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SUNDAY, MARCH 8, 2026

# SNAP benefits in Kansas will no longer include candy

**Those receiving food assistance will have to make healthier choices with benefits with limits on candy, soda**

ELLY GRIMM  
Leader & Times

Those using Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits will soon see some restrictions.

Wednesday, Gov. Laura Kelly announced the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has approved Kansas' SNAP food restriction waiver.

"Kansas now joins 21 other states in implementing restrictions on candy and soda purchases with SNAP dollars," Gov. Kelly noted in a release from the State of Kansas. "I have always supported policies that incentivize healthy eating, including

axing the state sales tax on food to put more money back in Kansans' pockets. Going forward, I would encourage the USDA to develop a nationwide eligibility strategy to reduce confusion and uncertainty for retailers and recipients alike."

The approved waiver, which will go into effect Feb. 15, 2027, will exclude all candy and soda beverages (also known as soft drinks) from the definition of eligible foods under 7 CFR 271.2 for purchase with SNAP benefits. Candy and soda are defined by the state's food and sales tax laws within the state retailer tax:

"Candy is defined as a preparation of sugar, honey, or other natural or artificial

*"Kansas now joins 21 other states in implementing restrictions on candy and soda purchases with SNAP dollars."*

— Gov. Laura Kelly

sweeteners in combination with chocolate, fruits, nuts, or other ingredients or flavorings in the form of bars, drops, or pieces. Candy does not include any preparation containing flour and shall require no refrigeration," the State of Kansas release

noted. "Soft drink beverages are defined as nonalcoholic beverages that contain natural or artificial sweeteners. Soft drinks do not include beverages that contain milk or milk products, soy, rice, or similar milk substitutes or beverages that are greater

than 50 percent vegetable or fruit juice by volume. During the approval process USDA recommended an implementation date of Feb. 15, 2027. USDA provided this recommendation based on feedback from retailers in other states that have similar approved waivers and avoids concerns with implementing restrictions over and through the 2026 holiday season."

The Kansas SNAP Food Restriction Waiver is made up of four plans that focus on communicating information to SNAP Food Assistance recipients and authorized retailers, as well as detailed evaluation, monitoring, and compliance plans.

DCF released a request for proposals (RFP) which closed on Feb. 17. This RFP is to bring on a contracting partner to help DCF manage the implementation plans and process. The proposals received are under review and a contract is expected to be in place by April 2026.

## Debrief ...

Continued from Page 1

and they had already taken the lady who lives there and moved her away."

Ward said contact was made with farmers and ranchers in the area who were busy moving cattle at the time.

"Seward County had two residences that were in danger," he said.

Residents of the Thorpe family home near Hayne, which was completely destroyed in a fire, were contacted by Deputy Clemente Torres, who was off duty at the time, and Ward said the family was thankful for the efforts.

"Thankfully, they were evacuated just minutes before the fire overtook their homes," Ward said. "While off duty, Clemente became aware of the fire moving towards the Thorpe family farm. Without hesitation, he reached out to ensure they were notified. Because of his quick thinking and initiative, the family was able to evacuate safely, including a handicapped brother and a bedridden grandmother, just minutes before the fire reached the property."

Ward said Torres's actions reflect the highest standards of the sheriff's office's service, dedication and community commitment.

"Being off duty did not lessen his sense of responsibility at all," Ward said. "He demonstrates how service

is not just a shift he works. It's his mindset. We are very proud to have him on our team, and his actions are true credit to this office and the community we serve."

Road and Bridge Director Marc Johnson said after receiving a call Tuesday, Feb. 17, of fire breaking out, he sent a truck from his department to help with the Tyrone, Okla., fire.

"We were on that fire until about 8 p.m., and prior to that, my foreman called and said there was a request for blades on the river fire," he said. "We had four blades on the river fire for two and a half days with our dozer. For the amount of training my guys have fighting fire, which is slim, I couldn't be more proud of them on how they did it, how they contributed to stop the fire."

Johnson said the radios Road and Bridge were using did not function well in the river bottom.

"It was very concerning when you would call out for someone, they wouldn't answer back for 10 to 15 minutes," he said. "You don't know what's going on with them. You would lose communication depending on where you were at down there."

Johnson said county responders received many compliments from surrounding firefighters, as well as those from Olathe, the Kansas National Guard and the Kansas Forest Service.

"They would take our guys in a heartbeat to go fight a fire somewhere," he said. "Hats off to those guys who helped and our

maintenance crew for keeping our equipment running through that time."

EMS Director John Ralston said the county has two generations of radios for communication.

"The ones we had prior to that, we got through Homeland Security, and those radios, they can take the programming, but you can't encrypt those through the older ones," he said. "That's what they have. They can be programmed with the same exact frequencies except for the their trip channels. We could up that to where they'd have communications on several frequencies with the state template."

"They just can't have law enforcement channels," Ward said. Johnson said Road and Bridge crews were on scene for 48 straight hours.

"We were rotating people and watched the water tanker," he said. "Our dozer operator, Dustin Bozarth, was called out on leave that Friday morning to assist with the mop up and pushing up of trees."

Like others at the debriefing, Ralston said communication definitely needs to be improved.

"We were very limited on our needs for this," he said. "We're health, and we respond to people hurt. We didn't have any. We were fortunate that week. Out of the 124 calls last month, we only had 13 that week during that fire. We were planning ahead, thinking we were going to have an increase with respiratory distress and things like

that in the community."

Ralston said the Local Emergency Planning Committee likewise was planning for a large patient load from the fires, but few, if any, were seen.

"We were able to have good staffing from the EMS standpoint for the first three days of it," he said. "We were mentally staffed on Thursday and Friday, so we had to backfill a little bit there."

Adding to the communication concern, Ralston said, is having many assets in different locations.

"Communications get tough," he said. "Keeping track of things gets tough, and there's no easy way to solve it. We always strive to do better each time as we identify these things, and we've identified some things we can do to help do that."

Ralston said the outpouring of assistance from the community was very much appreciated as firefighting efforts continued.

"You cannot do one of these events without that outpouring," he said. "We've got to have that, and I applaud everybody who came out there and helped. We're out there risking everything, and without that extra help, this thing would still be burning."

Seward County Health Department Director Brie Greeson said her department was in place for community readiness and to assist with EMS and mass care. She added shortly after 4 p.m. Feb. 17, the health department had been notified a shelter had been opened at the Activity Center.

"There was some confusion," she said. "I wasn't notified prior to that. Three staff were sent to run the shelter."

With no one showing up at the shelter, Greeson said the shelter was closed around 7 p.m., and she had been in communications with Liberal Area Coalition for Families Director Sarah Mersdorf-Foreman, as the coalition had a shelter set up at Crosspoint Church in Liberal.

"They also had nobody show up there," Greeson said. "They both closed around 7. One of our strengths was a fast response. We knew where our equipment was. Andrew and I had gone over a whole bunch of that in the weeks prior."

Greeson said should similar situations arise in the future with fires on the west side of town, the Activity Center may not be ideal for a shelter.

"We had a lot of smoke in that," she said. "We had the fans turned on. The whole town was smoky. If we had patients with oxygen and

other medical capabilities who didn't need to be sent to Southwest Medical Center and we were managing them there, a thought we might need to look into for next time is somewhere centrally located, possibly bringing our HEPA filters and some of those things to help clear the air out."

Greeson said SCHD officials also received many calls and texts asking if pets could be brought to shelters with their owners.

"We initially told them yes because we didn't know how widespread everything was at the time, but they had to be in a carrier," she said. "On our end, we're going to work with the Southwest Kansas Healthcare Initiative. They're working on some stuff with our five-county region on a trail that would have pet needs along with cots, blankets and all of those things. We do have some extra funding inside of PHEP, Public Health Emergency Preparedness, to possibly be purchasing more cots."

## Opinion ...

Continued from Page 1

"The Seward County Board of County Commissioners appoints Southwest Medical Center's hospital board," the opinion stated. "K.S.A. 19-4607(c) requires non-elected hospital boards to submit a proposed budget and the portion of the budget requested to be funded by a tax under K.S.A. 19-4606 to the county commissioners. K.S.A.

19-4610(a) directs that a hospital board shall have control over all expenditures, except those raised by revenue bonds. These statutes do not conflict, as they apply to two different subjects. K.S.A. 19-4607(c) directs a non-elected hospital board to submit a proposed budget to the county commissioners regardless of whether the hospital board is requesting any portion be funded by a tax under K.S.A. 19-4606. Thus, K.S.A. 19-4607(c) requires SWMC to submit its proposed budget to the Seward County

Board of County Commissioners each year for approval."

That requirement will allow the commissioners to decide whether or not the budget for SWMC is acceptable. For example, if the SWMC Board wants to spend more than it is planning to receive by using its reserve funds, the commission could either approve

that budget or direct the SWMC board to produce a budget that will not spend reserve funds.

The AG provided the opinion Feb. 23, so any future budgets or expenditures of SWMC will have to be approved by the Seward County Commission, who has the fiscal responsibility and authority, according to Kobach.

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