



COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET

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A Visit to the Grocery Store: How the U.S. Government Impacts a Routine Trip to the Market

Every day, millions of Americans visit grocery stores to restock their pantries, pick up ingredients for dinner, refill lifesaving medications, or purchase everyday household items. This routine act would be a fundamentally different experience without the federal government's actions to make sure the products are available, safe, and follow reasonable health standards. In nearly every aspect of your grocery store trip, from getting to the grocery store to leaving the parking lot, the federal government plays a role.

Getting to the Grocery Store: The federal government spends billions each year on transportation infrastructure projects to ensure that roads and highways are built and maintained and that the vehicles travelling on them meet safety standards.

- Vehicle safety standards: Since 1967, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has developed and enforced federal motor vehicle safety standards. These standards specify design, construction, performance, and durability requirements for motor vehicles. Consistent standards ensure that vehicles and roads remain safe for all passengers, in fact, NHTSA estimates that between 1960 and 2012, federal motor vehicle safety standards saved more than 600,000 lives and the risk of a fatality declined by 56 percent.
- Construction and maintenance of roads and highways: Both directly and through funding provided to states, federal government programs work to safely move people and goods. Not only do these funds help local communities construct and maintain roads and bridges, but they support initiatives that reduce traffic congestion, prevent accidents and injuries, and improve bus and other mass transit systems.

Shopping at the Grocery Store: The federal government supports nearly every product in your local grocery store. From making sure the vegetables are safe in the produce section to enforcing labeling standards so you know exactly what you are buying, the federal government sets and enforces numerous consumer-protection standards that make it possible for you to choose from a large variety of goods without concerns about safety.

- Food availability and safety: The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the Department of Health and Human Services and the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) in the Department of Agriculture regulate and protect the U.S. food supply. These agencies make sure that the food is nutritious and safe for consumption. In addition, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports, studies, educates, and collects data on food-related illness.
 - *Produce and Dairy*: The FDA is responsible for regulating all food except for meat, poultry, and egg products. With the growing complexity of the food supply and new public health threats, the FDA's role in inspection, making sure standards are met, and maintaining a strong enforcement program ensures that foodborne illness outbreaks remain infrequent. When an outbreak does occur, such as the 2016 listeria outbreak involving frozen vegetables and packaged salads, the FDA takes action to contain the outbreak quickly. Furthermore, the Risk Management Agency in the Department of Agriculture provides crop insurance to farmers, which protects them from loss of their crops due to natural disasters or declines in the prices of agricultural commodities, and supports grain, dairy, sugar, and other producers through multiple federal programs. This is a vital component of the farm safety net and ensures that food is consistently available.
 - *Meats, Poultry, Eggs, Seafood*: FSIS has the authority to regulate meat, poultry, and egg products to ensure they are wholesome, not adulterated, and are properly marked, labeled, and packaged. FSIS regularly inspects slaughterhouses to make sure set standards are followed and assists with importing and exporting these products. Additionally, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration works with FSIS and FDA to ensure that seafood remains safe.
- Pharmacy items: Prescription and non-prescription drugs and cosmetics typically available in the pharmacy section are regulated by the FDA. The FDA ensures that drugs are properly labeled, safe for consumption, and effective.
- Non-food products: As grocery stores expand to include items typically found in home goods stores such as household chemicals and cleaners, housewares, and toys, your trip to the grocery store benefits from the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC)'s role in making sure consumer products are safe. CPSC operates a toll-free hotline for consumers to report unsafe products and provides information on consumer products and recalls.
- Nutritional labeling and health claims: In addition to ensuring food safety, the FDA has authority to set food labeling requirements. These labels tell customers exactly what is in the package and therefore empower Americans to make nutritious choices. In 1990, in response to the growing obesity epidemic, Congress passed the Nutrition Labeling

and Education Act, requiring all packaged foods to bear nutrition labeling. Food labels help the buyer limit the amount of fat, sugar, and cholesterol in their diet while allowing buyers to compare and find food items suitable to their nutritional needs. In addition to ensuring that Americans understand the nutritional content of what they are buying, companies also must support their advertising claims with evidence. The Federal Trade Commission, charged with protecting America's consumers, is responsible for confirming that health claims made for food products, over-the-counter drugs, dietary supplements, contact lenses, and other health-related products are true.

- Federal research: The Department of Agriculture funds research on every aspect of our food supply, including research on food labeling, food choices and health, food markets and prices, food safety, and studying the rural population and economy. Research in this area has led to new products and a better understanding of how food affects our health. Research outside of the Department of Agriculture has also contributed to this knowledge base. For example, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, while researching life support for Mars missions, discovered a natural source for a nutrient primarily found in breast milk that plays a key role in infant development. This nutrient has been added to more than 90 percent of infant formula and is helping babies worldwide develop healthy brains, eyes, and hearts.

Checking out: At the end of your shopping trip, it is time to head to the register where, because of significant investment from the federal government, your shopping trip will conclude in a quick and efficient manner.

- Efficient, quick, and accurate check out: In the 1960s, the Department of Defense funded a project called the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network, which evolved into what we now know as the internet. The internet is, without question, the most revolutionary invention of our time. It allows grocery stores to maintain inventory information, log and track barcodes on every grocery item, and connects to cash registers to allow for seamless transfers of information. By efficiently maintaining inventory levels, grocery stores can improve product availability. Furthermore, although much of the initial stages of development of the barcode was funded by industry and universities, funding and research by the National Science Foundation advanced the technology enabling the use of barcodes nearly everywhere. This means customers can ring up every item quickly and pay exactly what they owe within minutes.
- Paying for groceries: For many Americans, paying for groceries can be difficult. The federal government ensures that people struggling to make ends meet, such as low-wage workers or seniors living on small fixed incomes, can afford to eat healthy meals. The government provides this benefit through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children program.

- Parking lot: While walking back to your car in the parking lot you will notice designated parking spaces for persons with disabilities. In 1990, Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act, which is enforced by the Department of Justice. Under this law, designated spaces must be on the shortest route to a business entrance and need to be wider than regular parking spaces. For the millions of Americans with physical disabilities, these parking spaces are vital for a safe and efficient trip to the grocery store.

The federal government, executing the laws enacted by the Congress, takes actions across a wide range of areas to “promote the general Welfare” as called for in the Constitution. This description of what happens behind the scenes on your routine trip to the grocery store is only one small example of the important role the federal government plays in the lives of American families.