

States love food stamps

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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[Eli Saslow's article last week on food-stamp recruitment](#) is a fine piece of reporting. It's primarily a look at the delicate work of persuading hurting people to accept help. Pretty intimate stuff:

“Take what you need,” [Dillie Nerios] said, again and again, until the fruit started to sweat and the vegetables wilted in the late-morning heat. Just as she prepared to leave, a car pulled into the senior center and a man with a gray mustache and a tattered T-shirt opened the driver-side door. He had seen the giveaway boxes earlier in the morning but waited to return until the crowd thinned. He had just moved to Spanish Lakes. He had never taken giveaways. He looked at the boxes but stayed near his car.

“Sir, can I help?” Nerios asked. She brought over some food. She gave him her business card and a few brochures about SNAP.

“I don’t want to be another person depending on the government,” he said.

“How about being another person getting the help you deserve?” she said.

But Saslow also deals more briefly with the public-policy side of the story:

State governments and their partner organizations have become active promoters, creating official “SNAP outreach plans” and hiring hundreds of recruiters like Nerios.

A decade ago, only about half of eligible Americans chose to sign up for food stamps. Now that number is 75 percent.

Rhode Island hosts SNAP-themed bingo games for the elderly. Alabama hands out fliers that read: “Be a patriot. Bring your food stamp money home.” Three states in the Midwest throw food-stamp parties where new recipients sign up en masse.

States are doing this because their people are hungry. But it's also because there's no better way to juice a state's economy: [food stamps are the single best economic stimulus there is](#). And state leaders know this, even if they work for administrations that have scored major point pooh-poohing the very idea of federal stimulus.

"Stimulus" remains a politically toxic word. Meanwhile, stimulus itself remains uncontroversial.