

# Local community-based organizations work to bridge the gap in the face of SNAP uncertainty



*Photo courtesy of Reuters*

By Hope Davis  
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BOONE, NC - As SNAP benefits are scheduled to return on Dec. 1, many community members and local organizations in the High Country are still fighting to bridge the gap created by the previous month-long lapse in benefits.

Amid the longest government shutdown in U.S. history, an ominous [memo](#) appeared on the USDA website. The [since updated](#) message read: "Bottom line, the

well has run dry,” a rather curt reference to the frozen funds of the federal government’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, which serves an average of [41.7 million](#) Americans each month.

Heated court battles between the Trump administration and state legislators have resulted in an ongoing back-and-forth about when SNAP benefits would resume, leaving a wake of uncertainty for those who rely on SNAP, and a widened gap to fill for local food banks and community-based organizations.

Food insecurity is an issue reaching all parts of North Carolina. Data from [Feeding America’s](#) “Map the Meal Gap” study in 2023 approximated 1,627,360 people, or 1 in 7 individuals, facing hunger in the state.

SNAP benefits serve a variety of households, from families with children, the elderly, disabled individuals and college students. Of the households that receive SNAP benefits in North Carolina, [38.8%](#) of them have children.

Jaden Lewis, a senior at Appalachian State, whose family has utilized SNAP as long as she can remember, recalls her worry for the upcoming Thanksgiving after being woken up by her roommate with the news.

“Even with all of the food banks, there’s definitely some worry that we won’t have the holiday that we’re all usually excited for,” said Lewis. “Coming from a family that is very low-income and sometimes has to live paycheck-to-paycheck, having that food security just makes everything else seem more manageable.”

Lewis comes from a family with 4 siblings, where some have dietary restrictions like gluten allergies. “That stuff is expensive,” said Lewis. “Having to buy pretty much whole separate meals also makes it difficult to handle without the help.”

“When you’re going hungry and you’re not able to eat and you’re worried about food, that kind of takes over all of your other responsibilities,” she added.

As of April 2025, there were [1,992](#) people receiving SNAP benefits in Watauga county. Local food pantries and community-outreach organizations such as Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture, who run the High Country Food Hub, and F.A.R.M cafe are already feeling the heat of the SNAP reductions.



A customer leaves the High Country Food Hub. Photo courtesy of Blue Ridge Women In Agriculture

On Oct. 28, Sydney Blume, the coordinator for the BRWIA's [Double Up Food Bucks](#) program released a [statement](#) that they will be operating under “special conditions” to continue providing access to local food during the month of November. This includes providing \$50

in incentives to SNAP recipients to spend at the Watauga County Farmers’ Market and \$50 off orders from SNAP recipients at the High Country Food Hub.

“In the past, when the government has shut down, SNAP has acted as a mandatory program,” said Blume. “That was a pretty quick turnaround of knowing the government was going to shut down and then knowing that people wouldn’t have their SNAP benefits.”

The Double Up Food Bucks program is utilized not just in the High Country, but all over the United States in places like grocery stores, farmers markets and other participating retailers. At local markets like the Watauga County Farmers’ Market and the High Country Food Hub, SNAP recipients can swipe their cards for up to \$75 and receive a free incentive of the same value. The program aims to keep fresh, clean foods accessible, and brings in around \$80,000 each year to the local food economy here in the High Country.

With the uncertainty of if and when benefits will resume, the community has stepped up to bridge the gap and keep food on the tables of their neighbors. Blume recalls an almost immediate influx of donations after posting about their special conditions plan.

“It’s been incredibly helpful to have that extra money,” said Blume. “There’s been around \$5,000 that has been donated to us just in the past couple weeks for these special conditions. And what’s nice about our program is that money is going directly to the people.”

Blue Ridge Energy Members Foundation, a local non-profit, awarded a grant earlier in the month of October to BRWIA, which allowed them to quickly create a plan to mobilize their special conditions when SNAP benefits ceased to go out on Nov. 1. “At the end of the day, we shouldn't have to have regular people that are already paying their taxes donating their other money in addition to that,” said Blume. “But in the case that we’re in, it’s really great that people are coming together and supporting each other. It’s been really incredible to see that support.”

“It’s really been community all around,” added Blume.

While the federal government has since reopened as of Nov. 12, the uncertainty surrounding food access and what it will look like going forward remains. Many local groups and businesses, ranging from on-campus [greek organizations](#) to [restaurants](#), have hosted food drives to help bridge the SNAP gap and keep food pantries stocked.



Other community-outreach organizations such as the Hunger and Health Coalition, who have been providing access to food and medicine for the High Country [since 1984](#), have reflected on the reality that the changes to SNAP funding poses for local families, calling for both monetary and food donations.

*The Hunger and Health Coalition unloads canned goods from a delivery Truck. Photo courtesy of The Appalachian.*

In an Instagram post, the organization stated that: “The question isn’t if more families will come – it’s how many. And we need to be ready when that happens.”

