

SNAP war: Massachusetts grocers, growers feel the whiplash



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The [SNAP freeze](#) is the latest in a long list of disruptions Massachusetts businesses have faced, from grocers to shellfish growers.

The big picture: The freeze has led to lower sales and delayed food shipments for retailers and companies up the food supply chain in Massachusetts, even after SNAP recipients received long-awaited benefits.

By the numbers: An estimated 5,458 grocers in Massachusetts accept SNAP, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture data compiled by the left-leaning, nonpartisan think tank [Center for American Progress](#).

- Stores in Middlesex, Suffolk and Worcester counties alone serve nearly a half-million SNAP recipients.

The latest: President Trump and several states are [fighting over SNAP funds](#) that governors released even after an [appeals court ordered](#) the feds to fully fund SNAP.

- "He may threaten to punish states. I'm not going to punish residents," Gov. Maura Healey told reporters Monday.

State of play: Grocery stores saw their numbers dip last week as shoppers were left without SNAP funds.

- "We're about a third of where we usually are," Marc Iannotti, COO of Stop and Compare supermarkets in Lynn and Chelsea, said on Nov. 5 at the Boston Chamber of Commerce's economic outlook panel.
- Vendors at [farmers markets](#) have seen sales decline since Nov. 1.

In Wellfleet, Alex Hay has been juggling calls from buyers in California, Massachusetts and New York, delaying their shipments of clams and other shellfish.

- "Several of our California buyers are telling us that the reasons their customers are not buying is because the retail customers are not able to use the SNAP benefits anymore and a lot of that is spent on shellfish," Hay, co-owner of Wellfleet Shellfish Company, told Axios.
- For Hay, the SNAP freeze is simply the latest hurdle after months of navigating tariff- and market-related disruptions.

Reality check: The sheer uncertainty brought on by the SNAP freeze may prompt grocers to hold off on shellfish and other food shipments.

- Hay says that's what happened once the threat of tariffs loomed over the seafood industry, even after the industry avoided the tax.

Zoom out: The restoration of SNAP funds doesn't immediately fill the gaps retailers and growers like Wellfleet Oysters are experiencing, says Spencer Hanus, a senior analyst at Wolfe Research.

- "There's not an immediate switch that you can flip to get this restarted," he said.
- The SNAP freeze stands to affect big-box stores as well as local businesses, including discount retailers like Walmart.
- But those discount retailers may draw more shoppers, including former small business loyalists, in the long run because they can keep prices lower for longer.

The bottom line: Whether the SNAP war resolves this week or drags on, food growers, retailers and the families they serve are still grappling with the whiplash of losing benefits.