

Missouri governor launches attack on SNAP recipients under guise of “nutrition reform”

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Missouri Governor Mike Kehoe issued Executive Order 25-30 in late September, directing the state Department of Social Services to seek a federal waiver to “restructure” the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Behind the moralistic talk of “nutrition” and “responsible choices,” the order’s real purpose is to shrink costs by limiting what recipients can buy. Because the state’s share of administrative expenses falls as fewer benefits are redeemed, the policy encourages lower usage without openly cutting aid—achieving a de facto reduction while claiming fiscal prudence.

The targets are the poorest Missourians. In many towns where food is only available at convenience stores, dollar outlets and gas stations, the low-priced processed foods now under scrutiny are often the only items available. By disqualifying them, the state makes it harder for families to use their benefits at all, pushing them to pay cash or simply go hungry. The bureaucratic cruelty is repackaged as “nutrition reform,” a familiar refrain in US welfare policy that blames poverty on personal behavior instead of on starvation wages, unaffordable housing and decades of bipartisan budget cutting.

Missouri filed its waiver request on September 29, 2025—just one day after Kehoe signed the order—signaling eagerness to serve as a testing ground for new restrictions. The move dovetails with his broader right-wing agenda. Only weeks earlier he convened a “special session” to ram through a gerrymandered congressional map and tighten ballot-initiative rules, maneuvers designed to entrench Republican dominance and suppress opposition. Now, by extending this authoritarian logic from the polling place to the grocery checkout, Kehoe advances the same goal: consolidating power for big business through the calculated erosion of democratic and social rights.

At the same time, the order is crafted to court rural constituencies. It explicitly calls for incentives to purchase Missouri-grown meats, dairy and produce. In

other words, it channels federal SNAP dollars into the hands of local agribusiness and farm lobbies, ensuring their political backing while diverting attention from the structural crisis of family farming—that is, the steady destruction of small and mid-sized farms under the weight of debt, monopolized markets and agribusiness domination.

In Missouri alone, the number of farms has steadily declined over recent decades, while the average size of farms has grown larger. This consolidation reflects not prosperity but the foreclosure and absorption of small operations into ever-bigger enterprises, leaving rural communities hollowed out, their schools and hospitals shuttered, and younger generations driven off the land. By presenting subsidies for “Missouri-grown” products as support for agriculture, the state masks the reality that public funds overwhelmingly flow to the largest agribusiness operations, deepening rather than reversing the social catastrophe in the countryside.

The measure will not increase benefit levels or expand access. Instead, it will add new restrictions and bureaucratic layers, turning checkout lines into sites of surveillance where EBT cards are rejected for “ineligible” items. If the USDA approves restrictions on certain products, retailers would have to update their point-of-sale item files so ineligible SKUs can’t be purchased with EBT—an approach comparable to how WIC enforces eligible items and, as one Missouri analyst notes, would require additional UPC-level technology and POS updates across retailers. This will further stigmatize SNAP users and expose them to public humiliation at the register. Critics have already warned that these restrictions will hit hardest in so-called “food deserts,” where fresh produce is scarce. Rather than expanding access, the order threatens to penalize recipients who already lack affordable, healthy choices.

Kehoe’s initiative is not an isolated maneuver, but part

of a bipartisan plan to restructure welfare stretching back decades. The Clinton administration's "welfare reform" of the 1990s institutionalized the framework of time limits and work requirements. Every administration since has deepened this orientation. By focusing on what the poor may or may not eat, the Missouri government, like its federal counterparts, shifts responsibility for health crises such as diabetes and obesity from the profit-driven food industry onto the individual consumer.

What is at stake is not improved health, but the interests of agribusiness, retailers and politicians. Agribusiness stands to gain guaranteed markets for state-listed "eligible foods," while retailers retain their role as gatekeepers of federal benefits, offloading the stigma onto low-wage clerks forced to deny customers' benefits. Politicians secure electoral credibility by posturing as fiscally prudent and health-conscious, while in reality attacking the living standards of the working poor. The working class families who rely on SNAP to survive are the ones who will bear the brunt of these measures, facing tighter controls, increased humiliation and unchanged benefit levels in the face of rising food inflation.

Executive Order 25-30 is a warning of what is to come: an intensification of efforts to undermine and restructure social programs under conditions of deepening economic crisis. While presented as reform, these measures are designed to pave the way for deeper attacks on the right to food assistance itself. The working class must reject the false narrative that poverty stems from "poor choices." The crisis in nutrition and health is inseparable from the domination of every sphere of life by corporate profit. Only through a unified political struggle, independent of both big-business parties, can workers defend and expand social rights, including the right to food, housing, healthcare and dignified living conditions.



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