

# Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI): SNAP Feasibility Study

Client: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service

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## Project Overview

This study assesses the feasibility of providing nutritional assistance to the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) instead of through its Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP), which is funded by the annual block grant it has received since 1982. The study, mandated by The Agricultural Act of 2014, provides Congress and the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) with information to aid policymakers in understanding the potential impacts of requiring the CNMI to utilize the same laws and regulations that States use for administering SNAP. Specifically, the study focuses on 5 major research objectives:

1) history of the CNMI's NAP, 2) socioeconomics of the CNMI, 3) changes that would be needed to transition to SNAP in the CNMI, 4) capabilities needed to transition to SNAP and potential barriers, and 5) alternative modifications to current SNAP requirements.

This study employs 8 complementary analytic methods:

1. **Document and Literature Review.** This provides a comprehensive understanding of the history of the CNMI's NAP.
2. **Descriptive Analysis of the Socioeconomic Conditions in the CNMI Versus the United States.** This provides important background information to shape the context of the research and identify recent trends in the data.
3. **Operations Analysis.** This examines the services provided by NAP and how the program is designed and operated, provides a comparative analysis of NAP and SNAP to identify all requirements for operating SNAP, and identifies the similarities and differences between the 2 programs.
4. **Implementation/System Change Analysis.** This identifies specific changes needed for the CNMI to transition to SNAP through infrastructure, administrative capacity, and controls.
5. **Stakeholder Analysis.** This identifies the potential impacts of these changes on participants, authorized retailers, employers, and low-income CNMI residents. It also identifies the context and challenges of NAP to ascertain barriers to SNAP implementation.
6. **Capabilities Assessment.** This focuses on 5 key administrative areas including participation, electronic benefit transfer (EBT), SNAP employment and training, SNAP Quality Control, and administrative costs.
7. **Alternatives Analysis.** This identifies alternatives to each of the 5 key administrative areas (listed in number 6 above) and evaluates the benefits, weaknesses, and costs associated with each alternative and implementation barriers.
8. **Administrative Cost Assessment.** This estimates the total administrative costs for the CNMI to convert from NAP to SNAP and the costs to implement an alternative SNAP-like model.



## Core Activities

Literature Reviews and Environmental Scans; Site Visits; Qualitative Research; Report Development and Presentation; Secondary Data Analysis; Microsimulation; Administrative Cost Analysis; Policy Analysis

## Products

The final Report to Congress will be submitted in January 2016.