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SNAP Workers: Working People & SNAP Benefits in Massachusetts

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Executive Summaryⁱ

SNAP serves as a crucial safety net for workers in precarious and low wage jobs, providing essential food assistance for families across Massachusetts. This report examines workers in Massachusetts who receive SNAP benefits in their households, finding:

- Over 1 in 10 workers in Massachusetts live in households that receive SNAP benefits, amounting to over 480,000 people.
- The vast majority of workers who receive SNAP benefits work in the private sector. 11.9% of the private sector workforce relies on SNAP.
- Retail and health care industries have the highest numbers of SNAP recipients, with over 68,000 workers in each. Combined, these two industries account for 29% of all workers receiving SNAP benefits in Massachusetts.
- Over 1 in 3 personal care assistants and home health aides – two of the fastest growing occupations – are SNAP recipients.
- Over 1 in 5 cashiers, nursing assistants, janitors and cleaners, cooks and food prep workers, fast food workers, security guards, hand laborers/stockers/movers, and drivers receive SNAP benefits.
- Women workers are more likely to receive SNAP benefits (12%), compared to men workers (9.5%).
- Most working-age (18-64) SNAP recipients work. In Massachusetts, 74% of working-age people who receive SNAP household benefits work.
- Of all workers who receive SNAP benefits, half work full-time and half work part-time.
- Several counties have disproportionately high rates of SNAP workers, including Hampden (19.0%) and Bristol (14.8%) counties.
- Business models that rely on low-wage jobs increase the need for SNAP. Employees of some of the largest companies in the country— from Walmart to Amazon— receive SNAP benefits in Massachusetts, as documented in a 2020 report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office.

Introduction

Established by the Food Stamp Act in 1964, SNAP is the country's largest anti-hunger program. SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, also known as food stamps, provides food assistance to low-income families. The program serves over 41 million people, or 12.3% of U.S. residents.ⁱⁱ Massachusetts has a higher SNAP rate than the U.S, with 16% of the Massachusetts population receiving SNAP.

This report examines workers in Massachusetts who live in households that receive SNAP benefits. The analyses use data from the American Community Survey (ACS), a representative survey administered by the Census Bureau. The report examines the most recent and comprehensive available ACS data, 2019-2023. See the methodological appendix for details.

SNAP serves as a crucial safety net for workers in precarious and low-wage jobs, providing nutritious food that low wages cannot buy. Millions of working Americans are eligible for federal assistance programs, such as SNAP and Medicaid, because their wages are so low. Analyzing data from February 2020, a report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office found that some of the biggest and most profitable companies in the country employed workers who received SNAP benefits in Massachusetts.ⁱⁱⁱ Many of Fortune's 50 largest national employers had high numbers of SNAP recipients, including TJ Maxx, CVS, McDonalds, Amazon, Target, Home Depot, FedEx, and Walgreens. The top five employers of SNAP recipients in 2020 Massachusetts were:

- ❖ Dunkin Donuts (1,195 workers received SNAP)
- ❖ PCA Quality Home Care Workforce Council (1,101 workers received SNAP)
- ❖ Stavros Center for Independent Living (846 workers received SNAP)^{iv}
- ❖ Walmart (797 workers received SNAP)
- ❖ Stop & Shop (794 workers received SNAP)

Some companies whose employees use SNAP benefits, including Target, Walgreens, CVS, and Walmart, are also designated SNAP retailer locations where people can use their SNAP benefits to purchase food.^v These large companies benefit from federal funds in two ways: SNAP provides subsidies to their low-wage workers, and their sales are bolstered by SNAP patrons. This system increases large companies' profits while placing the burden of low wages and food insecurity on workers and taxpayers.

SNAP supports precarious workers in several ways. In addition to compensating for low wages, the program provides stability to workers facing uneven, unpredictable schedules.

For workers who cannot count on a stable number of hours per week, or a stable paycheck, SNAP provides a buffer against hunger. SNAP also supports workers who are impacted by fluctuating economies, including layoffs. The program also protects workers who must take unpaid leave for medical or family emergencies, because their employers do not provide paid time off. Although many private sector workers have some paid family and medical leave, significant groups of workers are excluded from the Massachusetts Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) program, including teachers and paraeducators, municipal workers, and newly hired workers.

Income limits, which vary by state, determine SNAP eligibility. Excluding those over 60 years old and disabled people, the gross monthly income limit is \$2,608 with a maximum benefit of \$298 for a single person in Massachusetts per month. For a household of four, the income limit is \$5,358 with a maximum family benefit of \$994.^{vi} That means that workers who earn less than \$64,296 can be eligible for SNAP benefits for their family, depending on their specific circumstances. Half of Baystaters earn less than the SNAP income limit for a family of four: the annual median wage in Massachusetts is \$62,270.^{vii} The average SNAP benefit in Massachusetts in 2024 was \$196 a month.^{viii}

Most working-age SNAP recipients that are able to work do work. In Massachusetts, 74% of working-age people (18 to 64 years) receiving SNAP had earnings from working, based on ACS analyses from 2019-2023. SNAP work rules require most working-age non-disabled adults without dependents to meet work requirements, typically 20-hours a week.^{ix}

SNAP eligibility requirements changed due to the 2025 Trump administration's Big Beautiful Bill. New work requirements include expanded age limits (from 54 to 64 years old), removed exemptions for veterans, people experiencing homelessness, and those aging out of foster care, and narrower exemptions for caregivers.^x The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates these restrictions will reduce SNAP participation by an average of 2.4 million people each month from 2025 to 2034.^{xi}

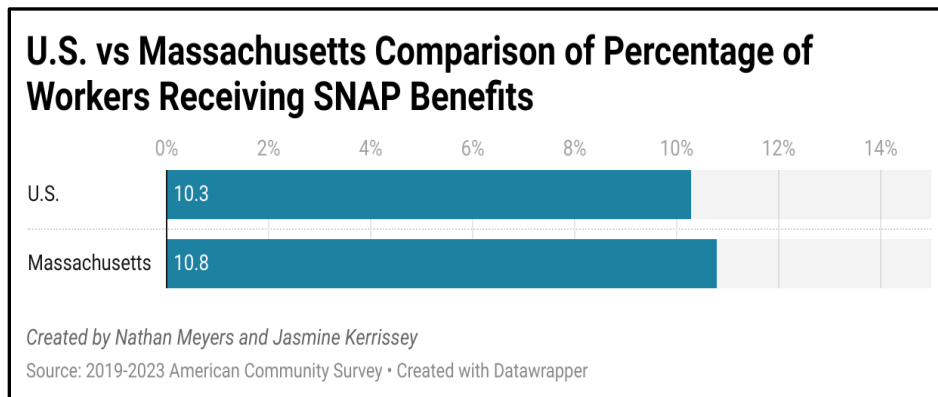
The 2025 government shutdown highlights the large scale, essential role that SNAP plays in alleviating hunger across America. During the shutdown, SNAP benefits were not distributed on time, stressing food banks.^{xii} The shutdown crisis underscores the need to address the root causes of the hunger epidemic, especially as SNAP eligibility restrictions tighten.

Workers Rely on SNAP

Nearly half a million individuals – over 480,000 – are working and receiving SNAP benefits in their Baystate households. Approximately 10.8% of all working people in Massachusetts live in a household that relies on SNAP benefits.

The Massachusetts rate is slightly higher than the U.S. rate of 10.3%, as Figure 1 shows. This higher rate is notable because the Massachusetts economy is ranked among the best in the country. While metrics differ, WalletHub designated Massachusetts as number 1 and US News ranked Massachusetts as number 13 of all state economies.^{xiii} The high SNAP rate is partly due to the higher income limits for SNAP eligibility in Massachusetts, compared to some states. Still, considerable numbers of Massachusetts workers rely on food assistance, as we demonstrate across several dimensions of employment, demographics, and geography.

Figure 1.



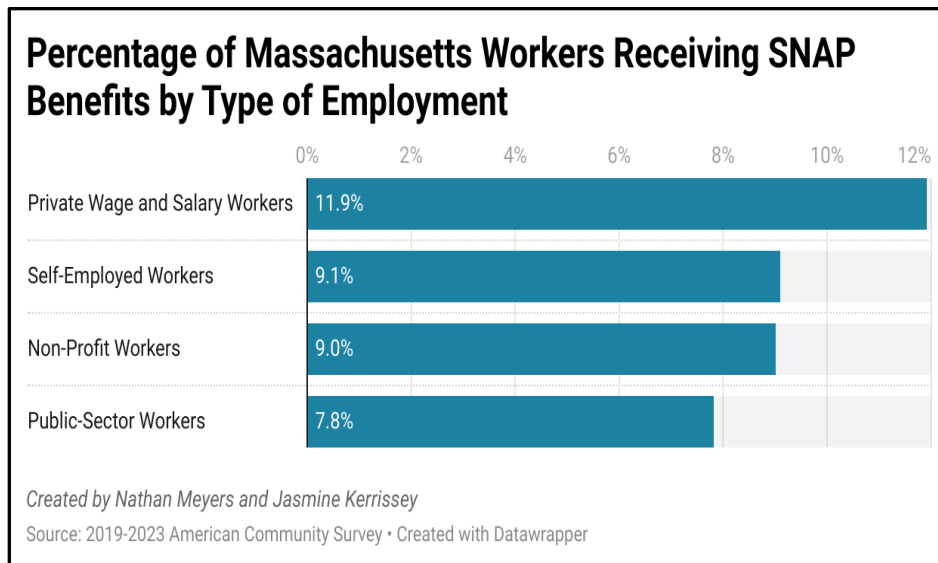
Even full-time workers can be eligible for SNAP benefits. Workers who are paid low wages, especially when they have families to support, are most at-risk of needing SNAP to prevent food insecurity. Not surprisingly, ACS analyses show that workers who use SNAP benefits are paid low wages on average. The average earnings of workers in SNAP households are approximately \$27,800, well below the annual median wage in Massachusetts of \$62,270. In addition, workers receiving SNAP benefits have larger families. SNAP workers have an average family size of 3.57 people, versus 2.76 people for non-SNAP workers. The combination of low-wage work and larger families creates increased need for food assistance.

Half of workers receiving SNAP work full-time, defined as 35 hours or over. Three million Massachusetts workers are full-time and 1.5 million are part-time, based on the ACS analysis. Over 242,000 from each of these groups receive SNAP benefits, meaning half of workers

receiving SNAP are employed full-time and half are employed part-time. Part-time workers may be part-time for many reasons, including holding jobs without stable, full-time hours or having family responsibilities or health issues. In total, 8% of full-time workers and 16% of part-time workers in MA receive SNAP benefits.

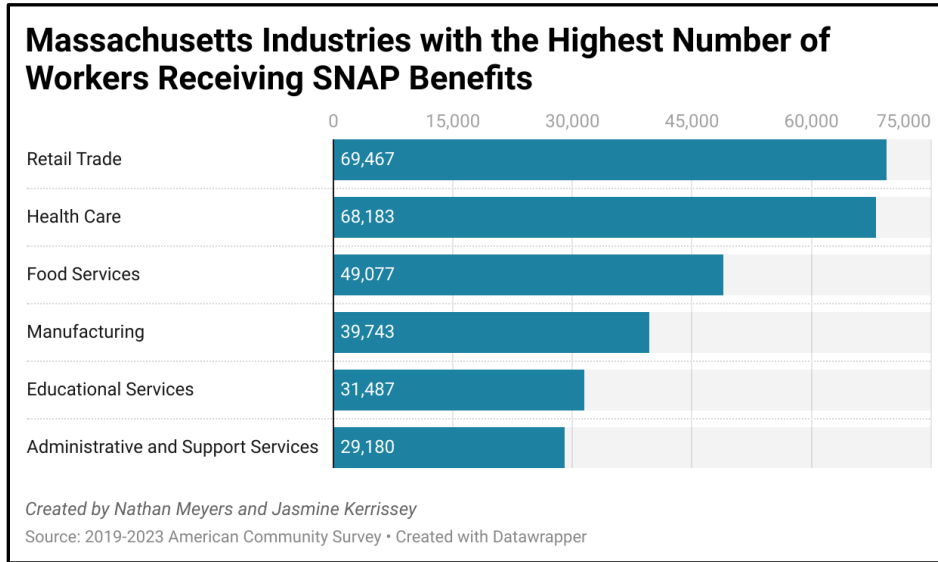
Where do workers with SNAP benefits work in Massachusetts? The vast majority of them work wage and salary jobs in the private, for-profit sector – approximately 347,000 workers. As Figure 2 reports, the private sector also has the highest percentage of SNAP workers, 11.9%. Self-employed and nonprofit workers are in less need of SNAP benefits, with rates of 9.1% and 9.0% respectively. Public-sector workers are the least likely class of worker to be SNAP recipients, with 7.8%. For detailed information on class of worker, see Appendix Table 1.

Figure 2.



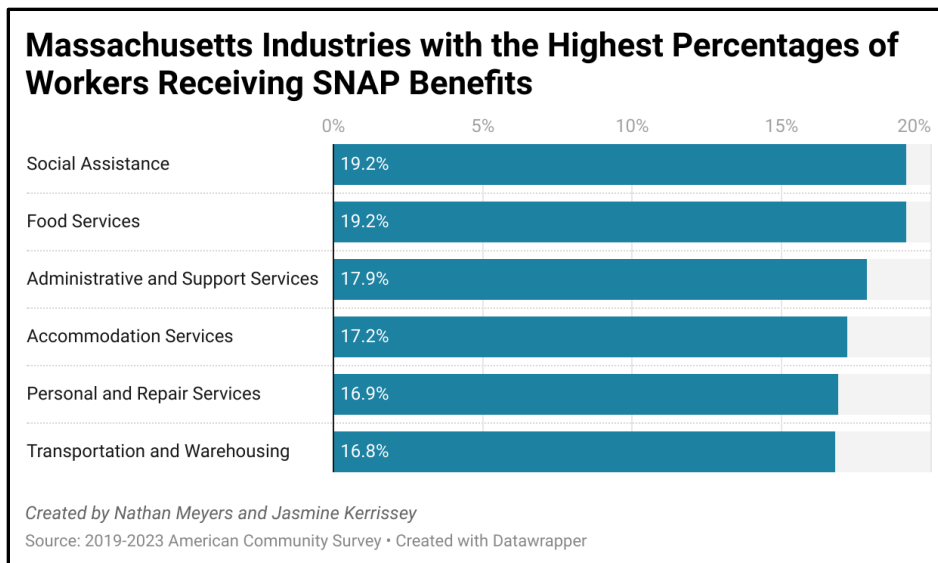
Service sector industries have the highest number of SNAP workers as well as the highest percentages. Retail and health care are the leading industries with the highest number of workers who rely on SNAP benefits, with over 68,000 and 69,000 respectively. Combined, these two industries account for 29% of all SNAP workers (see Figure 3).

Figure 3.



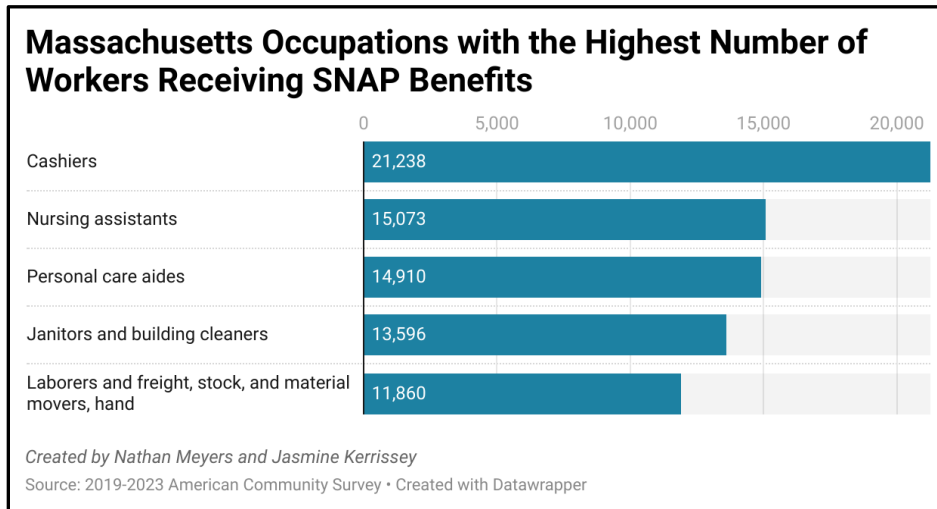
Food service companies in Massachusetts employ 49,000 low-wage workers who rely on SNAP to ward off hunger. Approximately 19.2% of both food service workers and social assistance workers rely on SNAP benefits (Figure 4). Other industries with notably high rates include administrative and support services, accommodation services, personal and repair services, and transportation and warehousing. By contrast, some large industries have very low rates of SNAP usage. Professional, scientific, and technical services employ 493,700 workers in Massachusetts, with only 19,900 receiving SNAP benefits, amounting to 4% of the industry. For industry details, see Appendix Table 2.

Figure 4.



Of all occupations in Massachusetts, cashiers have the most SNAP recipients, totaling more than 21,000 SNAP workers, as reported in Figure 5. The median hourly wage for cashiers is \$16.73, meaning that half of cashiers earn less.^{xiv} With low wages, 23% of cashiers are SNAP beneficiaries. Other occupations with high numbers of SNAP recipients include nursing assistants, personal care aides, janitors and building cleaners, and general laborers.

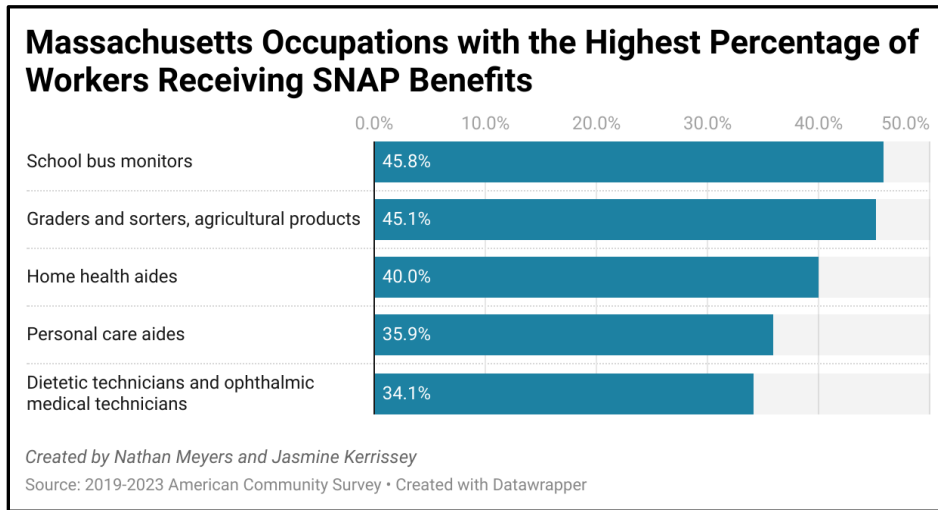
Figure 5.



Several occupations have particularly high percentages of workers with SNAP benefits, as reported in Figure 6. School bus monitors, agricultural product graders and sorters, and home health aides have rates of over 40%.

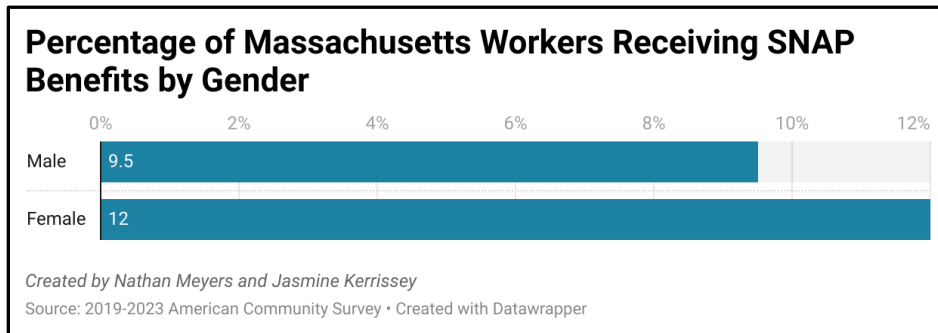
Personal care aides and home health aides, two occupations with very high SNAP usage among workers, are projected to be among the top 20 fastest growing occupations in the country.^{xv} Aides are low-wage jobs, with a median hourly wage of \$19, and have very high numbers of SNAP recipients. For detailed occupational tables, see Appendix Table 3.

Figure 6.



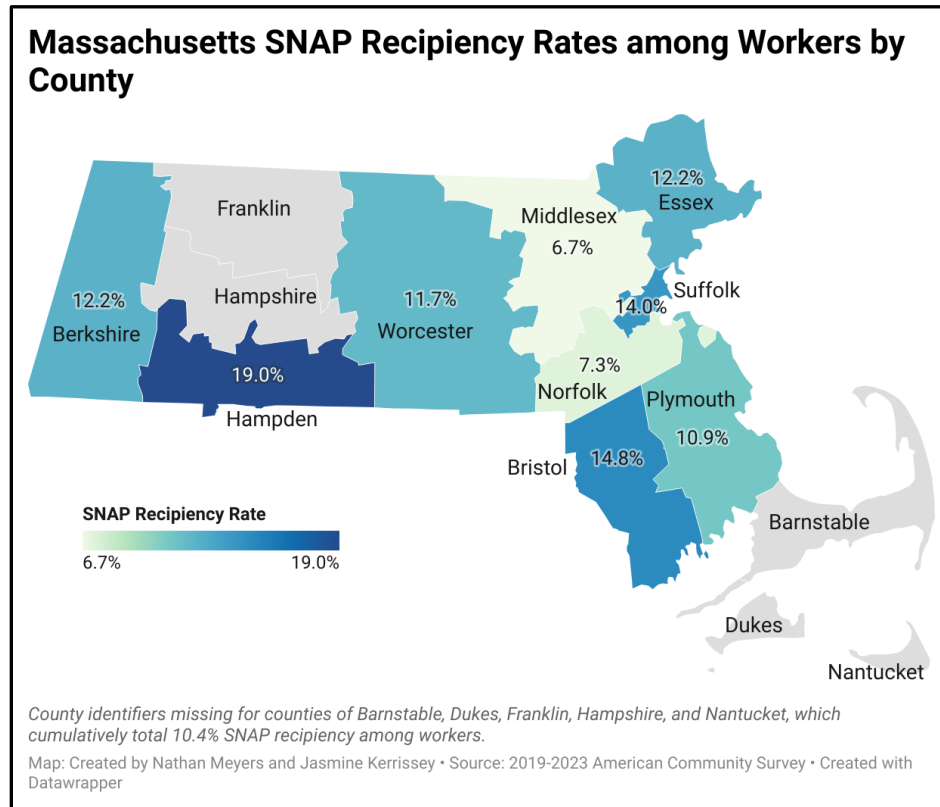
Women workers are more likely than men workers to receive SNAP benefits to their households. Shown in Figure 7, 12% of women workers are SNAP beneficiaries, compared to 9.5% of men workers. This gender discrepancy is likely because women are more likely to receive low wages, have caregiving responsibilities that require flexible schedules, and head one-parent households with children.

Figure 7.



Finally, how are workers with SNAP benefits distributed geographically? Although the 2019-2023 ACS does not provide data for all individual counties, Hampden County stands out, with 19% of workers receiving SNAP. Shown in Figure 8, Bristol County also has high rates, with 14.8% of workers relying on SNAP.

Figure 8.



Conclusion

Over 480,000 working people in Massachusetts depend on SNAP assistance to survive. The 1 in 10 working residents of Massachusetts who receive SNAP benefits are clustered in low-wage occupations and in some of the fastest-growing industries in the country, such as personal care assistants and home health aides. SNAP plays an essential role for low-income workers: food benefits help workers to survive in the face of low-wage work, unstable schedules, unpaid leave for medical and family emergencies, and unemployment spells.

These findings suggest an urgent need for the state and its largest employers to do more to support low-income families. In the short term, any pause to SNAP benefit distributions, such as during the 2025 government shutdown, can have devastating consequences for thousands of families, even in a state like Massachusetts with a strong economy. Changes to eligibility, such as the expanded work requirements started in November 2025, are likely to exclude individuals and families that desperately need supplemental food assistance. If the federal government cuts SNAP benefits for workers who need them, the state must step in to fill the gap to avoid disastrous consequences.

Longer term, these findings highlight the need to improve the lowest quality jobs in Massachusetts. Employers should strive to not create jobs with low pay, unstable scheduling, or insufficient access to paid leave. Massachusetts has taken important steps to improve job quality, including increasing the minimum wage to \$15 and implementing a Paid Family and Medical Leave program for many private sector workers. Still, even in a state like Massachusetts, 1 in 10 workers and their families rely on SNAP benefits. These workers disproportionately work in the private sector in low-wage jobs, meaning that the government effectively subsidizes profits for companies with low-wage business models. As the 2020 report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office documents, some of Massachusetts' largest companies employ SNAP workers, from Walmart to Stop and Shop. The recent increase in gig work since 2020, embraced by companies like Uber and Door Dash, has created a new wave of precarious, insecure workers. Significant numbers of these gig workers likely rely on SNAP benefits. The business models of low-wage companies rely on federal anti-hunger efforts to ensure that their lowest paid, most precarious employees are fed.

SNAP is an essential anti-hunger program, and the data show that investing in nutrition assistance and healthy families is always worthwhile. Low wages contribute to the need for SNAP. Employers must improve wages and working conditions, especially by making sure that all workers have living wages, predictable schedules with sufficient hours, and access to paid family and medical leave. Workers who contribute so much to the Massachusetts economy should have the dignity to be able to afford food for their families and so much more.

Appendix

Methodology

Unless otherwise stated, all results are derived from the 2019-2023 American Community Survey, obtained from the IPUMS USA database. Respondents are considered workers if they are employed and in the labor force. We refer to calculated medians as “average” values. All results use person-level sampling weights. See: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs.html>

Employment totals from the American Community Survey (ACS) are not directly comparable to Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)/ Current Population Survey (CPS) employment estimates. The ACS framework focuses on household demography, whereas the official employment numbers from CPS are framed around workers/workplaces. The ACS includes a broader population universe (e.g., armed forces), uses a rolling reference week, bases employment information on geographic residence rather than workplace location, and relies on self-administered responses, all of which tend to produce higher counts of people classified as employed relative to the CPS, the source of official BLS employment levels. For elaboration of these differences, see: <https://www.bls.gov/lau/acsqa.htm#Q06>.

Table 1: Massachusetts SNAP Reciprocity by Class of Worker

	No. of SNAP Workers	Pct. of Workers
Private Wage and Salary Workers	347,511	11.9%
Self-Employed Workers	38,524	9.1%
Non-Profit Workers	53,730	9.0%
Public-Sector Workers	44,769	7.8%
Total	4,477,973	10.8%

Table 2: Massachusetts SNAP Reciprocity by Industry

Industry	No. of SNAP Workers	Pct. of Workers	Total Workers
Social Assistance	26,080	19.2%	135,604
Food Services	49,077	19.2%	255,890
Administrative and Support Services	29,180	17.9%	163,470
Accommodation Services	6,777	17.2%	39,449
Personal and Repair Services	23,111	16.9%	136,395
Transportation and Warehousing	27,570	16.8%	164,371
Retail Trade	69,467	14.8%	468,271
Waste Management Services	1,735	14.6%	11,857
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	2,837	13.6%	20,877
Health Care	68,183	12.1%	563,967
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	221	12.0%	1,846
Wholesale Trade	8,907	10.9%	81,750
Construction	28,487	10.6%	269,526
Manufacturing	39,743	10.3%	386,260
Civic, Labor, Religious, and Political Organizations	5,950	9.8%	60,726
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	10,244	9.4%	109,458
Public Administration	10,547	6.1%	172,457
Educational Services	31,487	5.9%	530,955
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate, and Rental and Leasing	18,411	5.8%	316,153
Utilities	1,598	5.4%	29,699
Information	4,641	5.2%	89,723
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	19,946	4.0%	493,739

Table 3: Massachusetts SNAP Reciprocity by Occupation, Top 25

Occupation	No. of SNAP Workers	Pct. of Workers	Total Workers
Cashiers	21,238	23.0%	92,368
Nursing assistants	15,073	31.7%	47,492
Personal care aides	14,910	35.9%	41,476
Janitors and building cleaners	13,596	21.4%	63,547
Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers, hand	11,860	22.3%	53,301
Driver/sales workers and truck drivers	11,578	16.6%	69,708
Customer service representatives	11,355	16.0%	70,816
Cooks	11,201	22.7%	49,367
Retail salespersons	10,563	12.5%	84,320
Waiters and waitresses	9,241	17.6%	52,411
Maids and housekeeping cleaners	8,963	24.6%	36,416
Stockers and order fillers	8,528	21.9%	38,992
First-line supervisors of retail sales workers	7,430	10.7%	69,270
Food preparation workers	7,002	24.4%	28,739
Other managers	6,523	4.5%	143,500
Construction laborers	6,301	14.8%	42,712
Childcare workers	5,978	17.5%	34,122
Miscellaneous production workers, including equipment operators and tenders	5,831	23.9%	24,384
Secretaries and administrative assistants, except legal, medical, and executive	5,633	8.9%	63,003
Fast food and counter workers	5,631	20.9%	26,977
Home health aides	5,562	40.0%	13,901
Teaching assistants	5,343	10.2%	52,453
Security guards and gaming surveillance officers	5,307	22.8%	23,249
Landscaping and groundskeeping workers	4,968	15.6%	31,784
Other assemblers and fabricators	4,709	23.5%	20,072

ⁱ Nathan Meyers, PhD, is a Labor Center Fellow (npmeyers@umass.edu). Jasmine Kerrissey is Director of the Labor Center and sociology professor (jasmine@soc.umass.edu). The authors thank Eve Weinbaum, Carolina Bank Muñoz, Clare Hammonds, Sierra Dickey, and Sara Trongone for their thoughtful comments.

ⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Agriculture: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/chart-gallery/chart-detail?chartId=55416>

ⁱⁱⁱ For example, Walmart was listed as a top SNAP employer across states studied. Walmart's 2025 annual 10-K filing to the SEC, for example, reported a net income of \$20.2 billion, nearly double 2023 profit levels (pg. 39). Of this, \$6.7 billion was paid as shareholder dividends and \$4.5 billion was spent on stock buybacks (pg. 45).

<https://www.sec.gov/ix?doc=/Archives/edgar/data/0000104169/000010416925000021/wmt-20250131.htm>

^{iv} Stavros employs large numbers of workers with disabilities, who may be eligible for SNAP benefits.

^v Snap Retailer finder:

<https://usdafns.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=15e1c457b56c4a729861d015cd626a23>

^{vi} See Mass Legal Help: <https://www.masslegalhelp.org/public-benefits-ssi/snap-food-benefits/snap-gross-income-and-maximum-benefits-individuals-and>

^{vii} BLS data: <https://data.bls.gov/oes/#/area/2500000>

^{viii} According to the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities: <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/a-closer-look-at-who-benefits-from-snap-state-by-state-fact-sheets#Massachusetts>

^{ix} For work rules, see: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/work-rules-for-snap-clients#general-snap-work-rules>

^x The National Conference for State Legislators. <https://www.ncsl.org/state-legislatures-news/details/5-changes-the-beautiful-bill-is-bringing-to-snap>; For specifics on Massachusetts, see: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/november-2025-snap-updates#one-big-beautiful-bill-implementation>

^{xi} Congressional Budget Office. August 11, 2025. “Estimated Effects of Public Law 119-21 on Participation and Benefits Under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program”

^{xii} Massachusetts was among the states to release the benefits in full after a lower court ordered benefits to be released. Even so, food banks were stressed. See, for example:

https://www.berkshireeagle.com/news/local/snap-delay-fuels-food-insecurity/article_7adaf6bb-4ea4-4102-95e7-b67978b99f5e.html

^{xiii} US News: <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/rankings/economy>; also see

<https://www.mass.gov/news/massachusetts-ranked-best-state-economy-in-the-country>

^{xiv} See BLS occupational data for Massachusetts: <https://data.bls.gov/oes/#/area/2500000>

^{xv} See BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/fastest-growing.htm>