The Trump administration announced a plan Wednesday to end food-stamp benefits for about 700,000 Americans, issuing a new regulation that makes it harder for states to gain waivers from a requirement that beneficiaries work or participate in a vocational training program.

Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue said the new rule will move more food-stamp recipients “toward self-sufficiency and into employment.”

Conservatives have long sought cuts in the federal food assistance program for the poor. House Republicans tried to impose similar restrictions last year when Congress renewed the program but were rebuffed in the Senate.

The work requirement covers “able-bodied” recipients. A U.S. Department of Agriculture spokeswoman said it doesn’t apply to recipients who are over 50, disabled or pregnant, or anyone with a child under 18.

The measure would be the first of three Trump administration initiatives curtailing food stamp benefits to take effect. The Urban Institute estimated in an [analysis](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/101368/estimated_effect_of_recent_proposed_changes_to_snap_regulations.pdf) last month that the measures together would cut 3.7 million beneficiaries from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, often known by its previous name, food stamps.

Currently, states can receive waivers for work requirements if their unemployment rates are at least 20% above the national rate, which was 3.6% in October. The regulation, which will be published in the Federal Register Thursday, imposes stricter standards for the waivers.

**‘Grinch’ Move**

Democratic Congresswoman Marcia Fudge of Ohio said the new regulation was worthy of “the Grinch who stole Christmas.” In an emailed statement, she called it “an unacceptable escalation of the Administration’s war on working families.”

A Brookings Institution study published last year found more stringent work requirements are likely to hurt people who are already working but whose employment is sporadic. Recipients must work an average of 20 hours a week each month to meet the requirement.

The USDA estimates 688,000 people will lose food stamps by 2021 and 709,000 by 2024 under the new work requirement rule, according to a department spokeswoman. The rule will cut food-stamp spending by $5.5 billion over five years, according to a regulatory analysis the department published.

States seeking waivers to the work rule would have to meet the new, more stringent standards by April 1, said the people, who asked for anonymity to discuss the plan.

As of August, 36.4 million Americans received food stamps, [according to](https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/29SNAPcurrPP-11.pdf) USDA. Enrollment has declined as the economy has improved and was down 1.7 million from a year earlier.

IN JULY: The Trump administration moved to end food stamp benefits for 3.1 million people, the day after the president reached a deal with Democrats to raise federal spending by tens of billions of dollars for the next two years.

The proposed rule curtailing food assistance, announced Tuesday, drew a sharp rebuke from House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who called it an “act of staggering callousness.”

“This proposal perfectly showcases the Republicans’ cynical special interest agenda that gives billion-dollar handouts to big corporations and the wealthy few, and then steals from children, veterans, seniors and working families to make up the difference,” Pelosi said.

Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue said the administration acted to restrict states’ ability to automatically enroll beneficiaries of some federally funded welfare programs because many state governments “have misused this flexibility.”

“We are changing the rules, preventing abuse of a critical safety net system, so those who need food assistance the most are the only ones who receive it,” he added.