

Baesler: SNAP money halt won’t affect school meals

State School Superintendent Kirsten Baesler said free and reduced-price meals in North Dakota’s schools will not be affected by the stoppage of federal food aid.

Due to the ongoing federal government shutdown, which began Oct. 1, funds for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) were halted on Saturday, Nov. 1. SNAP, which is also known as “food stamps,” helps low-income families buy groceries. Benefits are distributed monthly to electronic debit cards issued to participants.

The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) has been inundated with questions about whether the pause in SNAP funds will affect students’ ability to access free and reduced-price meals at school. It will not. Students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals will get them for the remainder of the school year, Baesler said.

The question arose because families who qualify for SNAP benefits automatically are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals, and callers worried about whether a stoppage of SNAP money would also affect funds for school meals, which are administered by the Department of Public Instruction. North Dakota’s Department of Health and Human Services administers SNAP.

The Department of Public Instruction administers three other food programs on behalf of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. They are:

- The Emergency Food Assistance Program. This is offered through local food pantries and soup kitchens. Participants are asked to fill out a form at the pantry/soup kitchen. They are asked to declare their income and are not required to offer documentation.

- The Commodity Supplemental Food Program. It can be accessed by low-income households if a member is at least 60 years old. Completed applications should be emailed to dpicnfd@nd.gov. It will then be sent to a local agency in Fargo,

Devils Lake, Bismarck, Dickinson, or Williston for additional processing.

- The Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations program provides U.S. Agriculture Department foods to income-eligible households on Indian reservations, and to Native American households in designated areas near reservations. It is an alternative to SNAP. Households may not participate in this program and SNAP during the same month.

Melissa Anderson, assistant director of child nutrition and food distribution for the Department of Public Instruction, said the programs can be indirectly affected by the SNAP money stoppage because it will put more pressure on their food supplies. The Emergency Food Assistance and the Commodity Supplemental Food programs also do not have funds to cover food shipping costs, Anderson said.

An average of 48,700 North Dakotans used the SNAP program each month during the most recent state budget year, which ended June 30. The NDDPI estimates that more than 40 percent of N.D. beneficiaries are children. More than 57,000 North Dakotans drew almost \$10 million in benefits last May, according to U.S. Agriculture Department data.

Nationally, more than 42.6 million people used the program during the 2025 fiscal year, with an average \$230.34 monthly benefit per person.

For more information please visit:

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: <https://www.hhs.nd.gov/applyforhelp/snap>

Commodity Supplemental Food Program application: <https://tinyurl.com/2ubdf85y>

Food pantry locations: <https://greatplainsfoodbank.org/get-help/partner-food-pantries/>

USDA SNAP data: <https://tinyurl.com/2xw7a52t>

North Dakota Outdoors: Wild game care 101

By Doug Leier, NDGF outreach biologist



If you're anything like me, you've probably found yourself standing over a tailgate in November with cold fingers, a pocketknife that could use sharpening, and a few regrets.

Whether it’s a whitetail buck from the Sheyenne River breaks, a Badlands muley or prairie fawn, how we handle wild game after the shot matters just as much as the shot itself.

Each fall, I talk with hunters who are eager to do things right – ethically, legally and culinarily. Good game care isn’t complicated, but it does require a bit of thought, some preparation, and a healthy respect for the animals we harvest.

Deer: Clean, Cool and Quick

When it comes to big game, like deer, the golden rule is: get it clean, cool and dry as soon as you can. After the tag is filled and the high-fives are over, field-dressing should happen without delay. That means a sharp knife, clean gloves, and care to avoid puncturing the gut or bladder.

If temperatures are above freezing, it’s not enough to just hang your deer in the garage. Skinning it promptly helps it cool faster and avoids spoilage. And don’t forget that a clean carcass starts with a clean vehicle. Keep a tarp or game bag handy so road grime doesn’t undo your good work.

Upland Birds: Feathered Flavor

Pheasants and grouse may be smaller, but they deserve just as much care. I recommend field-dressing upland birds the same day you shoot them, ideally within a few hours. Plucking versus skinning

is a matter of preference, but leaving the skin on can help retain flavor and moisture, especially on older birds that benefit from a bit more TLC in the kitchen.

One tip I often share is to avoid tossing birds into a pile in the back of the truck. A simple game strap or breathable game bag goes a long way in keeping your harvest in good shape.

Waterfowl: Ice and Patience

Geese and ducks can be a challenge, both in the blind and in the kitchen. Proper care begins the moment you pick them up. If you’re hunting waterfowl all day, bring a cooler with ice. It might feel unnecessary on a 35-degree day, but birds piled up in a warm truck bed can quickly turn.

After the hunt, clean birds promptly, either by breasting or full-plucking, depending on your plans. Don’t be afraid to experiment with new recipes. Waterfowl gets a bad rap from folks who overcook it. Treat it like the red meat it is – medium-rare with a little seasoning goes a long way.

Take the time to do it right. The meat will taste better, the memories will last longer, and the respect you show for the resource will carry forward into seasons to come.

Freezer Management: Use It, Don’t Lose It

A common mistake I see is hunters forgetting what’s in the bottom of the freezer until the next season rolls around. By then, it’s too late. Even a well-packaged wild game doesn’t last forever.

- Label everything with species and date. You may think you’ll remember, but six months later, a mystery package of “meat” doesn’t help.
- Rotate your stock. Use older packages first, and inspect for signs of freezer burn – dry, gray edges or ice crystals inside the packaging.
- Plan your meals. Make it a goal to use at least one package of wild game each week through winter. It’s healthy, it’s local, and it’s a great way to keep your connection to the outdoors alive in the off-season.

Sharing the Harvest

Don’t forget that wild game is meant to be shared. Whether it’s jerky for your college kid who didn’t make it back, a pheasant pot pie at the potluck, or a venison roast for the neighbors, food is one of the best ways to pass along the story of your hunt.

What you do now – how you store, cook, and share your wild game – honors the effort, the animal, and the North Dakota outdoors we all value so deeply.

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Armstrong said the Department of Health and Human Services gave \$915,000 because it was the amount the nonprofit asked for.

The Great Plains Food Bank distributes food to almost 200 partner food pantries across the state.

“With distribution centers in Fargo and here in Bismarck, and a fleet of trucks that are on the road every day, we’re able to move food efficiently to our network operating in large cities, rural communities and our tribal nations,” said Great Plains Food Bank Interim CEO Kate Molbert.

The nonprofit sent out a plea for donations earlier this week due to the pause in federal services.

Armstrong on Thursday announced that the Department of Health and Human Services is also setting aside \$600,000 to support the federal Women, Infants and Children Program, which helps feed low-income new mothers and young children.

The program was originally expected to run out of money Nov. 10. The additional money will keep it fully funded through November, said Interim Health and Human Services Commissioner Pat Traynor.

Families with young children who qualify for federal programs like SNAP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Medicaid automatically qualify for the Women, Infants and Children Program, Traynor said.

There’s also a senior nutrition program for those age 60 or older, he added. There are no income requirements for that program.

For more information about food assistance, visit [hhs.nd.gov](https://hhs.nd.gov/greatplainsfoodbank.org) or greatplainsfoodbank.org.

People can also call the Health and Human Services Department at 701-328-1000.

Armstrong said the state doesn’t know at this time whether the federal government will reimburse it for any of the money.

He also said he’s not sure how the state will respond if the federal government is still shut down after November.

“We’re going to continue to hear where the needs are and see if there’s ways we can resource this,” he said. “But the answer is, we do not have unlimited funds in the state. We don’t have the infrastructure to replicate this stuff at the state level.”

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