

Food program cuts raise alarm

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Uncertainty looms over the number of Del Norte County residents who will be affected by the Trump Administration's tightening of rules regarding food stamps.

The rule in question is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which applies to "able-bodied adults with no dependents."

Some geographic areas with above-average unemployment have been using waivers to keep people on SNAP benefits longer than the mandated maximum of three months during a three-year period.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, counties with an unemployment rate as low as 2.5% were included in those areas. That changes April 1, 2020 to a new low of 6% to receive a waiver.

The USDA estimates that in 2019 there were more than 36 million Americans receiving SNAP benefits, up from 17 million in 2000. It expects that about 7% of those beneficiaries are "able-bodied adults without dependents." So about 688,000 recipients would be removed nationally from the program under the new rules.

The Trump Administration estimates the rule change will save the government \$5.5 billion over five years.

Melody Cannon-Cutts, Del Norte County's Health and Human Service director, said the SNAP program falls under the CalFresh Healthy Living benefits program. She confirmed that Del Norte County has utilized the waiver program to keep residents on SNAP.

"Historically, Del Norte County has had a higher unemployment rate than the rest of California," Cannon-Cutts said, adding that as of this past October, 2,895 households were receiving CalFresh benefits.

Waiver requirements go hand in hand with poverty, employment, gender and the ability to provide food in the home, Cannon-Cutts said.

She said the waivers still exist in California. “Nothing is finalized at this point. When there is a new methodology, they’ll work out who it impacts when the new rule starts. We hope the waivers will still apply.”