SNAP Policy Database: Variable Definitions and Coding Descriptions

This document provides a complete list of variables in the USDA, Economic Research Service (ERS) SNAP Policy Database. The SNAP Policy Database is available for download on the USDA, ERS website.

Identifying Variables

state_fips

Definition: The State FIPS (Federal Information Processing) code.

Coding description: range = 1, 56.

state_pc

Definition: The State postal code.

Coding description: string variable.

statename

Definition: Name of the State.

Coding description: string variable.

yearmonth

Definition: A six-digit integer (YYYYMM) indicating the month and year of the observation.

Coding description: range = 199601, 202012.

Policy Variables

Broad-based categorical eligibility (BBCE)

There are two sets of BBCE policy variables.

(1) The first set of BBCE policy variables – **bbce_inclmt, bbce_asset**, **bbce_a_amt**, and **bbce_a_veh** - includes the gross income and asset limits that apply either to virtually all applicants or, in States where the income or asset limits under BBCE differ for specific subgroups of households, the majority of participants.

(2) The second set of BBCE policy variables captures the policies that apply to specific subgroups of applicants. States can specify a higher gross income limit under BBCE for households with senior (age 60+) or disabled members; this gross income limit is captured by **bbce_elddisinclmt**. Some States limit BBCE only to households with children or apply a higher gross income limit to them. Because households with children constitute a majority of participants, the first set of policy variables capture the BBCE policies applied to them; **bbce_child** indicates if the first set of BBCE variables apply only to households with children. Finally, **bbce_multiple** indicates whether there are multiple sets of guidelines for households meeting different criteria (other than for households with senior or disabled members).

Missing data: All BBCE policy variables are set to missing from October–December 2020.

bbce

Definition: The State uses broad-based categorical eligibility to increase or eliminate the asset test and/or to increase the gross income limit for virtually all or the majority of SNAP applicants.

Coding description: range = 0, 1, where 0 = no and 1 = yes.

bbce_inclmt

Definition: The gross income limit as a percentage of the Federal poverty level (FPL) used under broad-based categorical eligibility applied to virtually all or the majority of SNAP applicants.

Coding description: range = -9, 200, where -9 = no broad-based categorical eligibility.

bbce_asset

Definition: The State eliminates the asset test under broad-based categorical eligibility for virtually all or the majority of SNAP applicants.

Coding description: range = -9, 1, where -9 = no broad-based categorical eligibility, 0 = asset limit is increased but not eliminated, and 1 = asset limit is eliminated.

bbce_a_amt

Definition: The dollar amount of the asset limit under broad-based categorical eligibility (in thousands) for virtually all or the majority of SNAP applicants.

Coding description: range = -9, 25, where -9 = no broad-based categorical eligibility, or broad-based categorical eligibility eliminates the asset test.

Note: bbce_a_amt = 5.5 in Pennsylvania between June 2012 and April 2015, but households with at least one senior (age 60+) or disabled member were subject to a higher $9,000 asset limit under broad-based categorical eligibility during this period.

bbce_a_veh

Definition: The State exempts an amount from the fair market value of a vehicle or excludes at least one vehicle to determine the value of countable resources applied to the asset test used under broad-based categorical eligibility.

Coding description: range = -9, 3 where -9 = no broad-based categorical eligibility, or broad-based categorical eligibility eliminates the asset test, 1 = the State exempts an amount from the fair market value of a vehicle, 2 = the State excludes at least one, but not all, vehicles, and 3 = the State excludes all vehicles.

bbce_child

Definition: The State limits broad-based categorical eligibility to households with dependent children.

Coding description: range = -9, 1, where -9 = no broad-based categorical eligibility, 0 = broad-based categorical eligibility gross income limit (defined by **bbce_inclmt)** and asset test (defined by **bbce_asset,**

bbce_a_amt, and bbce_a_veh) apply to households with or without dependent children, 1 = broad-based categorical eligibility gross income limit and asset test apply to households with at least one dependent child.

bbce_elddisinclmt

Definition: The gross income limit as a percentage of the Federal poverty guidelines used under broad-based categorical eligibility for households with at least one senior (age 60+) or disabled member.

Coding description: range = -9, 200, where -9 = no broad-based categorical eligibility, -8 = the State eliminates the gross income test under broad-based categorical eligibility for households with at least one senior or disabled member, -7 = the State uses broad-based categorical eligibility to increase the gross income limit to 200 percent FPL only for households where all members are senior or disabled.

Note: **bbce_elddisinclmt** = **bbce_inclmt** when the State uses the same broad-based categorical eligibility guidelines for households with at least one senior or disabled member as they do for the majority of households. In States where **bbce_elddisinclmt** = -8, households for whom the gross income test was eliminated were still subject to a net income test and, in some States, an asset test. **bbce_elddisinclmt** = -7 in only three States: Alabama, Georgia, and West Virginia. In West Virginia from May 2013 through June 2018, households where all members were senior or disabled were only subject to the higher 200-percent FPL gross income test if they also had no earned income.

bbce_multiple

Definition: The State applies different gross income and/or asset limits through BBCE to two or more types of households (with one or more of these paths to eligibility not fully captured by **bbce_inclmt**, **bbce_asset**, **bbce_a_amt**, and **bbce_a_veh)**. Note that this does not apply to cases where a different BBCE gross income limit applies to households with senior (age 60+) or disabled members, which is captured by bbce_elddisinclmt.

Coding description: range = -9, 1, where -9 = no broad-based categorical eligibility, 0 = broad-based categorical eligibility gross income limit and asset test apply the same to targeted households, 1 = broad-based categorical eligibility gross income limit and/or asset test apply differently to two or more groups of households with different characteristics.

Note: **bbce_multiple** = 1 in only three States: Maine from Jan 2016 to Nov 2019 (the pathway captured in the SNAP Policy Database applies to households with dependent children; other households were categorically eligible if they had gross income less than or equal to 185 percent FPL and assets less than $5,000 after exempting one vehicle), Massachusetts from July 2008 to Dec 2015 (the pathway captured in the SNAP Policy Database applies to households with dependent children; other households were categorically eligible with gross income less than or equal to 130 percent FPL and net income less than or equal to 100 percent FPL), and New York beginning in March 2009 (the pathway captured in the SNAP Policy Database applies to all households; other households were categorically eligible if they had dependent care expenses and gross income less than or equal to 200 percent FPL, or, beginning July 2016, if they had earned income and gross income less than or equal to 150 percent FPL).

call_any

Definition: The State operates call centers that service the entire State or select regions within the State. Call centers can provide support to the certification process in local offices by providing general SNAP information and application and benefit status information; conducting certification interviews; handling customer complaints, and processing changes. In some States, call centers go beyond these functions to directly certify and re-certify households.

Coding description: range = 0, 1, where 0 = no call centers, 1 = call centers available in any part of the State.

Missing data: November 2017 – December 2020.

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cap

Definition: The State operates a Combined Application Project for recipients of Supplemental Security Income (SSI), so that SSI recipients are able to use a streamlined SNAP application process.

Coding description: range = 0, 1, where 0 = no and 1 = yes.

Missing data: None

Recertification periods

The variables in this section capture the distribution of the length of recertification periods for three subsets of SNAP households in a State: those with earnings (**certearn**), those without earnings and no senior members (**certnonearn**), and those without earnings and with at least one senior (age 60+) member (**certeld**). Variables indicate the proportions of these households with recertification periods of 1-3 months, 4-6 months, 7-12 months, and 13+ months as well as the average and median recertification period length.

Missing data: All recertification variables are set to missing from October 2019–December 2020.

certearn0103

Definition: The proportion of SNAP units with earnings with 1–3 month recertification periods.

Coding description: range = 0, 0.93.

certearn0406

Definition: The proportion of SNAP units with earnings with 4–6 month recertification periods.

Coding description: range = 0, 1.

certearn0712

Definition: The proportion of SNAP units with earnings with 7–12 month recertification periods.

Coding description: range = 0, 1.

certearn1399

Definition: The proportion of SNAP units with earnings with 13+ month recertification periods.

Coding description: range = 0, 0.90.

certearnavg

Definition: The average certification period (in months) for SNAP units with earnings.

Coding description: range = 3.1, 15.2.

certearnmed

Definition: The median certification period (in months) for SNAP units with earnings.

Coding description: range = 2.8, 15.5.

certeld0103

Definition: The proportion of SNAP units with no earnings that include a senior (age 60+) member with 1–3 month recertification periods.

Coding description: range = 0, 0.38.

certeld0406

Definition: The proportion of SNAP units with no earnings that include a senior (age 60+) member with 4–6 month recertification periods.

Coding description: range = 0, 0.73.

certeld0712

Definition: The proportion of SNAP units with no earnings that include a senior (age 60+) member with 7–12 month recertification periods.

Coding description: range = 0, 1.

certeld1399

Definition: The proportion of SNAP units with no earnings that include a senior (age 60+) member with 13+ month recertification periods.

Coding description: range = 0, 1.

certeldavg

Definition: The average certification period (in months) for SNAP units with no earnings that include a senior (age 60+) member.

Coding description: range = 7.3, 50.9.

certeldmed

Definition: The median certification period (in months) for SNAP units with no earnings that include a senior (age 60+) member.

Coding description: range = 6, 48.

certnonearn0103

Definition: The proportion of SNAP units with no earnings and no senior (age 60+) members with 1–3 month recertification periods.

Coding description: range = 0, 0.70.

certnonearn0406

Definition: The proportion of SNAP units with no earnings and no senior (age 60+) members with 4–6 month recertification periods.

Coding description: range = 0, 0.95.

certnonearn0712

Definition: The proportion of SNAP units with no earnings and no senior (age 60+) members with 7–12 month recertification periods.

Coding description: range = 0, 1.

certnonearn1399

Definition: The proportion SNAP units with no earnings and no senior (age 60+) members with 13+ month recertification periods.

Coding description: range = 0, 0.89.

certnonearnavg

Definition: The average certification period (in months) for SNAP units with no earnings and no senior (age 60+) members.

Coding description: range = 4.5, 23.9.

certnonearnmed

Definition: The median certification period (in months) SNAP units with no earnings and no senior (age 60+) members.

Coding description: range = 3, 26.

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ebtissuance

Definition: The proportion of the dollar value of all SNAP benefits that are accounted for by EBT (electronic benefit transfer).

Coding description: range = 0, 1.

Missing data: None.

Waiver of face-to-face interview

The variables in this section capture information about whether States have waivers to allow telephone interviews in place of face-to-face interviews at households' initial certification or recertification.

Missing data: Both face-to-face interview variables are set to missing from January 2017–December 2020.

faceini

Definition: The State has been granted a waiver to use a telephone interview in lieu of a face-to-face interview at initial certification, without having to document household hardship.

Coding description: range = 0, 1, where 0 = no waiver, 1 = waiver applies in at least part of the State.

facerec

Definition: The State has been granted a waiver to use a telephone interview in lieu of a face-to- face interview at recertification, without having to document household hardship.

Coding description: range = 0, 1, where 0 = no waiver, 1 = waiver applies in at least part of the State.

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fingerprint

Definition: The State requires fingerprinting of SNAP applicants.

Coding description: range = 0, 2, where 0 = no, 1 = fingerprints required Statewide, and 2 = fingerprints required in only select parts of the State.

Missing data: None.

Eligibility restrictions on legal noncitizens' receipt of SNAP

The variables in this section capture information about whether States make some or all noncitizens of different types⸺adults (age 18–64), seniors (age ≥ 65), or children (age < 18)—who meet other SNAP eligibility requirements eligible for SNAP benefits or similar State-funded food assistance.

noncitadultfull

Definition: All legal noncitizen adults (age 18-64) who satisfy other SNAP eligibility requirements such as income and asset limits are eligible for Federal SNAP benefits or State-funded food assistance.

Coding description: range = 0, 1, where 0 = no and 1 = yes.

Missing data: May – December 2020.

noncitadultpart

Definition: Some, but not all, legal noncitizen adults (age 18–64) who satisfy other SNAP eligibility requirements such as income and asset limits are eligible for Federal SNAP benefits or State-funded food assistance.

Coding description: range = 0, 1, where 0 = no and 1 = yes.

Missing data: May – December 2020.

noncitchildfull

Definition: All legal noncitizen children (age < 18) who satisfy other SNAP eligibility requirements such as income and asset limits are eligible for Federal SNAP benefits or State-funded food assistance.

Coding description: range = 0, 1, where 0 = no and 1 = yes.

Missing data: None.

noncitchildpart

Definition: Some, but not all, legal noncitizen children (age < 18) who satisfy other SNAP eligibility requirements such as income and asset limits are eligible for Federal SNAP benefits or State-funded food assistance.

Coding description: range = 0, 1, where 0 = no and 1 = yes.

Missing data: None.

nonciteldfull

Definition: All legal noncitizen seniors (age ≥ 65) who satisfy other SNAP eligibility requirements such as income and asset limits are eligible for Federal SNAP benefits or State-funded food assistance.

Coding description: range = 0, 1, where 0 = no and 1 = yes.

Missing data: May – December 2020.

nonciteldpart

Definition: Some, but not all, legal noncitizen seniors (age ≥ 65) who satisfy other SNAP eligibility requirements such as income and asset limits are eligible for Federal SNAP benefits or State-funded food assistance.

Coding description: range = 0, 1, where 0 = no and 1 = yes.

Missing data: May–December 2020.

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oapp

Definition: The State allows households to submit a SNAP application online.

Coding description: range = 0, 2, where 0 = no, 1 = yes, Statewide, and 2 = yes, in only select parts of the State.

Missing data: March–December 2020.

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outreach

Definition: The sum of Federal, State, and grant outreach spending in nominal dollars (in thousands).

Note: This variable is derived from annual data, spread across 12 months of the relevant fiscal year.

Coding description: range = 0, 2665.

Missing data: October – December 2020.

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reportsimple

Definition: For households with earnings, the State uses the simplified reporting option that reduces requirements for reporting changes in household circumstances.

Coding description: range = 0, 1, where 0 = no and 1 = yes.

Missing data: March – December 2020.

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transben

Definition: The State offers transitional SNAP benefits to families leaving the TANF or State-funded cash assistance programs.

Coding description: range = 0, 1, where 0 = no and 1 = yes.

Missing data: November 2017–December 2020.

Treatment of vehicles in SNAP asset test

The variables in this section capture information about how States incorporate household vehicles in determining SNAP households' countable resources. States are able to exclude all vehicles from the asset test, exclude one or more (but not all) vehicles, or exempt some amount from fair market value higher than the standard auto exemption. When States' broad-based categorical eligibility policy change how vehicles are incorporated for virtually all or the majority of SNAP households, these guidelines are reflected in the variables in this section.

Missing data: All vehicle policy variables are set to missing from October–December 2020.

vehexclall

Definition: The State excludes all vehicles in the household from the SNAP asset test.

Coding description: range = 0, 1, where 0 = no and 1 = yes.

Note: When a State removes the asset test due to its adoption of broad-based categorical eligibility, *vehexclall* is assigned a value of 1.

vehexclamt

Definition: The State exempts an amount higher than the SNAP standard auto exemption (set at $4,650 in FY 2020) from the fair market value to determine the countable resource value of one or more vehicles.

Coding description: range = 0, 1, where 0 = no and 1 = yes.

Note: When a State removes the asset test due to its adoption of broad-based categorical eligibility, *vehexclamt* is assigned a value of 0.

vehexclone

Definition: The State excludes at least one, but not all, vehicles in the household from the SNAP asset test.

Coding description: range = 0, 1, where 0 = no and 1 = yes.

Note: When a State removes the asset test due to its adoption of broad-based categorical eligibility, *vehexclone* is assigned a value of 0.