

Background

One important measure of a program’s performance is the ability to reach its target population. This report – the latest in an annual series – presents estimates of the percentage of eligible persons, by State, who participated in the Food Stamp Program (FSP) during an average month in fiscal year 2006 and in each of the 2 previous fiscal years.

This report also presents estimates of State participation rates for eligible “working poor” individuals (persons in households with earnings) over the same period. Although the FSP provides an important support for working families, the working poor have participated at rates that are substantially below those for all eligible persons. The addition of State-by-State information on participation among the working poor enables a comparison of these rates to the overall participation rates.

Nationally, the participation rate among all eligible persons was 67 percent in fiscal year 2006. The participation rate for eligible working poor individuals was 57 percent, a significant difference of 10 percentage points.

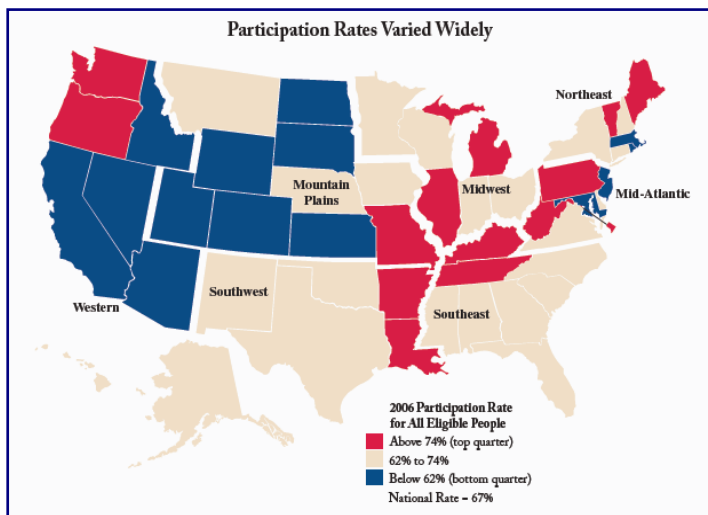
On October 1, 2008, the Food Stamp Program was renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).



- In 34 States, food stamp participation rates for working poor individuals were significantly below the rates for all eligible persons. In 8 of these States, the working poor rate was more than 10 percentage points lower than the rate for all eligible persons. Working poor rates were not significantly different than the rate for all eligible persons in the other 16 States.
- Some States had consistently high participation rates relative to other States in all 3 fiscal years. In each year from 2004 to 2006, Illinois, Kentucky, Maine, Missouri, Oregon, Tennessee, and West Virginia had significantly higher participation rates than two-thirds of the States.

Findings

- Although State food stamp participation rates for all eligible persons increased overall from 2004 to 2006, they continued to vary widely. In fiscal year 2006, estimated rates for all eligible persons ranged from 50 percent to over 95 percent.



- Some States had consistently low participation rates relative to other States. California, Colorado, Nevada, North Dakota, Rhode Island, and Wyoming had significantly lower rates than two-thirds of the States in all 3 fiscal years.
- With a few exceptions, a State ranked at the top or bottom of the distribution of participation rates for all eligible persons was similarly ranked for participation by working poor persons.

The estimates are derived using a statistical approach known as shrinkage estimation which draws on data from the Current Population Survey, decennial census, and administrative records. The shrinkage estimator averages direct sample estimates of participation rates with predictions from a regression model based on indicators of socioeconomic conditions. Shrinkage estimates are substantially more precise than direct sample estimates from the Current Population Survey, even though larger sample sizes in recent years improved the precision of direct estimates for States with smaller populations. Nevertheless, the estimated participation rates are still based on fairly small samples of households in many States, and the uncertainty associated with these estimates is

substantial. Users of these data should take the estimated confidence intervals into account when interpreting differences between States, within a State over time, and between estimates for all eligibles and the working poor.

For More Information

Cunyngham, Karen E., Laura A. Castner and Allen L. Schirm. *Reaching Those in Need: State Food Stamp Participation Rates in 2006*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. October 2008.

Wolkwitz, Kari, *Trends in Food Stamp Program Participation Rates: 2000 to 2006*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. June 2008.

Available online at www.fns.usda.gov/fns

Acknowledgement

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