

## SNAP's Restaurant Meals Program: Understanding drivers and constraints on state adoption and implementation

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Submitted July 29, 2025 / Revised October 27, November 20, December 10, and December 16, 2025 /  
Accepted December 17, 2025 / Published online March 16, 2026

*Citation:* Vong, V., Antonacci, C. C., Thomas, A. E., Poirier, L., Mueller, M. P., Wolfson, J. A., & Mui, Y. (2026). SNAP's Restaurant Meals Program: Understanding drivers and constraints on state adoption and implementation. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 15(2), 403–424. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2026.152.013>

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### Abstract

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the largest U.S. nutrition assistance program, provides financial support to Americans with

low income to purchase food. However, SNAP benefits cannot be used to purchase prepared foods, including foods at restaurants. The Restaurant Meals Program (RMP), a program under SNAP offices, offers an important opportunity, yet an underutilized strategy, to improve food access and food security for some of the most vulnerable individuals, including older adults, people experi-

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encing homelessness, and those with disabilities, by allowing them to use SNAP benefits to purchase food at participating restaurants. Though introduced as an option for states in 1977, uptake of RMP has been low, with only nine states participating as of 2025. The factors driving or hindering RMP adoption and effective implementation are poorly understood, leaving a critical gap in policy and practice. To fill these knowledge gaps, this study utilized a rapid literature review, followed by key informant interviews with state administrators of RMP and owners of independent restaurants participating in RMP. Key drivers for adoption and implementation of RMP included motivations to champion food access and food security; to connect local restaurants, communities, and cultures; and to stimulate local economies. Conversely, major constraints included onerous administrative processes for both states and restaurants; fast-food chain domination undermining the driver of connecting local restaurants, communities, and cultures; overcoming misconceptions and negative public opinions about the program; and addressing gaps in program evaluation efforts. These findings highlight the multi-level nature of factors, ranging from intrapersonal motivations to broader policy and administrative domains, that require attention for the successful and equitable expansion of RMP, and highlight RMP as an opportunity to promote agency, dignity, and equity in food assistance, particularly for vulnerable groups least able to prepare meals at home. Recommendations include stream-

lining enrollment, prioritizing independent restaurant participation, improving federal guidance, and investing in program evaluation.

### **Keywords**

SNAP, Restaurant Meals Program, food policy, nutrition program, food access

### **List of Abbreviations**

SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program)

RMP (Restaurant Meals Program)

POS (point-of-sale)

EBT (electronic benefit transfer)

### **Introduction**

In 2023, food insecurity affected 13.5% (18 million) of U.S. households, with rates four times higher among individuals experiencing homelessness or living with disabilities (Berkowitz et al., 2024; Rabbitt et al., 2024). Food insecurity among older adults also remains above pre–Great Recession levels, reflecting a long-standing vulnerability of this population (Ziliak & Gunderson, 2023). The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), a federally funded initiative, plays a critical role in addressing food insecurity by providing individuals and families with low income the financial support to purchase groceries. SNAP has broad national reach and importance. In 2023, more than 41 million people were enrolled in SNAP each month on average, and studies have estimated that participation in SNAP reduces food insecurity by up to 30% (Gundersen et al., 2017; Keith-Jennings et al., 2019; Mabli et al., 2013).

Despite SNAP's general success in mitigating food insecurity, barriers to its use exist for vulnerable populations (Keith-Jennings et al., 2019; Mabli et al., 2013). For example, SNAP participation among older adults was below 50% in 2020, and certain stipulations (e.g., work requirements) disproportionately reduce participation for those experiencing homelessness (Gray et al., 2023; Vigil, 2022). Moreover, SNAP-participating households can only use benefits to purchase groceries, not prepared foods that are hot at the time of purchase (U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service [USDA FNS], 2025a). This restriction adds to meal preparation burdens for many fami-

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### **Authors' Contributions**

VV collected the data, analyzed the data, led data interpretation, and led manuscript writing. CCA analyzed the data, contributed to data interpretation, and contributed to writing the manuscript. AET collected the data, analyzed the data, contributed to data interpretation, and contributed to writing the manuscript. LP designed the study, contributed to data interpretation, and edited the manuscript. MPM contributed to data interpretation and edited the manuscript. JAW contributed to data interpretation and edited the manuscript. YM designed the study, oversaw data collection, guided data analysis, contributed to data interpretation and manuscript writing, and edited the manuscript.

### **Funding Disclosure**

This project was funded by the Bloomberg American Health Initiative.

lies, especially as SNAP participants spend about 26% more time preparing at-home meals compared to the general population (Davis & You, 2010). Such regulations also present challenges for individuals experiencing homelessness who may lack access to food storage and cooking supplies and for older adults and those with disabilities who may be unable to safely prepare food at home.

The Restaurant Meals Program (RMP), an extension of SNAP, allows certain SNAP participants to spend benefits on prepared meals at authorized restaurants (USDA FNS, 2025b). RMP became a state-optional program within SNAP as part of the 1977 Food Stamp Act, and is unique among U.S. food assistance programs, such as the National School Lunch Program, due to its focus on populations that may be incapable of storing or preparing food at home: eligible populations include adults over 60, people experiencing homelessness, and those with a disability (Food and Agriculture Act of 1977, 1977). California in the early 2000s became the first state to implement RMP (California Department of Social Services, 2021). As of 2025, nine states participated in RMP: Arizona, California, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Rhode Island, Virginia, and two counties in Illinois (USDA FNS, 2025b).

RMP holds strong potential to enhance food security among some of the most high-risk SNAP participants. Nevertheless, adoption remains limited, and little empirical research has examined drivers, constraints, and best practices associated with program implementation (Hua et al., 2024). This study aims to address critical gaps in SNAP policy research by:

1. Reviewing existing evidence on RMP implementation and evaluation; and
2. Examining the perspectives of state administrators and independent restaurant owners on factors influencing program adoption, restaurant participation, and outcomes for eligible SNAP participants.

These analyses seek to advance understanding of how RMP can expand its reach and enhance food access among some of SNAP's most vulnerable participants.

## Methods

To generate a more comprehensive understanding of RMP implementation and impact, this study utilized multiple methods—a rapid literature review followed by key informant interviews with state RMP administrators and independent restaurant owners participating in RMP—allowing for both breadth of evidence and depth of perspective. A literature search was conducted in October 2023 utilizing databases representing literature from relevant disciplines, including public health, nursing, social sciences, public policy, and nutrition: PAIS, PubMed, CINAHL, SCOPUS, Web of Science, and Hein Online. In addition, a search of grey literature (e.g., press articles, academic papers, institutional reports) using Google Scholar was performed. Search terms included (Restaurant Meals Program) OR (RMP) AND (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) OR (SNAP) AND (Restaurants).

Studies that met the following criteria were included in the review: discussed implementation or evaluation of RMP, published in English, and full-text accessible. Articles were managed using Covidence (Covidence Systematic Review Software). A trained graduate research assistant independently screened titles and abstracts according to inclusion criteria. Full texts were subsequently reviewed to confirm eligibility based on inclusion criteria. Data extraction was organized in Microsoft Excel and captured bibliographical information, study objectives, and reported drivers and constraints of RMP. Following extraction, the research team discussed the literature findings, and the trained research assistant employed a thematic approach to identify inductive patterns related to drivers and constraints of RMP implementation and evaluation. Throughout, questions and ambiguities were discussed and resolved through consultation with the broader research team, ensuring rigor, transparency, and consistency.

To deepen understanding of drivers, constraints, and impacts of RMP participation, semi-structured key informant interviews were conducted with state administrators of RMP and RMP-participating independently owned restaurants (January–April 2024). Participants were recruited using purposive snowball sampling.

Recruitment began in one focal state (Hua et al., 2024) by contacting the state's RMP administrator using publicly available contact information, who then recommended RMP administrators from other states. At the time of recruitment, only three independently-owned restaurants were enrolled in RMP in the focal state, and one had since closed. Therefore, recruitment was expanded to a second state based on the recommendation of an RMP administrator who provided a list of eligible restaurant owners in their state, facilitating subsequent recruitment. Restaurant owners who participated in interviews were compensated with a \$25<sup>1</sup> gift card, while administrators were not permitted to accept gift cards.

Guided by the research aims, gaps identified in the literature review, and related work (Hua et al., 2024), state administrators ( $n = 6$ ) were asked questions about RMP adoption, restaurant participation and communication, and program evaluation, and restaurant owners ( $n = 2$ ) were asked about applying for and enrolling in RMP and impacts of participation on their business (e.g., customers, revenue). Specific questions can be found in the interview guides, appendices A and B for each key informant group. Interviews were conducted via telephone or Zoom and scheduled for 60 minutes; interviews ranged in length from 45 minutes to two hours depending on participant availability and scope of program implementation.

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and uploaded to Taguette, an online qualitative analysis tool. Data were analyzed by two graduate research assistants, following Braun and Clarke's (2021) work on thematic analysis, beginning with data familiarization and detailed memos to identify preliminary codes. Transcripts were then independently coded using inductive codes (e.g., participation requirements, administrative burdens) and deductive codes (e.g., RMP facilitators, RMP restrictions/limitations) related to drivers and constraints to RMP participation. Codes were analyzed for a shared pattern of meaning to identify preliminary themes, which were refined through a recursive process, revisiting the data and codes and discussing with the broader research team to modify,

remove, and add codes as necessary. Illustrative quotes were provided to add context and clarify themes.

## Results

The initial database search yielded 199 records. In total, 179 non-duplicate articles were screened, and 59 articles were selected for full-text review (Figure 1). An additional 30 articles were excluded after full-text review due to duplication (i.e., the same articles published under different titles or publishers) or brief mentions of RMP without implementation or evaluation details. This resulted in 29 articles included in the final review, of which 21 were news articles, four were policy briefs, two were college papers (one was a masters thesis), and two were law review articles (Table 1).

### *Drivers Supporting RMP Adoption and Implementation*

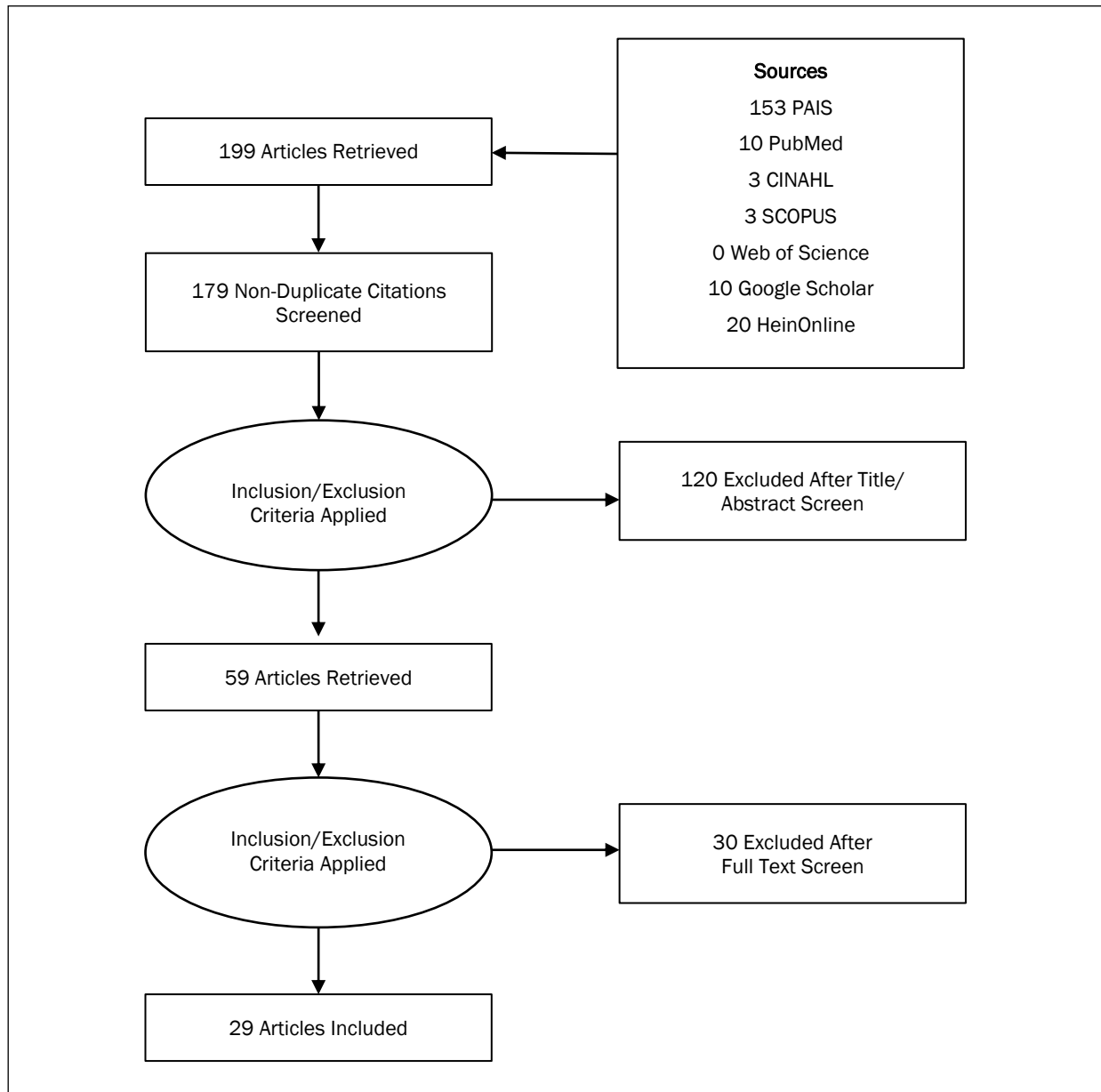
The following sections discuss drivers supporting RMP adoption and implementation, which include championing food access and food security; connecting local restaurants, communities, and cultures; and growing business revenue and stimulating local economies.

#### *Championing Food Access and Food Security*

Most articles included in the literature review described RMP as a mechanism for increasing food access and food security while centering participants' dignity and autonomy, a finding echoed by administrators and restaurant owners interviewed for this study (Table 2). Within the reviewed literature, "anti-hunger advocates" (i.e., those working to address hunger and its root causes) were among the most vocal champions of RMP, emphasizing its importance for populations who may face barriers to using SNAP benefits (Alex Padilla: U.S. Senator for California, 2023; Dewey, 2022; Elejalde-Ruiz, 2019; Harris, 2011; Janzer, 2020; Jones, 2011; New York State: Governor Kathy Hochul, 2021; Prah, 2011; Walker, 2016; 2018). These advocates emphasized RMP's role in expanding food access while promoting dignity and autonomy, particularly among

<sup>1</sup> All currencies are in US\$.

**Figure 1. PRISMA Diagram of Literature Sources and Articles Screened and Included**



people experiencing homelessness (Alex Padilla: U.S. Senator for California, 2023; Blum, 2011; Dewey, 2022; Elejalde-Ruiz, 2019; Harris, 2011; Janzer, 2020; Jones, 2011; Kovarsky, 2022; U.S. Representative Jimmy Panetta, 2020; Walker, 2018). News articles similarly emphasized the significant challenges unhoused individuals encounter when seeking hot meals, including being denied entry to restaurants or relying on soup kitchens with limited meal options and operating

hours (Elejalde-Ruiz, 2019; Janzer, 2020). In contrast, RMP enabled participating restaurants to welcome individuals experiencing homelessness as valued customers, granting them access to the same amenities (e.g., bathroom facilities) and food choices available to the general public.

The literature review also noted restaurants with anti-hunger missions, including large corporations and independent restaurants, as supporters of RMP for its ability to promote food access and

food security. For instance, news articles and a college paper cited Yum! Brands, the parent company of KFC, Taco Bell, and other chains that devote millions each year to hunger relief organizations, for actively lobbying to expand RMP implementation across states (Blum, 2011; Jones, 2011; Prah, 2011; Robertson, 2020). Likewise, one article featured the California-based food company, Everytable, which pledged to enroll each new franchise in RMP wherever available as part of its Social Equity Franchise Program (Everytable, 2022). Independent restaurant owners cited in news articles also described commitments to addressing food insecurity in their communities as a prime motivator for participating in RMP (Janzer, 2020; Solis, 2023; Walker, 2018).

Findings from the interviews reinforced these themes. Both administrators and restaurant owners emphasized RMP's dignity-centered approach as central to their support for the program. One restaurant owner explained he viewed patrons as "[guests] of our restaurant" (Owner 2) regardless of housing status or payment type. Similarly, a state administrator shared the following sentiment about RMP participants:

We know that those groups of people have ... limited access to cooking facilities, the ability to prepare food, store food, buy food, cook food. So, allowing these populations the autonomy ... to make their own decisions about what they want to eat, when they want to eat, how they want to eat is also affirming of them as human beings, people

with autonomy, and that matters.  
 (Administrator 6)

Mirroring the influential role of anti-hunger advocates identified in the literature review, advocacy groups were also instrumental in promoting RMP among SNAP administrators interviewed for this study. One RMP administrator credited such organizations as the driving force behind their state's adoption of the program, stating advocacy groups "caught wind of [RMP] and then enlightened us and we got on board" (Administrator 4).

### *Connects Local Restaurants, Communities, and Cultures*

Another key driver of RMP participation identified in both the literature review and interviews was the program's role in fostering connections between businesses and communities (Table 2) (Cohen, 2022; Dewey, 2022; Elejalde-Ruiz, 2019; Janzer, 2020; Solis, 2023; Walker, 2018). Advocates cited in news articles described RMP-participating restaurants as inclusive and safe spaces for social connection, particularly for individuals who might otherwise feel unwelcome in public dining spaces or be unable to afford restaurant meals (Dewey, 2022; Elejalde-Ruiz, 2019). Community connection was particularly salient among owners of locally owned restaurants interviewed for news articles, who saw RMP participation as a way to make their restaurants more financially accessible and, in turn, to engage with a larger share of local residents (Janzer, 2020; Solis, 2023; Walker, 2018). To promote this driver, some states, such as Massachusetts, have

**Table 1. Publication Sources of Articles Included in the Review**

Article Type (n = 29)	Publication Sources
News articles (n = 21)	Axios, Chicago Tribune, Columbia Missourian, Courier-Journal [Louisville, Kentucky], Maryland Matters, Next City, Orange County Register, PR Newswire, Public Opinion Newspaper, Restaurant Hospitality, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Supermarket News, Tribune Content Agency, The Washington Post
Policy briefs (n = 4)	Alex Padilla: US Senator for California, Governor Kathy Hochul, MENA Report, US Representative Jimmy Panetta
Dissertations (n = 2)	Occidental College, Rochester Institute of Technology
Law review (n = 2)	Clearinghouse Review Journal of Poverty Law and Policy, University of Illinois Chicago Law Review

chosen to limit RMP participation to independent restaurants, excluding chain restaurants in order to prioritize local impact (Solis, 2023).

Administrators who participated in interviews echoed the importance of community connection through RMP. Several administrators familiar with Massachusetts' focus on independent restaurants praised this approach, pointing to the state's "extremely robust RMP campaign with restaurants that are owned by women and people of color and local restaurants" (Administrator 1), and expressed aspirations to follow suit. One administrator specifically accentuated the community connection that RMP fosters among older adults "who stay in the house because [they] have less mobility," not-

ing that "being able to take [their] SNAP card and go to a restaurant allows [for] some socialization with others" (Administrator 3).

Another key aspect of community connection, found in both the literature review and interviews, was multiculturalism (Janzer, 2020; Solis, 2023; Walker, 2018). Restaurant owners from diverse cultural backgrounds interviewed in news articles expressed a strong desire to share their food and by extension their cultural heritage with broader segments of their communities through participation in RMP (Janzer, 2020; Walker, 2018). Similarly, interviews revealed that both administrators and restaurant owners sought to ensure that eligible SNAP participants had access to

**Table 2. Drivers Supporting RMP Adoption and Implementation**

Theme	Description	Illustrative Quote
Championing food access and food security (n = 17 articles)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater food access and food security for SNAP participants with limited access to store or cook food</li> <li>• Dignity and autonomy in accessing food and restaurants beyond the charitable food system</li> <li>• Alignment between RMP and restaurants' social missions</li> </ul>	<p>"We chose to do the Restaurant Meals Program because it kind of tied in with the Pay It Forward program that we were already trying to do. We were already trying to make it so that people that can't afford a meal ... are able to." (Restaurant owner 1)</p> <p>"We identified 20 priority communities...The food insecurities are in some of the deserted towns ... farmland towns and things like that ... we are really looking to address communities that ... have the population that needs the services." (Administrator 3)</p>
Connects local restaurants, communities, and cultures (n = 6 articles)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restaurants as venues for social connection</li> <li>• Support for local and minority-owned businesses</li> <li>• Promotion of multiculturalism</li> </ul>	<p>"Restaurants are connections to community, especially for immigrants that have come to this country that are looking for food from their homeland." (Administrator 1)</p> <p>"The core goal is bringing our food to as many people as possible. So, by participating in the RMP, that opened ... the door ... to reach out to more people that are income restricted ... to allow them to have a taste of our great food." (Restaurant owner 2)</p>
Grows business revenue and stimulates local economies (n = 9 articles)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for restaurants during COVID-19</li> <li>• Economic stimulus in local communities</li> <li>• Growth in restaurant revenue and customer base</li> </ul>	<p>"I see the same faces over and over. So that has created a steady revenue from those people that have [SNAP] benefits. Obviously, it looks like to me that they like our food too. But yes, I've seen ... the repeated customers." (Restaurant owner 2)</p> <p>"[RMP] is essentially an entirely new revenue stream for restaurants...It supports their business in having more customers and bringing in more money. And in turn, it helps the local community. It helps pump dollars back into the local community." (Administrator 6)</p>

“culturally relevant restaurants within culturally diverse communities” (Administrator 3). RMP administrators in particular recognized the value of culturally diverse restaurants not only as sources of nourishment but also as spaces that reflect and reinforce community identity and belonging:

Restaurants are connections to community, especially for immigrants that have come to this country that are looking for food from their homeland ... Restaurants can be a really good way to kind of link and join communities together. (Administrator 1)

One interviewed restaurant owner, originally from the Dominican Republic, explained that his motivation for enrolling in RMP stemmed from wanting to share his culture with others through food:

The core goal is bringing our food to as many people as possible. So, by participating in the RMP, that opened ... the door ... to reach out to more people that are income restricted ... to allow them to have a taste of our great food. (Owner 2)

Recognizing this motivation, administrators described efforts to support diverse restaurant owners by making the RMP application process more inclusive and accessible, such as providing materials in multiple languages, such as Spanish and Korean, and offering assistance to non-native English speakers. By lowering administrative barriers, these practices can expand participation in RMP and reinforce the program’s potential to celebrate cultural diversity and strengthen community connections through food.

### *Grows Business Revenue and Stimulates Local Economies*

Articles in the literature review emphasized the potential of RMP to grow business revenue for participating restaurants and stimulate local economies (Table 2) (Alex Padilla: US Senator for California, 2023; Carman, 2020; “Charge this meal to Uncle Sam,” 2011; Dewey, 2022; New York

State: Governor Kathy Hochul, 2021; Janzer, 2020; U.S. Representative Jimmy Panetta, 2020; Walker, 2018). The economic benefit became a prominent driver of RMP expansion during the COVID-19 pandemic, when government officials faced the dual challenge of rising food insecurity and declining restaurant revenues (Carman, 2020; Dewey, 2022; New York State: Governor Kathy Hochul, 2021; Janzer, 2020; U.S. Representative Jimmy Panetta, 2020).

These themes were further affirmed by administrators interviewed for this study; one described the COVID-19 pandemic as a catalyst for their state’s adoption of RMP, and another highlighted a sharp increase in program-related expenditures: “peak expenditures for the RMP [were] \$30 million plus per month” (Administrator 6) compared to about \$9 million per month pre-pandemic. The goal of supporting local economies was found to align with efforts to prioritize independently owned restaurants in RMP; one administrator stated:

If we have SNAP customers who can use their SNAP benefits at small mom and pop shops, we’re hopeful that that would help with the economic impact for local businesses too. (Administrator 2)

Some administrators cited the statistic that “a dollar of SNAP [is] estimated to generate \$1.50 in the local economy” (Administrator 1), an observation also referenced once in the literature review by an RMP advocate (Alex Padilla: US Senator for California, 2023). Overall, SNAP’s demonstrated economic stimulus effect underscores RMP’s capacity to yield wider economic ripple effects.

Although the two restaurant owners interviewed for this study were less financially motivated, both expressed satisfaction in observing noticeable growth in business since joining RMP. One owner noted “at least a 10% increase in sales per week” (Owner 1), attributing additional revenue to greater accessibility and development of a loyal customer base. The other owner expanded on this pattern:

I see the same faces over and over. So that has created a steady revenue from those people that have [SNAP] benefits. Obviously, it looks like to me that they like our food too. But yes, I've seen ... the repeated customers.  
(Owner 2)

### *Constraints Limiting RMP Adoption and Implementation*

Despite the major drivers supporting RMP adoption, several notable constraints mentioned in the literature review and interviews continue to limit broader adoption by states and participation by restaurants. Constraints include states and restaurants being burdened by an onerous administrative process; the dominance of fast-food chains undermining the driver of connecting local restaurants, communities, and cultures; overcoming misconceptions and negative public perceptions; and gaps in program evaluation, which limit the data needed to encourage RMP adoption.

#### *States and Restaurants Burdened by Onerous Administrative Processes*

A primary challenge identified in the interviews was the burdensome administrative process for states to implement RMP (Table 3). Although not widely discussed within the literature review, participants described a lack of dedicated RMP staff within state SNAP agencies. In some cases, newly established RMP programs were managed by a single staff member, with one administrator commenting, "I'd say grow more of me if we're going to grow the program" (Administrator 3). Even states with "many thousands of restaurants" were managed by a "team of five" staff members (Administrator 6). In most instances, RMP staff were also responsible for other aspects of their states' SNAP programs, limiting capacity to effectively administer RMP.

Another major hurdle cited within the literature review and by interviewees was reliance on a manual process to identify SNAP participants eligible for RMP. This approach is both time consuming and error-prone, because of the fluid nature of eligibility criteria which change with life circumstances such as age, housing, and disability status. In the literature review, authors noted that such

errors can result in eligible individuals being misclassified and denied access to meals, creating frustration for both SNAP recipients and participating restaurants (Cohen, 2022; Dewey, 2022). Restaurant owners interviewed in the study affirmed these frustrations. One restaurant owner underscored the need for a more efficient and reliable process for determining RMP eligibility:

I would just want to stress ... the frustration that happens when somebody's denied that shouldn't be denied. ... There should be a streamlined process whether it's just like a form that they're able to fill out online ... that will go to somebody that will look into this and classify them properly. ... I've had people come in and say, "I just walked two hours to get here," just so that they can get a hot meal. The disappointment that is on their face when something is declined. (Owner 1)

Additionally, conflicting information from the literature review highlighted confusion surrounding requirements for states to implement RMP. For instance, one news source reported that states must first demonstrate to USDA that RMP's target populations are not "well-served" by the state's broader SNAP program (Dewey, 2022). Other sources, including a news article and a policy brief, claimed states must submit an application to USDA for approval (Carman, 2020; New York State: Governor Kathy Hochul, 2021), while two articles asserted states can simply opt into the program at their discretion (Blum, 2011; Janzer, 2020). Such inconsistencies may contribute to states' hesitation to pursue the program, as the administrative pathway remains unclear.

Similarly burdensome were administrative constraints that restaurants face to apply for and participate in RMP. While these emerged in several news articles and one policy brief from the literature review (Alex Padilla: US Senator for California, 2023; Dewey, 2022; Walker, 2018), the constraints were primarily discussed in interviews, with one administrator citing administrative processes as "one of the main barriers to participation for restaurants" (Administrator 1). Administrators and restaurant owners emphasized that the application

process is burdensome and time-consuming, involving multiple steps. Restaurants first must apply through their state's RMP online system, which requires a completed application plus "all this documentation, you know, the license to do business, all the tax stuff, the social security ... it's any government bureaucracy, you know, lots of stuff" (Administrator 4). Once approved by the state, restaurants must complete a second application to the USDA Food and Nutrition Service to become an RMP-authorized restaurant. However, the federal application must be mailed physically, an outdated process that raises both security and efficiency concerns. For example, Administrator 1 explained that a "restaurant doesn't know if that piece of mail they sent is lost somewhere" when sending documents through the mail, and Administrator 5 indicated the lengthy processing time of physical documents: "when it goes to the federal people, 30 to 90 days is how long it takes sometimes."

Even after acceptance into RMP, restaurants face additional administrative burdens, mentioned in both the literature review and interviews, in covering start-up costs. Chief of these is the point-of-sale (POS) devices required to process electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards, which are the SNAP equivalent of a debit card. News articles and one thesis in the literature review explained that restaurants must either purchase new EBT-compatible devices or pay a third-party vendor to retrofit existing systems (Cohen, 2022; Dewey, 2022; Muckerman, 2023; Prah, 2011; Solis, 2023; Walker, 2018)—an added expense that can cost roughly \$75 per month (Walker, 2018). However, an administrator explained that devoted funds from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 were available to subsidize EBT-compatible POS systems for the first cohort of participating restaurants in their state, but noted that no such funding would be available for future cohorts.

These layers of administrative burdens have prompted policy responses documented in the literature review. Senators from RMP-participating states introduced the Meals for At-Risk Americans Act, calling on USDA to modernize RMP's infrastructure (Alex Padilla: US Senator for California, 2023). According to the accompanying policy brief,

the legislation directed USDA to create a digital application system for restaurants, provide guidance to states interested in launching RMP, improve communication with restaurant and state applicants, and offer technical assistance to restaurants and states (Alex Padilla: US Senator for California, 2023).

*Dominance of Fast-Food Chains Undermines the Driver of Connecting Local Restaurants, Communities, and Cultures*

Fast-food and quick-service restaurant chains make up the majority of RMP participants, a pattern consistently noted in both the literature review and interviews with program administrators (Cohen, 2022; Dewey, 2022; Healy, 2021; Janzer, 2020; Jones, 2011; Prah, 2011; Robertson, 2020; Walker, 2018). This trend was often framed as a constraint to broader state adoption of RMP, partly because the dominance of chain restaurants was seen as misaligned with the driver for RMP to connect local restaurants, communities, and cultures (Table 3). One news article noted RMP critics calling the program a "handout to fast-food corporations" (Dewey, 2022, para. 22). Many fast-food chains and franchises likely have the infrastructure, staffing, and financial capacity to absorb start-up costs and administrative burdens more easily than independently-owned restaurants (Cohen, 2022; Robertson, 2020).

Large restaurant chains have also been reported to actively lobby for the program. For example, Yum!, the parent company of several fast-food chains, was frequently cited in the literature for its extensive lobbying efforts to expand RMP implementation (Blum, 2011; Boss, 2011; Dewey, 2022; Jones, 2011; Prah, 2011; Rauhut, 2011). While Yum! positions its advocacy as aligned with corporate social responsibility and anti-hunger efforts (Blum, 2011; Prah, 2011; Robertson, 2020), opponents contend the company's actions are primarily driven by financial interests (Boss, 2011; Jones, 2011).

Interviewed participants echoed the tension between the dominance of fast food chains in RMP and the motivation to prioritize local businesses. One administrator articulated the conflict:

Unfortunately ... it's mostly fast food places [that participate] ... we would love it and prefer it if this entire list was mostly local restaurants because that's what we really wanted to support coming out of the gate.  
(Administrator 1)

Several administrators suggested that RMP-participating chain restaurants can create a "blueprint" (Administrator 1) for additional locations for the chain to develop, further contributing to their overrepresentation in the program. The procedural familiarity that chain restaurants possess underscores an informational gap which leaves many smaller, independent restaurants at a disadvantage.

Despite attempts to limit chain participation, one article reported challenges recruiting local restaurants to participate in RMP (Dewey, 2022). A recurring explanation, discussed in both the literature review and interviews, was the limited recruitment efforts undertaken by states. For instance, a college paper described how some local restaurants learned about RMP through signs posted in windows of RMP-participating restaurants stating "EBT accepted here" (Robertson, 2020). Similarly, an administrator recalled when her state implemented RMP, they "didn't do a marketing campaign" (Administrator 4), instead relying solely on word-of-mouth outreach from RMP staff to local restaurants, an approach echoed across most administrator interviews. Additionally, both restaurant owners interviewed also reported learning about RMP informally through word-of-mouth. Given the limited staff capacity devoted to administering state RMPs, proactive recruitment of local restaurants is unlikely to be prioritized.

To overcome these constraints and promote independent restaurant participation in RMP, one administrator suggested allocating state funding to offset start-up costs, such as EBT-compatible POS systems. Not all stakeholders, however, viewed overrepresentation of fast-food restaurants as a constraint to RMP adoption. As highlighted in the literature review, some stakeholders emphasized the role that fast-food restaurants can play in improving food access, particularly in communities where they represent some of the few affordable and accessible food sources (Cohen, 2022;

Everytable, 2022; Jones, 2011; Kovarsky, 2022). Reflecting this perspective, one administrator noted that their state's primary goal was to "increase food access first and foremost" (Administrator 6), rather than prioritize participation of certain restaurants over others.

#### *Overcoming Misconceptions and Negative Public Perceptions of RMP*

Another set of constraints impeding broader RMP adoption was the prevalence of misconceptions about RMP (Table 3). One pervasive misconception among RMP opponents identified in the literature review was the "paternalistic attitude" (Janzer, 2020, para. 4) that SNAP participants should not be able to use benefits to purchase foods considered unhealthy ("Charge this meal to Uncle Sam," 2011; Boss, 2011; Carman, 2020; Cohen, 2022; Dewey, 2022; Elejalde-Ruiz, 2019; Harris, 2011; Healy, 2021; Jones, 2011; Robertson, 2020; Suntrup, 2022; Walker, 2016; 2018). This concern has mainly played out in debates surrounding the perceived unhealthfulness of menu items at fast-food restaurants, which represent the majority of RMP participants. Some legislators have used this rationale to oppose RMP implementation ("Charge this meal to Uncle Sam," 2011). Similarly, Michigan had adopted RMP but discontinued the program in 2013 over concerns related to the nutritional quality of menu options at their predominantly fast-food restaurant participants (Dewey, 2022; Elejalde-Ruiz, 2019; Healy, 2021), although the state has since re-instated RMP. One administrator articulated the tension between fast-food restaurant participation and health priorities:

It's nice that we have some of these big chain restaurants that are interested in our program for convenience. ... But to be completely honest ... we want to be able to offer healthier choices. And sometimes those fast food chains don't have a lot of super nutritious ... things that they offer. (Administrator 2)

In response, proponents of RMP have offered other considerations. Some articles in the literature reviewed noted that many fast-food restaurants now offer "better for you" options, such as salads

and grilled chicken, enabling participants to make more nutritious choices (Blum, 2011; Prah, 2011; Robertson, 2020). This message was affirmed by several administrators, who pointed to Subway’s participation in RMP as an example of a fast-food restaurant with healthier options, that a “place like Subway sort of has built-in healthy meal options” (Administrator 6).

Additionally, advocates cited in the literature review stressed the importance of personal agency,

arguing that SNAP participants, like anyone else, should have autonomy over their own food choices (Blum, 2011; Elejalde-Ruiz, 2019; Janzer, 2020; Prah, 2011; Walker, 2018). Just as individuals not using SNAP are free to choose between healthier and less healthy food options in grocery stores and restaurants, participants in SNAP and RMP should be afforded the same choices (Harris, 2011; Suntrup, 2022). This perspective was generally shared among administrators interviewed:

**Table 3. Constraints Limiting RMP Adoption and Implementation**

Theme	Description	Illustrative Quote
States and restaurants burdened by onerous administrative processes (n = 11 articles)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Few staff to administer RMP at the state-level and the need to manually identify RMP-eligible SNAP participants</li> <li>• Lack of clarity on requirements for states to implement RMP</li> <li>• Dual application process for restaurants applying to RMP</li> <li>• Start-up costs for restaurants</li> </ul>	<p>“[The application] is a two-part thing. So with the state, if I get everything I need it only takes me like one day to approve [a restaurant’s application]... Then when it goes to the federal people, 30 to 90 days is how long it takes sometimes.” (Administrator 5)</p> <p>“From a staffing...perspective, I think in order for [state] to really expand the [RPM], we’re almost going to have to staff an individual that can solely focus on [RPM]...it could become a full-time job.” (Administrator 2)</p>
Dominance of fast-food chains undermines the driver of connecting local restaurants, communities, and cultures (n = 14 articles)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater resources and less financial risk to participate in RMP</li> <li>• Greater awareness of procedural requirements of RMP via information sharing within a chain or franchise</li> <li>• Challenges recruiting locally-owned restaurants in some states</li> </ul>	<p>“Unfortunately...it’s mostly fast food places...we would love it and prefer it if this entire list was mostly local restaurants because that’s what we really wanted to support coming out of the gate.” (Administrator 1)</p> <p>“There’s a lot of fast food restaurants that participate...the Jack in the Boxes, Taco Bell...just a lot of fast-food places” (Administrator 4)</p>
Overcoming misconceptions and negative public perceptions of RMP (n = 19 articles)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negative perceptions of the healthfulness of fast-food restaurant menu options</li> <li>• Misconceptions of RMP as expanding SNAP, increasing benefit amounts, or restricting participants from using benefits at grocery stores</li> </ul>	<p>“It’s nice that we have...big chain restaurants that are interested in our program for convenience...But to be completely honest...we want to be able to offer healthier choices. And sometimes those fast food chains don’t have a lot of super nutritious...things that they offer.” (Administrator 2)</p> <p>“It’s important to really not communicate [RMP’s existence] to everybody [participating in SNAP] because...everybody’s not eligible. So we have notices [about RMP]...to clients that are specifically addressed to eligible clients.” (Administrator 3)</p>
Gaps in program evaluation limit the data needed to encourage RMP adoption (n = 2 articles)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No formal state-level evaluation data related to restaurants beyond some states tracking the number of participating restaurants</li> <li>• Lack of evaluation data on the reach and impact of RMP on SNAP participants</li> </ul>	<p>“As far as evaluation, there’s nothing really built into RMP that looks to see how well it’s doing...[that’s] a really hard metric to...define.” (Administrator 1)</p> <p>“We don’t have an official program monitoring or evaluation practice...because we don’t have the bandwidth at the state level.” (Administrator 6)</p>

We're not on the job of telling people what to eat ... nutrition and education is super important, but at the end of the day, a meal is a meal and people have rights to eat and choose whatever they desire. (Administrator 1)

Moreover, sources from the literature review described the considerable discretion states have over eligibility requirements for restaurant participants in RMP. In most states, the primary requirement is that restaurants offer discounted or low-cost meals (Dewey, 2022; Janzer, 2020). Other states permitting fast-food restaurants to participate have chosen to prioritize healthier chains (e.g., Subway) or have implemented additional criteria, such as requiring restaurants to offer at least five healthy menu options (Robertson, 2020; Walker, 2016; 2018). Massachusetts, on the other hand, has taken a more restrictive approach by excluding fast-food restaurants from participating in RMP entirely (Solis, 2023).

Another misconception identified in the literature review involves media portrayals that inaccurately depict RMP as an expansion of SNAP, rather than an optional sub-program operating within the existing SNAP framework (Muckerman, 2023; Zokovitch, 2022). Several authors, including both academic and journalistic sources, have sought to correct this by clarifying that RMP neither increases recipients' monthly SNAP benefits nor restricts them to using benefits exclusively at restaurants (Robertson, 2020; Suntrup, 2022). SNAP participants enrolled in RMP continue to receive the same amount of monthly benefits and retain the ability to purchase food at grocery stores (Robertson, 2020; Suntrup, 2022). Moreover, sources in the literature review emphasized that only specific SNAP subpopulations are eligible for RMP, a nuance often lost in public discourse (Harris, 2011; Prah, 2011). An additional identified misconception was that implementing RMP imposes high costs on states. However, multiple news sources have clarified that states with existing programs have relatively low administrative costs, especially after the initial implementation phase (Blum, 2011; Harris, 2011; Jones, 2011; Suntrup, 2022; Zokovitch, 2022). An administrator reinforced this point, sharing that opting into RMP

“was relatively cheap, just some administrative costs” (Administrator 1). Altogether, these misconceptions about RMP have contributed to negative public perceptions of the program, particularly among fiscally conservative stakeholders wary of expanding social welfare programs or increasing government spending (Carman, 2020; Suntrup, 2022).

#### *Gaps in Program Evaluation Limit the Data Needed to Encourage RMP Adoption*

Results from the literature review revealed a lack of formal data collection or evaluation mechanisms among state RMPs aside from maintaining a participating restaurant list (Table 3) (Cohen, 2022; Robertson, 2020). This observation was corroborated by participants interviewed. For instance, one administrator acknowledged the lack of formal evaluation but was proactive in tracking restaurant participation over time as an indicator of program growth and success, stating that when RMP was adopted in their state in 2021 “we had about 2,500 restaurants on the program. ... Now in 2024, we have 4,400 restaurants. ... Huge growth, right?” (Administrator 6). Two other administrators said that their states collect and report overall SNAP dollars spent through RMP to USDA, but the data were not analyzed at more granular levels. Another administrator assumed USDA was responsible for program monitoring and evaluation because “the relationship... is stronger between the retailer and the feds than it is between the retailer and the state” and went on to say, “I got a feeling I'm failing the monitoring part” (Administrator 4).

The absence of evaluation data represents a significant constraint to states improving existing RMP and to supporting adoption in additional states. Without robust evaluation data, it remains difficult to understand the program's reach and impact on eligible SNAP recipients. Key questions remain unanswered, such as how many eligible SNAP recipients are participating in RMP, how many are not, and the types of meals bought and restaurants at which SNAP benefits are spent. Generating these insights would be critical for continuous program improvement and to build an evidence base to advocate for RMP expansion nationally.

## Discussion

To our knowledge, this is the first comprehensive review of literature related to RMP. The vast majority of sources identified in this review were news articles, and none was a peer-reviewed publication, underscoring the need for scientific investigation of RMP. By synthesizing information from these sources and incorporating insights from interviews with RMP administrators and restaurant owners, this review extends existing literature on food assistance programs by highlighting the multifaceted drivers and constraints influencing RMP adoption and implementation. The primary drivers included championing food access and food security; connecting local restaurants, communities, and cultures; and generating business revenue and strengthening local economies. Conversely, major constraints included a burdensome administrative process faced by both states and restaurants; the dominance of fast-food restaurants undermining the driver of connecting local restaurants, communities, and cultures; misconceptions and negative public opinions about RMP; and insufficient program evaluation efforts. Together, these findings begin to reveal the promise of RMP and critical areas requiring attention for successful and equitable expansion.

This study highlights the unique role RMP can play in enhancing food access and food security among target populations who often face barriers to food preparation and storage. RMP ensures eligible SNAP participants can safely and conveniently access prepared meals, and represents an opportunity to support a dignity-centered approach to food security. This aligns with calls for food assistance strategies that prioritize agency and dignity by creating environments that center choice, reduce stigma, and foster respect. For example, offering client-choice models, minimizing bureaucratic hurdles, and ensuring food assistance is delivered in ways that affirm participant autonomy can improve food security, meet preferences for healthy, perishable foods, and increase self-efficacy to manage diet-related chronic disease (Andriessen & van der Velde, 2024; Herrington & Mix, 2021; Martin et al., 2013, 2016; Remley et al., 2019). Future research should explore how RMP can be more intentionally implemented to affirm the dig-

nity, autonomy, and preferences of participants, while effectively addressing food access needs of the program's intended populations. For instance, research could assess whether program design offers meaningful choice, such as allowing participants to select meals that align with dietary needs and preferences or cultural traditions.

RMP occupies a critical and underexplored space in the food assistance landscape. While preliminary research found RMP improved food security among older SNAP participants in California (Jamal, 2025), research with other RMP target populations and states is lacking. Research could explore RMP's impact on time poverty, the lack of sufficient time to complete necessary responsibilities (Chaudhuri et al., 2021). SNAP participants often cite time as the biggest barrier to preparing healthy meals and devote 26% more time preparing meals than non-participants (Gearing et al., 2021; Davis & You, 2010). Importantly, labor costs of a meal (i.e., time needed to plan, purchase, and prepare food) are not incorporated into the Thrifty Food Plan, on which SNAP benefit amounts are based, likely underestimating the total cost—both time and monetary—of a nutritious diet (You et al., 2022). Households would need to reallocate a significant portion of commuting and/or work hours to food preparation to reach the full cost of a home-cooked nutritious diet (You et al., 2022). RMP could alleviate the labor costs of a meal without requiring time reallocation.

The ability of RMP to strengthen ties between communities and locally owned restaurants aligns with broader food system scholarship emphasizing social and economic values of place-based food access strategies (Deller et al., 2017; Enthoven & Van den Broeck, 2021; Feenstra, 2019; Warsaw et al., 2021), which argues that local food economies can serve as sites of both material support and social connection, particularly among historically underserved populations. As literature sources and interviewed administrators pointed out, every \$1.00 of SNAP benefits spent generates approximately \$1.50 in the local economy (Canning & Stacy, 2019), which could provide a critical revenue stream for independent establishments in states with RMP. In 2023 alone, SNAP participants redeemed \$124 billion in SNAP benefits, with \$302

million spent at private restaurants (USDA FNS, 2025c). While this represents a small proportion of total SNAP spending, it points to a meaningful opportunity for economic development, particularly in areas where food options are scarce. Additional research that quantifies and contextualizes economic impacts of RMP could elevate this underexplored driver of program adoption and sustainability.

Despite these benefits of RMP, several challenges hinder broader adoption and effective implementation. Chief among these are the significant administrative burdens encountered by both states and restaurants enrolling in RMP—challenges echoed in prior research, particularly among foreign-born restaurant owners who reported language barriers and difficulty accessing information needed to apply for RMP (Hua et al., 2024). While USDA provides some online resources to interested restaurants (i.e., the online application, information on third-party processors for EBT-compatible POS systems, training resources), they are only available in English and are difficult to locate (USDA NS, 2024a; 2025b; 2025d). Moreover, no publicly available guidance by USDA exists to support states exploring RMP adoption (USDA FNS, 2025b). Such gaps in accessibility and support infrastructure may disproportionately affect smaller, independently owned restaurants and states with fewer administrative resources.

These challenges have drawn federal attention, culminating in the introduction of the Meals for At-Risk Americans Act of 2023, which proposed that USDA provide clearer guidance to states implementing RMP, simplify the application process for restaurants, and offer technical assistance to states and restaurants enrolling in RMP (Alex Padilla: US Senator for California, 2023). Though legislation seems to have stalled, USDA can still implement its recommendations (Alex Padilla: US Senator for California, 2023; Meals for At-Risk Americans Act, 2023). In 2021, USDA partnered with the National Grocers Association to create the SNAP EBT Modernization Technical Assistance Center (SEMTAC), providing technical assistance to retailers to modernize their business and accept SNAP benefits online (USDA FNS,

2023). A similar partnership between USDA and the National Restaurant Association, for instance, could provide information and technical assistance to enable restaurants to participate in RMP.

In addition to administrative challenges, negative public perceptions of fast-food restaurant participation in RMP represent another barrier for state participation. Some critics expressed concerns that allowing SNAP dollars to be spent at fast-food establishments undermines nutrition and public health, a perception that led Michigan to eliminate its RMP in 2013 before reinstating it in 2020 (Dewey, 2022; Elejalde-Ruiz, 2019; Healy, 2021; Low Income Relief, 2025). While results demonstrated some states have focused on expanding food access regardless of restaurant type and healthfulness of food options (Cohen, 2022; Kovarsky, 2022), there is untapped potential to recruit more local, non-chain restaurants into RMP. USDA could support this effort by offering grants to local restaurants interested in joining RMP, as it has done with farmers markets that want to accept EBT (USDA FNS, 2024b). Furthermore, states have authority to shape their RMPs, including defining restaurant eligibility criteria, which some states, like Massachusetts, have leveraged to limit or exclude fast-food participation and prioritize healthier or locally owned small businesses (Solis, 2023). Even so, while debates around the nutritional quality of SNAP-eligible foods are ongoing, recent research has found no significant difference in obesity rates among SNAP participants over 60 in California counties with and without RMP (Jamal, 2025). This finding indicates that while nutrition concerns are valid, they should be weighed alongside the urgent need to improve food access and security among vulnerable populations.

Additionally, despite being an existing option under federal SNAP policy, RMP remains underutilized, emblematic of broader policy-implementation gaps commonly seen in public health, with programs like RMP stalled in a “black box” of unclear or inconsistent implementation (Chriqui et al., 2023). Systematic evaluation of RMP, such as using CDC’s Program Evaluation Framework (Kidder et al., 2024), can bridge this gap and dispel misconceptions. For instance, process evaluations

could illuminate start-up and administrative costs for states establishing an RMP, while outcome evaluations could assess program impacts on food security prevalence and diet quality among target populations—both of which could abate concerns related to dietary quality of food offered at RMP-participating restaurants. Ultimately, evaluation data would improve current RMPs and strengthen the case for adoption in more states.

Finally, some have called for expanding RMP eligibility to include college students, a population increasingly recognized as vulnerable to food insecurity (Billings et al., 2021; Gamba et al., 2021; Laska et al., 2021). In 2016, California changed restaurant eligibility requirements to include college campus restaurants but did not expand RMP to college students (Laska et al., 2021; Walker, 2016). In other words, only students participating in SNAP who also meet RMP eligibility criteria would be able to use SNAP benefits at RMP-participating campus restaurants. Therefore, without allowing all college students using SNAP to participate in RMP, its impact on college student food insecurity is likely limited (Billings et al., 2021). Additional research should explore whether extending RMP access to this population could mitigate food insecurity on college campuses.


### Strengths and Limitations

To our knowledge, this is the first comprehensive review of RMP-related literature, offering a foundational synthesis of an underexplored area. This study also contributes one of few empirical investigations of RMP, filling an important knowledge gap largely shaped by grey literature. To enhance depth and nuanced richness of the review, we also included qualitative interviews with RMP administrators and restaurant owners.

Several limitations are worth considering. First, many sources included in this review were news articles, some of which contained factual inaccuracies regarding RMP, as discussed in the “Misconceptions” subtheme, as well as biases supporting or opposing RMP. However, given limited publicly available information from USDA about RMP, it is challenging to assess the accuracy of these sources or potential influence on our

findings. The impact of this limitation was lessened due to interview data we collected, which triangulated results from the literature. Second, the sample size of qualitative interviews was small, with six administrators from four states and two restaurant owners from one state, due in part to the limited number of active RMPs, small administrative teams devoted to RMP within SNAP agencies, relatively few locally owned restaurants participating in RMPs, and the volatile nature of independently owned restaurant operations. While we captured perspectives across four regions, the small sample size may have excluded valuable viewpoints, particularly from restaurant owners with differing motivations and experiences with program participation, from residents of other regions, from those not enrolled in RMP, as well as from administrators in other states and regions. Finally, while this study highlights the perceived value of RMP in championing food access and food security for eligible SNAP participants, voices of SNAP participants were not represented in the literature or our interview data. Their perspectives and those of independent and chain restaurants represent a critical gap for future research.

### Conclusions

This study examined the drivers and constraints influencing restaurant and state participation in RMP. Results highlighted the multi-level nature of these factors, ranging from intrapersonal motivations to broader policy and administrative domains. To strengthen and expand RMP, policy evaluation should be prioritized to bridge gaps between RMP policy design and on-the-ground implementation. Findings from such evaluations, in addition to future research, could then inform policy actions that address key constraints to RMP while investing in the enabling conditions supporting program success. Future research would also benefit from exploring the feasibility, timelines, and cost implications of proposed solutions. Ultimately, encouraging broader RMP adoption could mitigate food insecurity among some of the nation’s most vulnerable populations. 

## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the participants involved in this study who devoted their time and shared their expertise with our team of researchers.

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## **Appendix A. In-Depth Interview Guide: State Administrators**

### **Part 1. General Questions**

1. What specific factors motivated/led to the establishment of the Restaurant Meals Program in [state]?
2. Who were the stakeholders involved in getting your state's RMP legislation passed?
3. Can you share what the core goal of the Restaurant Meals Program is in [state]?
4. Who is the target audience of the Restaurant Meals Program?

### **Part 2. Eligibility and Participation**

1. Can you talk about how restaurants learn about the program?
2. Once restaurants learn about the program, what is the process they go through to become enrolled?
3. Can you describe the restaurants that are currently participating in the program?
4. What benefits do restaurants gain from participating in the program?
5. How are SNAP recipients made aware of what restaurants are participating in the Restaurant Meals Program?

### **Part 3. Monitoring and Evaluation**

1. Can you provide examples (top 3) of specific measures/indicators that you are currently monitoring and evaluating to track the program's success and impact?
2. Can you tell me about any formal or informal processes to monitor and evaluate these measures/indicators?
3. What are any challenges or concerns related to implementing the program that participating restaurants have raised?
4. Given the progress of RMP so far, what are 1 or 2 areas where you would like to see it improve?

### **Part 4. Closing Questions**

1. What do you think is the impact of the Restaurant Meals Program on food access or food security in [state]?
2. If you had to pick one policy or strategy that you think could advance the impact of RMP, what would that be?
3. Is there anyone else you would recommend we speak with related to implementation of the Restaurant Meals Program?

## **Appendix B. In-Depth Interview Guide: Restaurant Owners**

### **Part 1. General Questions**

1. Can you share what led you to opening this restaurant?
2. Can you share what the core goal of the Restaurant Meals Program is for your business?
3. Who is the target audience of the Restaurant Meals Program?

### **Part 2. Eligibility and Participation**

1. How did you learn about the Maryland Restaurant Meals Program?
2. Can you describe the process of enrolling your restaurant in the Restaurant Meals Program?
3. Given your participation in the program, what changes have you noticed with your restaurant business?
4. What benefits do you gain or expect to gain from participating in the program?
5. Do you let your customers know that you are participating in the Restaurant Meals Program?
6. Can you tell me about the tasks or activities required to ensure the Restaurant Meals Program runs smoothly in your restaurant?
7. Given the progress of the Restaurant Meals Program so far, what are 1 or 2 areas where you would like to see it improve?

### **Part 3. Closing Questions**

1. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with the Restaurant Meals Program that we have not had the chance to discuss?
2. Is there anyone else (e.g., restaurant owner) you would recommend we speak with related to the Restaurant Meals Program?