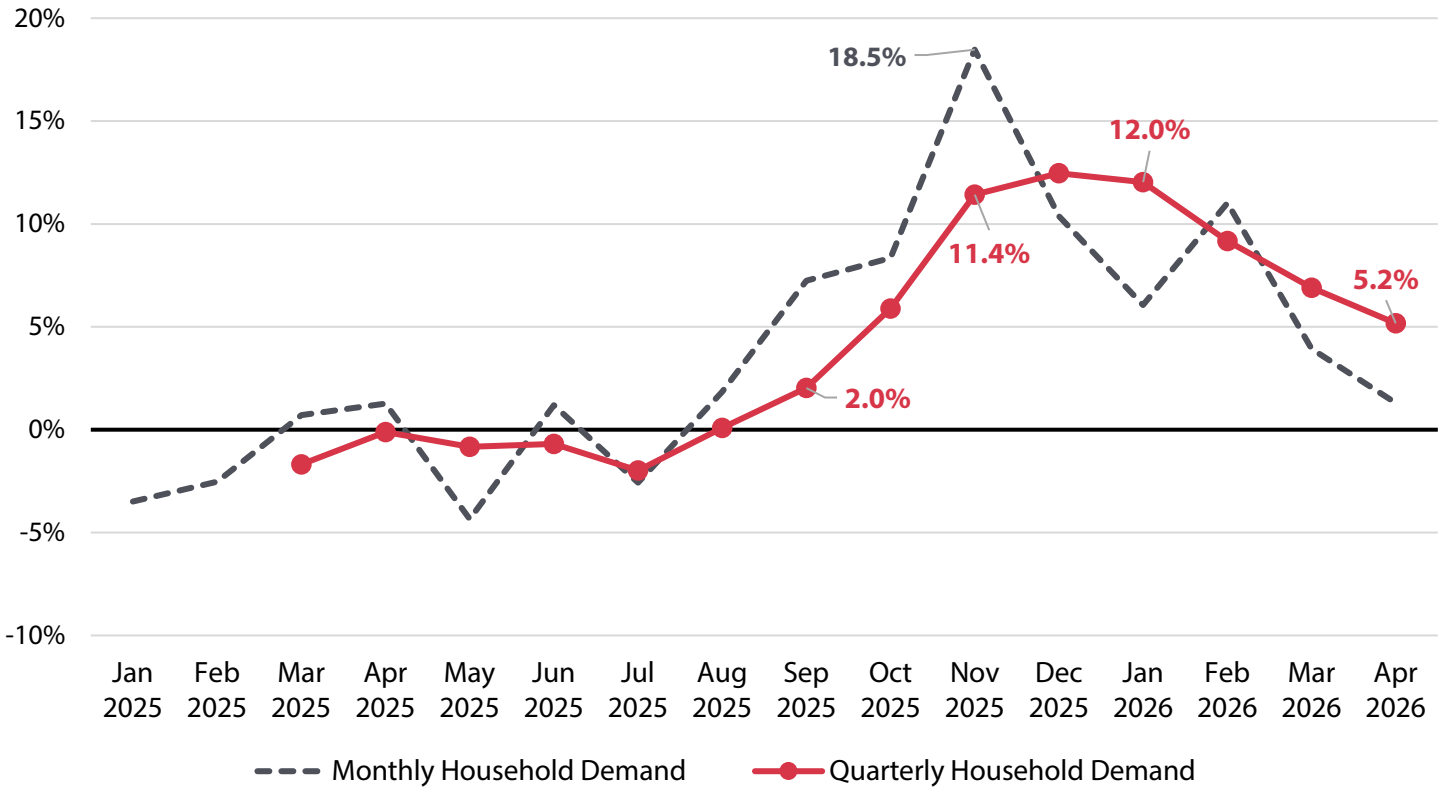


As shown in the chart above, SNAP participation began to drop in Spring 2025, corresponding with discussion and media coverage of program cuts under consideration for inclusion in that year’s budget reconciliation bill, also known as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act. Participation continued to drop upon the bill’s passage in early July 2025, and as expanded work requirements and other changes took effect beginning in Fall 2025. In recent months, the decrease in SNAP participation has slowed substantially, but overall participation rates remain low. More than 250,000 fewer Pennsylvanians, including more than 40,000 residents of central Pennsylvania, received SNAP in April 2026 than did one year prior.

Because of these large drops in SNAP participation, more people have begun to visit the charitable food system in order to access the food they need. The delay in benefit payments caused by the government shutdown in November 2025 highlighted the close link between SNAP and the charitable food system, as food pantry visits increased by 40% year over year in the first week of November.

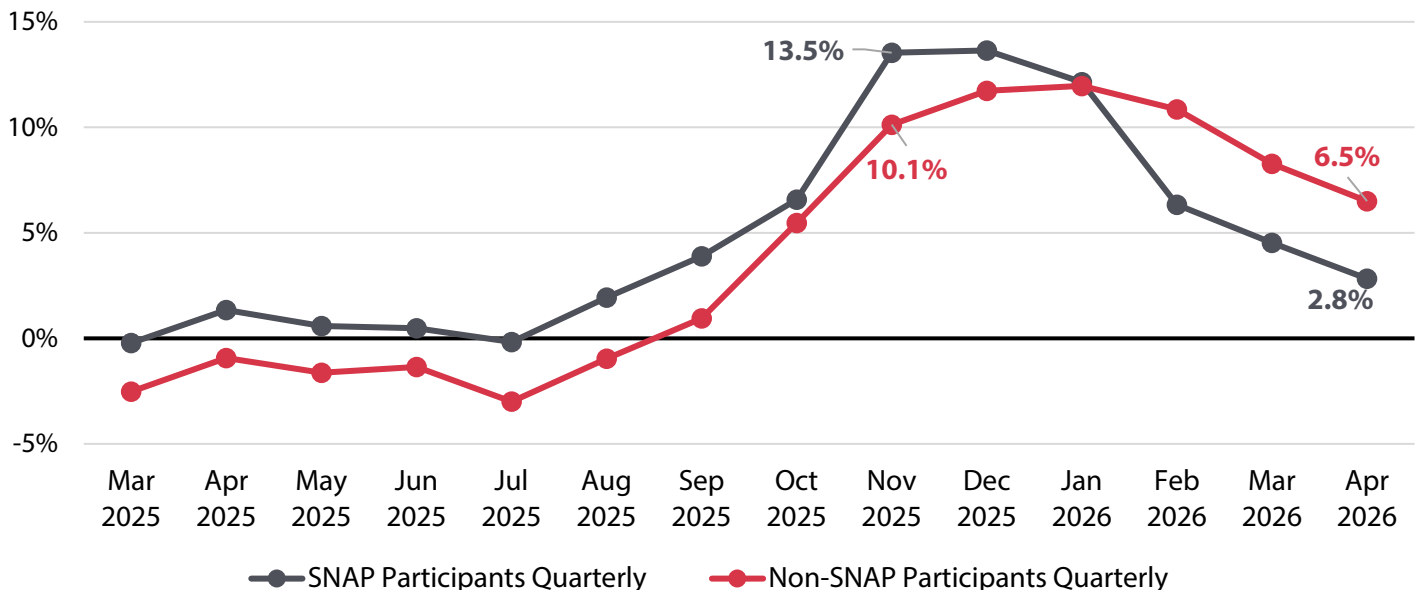
The ongoing rise in food pantry visit frequency through Spring 2026, well after the major shock of the SNAP crisis, continues to demonstrate the strong tie between decreasing SNAP participation and increasing need for other forms of assistance. Visits to the charitable food system on a quarterly average are up 5.2% between February and April 2026 compared to visits over the same time frame in 2025. The graph below shows both monthly and quarterly demand, as month-to-month trends may be affected by differences in distribution frequency across agencies and other factors.

Year-Over-Year Percent Change in Visits to the Charitable Food System in Central Pennsylvania (84 Service Insights Agencies)



Over the last few months, non-SNAP participants have been the main force behind the rise in visits to the charitable food system. The graph below shows quarterly average food pantry visits for both SNAP and non-SNAP participants over the last year. During the SNAP crisis in November 2025, increased demand was driven by the delay in benefit delivery, as quarterly average visits among SNAP recipients increased by 13.5% year over year. However, since February 2026, increased charitable food demand has been caused primarily by non-SNAP participants; there has been a 6.5% increase in food pantry visits among households who do not participate in SNAP compared to a 2.8% rise for those who still benefit from the program.

Year-Over-Year Quarterly Percent Change in Visits to the Charitable Food System by SNAP Participation Status (84 Service Insights Agencies)



The difference in the increased rate of food pantry visits between SNAP participants and non-participants can be attributed to the changes to the program and loss of benefits, as other factors that may induce broader increases in charitable food demand, such as food and fuel inflation, affect both groups similarly.

Though this 3.7 percentage point difference may seem small, the 6.5% rise in visits for non-SNAP participants is more than double the 2.8% rate of increase among those who are still on the program. This differential equates to thousands of additional monthly visits to the charitable food system; CPFEB's network already serves more than 270,000 neighbors per month. At the same time, federal direct support for food banks via The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) has decreased by more than half over the last year, and the and the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFPA) has been eliminated entirely. Combined, these policy changes mean that the charitable food system is being tasked with serving more people with fewer resources.

The Central Pennsylvania Food Bank is committed to continuing to serve our neighbors in need in collaboration with our more than 1,100 partner agencies and programs, but we cannot meet the need alone. Advocacy to reverse the 2025 changes to SNAP and to expand TEFAP, as well as donations of time or money to support the charitable food system are all actions interested stakeholders can take to help us build a central Pennsylvania where no one goes hungry.