

# HISTORY OF FOOD STAMPS

The food stamp program, which helps low-income people buy food, has grown and changed over the last several decades.



**1939-1943** — The first food stamp program existed to deal with unmarketable food surpluses and widespread unemployment during the Great Depression.

**1964** — President Lyndon Johnson requested Congress pass legislation making the program permanent. It did, with the Food Stamp Act of 1964. The U. S. Department of Agriculture estimated that participation would eventually reach 4 million people, at a cost of \$360 million annually.



**Johnson**

**1965** — Participation tops half a million people.



**Reagan**

**1981-1982** — Major legislation in Congress includes cutbacks in the program.

**1988-1990** — The Hunger Prevention Act of 1988 and the Mickey Leland Memorial Domestic Hunger Relief Act in 1990 increased benefits. Part of the Hunger Prevention Act included provisions for pilot projects for electronic benefit transfer — a system that allows people to get their benefits electronically, as opposed to paper coupons.



**Leland**

**2000** — Participation hits a low of 16.9 million people.



**2009** — Participation in the food stamp program is projected to hit 28 million, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

**1930s**

**1940s**

**1950s**

**1960s**

**1970s**

**1980s**

**1990s**

**2000s**

**1961** — In fulfillment of a campaign pledge made in West Virginia, President John F. Kennedy's first executive order called for expanded food distribution and on Feb. 2, 1961, he announced food stamp pilot programs would be initiated. Mr. and Mrs. Alderson Muncy of Paynesville, W. Va., were the first food stamp recipients on May 29, 1961. They purchased \$95 in food stamps for their 15-person household. In the first food stamp transaction, they bought a can of pork and beans at Henderson's Supermarket.



**Kennedy**

**1974** — The program began operating nationwide on July 1. In July, 1974, there were almost 14 million recipients. During the 1970s, Congress made several changes to the program, wrestling with the issues that would continue to dominate food-stamp legislation: how to balance access; making sure those who need help are able to receive it, and preventing waste and fraud.



**1994** — In March, 1994, people in the program hit a high of 28 million. It declined steadily throughout the 1990s.

**2001** — The number of people enrolled in the program begins to climb because of increases in unemployment and improved access to the program.