The USDA Online Purchasing Program

A Study of SNAP families’ perceptions, attitudes, and purchasing behaviors of groceries online

KEY FINDINGS

2020–2021: Rapid uptake of online grocery shopping among SNAP-eligible families since the SNAP OPP
- 57% of SNAP-participants shopped for groceries online1

Online Grocery Service Paradox: Online grocery shopping is convenient and reduces transportation barriers, but introduces other challenges such as additional cost

Fewer online purchases of fresh produce and sweets compared to in-store
- Concerns about being unable to personally check the quality of fresh items online.
- Online shopping had fewer impulsive purchases of sweet snacks due to lack of in store nudges and distractions.

Positive Attitudes
- Saves time
- Convenient
- Helps with meal planning
- “Online is easier, once I don’t have to wait at the store, wait up and shop.”

Perceived Barriers
- Mistrust of shoppers hired to select food
- Poor food selection (especially fresh food)
- Costs and fees
- “Prices online are actually way more than in store.” We’ve been budget shopping and you compare the prices every week, different stores have different deals, so none of this stuff you’re overpaying.”

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SNAP-ELIGIBLE FAMILIES

Improve trust of online hired shoppers
- Develop a SNAP-Ed approved curricula to aid in training of online hired shoppers.
- Share information on how hired shoppers are selected and trained.
- Widen implementation features online already in place at some retailers:
  - Transparent return and exchange policies.
  - Communication with online hired shopper (e.g., live chat, email, messenger, calls)

Expand SNAP online to more retailers
- Select retailers in locations that serve SNAP-eligible families.
- Standardize procedures related to item exchange, replacement, and delivery available to SNAP families.

Improve uptake of online grocery services by emphasizing positives
- Reduce costs associated with transportation.
- Ease of calculating total grocery spending before checking out.
- Less stigma associated with using a SNAP card at check out.

Reduce costs associated to online grocery shopping
- Allow physical coupons to be redeemed online.
- Implement same deals online and in-store.
- Increase online payment options (e.g., split Payments across multiple cards, use of WIC benefits, and pay in cash at delivery or pickup).
- Retailers to waive delivery fees.
- Offer in-store pickup as an alternative to delivery.

The USDA Online Purchasing Program
2 Methodology
- This study was conducted between November 2020 and March 2021.
- We recruited families with young children who were SNAP-eligible and other participating in SNAP (SNAP-TEP) or not enrolled in SNAP (non-SNAP).
- 292 families in Maryland answered a 29-minute online survey; all provided additional insight in qualitative interviews.
- The conducted surveys and interviews with the households main grocery shopper, primarily mothers aged 21-39.

For suggestions, comments, or questions, please contact Angie Trahan at angie.trahan@umaryland.edu

The USDA Online Purchasing Program
The USDA Online Purchasing Program tests the feasibility of using cash-like benefits to online grocery shopping.
This program could be especially beneficial to families who live in areas with few grocery stores, do not have a vehicle, and who are at higher risk for poor diet or habits.
To learn more about: https://www.fns.usda.gov/online-purchasing-program

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It appeals to me because the kids, the corn, taking little to the store, walking up and down the aisles. I forgot stuff when I go to the store on the house. Know what I need. I can just click and order SNAP-participant, never shopped online

If it’s hard to say no. SNAP-participant, never shopped online

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