

GAO

Report to the Ranking Minority Member,
Subcommittee on Children and Families,
Committee on Labor and Human
Resources, U.S. Senate

December 1997

WELFARE REFORM

State and Local Responses to Restricting Food Stamp Benefits



**Resources, Community, and
Economic Development Division**

B-278575

December 18, 1997

The Honorable Christopher J. Dodd
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Children and Families
Committee on Labor and Human Resources
United States Senate

Dear Senator Dodd:

In August 1996, the enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act¹—commonly called the Welfare Reform Act—overhauled the nation’s welfare system, and made significant changes to the Food Stamp Program. This program—administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)—is the nation’s largest food assistance program and provided about \$22.5 billion in benefits for a monthly average of more than 25 million low-income participants in fiscal year 1996. According to the Congressional Budget Office, the changes to the Food Stamp Program, brought about by the Welfare Reform Act, will reduce the program’s expenditures by a projected total of more than \$23 billion over 6 years, from fiscal year 1997 through fiscal 2002.

Among other things, the Welfare Reform Act reduced food stamps for many participants² and eliminated them, except under certain conditions, for two groups—able-bodied adults without dependents and legal immigrants.³ Able-bodied adults without dependents can receive benefits only for 3 months in a 3-year period unless they meet work or training requirements. Legislation made most legal immigrants ineligible for food stamps as of August 22, 1997. While these two groups of individuals represented only 10 percent of all Food Stamp Program participants for fiscal year 1995, the Congressional Budget Office estimates that the savings realized from these actions represent over 37 percent, or about \$8.8 billion, of the over \$23 billion in net savings expected in the Food Stamp Program from welfare reform.

You asked us to study several issues concerning the impact of welfare reform on the Food Stamp Program. This report is the second in a series

¹P.L. 104-193, Aug. 22, 1996.

²Food stamp benefits may be provided though coupons redeemed at the check-out counter or through an electronic card similar to a bank card. For this report, we refer to both as food stamps.

³We use the term “legal immigrant” throughout this report rather than the term used in the legislation—“qualified alien”—because USDA’s guidance often uses the terms interchangeably.

responding to that request.⁴ It focuses on the two groups of individuals that were the most likely to lose their food stamp benefits—able-bodied adults without dependents and legal immigrants. Specifically, we describe the (1) actions, if any, that states have taken to assist those individuals who lose eligibility for the Food Stamp Program and (2) related actions, if any, taken by other organizations in selected localities—local governments and nonprofit organizations—to assist those individuals who lose their eligibility for the Food Stamp Program.

As part of our review, we surveyed the 50 states and the District of Columbia on the actions they are taking, if any, in response to the changes in the Food Stamp Program. All 50 states and the District of Columbia responded to our survey. (See app. I for the results of the survey.) In addition, we visited with government officials and representatives of nonprofit organizations in five localities⁵ to obtain their views on what effect the changes to the Food Stamp Program may have on their agencies' or organizations' ability to meet demand for their food assistance services. Appendix II discusses our methodology in more detail.

Results in Brief

Most states are taking a variety of measures to address the changes in the Food Stamp Program as a result of welfare reform. For able-bodied adults without dependents, many states are providing employment and training assistance. This assistance, although primarily intended to move these individuals toward self-sufficiency, may still allow them to qualify for food stamp benefits if they meet both the income and work requirements. Additionally, most states have obtained the authority from USDA, if they choose to exercise it, to continue providing food stamp benefits for individuals in areas with high unemployment or in areas with an insufficient number of jobs. Twenty states are providing or plan to provide legal immigrants with information on how to become U.S. citizens. However, because it takes over 1 year on average to process citizenship applications at the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), many legal immigrants lost their food stamp benefits as of August 22, 1997. USDA's Food and Nutrition Service estimated that 935,000 legal immigrants had lost their federal food stamp benefits. In addition, some states have existing programs that provide food assistance for the needy—such as food pantries—that able-bodied adults without dependents and legal

⁴Our first report is entitled *Food Stamp Program: Characteristics of Households Affected by Limit on the Shelter Deduction* (GAO/RCED-97-118, May 14, 1997). We will report at a later date on the Simplified Food Stamp Program.

⁵The localities that we visited were Denver, Colorado; Detroit, Michigan; Hartford, Connecticut; Houston, Texas; and Los Angeles, California.

immigrants who have lost their food stamps already had access to. Some states have developed new programs to specifically meet the needs of individuals who lose their food stamps. For example, 10 states—including 4 states estimated to have about 70 percent of the legal immigrants who receive food stamps in the United States—are purchasing or planning to purchase federal food stamps with their own funds—primarily for legal immigrant children and the elderly. In December 1997, the states involved indicated that about 241,000 of these individuals are now receiving food stamp benefits funded by the states. However, the extent to which any of these actions will meet the food assistance needs of those affected remains unknown.

In the five localities we visited, government officials are implementing their state's efforts to address changes in the Food Stamp Program and, in some cases, are working with local nonprofit organizations to plan for an expected increase in the need for food assistance. Most of the nonprofit organizations we visited said that it is too early to assess the impact of welfare reform on their food assistance programs. However, the organizations fear that their limited resources may be insufficient to meet the needs of the individuals who have lost their food stamps, which included the basic foods that the program provided. These organizations do not believe that they can replace the long-term assistance that food stamps provided.

Background

The Food Stamp Program helps low-income households (individuals and families) obtain a more nutritious diet by supplementing their income with food stamp benefits. In fiscal year 1996, the average monthly food stamp benefit was \$73 per person. These benefits are generally provided through coupons or electronically on a debit card (similar to a bank card) that may be used to purchase food at stores authorized to receive food stamps.

The Food Stamp Program is a federal-state partnership, in which the federal government pays the full cost of the food stamp benefits and approximately half of the states' administrative costs. USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)—formerly, the Food and Consumer Service—administers the program at the federal level. The states' responsibilities include certifying eligible households, calculating the amount of benefits, and issuing benefits to participants who meet the requirements set by law.

The Welfare Reform Act overhauled the nation's welfare system and significantly changed the Food Stamp Program. In addition, the Fiscal Year 1997 Supplemental Appropriations Act (P.L. 105-18, June 12, 1997) included new authority allowing the states to purchase federal food stamps to provide state-funded food assistance for legal immigrants and able-bodied adults without dependents who are no longer eligible for federal food stamps under the Welfare Reform Act. Under the supplemental act, states are required to receive approval from FNS to distribute additional food stamps and to fully reimburse the federal government in advance for all costs associated with providing the benefits. In addition, the states' food stamp programs must be cost-neutral to the federal government.

Changes to the Food Stamp Program included imposing time limits on those able-bodied individuals between the ages of 18 and 50 without dependents who were not working at least 80 hours a month or participating in certain kinds of employment and training programs.⁶ This work requirement was effective not later than November 22, 1996. States were required to terminate food stamps for these nonworking able-bodied adults without dependents after 3 months within any 36-month period. Disabled individuals, if they meet eligibility requirements, can still receive assistance. The act allows FNS to grant waivers to states for exempting able-bodied adults without dependents from the work requirement if they live in an area where unemployment is over 10 percent or in an area with an insufficient number of jobs. FNS generally grants waivers for a 1-year period. Once approved, these waivers may be renewed if the areas covered continue to have high unemployment or insufficient jobs. Once the waivers are approved, the states or localities can choose to either implement them in whole or in part, or choose not to implement them at all. In addition, The Balanced Budget Act (P.L. 105-33, Aug. 5, 1997) gives states the discretion to exempt certain types of able-bodied adults without dependents from the work requirement—up to 15 percent of those not otherwise waived. The Balanced Budget Act also provided an additional \$131 million for each of the next 4 years to the Food Stamp Program—80 percent of it is designated for employment and training opportunities for these adults. According to data from FNS for fiscal year 1995—the latest year for which data were available—in an average month, the Food Stamp Program provided benefits for 27 million people. Of these, 2.5 million were able-bodied adults between the ages of 18 and 50 without dependents. An

⁶These programs may involve the participation of both the public and private sectors. For example, Workfare, which is a federal program, requires individuals to work in a public service capacity in order to receive federal food stamps. Some states allow participants to meet these work requirements by volunteering at nonprofit organizations.

estimated one-half of these adults, about 1.3 million, are subject to the 3-month time limit.⁷

In addition, the Welfare Reform Act and the Supplemental Appropriations Act allowed immigrants with legal status as of August 22, 1996, to retain food stamps up to August 22, 1997. However, if legal immigrants have 40 quarters or more of work history in the United States or are veterans or active duty members of the U.S. military, they may continue to retain food stamps. Spouses and minor children of veterans are also eligible.⁸

Most States Taking Actions to Address Changes in Food Stamp Program

At the time of our survey of states in the summer of 1997, the states were pursuing a variety of options to address changes in the Food Stamp Program that affected able-bodied adults without dependents and legal immigrants. Some state actions, such as job training assistance, although primarily intended to move individuals toward self-sufficiency, may have the effect of allowing some able-bodied adults without dependents to retain food stamps by meeting the act's work requirements. Twenty states provided legal immigrants with information on how to become citizens so that they can be eligible for food stamps. Other state actions are intended to replace the food stamp benefits that individuals have lost.

States Are Pursuing Several Options That Allow Some Individuals to Keep Benefits

According to our survey results, when the states notified able-bodied adults without dependents that they were subject to the work requirements in order to retain food stamps, many states told us that they chose to also notify these adults of job placement and/or training services that were available. Although these programs are intended primarily to move individuals toward self-sufficiency, participants may still receive food stamps if income and other requirements are met. For example, our survey indicated that Texas provided information on jobs and/or employment resources and training. Thirty-two states provided information about jobs and/or employment resources; 29 provided information on training; 19 provided information on workfare. In addition,

⁷The 1.3 million figure includes those adults who could be exempt from the requirements by the states obtaining waivers from FNS. The source of these data is Characteristics of Childless Unemployed Adult and Legal Immigrant Food Stamp Participants: Fiscal Year 1995, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (Feb. 13, 1997).

⁸Under the Welfare Reform Act, three other groups—refugees, individuals seeking asylum, and individuals granted a stay of deportation—remain eligible for food stamps for up to 5 years. After 5 years, members of all of these groups are subject to the same restrictions as legal immigrants unless they have become U.S. citizens. Under the Balanced Budget Act, certain groups—including Amerasians, Cubans, and Haitians—had their food stamp benefits restored for up to 5 years, and World War II Filipino veterans were given status allowing them to receive food stamps if they meet income and work requirements.

20 states helped assess an individual's employment skills. The states also offered one or more ways to meet the work requirements: 25 states counted volunteer work, 25 counted workfare, and 33 counted employment training that leads to a job.

In addition, as allowed under the Welfare Reform Act, our survey indicated that 43 states had applied for, and 42 received, authority to waive the work requirement for able-bodied adults without dependents in areas where unemployment exceeded 10 percent or in areas with insufficient jobs. (See app. III for the waiver status of each state.) FNS estimated that as many as 35 percent of the affected able-bodied adults without dependents would retain their eligibility through a waiver.

However, 8 of the 43 states were not planning to implement their waivers—either in their entirety or in part. In seven states—California, Indiana, Nevada, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, and Virginia—waivers were approved for selected regions but the local governments, which are authorized to implement the waivers, did not plan to do so. Texas planned to implement its waiver only in localities with an unemployment rate of over 10 percent. Two of the eight states or their localities had not fully implemented the waivers because they believed that it was unfair to exempt able-bodied adults without dependents from the work requirement while single mothers receiving federal assistance, like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF),⁹ are required to participate in work activities.

At the time of our survey, 20 states provided or planned to provide legal immigrants—who were scheduled to lose their food stamps—with information on how to become U.S. citizens. In May 1997, we reported that it took between 112 and 678 days (with an average of 373 days) to process applications for citizenship at INS between June of 1994 and June of 1996.¹⁰ For example, it took just over 1 year to process a request for citizenship in Los Angeles—a city with one of the largest immigrant populations in the nation—and almost 2 years to process an application in Houston. INS officials told us that among the reasons for the significant increase in the number of applications that INS has received since fiscal year 1989 is that there are incentives to becoming a citizen because of the benefits that can

⁹This block grant program replaces Aid to Families with Dependent Children. It is intended to provide temporary financial assistance for families and, like the Food Stamp Program, has work requirements as a condition for receiving assistance.

¹⁰See *Alien Applications: Processing Differences Exist Among INS Field Units*, (GAO/GGD-97-47, May 20, 1997).

be derived. Because it takes an average of over 1 year to process applications for citizenship and legal immigrants were not eligible to receive food stamps after August 22, 1997, many legal immigrants have lost their federal food stamp benefits. FNS' most current estimate is that 935,000 legal immigrants lost their federal food stamps under the welfare reform provisions. However, as of December 1997, estimates are that over one-quarter, or about 241,000, of these individuals are receiving food stamps funded by the states.

States Are Taking Some Actions to Offer Food Assistance to Those Losing Benefits

For those individuals who lose federal food stamp benefits, 20 states were taking one or more actions to provide state-funded food assistance. (App. IV identifies the 20 states with food assistance programs that serve able-bodied adults without dependents and/or legal immigrants.) Ten states¹¹ decided to purchase federal food stamps with their own funds for certain legal immigrants—primarily children and the elderly. According to FNS and the states, 9 of the 10 states have estimated that about 241,000 legal immigrants are now receiving state-funded food stamps.¹² Among these states are California, Florida, New York, and Texas, which, according to an FNS report, had about 70 percent of the legal immigrants receiving food stamps in fiscal year 1995—the latest year for which data were available. These states will generally use the Food Stamp Program's infrastructure and benefit structure to deliver food assistance, according to FNS. For example, Washington State appropriated just over \$60 million for fiscal years 1998-99 to fully restore benefits to an estimated 38,000 legal immigrants—all of whom were slated to become ineligible for federal food stamps. Households eligible for participation receive the same benefits that they did under the federal program. However, FNS also told us that, unlike Washington State's, most states' eligibility standards are likely to apply to only certain categories of legal immigrants. California, for example, recently appropriated \$34.6 million to provide food stamps for legal immigrants who are children or elderly.

¹¹These states are California, Florida, Massachusetts, Maryland, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Texas, and Washington. With the exception of Nebraska, Rhode Island, and Washington, these states are assisting certain categories of the legal immigrant population. Nebraska and Rhode Island have pledged to provide food stamps for all immigrants who had legal status as of August 22, 1996. Washington is providing food stamps for all legal immigrants regardless of when they received legal status.

¹²FNS estimated that 223,000 legal immigrants received state-funded food stamps in 8 of the 10 states. In addition, Massachusetts estimated that about 18,000 legal immigrants are receiving state-funded food stamps. One state—Texas—had not initiated its food stamp program for legal immigrants.

Thirteen of the 20 states¹³ reported that they were using their own state-funded food assistance programs, and 2 of the 13 states created programs in response to welfare reform. These two states—Colorado and Minnesota—developed state-funded food assistance programs to aid those legal immigrants losing their federal food stamp eligibility as a result of welfare reform. Colorado, for example, has appropriated \$2 million to provide emergency assistance, including food, for legal immigrants. Minnesota has allocated just over \$4.7 million for two programs to provide food assistance for legal immigrant families in that state.

The remaining 11 states had food assistance programs—created before the Welfare Reform Act was passed—that ranged from those that provide individuals with cash directly to those that provide funds for local food banks and food pantries that serve, among others, both able-bodied adults without dependents and legal immigrants.¹⁴ A program with significant funding is Pennsylvania's State Food Purchase Program, which provided about \$13 million in fiscal year 1997 and \$13.6 million in fiscal 1998 to counties for the purchase of food. This program is intended to supplement the efforts of food pantries, shelters for the homeless, soup kitchens, food banks, and similar organizations to reduce hunger.

Two states with state-funded programs are also providing existing state or local programs with additional funding to assist able-bodied adults without dependents and legal immigrants. Rhode Island appropriated \$250,000 in fiscal year 1998 for a community-run food bank. Massachusetts increased the funding it provides for local food banks and food pantries from just under \$1 million to \$3 million in fiscal year 1998 in anticipation of an increased need by both groups.

Seven of the 20 states¹⁵ reported that they had allocated additional money to federally funded programs that assist groups of individuals, which may include those losing food stamp benefits. Programs identified by the states in our survey include The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

¹³These states are Colorado, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, Minnesota, Nebraska, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, and West Virginia.

¹⁴Food banks collect and distribute a variety of food products to various organizations, such as food pantries and soup kitchens. Food pantries may provide temporary food assistance for those in crisis. Soup kitchens provide meals on-site for those in need. They often serve the homeless; the mentally, socially, and/or physically disabled; the unemployed; the elderly of fixed incomes; transients; single parents; families in crisis; and the working poor.

¹⁵Massachusetts, Maryland, Maine, New York, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Texas.

and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).¹⁶

Assistance in Five Localities Is Largely Focused on Implementing State Initiatives, While Nonprofit Organizations Are Assessing Future Needs

In the five localities we visited, government officials reported that their assistance largely consists of implementing state programs. Most nonprofit organizations that we contacted said that although it is too soon to assess the impact of welfare reform, they anticipate an increased need for their services. Given their limited resources, however, these organizations are concerned that the supplemental assistance they provide will not compensate for the basic food assistance provided by the federal program. (See apps. V-IX for information about food assistance programs in these localities.)

Assistance at the Local Level Is Generally Limited to Implementing State Programs

In the five localities we visited—Denver, Detroit, Hartford, Houston, and Los Angeles—employment and training programs were offered to able-bodied adults without dependents through existing or expanded programs. Although these programs are intended to promote self-sufficiency, they may also help participants to retain food stamps if they meet income and work requirements.

For example, in Hartford, Connecticut, able-bodied adults without dependents can participate in the statewide Connecticut Works System. This program's objective is to enhance the state's economy by helping to match the needs of businesses with workers' skills. The Connecticut Works System brings together state, regional, and local organizations to provide job listings, job search assistance, access to training and education programs, resume assistance, interviewing, and networking assistance.

In Detroit, Michigan, able-bodied adults without dependents can participate in a new state employment and training assistance program that specifically targets this population; about one-half of these adults live in the greater Detroit area. For fiscal year 1998, the state will receive \$13.4 million from FNS to expand work programs for this population.

¹⁶TEFAP provides low-income households with commodities such as canned fruit, vegetables, and meat. WIC provides certain women and children with specific food items, such as milk, cheese, and infant formula, generally from retail vendors.

For legal immigrants, three out of the five localities—Denver, Houston, and Los Angeles—had plans to offer limited food assistance through state-funded programs. California passed legislation to provide food stamps for legal immigrant children and the elderly by purchasing federal food stamps. Similarly, Colorado passed legislation that provides legal immigrant families with special emergency assistance. As a result, families in Denver can receive, among other things, food coupons redeemable at designated food pantries. Finally, Texas is planning to offer food assistance to elderly and disabled legal immigrants.

In addition, Los Angeles County launched two special efforts on behalf of legal immigrants after the passage of welfare reform. First, Los Angeles initiated a countywide citizenship campaign that brought together 200 public and nonprofit organizations whose goal was to assist legal immigrants in obtaining citizenship. Los Angeles County coordinated the efforts of these organizations, worked with the local district office of the INS, and directly contacted 400,000 potentially affected legal immigrants. However, Los Angeles officials told us that (1) because of the time it takes to process applications for citizenship—including the fact that criminal background checks are required on all applicants—and (2) because many of the applications remain unprocessed owing to the volume of applications received by the INS, they estimate that about 91,000 legal immigrants lost their food stamps. Los Angeles County officials said they continue to encourage legal immigrants to become U.S. citizens and, for those who do become citizens, hope to restore benefits to those who meet the Food Stamp Program's requirements. Second, Los Angeles County and the local United Way jointly sponsored the efforts of a local referral service to provide information on food assistance. Information on how to contact this referral service was enclosed with termination notices to legal immigrants.

**Nonprofit Organizations
Expect an Increased Need
That They Cannot Meet**

In every locality that we visited, nonprofit organizations—including food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, and religious organizations—generally serve anyone who needs their services, including able-bodied adults without dependents and legal immigrants. Historically, these organizations provide supplemental food assistance on an emergency basis, perhaps once or twice a month. According to these nonprofit organizations, food stamp recipients—even before welfare reform—had turned to them for assistance.

These organizations generally expect an increase in the need for their services—both in terms of the numbers of people and frequency of visits—as a result of welfare reform. For example, in Denver, one organization was getting 40 to 50 more applicants for food assistance per week in August 1997. Furthermore, the organizations were generally concerned that they could not replace the long-term, sustained assistance that food stamps provided.

At the time of our visits in the late summer of 1997, however, most organizations had not experienced this anticipated increase. Our visits occurred before benefits were cut off for legal immigrants and before the usual increase in the need for food assistance in the winter months.

The organizations are unsure how they will meet the expected increase because they have limited resources. Furthermore, these organizations are competing for these limited resources, and officials told us that they do not anticipate larger contributions as a result of welfare reform. While most organizations were waiting to see the full impact of welfare reform, some were developing contingency plans to handle the expected increase. For example, in Detroit, a kosher food pantry surveyed its existing clientele to determine which individuals would lose their benefits. The pantry learned that it would need about \$100,000 the first year to serve its existing population. According to officials from the food pantry, this effort is not likely to be duplicated by other organizations because, unlike most other organizations, the kosher food pantry serves a known group of legal immigrants. More typically, most organizations are unsure how they will sustain a long-term increase in the number of people needing their services because they typically provide assistance on an emergency basis for anyone in need, and their resources are already limited. These organizations are considering strategies that would restrict eligibility, such as limiting eligibility to serve children or the elderly, in order to accommodate the anticipated increase and/or reduce their existing levels of service in order to accommodate the needs of more individuals.

Conclusions

It is too soon to assess how able-bodied adults without dependents and legal immigrants will fare in the long term under welfare reform. However, many states have taken actions that could result in continuing food assistance, under certain conditions, for some of these individuals. For able-bodied adults, some of these actions—employment assistance and training—may help move these individuals towards self-sufficiency. For legal immigrants, citizenship could restore federal food stamps to those

who meet income and work eligibility requirements. However, because of the amount of time it takes to process citizenship applications, many individuals have likely lost their food stamps.


Agency Comments

We provided USDA with a copy of a draft of this report for review and comment. We met with FNS officials, including the Acting Deputy Administrator for the Food Stamp Program. USDA concurred with the accuracy of the report but stated that while some states are providing or will provide food assistance for legal immigrants with state funds, in many cases, the assistance will not replace federal benefits because it generally targets only certain portions of the legal immigrant population, such as the elderly or children. USDA officials indicated that about one-quarter of the 935,000 legal immigrants that they estimated would lose food stamp benefits are now being covered under state funded programs. The USDA officials also pointed out that while many states are offering employment and training services for able-bodied adults without dependents, often, the services offered are job search activities, which do not satisfy the work requirements under the Welfare Reform Act and, thus, do not qualify these individuals for food stamps. We expanded our discussion of these points where appropriate and made some additional minor clarifications to the report on the basis of USDA's comments.

As arranged with your office, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 30 days from the date of this letter. At that time, we will send copies of this report to the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry; the House Committee on Agriculture; other interested congressional committees, and the Secretary of Agriculture. We will also make copies available upon request.

If you have any questions about this report, I can be reached at (202) 512-5138. Major contributors to this report are listed in appendix X.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert A. Robinson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Robert A. Robinson
Director, Food and
Agriculture Issues

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Abbreviations

DDSS	Denver Department of Social Services
DPSS	Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services
DSS	Department of Social Services (Connecticut)
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FIA	Family Independence Agency (Michigan)
FNS	Food and Nutrition Service
GAO	General Accounting Office
INS	Immigration and Naturalization Service
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
TDHS	Texas Department of Human Services
TEFAP	The Emergency Food Assistance Program
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
WIC	Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

Results of GAO'S Survey of States' Responses to Changes in Food Stamp Programs

United States General Accounting Office



Survey on State Responses to Changes in the Food Stamp Program

Instructions

The U.S. General Accounting Office, an agency that collects and evaluates information for the U.S. Congress, is currently reviewing state responses to the recent changes in eligibility standards for participation in the Food Stamp Program (FSP). As part of our review, we are surveying each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Please complete this questionnaire, and, if requested, the attached form. Because some of our questions concern programs other than the FSP (such as employment and nutrition), completing the questionnaire and/or form may require assistance from other state agencies or departments. If so, we appreciate your handling the coordination.

Please return your completed questionnaire and forms by July 18, 1997, if at all possible. Your response is essential in order for us to provide the Congress with information that is both complete and timely.

In the event that the enclosed return mail envelope is misplaced, our return address is:

Ms. Tracy Solheim
 U.S. General Accounting Office
 441 G Street, N.W. Room 1826
 Washington, D.C. 20548-0001

If you have any questions, please call Tracy Solheim at (202) 512-4409 (email: solheimt.rced@gao.gov) or Pat Yorkman at (202) 512-9265 (email: yorkmanp.rced@gao.gov).

Definitions

For the purposes of this survey, please use the following definitions:

"Able-bodied adults without dependents" are those individuals who would be subject to the 3-month/3-year limitation on receiving FSP benefits in the absence of a waiver (e.g., individuals aged 18 to 50 who have no dependents, are not disabled, and are not in one of the exempted categories).

Legal immigrants are those immigrants who have been accorded permanent resident status and are subject to the work history or military service requirements to receive FSP benefits.

Waivers

1. Has your state applied for or does it plan to apply for waivers affecting the eligibility of "able-bodied adults without dependents" for FSP benefits this year? (Check one.)

- 43 Yes, have applied 1(4)
- 1 Yes, plan to apply
- 7 No plans to request waivers →Skip to Question 5

2. Has your state received approval either statewide or in selected districts to waive the requirements that affect the eligibility of "able-bodied adults without dependents" for FSP benefits? (Check one.)

- 1 Statewide waiver was approved. (5)
- 41 Waivers were approved for selected districts or regions.
- 1 Status of request for waivers is still pending.
- 0 All requests for waivers were denied. →Skip to Question 5

**Appendix I
Results of GAO'S Survey of States'
Responses to Changes in Food Stamp
Programs**

3. Is your state planning to implement all of its approved waivers? *(Check one.)*

- 35 Yes, all approved waivers will be implemented. →*Skip to Question 5*
- 1 Statewide waiver was approved, but state does not plan to implement it anywhere.
- 1 Statewide waiver was approved, but state does not plan to implement it in some locations. *(Please specify the locations where waivers will not be implemented as approved.)*
- 6 Waivers were approved for selected districts or regions, but all localities do not plan to implement them. *(Please specify the locations where waivers will not be implemented as approved.)*

4. Briefly, what are the major reasons why the state or selected districts or regions have chosen not to implement the approved waivers? If you are implementing all approved waivers, skip to Q5. *(Describe in the space below.)*

“Able-bodied Adults Without Dependents”

⁽⁶⁾ 5. At the time an “able-bodied adult without dependents” is informed that he or she is subject to the work requirement in order to receive FSP benefits (i.e., the adult’s 3-year clock is starting), is your state providing any of the following types of services? *(Check all that apply.)*

- 19 Provide information about workfare ⁽⁸⁻²⁰⁾
- 29 Provide information about training or other job-related programs
- 32 Provide information about jobs and/or employment resources
- 20 Help to assess client’s employment skills
- 11 Recommend or invite client to contact social worker/self-sufficiency worker
- 20 Provide information about other food assistance programs
- 18 Provide information about cash assistance programs
- 12 There are no state directives about these services.
- 26 Services will vary by locality.
- 10 Services will vary from person to person.
- 5 Other *(Please specify.)*

6. Which, if any, of the following activities is your state acknowledging as meeting the FSP work requirements for “able-bodied adults without dependents”? *(Check all that apply.)*

- 25 Volunteer work ⁽²¹⁻²⁴⁾
- 33 Employment training that leads to a job
- 25 Workfare (voluntary or traditional)
- 18 Other *(Please specify.)*

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7. For the FSP, is your state implementing either voluntary (self-directed) workfare or traditional workfare? (Check one.)

- 4 Voluntary (self-directed) workfare only ⁽²⁵⁾
- 10 Traditional workfare only
- 8 Both voluntary (self-directed) and traditional workfare
- 27 Neither →Skip to Question 9

8. How many workfare slots has your state developed or does it plan to develop to help "able-bodied adults without dependents" retain eligibility for FSP benefits? Exclude self-directed workfare from your answer. (Check all that apply.)

- 7 State has developed 165 - 10,000 slots. (Enter number.) ⁽²⁶⁻²⁹⁾
- 3 State plans to develop 400 - 5,000 slots. (Enter number.)
- 8 State plans to develop an unknown number of slots.
- 4 State has no plans to develop FSP workfare slots. ⁽³⁰⁻⁴¹⁾

9. Other than workfare, which, if any, of the following actions has your state taken or does it plan to take in response to the expected increase in demand for jobs because of changes in the FSP eligibility requirements for "able-bodied adults without dependents"? (Check all that apply.)

- 9 Expand existing job training programs ⁽⁴²⁻⁴⁶⁾
- 3 Develop new job training programs
- 13 Expand existing employment programs
- 3 Develop new employment programs
- 22 There are no state plans to develop or expand employment and training programs.
- 5 Decisions about employment and training programs are made at the local level.
- 9 Other (Please specify.)

Legal Immigrants

10. Is your state notifying legal immigrants that they may lose their FSP benefits because of changes in the eligibility standards? (Check one.)

- 50 Yes ⁽⁴⁹⁾
- 1 No (Please explain; then skip to Question 12.)

11. Which of the following methods are you using, have you used, or do you plan to use to notify legal immigrants about their potential loss of FSP benefits? (Check all that apply.)

- 37 Conduct mass mailing of letters of notification ⁽⁵⁰⁻⁵⁷⁾
- 47 Advise participants at recertification
- 48 Advise new applicants
- 17 Notify through publication in mass media
- 10 Display posters in local offices and/or other locations
- 21 Notify through presentations with community-based organizations
- 12 Types of notification will vary by locality.
- 4 Other (Please specify.)

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12. At the time a legal immigrant is informed that he or she is no longer eligible for FSP benefits because the immigrant does not meet work or military service requirements, is your state providing or planning to provide any of the following types of services? (Check all that apply.)

- 9 Provide information about training or other job-related programs ⁽⁵⁸⁻⁷⁰⁾
- 8 Provide information about jobs and/or employment resources
- 4 Help to assess client's employment skills
- 5 Recommend or invite client to contact social worker/self-sufficiency worker
- 18 Provide information about other food assistance programs
- 13 Provide information about cash assistance programs
- 20 Provide information about naturalization
- 20 There are no state directives about these services.
- 17 Services will vary by locality.
- 13 Services will vary from person to person.
- 3 Other (Please specify.)

13. Is your state planning to increase its outreach efforts for the WIC Program (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children) to make legal immigrants aware of their potential eligibility to receive food assistance from this program? If WIC is not handled in your division or department, please call the appropriate contact person for the correct response to this question. (Check one.)

- 5 Definitely will increase efforts ⁽⁷¹⁾
- 6 Probably will increase efforts
- 27 Uncertain at this time
- 8 Probably will not increase efforts
- 2 Definitely will not increase efforts

14. Does your state issue FSP benefits with an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) system or does it issue food coupons? (Check one.)

- 8 EBT system is implemented statewide. ⁽⁷²⁾
- 15 EBT system is implemented in some areas of the state; food coupons are issued in other areas.
- 28 Food coupons are issued statewide.

15. If your state had the option to issue federal FSP benefits to legal immigrants who lose their eligibility under the recent changes in the FSP and bear all associated costs (administration, printing, shipping, and redeeming), how likely is it that your state would implement the option? (Check one.)

- 5 Would definitely implement such an option ⁽⁷³⁾
- 2 Would probably implement such an option
- 17 Uncertain at this time
- 21 Would probably not implement such an option
- 6 Would definitely not implement such an option

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Other Assistance Programs

16. How available, if at all, throughout your state for use by "able-bodied adults without dependents" and/or legal immigrants are each of the following food assistance programs? (Check one for each affected group and program type.)

2(4-11)

	"Able-bodied Adults"					Legal Immigrants				
	All or Almost All Areas of State (1)	Most Areas of State (2)	Selected Locations Only (3)	Program Not Available (4)	Do Not Know (5)	All or Almost All Areas of State (1)	Most Areas of State (2)	Selected Locations Only (3)	Program Not Available (4)	Do Not Know (5)
1. Food pantries or food banks	21	21	8	0	1	20	20	8	0	2
2. Soup kitchens or canteens	5	9	34	0	1	5	9	30	2	2
3. Food voucher assistance programs (other than WIC)	1	1	8	16	18	1	1	9	15	18
4. Other (Please specify.)										
	3	0	1	2	5	5	0	1	1	5

17. Does your state have a program through which "able-bodied adults without dependents" and/or legal immigrants could obtain cash assistance that could be used for food (other than TANF—Temporary Assistance to Needy Families)? (Check all that apply.)

(12-15)

- 7 Yes, "able-bodied adults without dependents" could be eligible.
- 19 Yes, legal immigrants could be eligible.
- 7 Neither group is eligible for assistance. →Skip to Question 19
- 22 State does not have a cash assistance program. →Skip to Question 20

18. To the best of your knowledge, about how much, if at all, would the loss of FSP benefits increase the amount of cash assistance that an "able-bodied adult without dependents" and/or a legal immigrant might receive from the state's cash assistance program that could be used for food? (Check all that apply.)

(16-19)

- 1 Cash assistance to an individual could increase by as much as the amount of the lost FSP benefits.
- 3 Cash assistance to an individual could increase by an amount that is less than the lost FSP benefits.
- 1 Individuals not formerly eligible for cash assistance may become eligible because of lost FSP benefits.
- 17 There would be no change in the amount of cash assistance to an individual.

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19. In which of the following ways, if any, has your state changed or does it plan to change the eligibility standards for its cash assistance program (referred to in Questions 17 and 18) as a consequence of the changes in eligibility for FSP benefits and/or for other reasons? (Check all that apply.) (20-31)

Changes	Reason for Change	
	FSP Reform (1)	Other Reasons (2)
1. Standards have been or will be relaxed to provide more opportunities for assistance to "able-bodied adults without dependents."	0	0
2. Standards have been or will be relaxed to provide more opportunities for assistance to legal immigrants.	1	4
3. Standards have been or will be tightened to limit opportunities for assistance to "able-bodied adults without dependents."	1	3
4. Standards have been or will be tightened to limit opportunities for assistance to legal immigrants.	2	1
5. Standards have not changed and there are no plans for changes.	16	11
6. Other (Please specify.)	0	0

20. Is your state creating or does it plan to create a program to replace or supplement the existing FSP for those "able-bodied adults without dependents" and/or legal immigrants who lose eligibility for FSP benefits? (Check all that apply.) (32-34)

0 "Able-bodied adults without dependents" (Please explain.)

12 Legal immigrants (Please explain.)

CA, CO, MA, MD, MI, MN, NE, RI, TX, WA

39 No plans to replace or supplement the existing FSP

21. Does your state, through your department/division or any other department/division, provide funds for any food assistance programs that are available to "able-bodied adults without dependents" and/or legal immigrants? Include programs, such as WIC, if they receive state funding. (Check one.) (35)

16 Yes

35 No →Skip to Question 24

22. Please identify below the food assistance programs that are funded by your state and are available to "able-bodied adults without dependents" and/or legal immigrants. Include any programs you identified in Question 20 and 21. (36)

1. 36 programs in 20 states, 1-4 programs each

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

23. Please fill out one copy of the attached program description form for each state-funded program you identified in Question 22. (Please call us at the number on page 1 if the form is misplaced.) (37)

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24. Are you aware of any food assistance programs in your state that receive no state funding for services but total or partial **funding from local governments** and are available to "able-bodied adults without dependents" and/or legal immigrants? (*Check one.*)

 8 Yes (38)

 43 Not aware of any programs →*Skip to Q. 26*

25. Please identify below those food assistance programs that you know receive **no state funding for services but total or partial funding from local governments** and are available to "able-bodied adults without dependents" and/or legal immigrants.

(39)

1. IA, ID, ME, MO, ND, NH, OR one program each

2. SD two programs

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

26. Please identify the person we should contact if we need further information.

Name _____

Title _____

Phone _____

Thank you for your cooperation.

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

In October 1996, the Ranking Minority Member, Subcommittee on Children and Families, Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources, asked us to study several issues concerning the impact of welfare reform on the Food Stamp Program. This report focuses on the two groups of individuals most likely to lose their food stamp benefits—able-bodied adults without dependents and legal immigrants. Specifically, we describe the (1) actions, if any, that states have taken to assist those individuals who lose eligibility for the Food Stamp Program and (2) related actions, if any, taken by other organizations in selected localities—local governments and nonprofit organizations—to assist those individuals who lose their eligibility for the Food Stamp Program.

To address the first objective, we surveyed and received responses from the 50 states and the District of Columbia. We also updated our results as appropriate. The tabulated results of the survey are included as appendix I.

To address the second objective, we visited five localities. These localities were selected using the following criteria regarding the states in which they are located: (1) whether the states offered general relief to able-bodied adults without dependents and (2) whether the states had filed waivers precluding able-bodied adults without dependents from meeting the work requirement because of high unemployment or an insufficient number of jobs. We then selected states within these categories by (1) those with the highest food stamp participation of able-bodied adults without dependents and legal immigrants and (2) geographic diversity. Within the states, we chose the locality, usually a county, with the highest participation in the Food Stamp Program.

We visited these localities in the late summer of 1997. We contacted several organizations that were significantly involved in providing the localities with food assistance. We also met with government officials responsible for food stamps and other officials involved in welfare reform. In several localities, we also met with officials affiliated with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) because of their expertise in providing emergency food assistance after natural disasters. We also visited nonprofit organizations, such as community action agencies; food banks; church-affiliated food assistance providers, such as soup kitchens; local advocacy groups; local United Way affiliates; and food pantries. (See apps. V-IX for individual reports on the food assistance provided in these localities.)

Appendix II
Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

In addition, we contacted several national organizations that provide local communities with food assistance, including Catholic Charities USA; Lutheran Social Services; Second Harvest; World Share, Inc.; and the United Way of America. We also attended a conference sponsored by Second Harvest on the implications of welfare reform on food assistance. Additionally, we attended the American Public Welfare Association's National Conference for Food Stamp Directors to obtain information on current state and local food assistance programs. Finally, we met with officials from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to obtain program information and statistics.

We performed our work in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards from March through December 1997.

States That Have Applied For, Planned to Apply For, And/Or Received Waivers for Areas in Their State Where Employment Opportunities Are Limited



Source: GAO's analysis

States With New or Existing Food Assistance Programs Serving Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents And/Or Legal Immigrants



Source: GAO's analysis

Food Assistance in Los Angeles County, California

Figure V.1: Los Angeles County, California



County Profile

Los Angeles County had a population of about 9.1 million in 1995. In 1996, its unemployment rate was 8.3 percent, and its poverty rate for 1995-96 averaged 18.7 percent. In comparison, the state's unemployment rate was 7 percent, and the poverty rate for 1995-96 averaged 16.8 percent. Nationwide, unemployment was 5.4 percent and the poverty rate for 1995-96 averaged 13.8 percent.¹

In January 1997, as states were beginning to implement the Welfare Reform Act, over 1 million individuals participated in the Food Stamp Program in Los Angeles County. Of this total, over 189,000 were legal immigrants, and an estimated 56,400 were able-bodied adults without dependents. As of September 1997, after many changes to the Food Stamp

¹Statistics presented are the latest available. Population and poverty rates come from Census Bureau data for 1995 and 1996, respectively. Unemployment rates come from Bureau of Labor Statistics data for 1996.

Program were implemented, the county had about 870,000 food stamp participants of which about 31,000 were able-bodied adults without dependents and about 24,000 were legal immigrants. In addition, 29,000 legal immigrant children and elderly were receiving state-funded food stamps.

Approach to Providing Food Assistance

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) administers the Food Stamp Program, with guidance from the California Health and Welfare Agency. DPSS officials told us that they assist both able-bodied adults without dependents and legal immigrants in retaining food stamp benefits to the extent possible.

For able-bodied adults without dependents, local officials were providing employment and training experiences through workfare. The county has expanded its workfare program to include from 80 percent of these adults prior to welfare reform to 100 percent. Officials were concerned that if these adults were not offered workfare to meet the work requirement, they would lose their food stamp benefits.

For legal immigrants losing food stamp benefits, DPSS had an extensive notification process to advise them of their impending change in status for the Food Stamp Program as a result of welfare reform. DPSS sent out notification flyers entitled “You May Lose Your Food Stamp Benefits” to legal immigrants on five occasions and in several languages. The flyers described the process for obtaining citizenship. DPSS is providing assistance through a countywide effort in partnership with 200 public and nonprofit organizations. Activities have included providing assistance with applications for U.S. citizenship, including completing forms, and offering classes in English as a second language and in American government. However, because of the time needed to process citizenship applications by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), including the fact that the INS has to do criminal background checks on all applicants for U.S. citizenship, Los Angeles officials indicated that about 91,000 legal immigrants lost their federal food stamp benefits. These officials indicated, however, that the citizenship campaign continues and they hope to be able to restore food stamps to those who qualify once they become U.S. citizens.

At the time of our visit, DPSS was also considering what state and federal assistance could be provided. DPSS officials were awaiting the outcome of pending state legislation that would assist legal immigrants who were

losing food stamps. In August 1997, the state legislature restored food stamps by purchasing federal food stamps for legal immigrants who are elderly or are children. County officials believed it was important to restore food stamps and other benefits to legal immigrants—particularly because they represent 15-20 percent of the population in Los Angeles County.

Nonprofit Organizations' Efforts in Providing Food Assistance

Nonprofit organizations in Los Angeles County, some of which are affiliated with national groups, provide direct and indirect food assistance through a well-established network.² These organizations are also connected with federal, state, and local government agencies to provide services. Officials in different organizations told us that this locality's food assistance providers are effective in their efforts because of their experience in providing assistance following natural disasters, such as earthquakes, brush fires, and land slides, and because of experiences with rioting. These organizations generally expected to see an increase in the number of people needing their services as a result of welfare reform. Officials expressed concern that they would not be able to provide more services if their current level of resources remained the same. Additionally, several officials told us that resources for food and funding were diminishing. Accordingly, the organizations had developed the following approaches for handling the anticipated increase in needed services: (1) seeking additional donations for funds and food, (2) considering decreasing the amount of services that each recipient receives, and (3) targeting certain populations, such as the elderly, for services. Table V.1 describes the nonprofit organizations that we contacted.

²For the purpose of this report, organizations providing direct food assistance include those nonprofit organizations with a role in distributing food to needy individuals. Organizations providing indirect food assistance include those that provide funds, distribute information, and provide advocacy or bulk food for direct food assistance providers.

**Appendix V
Food Assistance in Los Angeles County,
California**

Table V.1: Nonprofit Organizations We Contacted Concerned With Food Assistance in Los Angeles County

Organization	Type	Role in food assistance
Catholic Charities of Los Angeles	Religious-based social service nonprofit (local affiliate of Catholic Charities)	Distributes food through its community centers to about 90,000 individuals twice a week.
LA Regional Foodbank	Food bank (local affiliate of Second Harvest)	Distributes food to 750 charitable organizations at 14¢ per pound. These organizations distribute food to an estimated 200,000 individuals per week; also distributes federal agricultural commodities.
New City Parish	Religious organization (a local affiliate of Lutheran Social Services)	Distributes bags of groceries and hot meals to more than 2,500 families.
San Fernando Valley Interfaith Council	Interfaith/Religious social service nonprofit (represents over 300 denominations and temples)	Distributes food through programs such as food pantries, meals-on-wheels, "homebound meals," and nutrition sites.
FEMA's Emergency Food and Shelter Program	Federally and state-funded program administered through the United Way of Los Angeles	Distributes funding to and purchases food for food pantries, soup kitchens, food banks, and homeless shelters.
United Way of Los Angeles	Community social service agency (local affiliate of the United Way)	Donates funding for food assistance to 15 food service providers. Estimates serving 408,000 clients with food and meals service.
INFO LINE of Los Angeles	Social service information and referral system	Provides the needy with information about food pantries and soup kitchens throughout the Los Angeles area. Handles about 150 food assistance inquiries per day.
Los Angeles Coalition to End Hunger and Homelessness	Advocacy group for hunger and homelessness issues	Provides advocacy assistance for the poor in representing their views to local political officials on a number of issues, including food assistance.

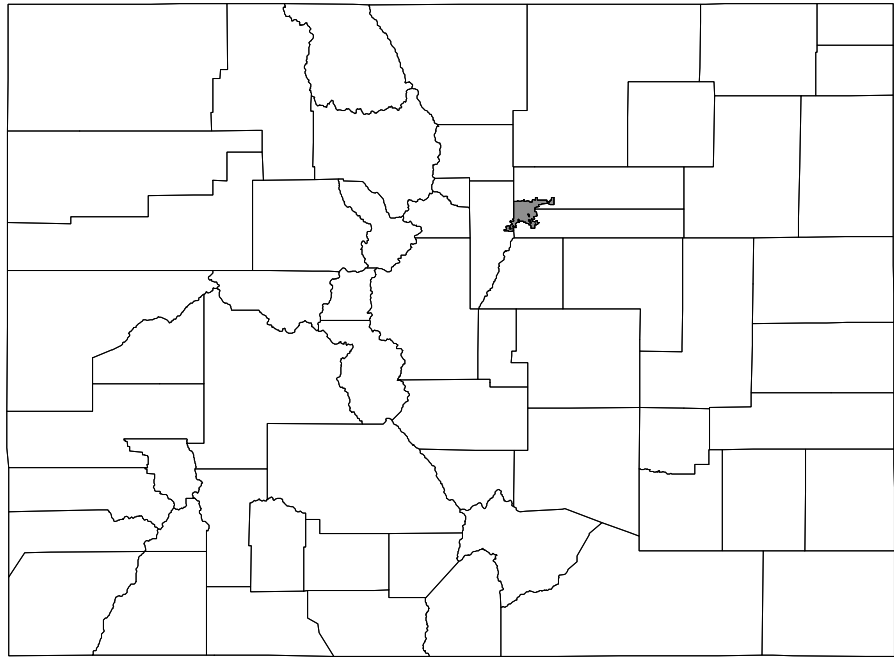
Most organizations did not have specific eligibility requirements for recipients of their food assistance services and did not keep demographic

information on those they served. Generally, they serve anyone in need, including able-bodied adults without dependents and legal immigrants. Officials told us that their organizations serve the working poor, including single mothers with children and grandparents raising young children.

The resources available to these organizations included federal, state, and local government grants, philanthropic grants, private donations, and in-kind donations, such as voluntary services and housing. For example, the city of Los Angeles provides some of these organizations with funding from its federal Community Development Block Grant.

Food Assistance in Denver, Colorado

Figure VI.1: Denver County, Colorado



County Profile

The population of Denver County in 1995 was approximately 500,000. In May 1996, the unemployment rate for the Denver metropolitan area¹ was 3.9 percent. At the state level, the unemployment rate was 4.3 percent in May 1996, and the poverty rate for 1995-96 averaged 9.7 percent.² Nationally, in May 1996, the unemployment rate was 5.4 percent, and the poverty rate for 1995-96 averaged 13.8 percent.³

In January 1997, as states were beginning to implement the Welfare Reform Act, about 56,000 individuals participated in the Food Stamp Program. By September 1997, after many changes to the Food Stamp Program were implemented, participation had declined to approximately 47,000. Between January and September, the number of able-bodied adults

¹Denver County is contained within the Denver metropolitan area.

²Data for 1996 on the poverty rate for Denver were unavailable.

³Statistics presented are the latest available. Population and poverty rates come from Census Bureau data for 1995 and 1996, respectively. Unemployment rates come from Bureau of Labor Statistics data for 1996.

without dependents with food stamps decreased from about 1,600 to about 300. According to an official with the Denver Department of Social Services (DDSS), most of these adults lost food stamp benefits because they did not attend a required orientation session informing them of their work requirements under welfare reform. The information on this session was publicized through fliers at food pantries and soup kitchens as well as in the food stamp office. Although the number of legal immigrants on food stamps is unknown, a 1996 study by the Colorado Department of Human Services estimated that, statewide, approximately 5,700 immigrants would lose their benefits as a result of welfare reform.

Approach to Providing Food Assistance

DDSS administers the Food Stamp Program in Denver County with supervision from the Colorado Department of Human Services. To assist able-bodied adults without dependents in meeting the Food Stamp Program's work requirements, DDSS provides employment and training assistance through Denver Employment First. This program helps these adults prepare for jobs by teaching them resume writing, interviewing techniques, and appropriate dress. The program also offers General Educational Developmental (GED) self-study courses to move adults without a high school education toward earning a high school equivalency diploma. The program also operates the county workfare program for able-bodied adults without dependents and maintains a list of approved nonprofit agencies at which participants can meet their work requirements.

In addition, DDSS is administering an emergency assistance program for legal immigrants in Denver County who lost federal food stamps. Colorado appropriated \$2 million for emergency assistance to legal immigrants from July 1997 to June 1998. Under this program, legal immigrants can receive assistance, including food vouchers, that can be redeemed at designated food pantries. In order to receive this special emergency food assistance, the legal immigrants' participation must be approved by DDSS. With DDSS' approval, legal immigrants can continue to receive this emergency assistance on a monthly basis as long as they continue to be in an emergency situation.

Nonprofit Organizations' Efforts in Providing Food Assistance

Nonprofit organizations in Denver County provide direct and indirect food assistance.⁴ Most of the organizations we visited were affiliated with national groups; others were state or local. In the last several years, these nonprofit organizations and some government agencies have established a network to discuss food assistance problems. Several organizations expected the number of individuals requesting services to increase as a result of welfare reform. Most organizations reported that they were already experiencing an increased demand, with one organization reporting 40 to 50 more applicants per week.

Although many of the nonprofit organizations we contacted expect more individuals to request services, none are sure how they will deal with the expected increase. They are also concerned about their ability to meet an increased need for their services because of their limited resources. A few of them also reported that they would try to raise additional money through fund-raising activities and grants. Two officials also voiced concern about their ability to meet the demand for emergency food assistance in an economic downturn. Table VI.1 describes the nonprofit organizations that we contacted.

Table VI.1 Nonprofit Organizations We Contacted Concerned With Food Assistance in Denver County

Organization	Type	Role in food assistance
Metro CareRing	Provides emergency services, including food, to the poor	Provides bags of food to clients. Serves approximately 26,000 individuals per year.
FEMA Emergency Food and Shelter Program	Federally funded program administered by the Denver Foundation	Provides funding for local food assistance programs.
Colorado Coalition for the Homeless	Advocacy group for the homeless	Provides advocacy on issues, including food assistance, in Colorado.
Food Bank of the Rockies	Foodbank serving metropolitan Denver, northern Colorado, and Wyoming (local affiliate of Second Harvest)	Serves approximately 750 hunger-relief programs, including, for example, a program to pick up surplus prepared foods and a "kid's cafe" providing food for children in Denver's inner city.

(continued)

⁴For the purpose of this report, organizations providing direct food assistance include those nonprofit organizations with a role in distributing food to needy individuals. Organizations providing indirect food assistance include those that provide funds, distribute information, and provide advocacy or bulk food for direct food assistance providers.

Appendix VI
Food Assistance in Denver, Colorado

Organization	Type	Role in food assistance
Jewish Family Service of Colorado	A religious human service and resource agency	Manages a kosher food pantry that provides food for those who meet income requirements. Serves approximately 250 people per month.
Mile High United Way	Community social service agency	Provides a variety of services, including funding for approximately 13 emergency food assistance programs.
Statewide Coalition on Hunger	Group of government and nonprofit food assistance providers sharing information about food assistance in Colorado	Provides advocacy on food assistance in Colorado.
Catholic Charities and Community Services	A religious organization (local member of Catholic Charities)	Provides food through a network of emergency assistance centers in the Denver metropolitan area; a food bank, which pools together the resources of 22 food banks to buy food in bulk at lower cost; the SHARE program; ^a and meals at a temporary shelter for the homeless.

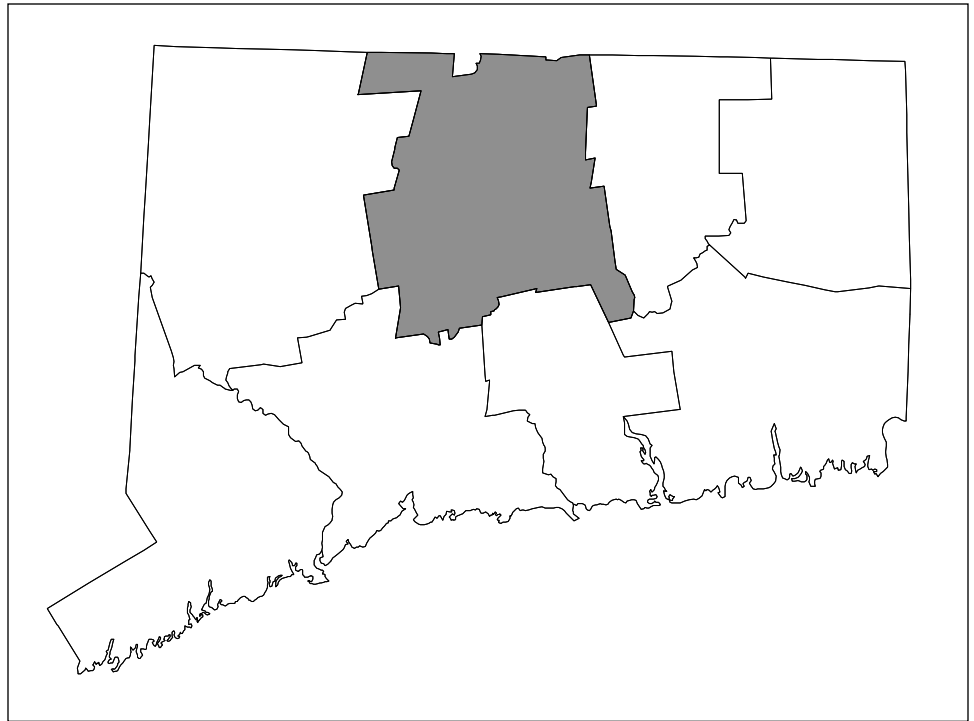
^aThe SHARE Colorado Program is a unique food distribution and community building program. It offers a monthly food package of meats, fresh fruits, vegetables, and staples worth double or triple their retail value for \$13 and 2 hours of community service.

The nonprofit organizations we contacted generally required their clients to meet some type of eligibility requirement in order to receive services. The organizations said that they serve many different groups of people besides legal immigrants and able-bodied adults without dependents, including the working poor, single mothers with children, and the elderly.

The organizations use various resources to fund their operations, including federal government grants, foundation grants, individual contributions, and volunteer services. For example, one organization received approximately \$264,000 in volunteer services and \$1.4 million in in-kind food pantry donations during the last year.

Food Assistance in Hartford, Connecticut

Figure VII.1: Greater Hartford, Connecticut



Area Profile

The greater Hartford area had a population of approximately 835,000 in 1995. The area consists of three jurisdictions—the city of Hartford and the towns of East and West Hartford. In May 1996, the unemployment rate for the Hartford area was 5.9 percent.¹ By comparison, the state's unemployment rate was 5.5 percent in May 1996, and the poverty rate for 1995-96 averaged 10.7 percent. Nationally, in May 1996, the unemployment rate was 5.4 percent, and the poverty rate for 1995-96 averaged 13.8 percent.²

In August 1996, before the Welfare Reform Act was implemented, over 219,000 individuals were participating in the federal Food Stamp Program statewide, according to Connecticut officials. (Statistics were not available for the greater Hartford area.) Of this total, about 5,800 were able-bodied adults without dependents. Furthermore, as of August 1996, an estimated 9,700 food stamp participants were legal immigrants. By September 1997, after many changes to the Food Stamp Program were implemented,

¹Data for 1996 on the poverty rate for Hartford were unavailable.

²Statistics presented are the latest available. Population and poverty rates come from Census Bureau data for 1995 and 1996, respectively. Unemployment rates come from Bureau of Labor Statistics data for 1996.

participation had declined to about 202,000. Of this total, about 5,400 were able-bodied adults without dependents, and about 7,100 were legal immigrants.

Approach to Providing Food Assistance

Connecticut's Department of Social Services (DSS) administers the Food Stamp Program throughout the state. At the time of our visit, DSS officials told us that they did not have and did not plan to develop outreach services to help individuals retain their food stamps. In August 1997, however, the state received approval for a waiver of the work requirement for areas with limited employment opportunities and began to notify able-bodied adults without dependents who lost benefits because of welfare reform that their benefits could be restored. DSS' goal is to provide access to information and services for employment and training. However, if participants in these programs meet income and work requirements, they may still qualify for food stamps. In addition, the state has developed a referral system to provide individuals with information on available food assistance.

Able-bodied adults without dependents can participate in employment and training in a number of ways. For example, they can obtain training through the Connecticut Works System, which offers a "one-stop" approach to employment services and unemployment benefits. In addition, able-bodied adults without dependents can participate in the Self-Initiated Food Stamp Community Service Program/Working for In-Kind Income. In this state program, an able-bodied adult without dependents can meet workfare requirements by participating in a community service activity. The state will provide these adults with information on potential community service opportunities. Individuals accepting these community service positions will be able to maintain their eligibility for food stamps.

State officials told us they had not made plans to provide outreach programs/services for legal immigrants losing food stamps because they were uncertain how many legal immigrants would become ineligible for the food stamp program. However, the state provided legal immigrants with information about obtaining U.S. citizenship when they were notified about changes in their eligibility for food stamps.

Nonprofit Organizations' Efforts in Providing Food Assistance

The nonprofit organizations at work in the greater Hartford area provide food assistance directly and indirectly through food banks, food pantries, shelters, and soup kitchens.³ These organizations are affiliated with a network overseen by the local board of FEMA. The local board provides an opportunity for nonprofit organizations to communicate and coordinate the efforts or services they provide.

Several of the organizations noted that it was too soon to clearly determine the effects of welfare reform. Nevertheless, they expected an increased need for food assistance because of the loss of eligibility for food stamps and were concerned about their ability to respond to that increase with little or no additional funding. Organizations told us that they plan to (1) seek additional funding and food donations and (2) make adjustments with the amounts and/or types of services they normally provide. Table VII.1 lists the nonprofit organizations we contacted.

³For the purpose of this report, organizations providing direct food assistance include those nonprofit organizations with a role of distributing food to needy individuals. Organizations providing indirect food assistance include those that provide funds, distribute information, and provide advocacy or bulk food for direct food assistance providers.

Appendix VII
Food Assistance in Hartford, Connecticut

Table VII.1: Nonprofit Organizations We Contacted Concerned With Food Assistance in Hartford, Connecticut

Organization	Type	Role in food assistance
Community Renewal Team of Greater Hartford, Inc.	Community action agency	Distributes funding to five agencies to provide food assistance.
Foodshare	Food bank (local affiliate of Second Harvest)	Distributes donated food to over 200 private, nonprofit programs that feed the hungry (e.g., food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters).
Center City Churches (Center for Hope)	Religious Organization	Serves meals to approximately 1,200 to 1,400 individuals and provides referrals to other food assistance programs.
Connecticut Association for Human Services/Anti-Hunger Coalition	Statewide advocacy organization	Conducts research, outreach, training, advocacy, and provides referrals to other food assistance.
Community Soup Kitchen	Soup kitchen	Serves meals or provides bags of food.
Connecticut Food Bank	Food bank (local affiliate of the Second Harvest)	Provides donated food to 450 private, nonprofit feeding agencies.
Jewish Federation Association of Connecticut	Religious organization (local affiliate of Jewish Federation)	Provides kosher lunches for approximately 300 to 350 individuals.
FEMA's Emergency Food and Shelter Program	Federally funded program administered through the United Way of Connecticut	Distributes funding to the local food bank to service shelters, food pantries, and soup kitchens.
Salvation Army	Community Social Service	Provides food vouchers, Senior meal programs, hot meals, home-meal delivery for the elderly, seasonal meal programs, and part-time soup kitchens.
United Way Infoline of Connecticut	Information referral service	Makes referrals to food assistance programs.
Lutheran Social Services of New England	Religious organization (local affiliate of Lutheran Social Services)	Provides referrals to food assistance for refugees and immigrants.

These nonprofit organizations have no or minimal eligibility requirements for participation, such as picture identification and documentation of income. Currently, the nonprofit organizations receive funding from

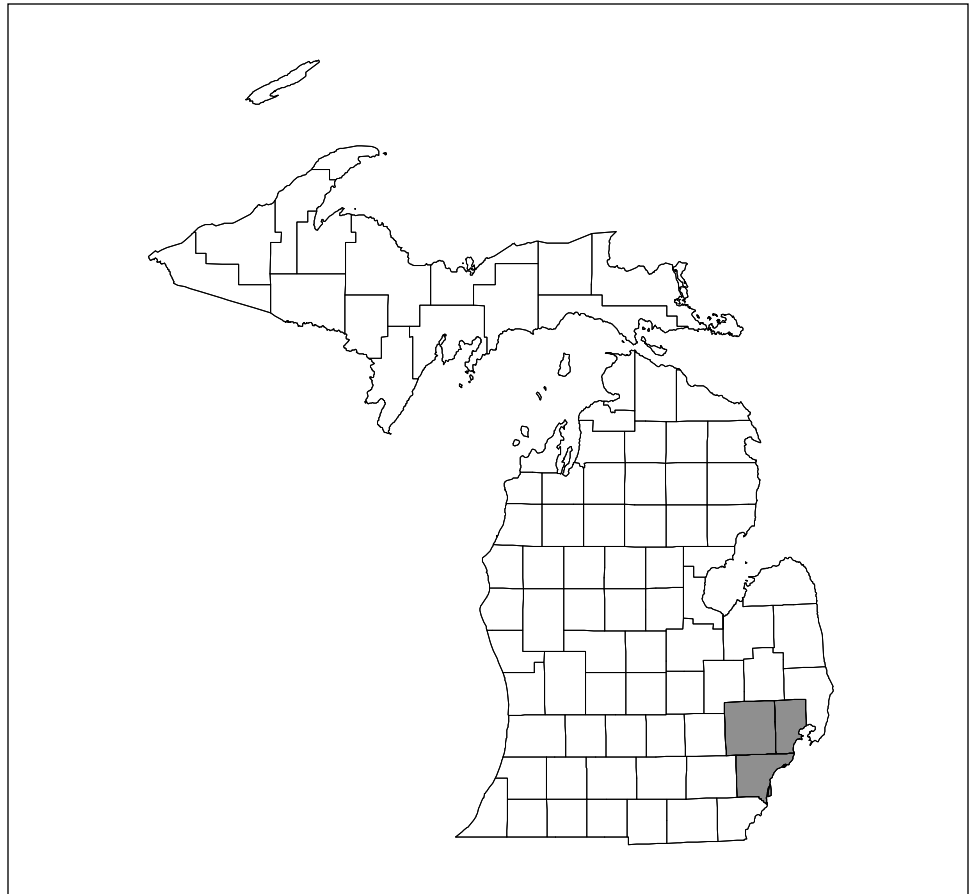
federal, state, and local government grants; individual and corporate contributions; and volunteer services.

**Other Observations
Regarding Local Food
Assistance Efforts**

Two municipalities—the town of West Hartford and the town of East Hartford—maintain town food pantries where the needy can obtain either bags of groceries or food vouchers redeemable at local grocery stores. In East Hartford, participants must show a photo identification, which includes a social security number and date of birth; provide verification of income for all family members; and sign a “Client Information Form” that provides proof of dependents.

Food Assistance in the Detroit Tri-County Area

Figure VIII.1: Greater Detroit, Michigan



Area Profile

The Detroit Tri-County area—Macomb, Oakland, and Wayne counties—had a population of about 3.9 million people in 1995—about 41 percent of Michigan’s population. In May 1996, the Detroit metropolitan area had an unemployment rate of 4.3 percent.¹ In comparison, the state unemployment rate in May 1996 was 4.6 percent, and the poverty rate for 1995-96 averaged 11.7 percent. Nationally, in May 1996, the unemployment rate was 5.4 percent and the poverty rate for 1995-96 averaged 13.8 percent.²

In November 1996, as states were beginning to implement the Welfare Reform Act, about 427,600 persons received food stamps in the tri-county

¹Data on the poverty rate in Detroit for 1996 were unavailable.

²Statistics presented are the latest available. Population and poverty rates come from Census Bureau data for 1995 and 1996, respectively. Unemployment rates come from Bureau of Labor Statistics data for 1996.

area. Of this total, about 29,500 were able-bodied adults without dependents. According to a Michigan state official, the agency does not track the number of legal immigrants receiving food stamps. As of September 1997, after many changes to the Food Stamp Program were implemented, about 381,500 individuals were receiving food stamps.

Approach to Providing Food Assistance

Michigan's Family Independence Agency (FIA) administers the Food Stamp Program in all counties, including Macomb, Oakland, and Wayne. An FIA official told us that FIA was assisting able-bodied adults without dependents with employment and training so that they can become self-sufficient while meeting work requirements that allow them to continue receiving food stamps. According to an FIA official, the state is not planning to create a new food assistance program to assist legal immigrants who lost food stamp benefits.

Able-bodied adults without dependents have several opportunities to participate in employment and training and meet the Food Stamp Program's work requirements. They can participate in a state-approved employment training program, work 20 hours a week, or perform 25 hours of public service at a nonprofit agency. Effective October 1, 1997, the number of community service hours must equal the benefit divided by the minimum wage (\$5.15 per hour). In addition, in 1996, Michigan established the Food Stamp Community Service Program, which focuses on able-bodied adults without dependents. In fiscal year 1998, the state will receive \$13.4 million from USDA's FNS to expand work programs for this population.

Nonprofit Organizations' Efforts in Providing Food Assistance

Nonprofit organizations in greater Detroit, Michigan, some of which are affiliated with national groups, provide direct and indirect food assistance through an established network that includes soup kitchens, food pantries, and food banks.³ According to officials of 10 nonprofit agencies, able-bodied adults without dependents and legal immigrants who lose their food stamps as a result of welfare reform will look for food assistance from these nonprofit organizations. Several of these officials told us that they had already experienced an increased need for their services as a result of welfare reform. They expressed concern about their ability to provide these additional services because of limited funding.

³For the purpose of this report, organizations providing direct food assistance include those nonprofit organizations with a role of distributing food to needy individuals. Organizations providing indirect food assistance include those that provide funds, distribute information, and provide advocacy or bulk food for direct food assistance providers.

Appendix VIII
Food Assistance in the Detroit Tri-County
Area

However, several organizations we visited have developed strategies to increase the supply of food. These strategies include (1) raising additional money through fund-raising activities, (2) seeking more government and corporate grants, (3) encouraging Michigan to apply for federal food stamp waivers, (4) raising funds for target groups of legal immigrants, and (5) improving the emergency provider infrastructure. Table VIII.1 describes the nonprofit organizations that we contacted.

**Appendix VIII
Food Assistance in the Detroit Tri-County
Area**

Table VIII.1: Nonprofit Organizations We Contacted Concerned With Food Assistance in the Tri-County Area

Organization	Type	Role in food assistance
Gleaners Community Food Bank of Detroit	Food bank (a Second Harvest affiliate)	Serves about 300 emergency food providers, including soup kitchens and food pantries.
Wayne-Metro Community Service Agency	Community action agency	Refers clients to 124 soup kitchens and food pantries in Wayne County and provides technical assistance for emergency food providers.
Forgotten Harvest	Perishable food salvage organization	Retrieves perishable food from restaurants and other food service organizations. Each month transports 60,000 pounds of food to tri-county soup kitchens and shelters.
Yad Ezra	Food pantry	Provides about 500,000 pounds of food per year to about 1,100 Jewish families in the metropolitan area.
Hunger Action Coalition of Michigan	Policy advocacy organization	Establishes about 20 new emergency food assistance providers each year. Since 1991, the coalition has received about \$1.8 million in grants which it distributed to about 270 emergency food providers.
Capuchin Soup Kitchen	Religious organization	Provides 7 days of food for needy families. Also serves two meals daily for the homeless in downtown Detroit.
Focus: Hope	Human rights organization	Manages USDA's Commodity Supplemental Food Program, providing groceries for mothers, infants, preschool children, and seniors over the age of 60 meeting certain income guidelines.

Many nonprofit organizations had eligibility requirements for individuals to receive their food assistance services. One required a certain qualifying income level but frequently made exceptions. Some providers serve only people within certain geographical boundaries. Others will provide food for anyone who asks. A few groups provide groceries for people on special

diets; for example, an Oakland County food pantry provides groceries for those who keep kosher kitchens. Other providers primarily serve specific groups such as Hmong, Vietnamese, and migrant farm workers.

Detroit's emergency food assistance providers depend upon a variety of resources to fund their operations: grants from large corporate foundations; federal, state, and local governments; and community fund-raising activities that donate food and money. Community-based organizations also depend upon volunteers to manage and staff their food pantries and soup kitchens.

Other Observations on Nonprofit Efforts to Provide Food Assistance

According to the emergency food providers we interviewed, food is generally available for soup kitchens and food pantries, but additional funding for infrastructure is needed. The supply of food available for emergency food services does not depend only on the number of people needing emergency food services or the amount of food available for donation. The availability of funding for infrastructure—transportation and storage space, including refrigeration, and staff—is key to a successful food assistance operation. For example, many smaller soup kitchens and food pantries lack refrigeration and storage space, which prevents them from obtaining and keeping donated meats, vegetables, fruits, or dairy products.

Furthermore, these organizations anticipate an increase in individuals and families needing their services. For example, early in 1997, one food pantry—Yad Ezra—realized that welfare reform would affect a number of Russian Jewish immigrants and that some means had to be found to replace the food stamps that would no longer be available. A Yad Ezra survey indicated that 212 of the 1,006 families currently being assisted would be affected by welfare reform and that many of the families are elderly and sick. Therefore, their ability or desire to learn English and gain citizenship is doubtful. Only 39 percent of the surveyed immigrants are taking citizenship classes.

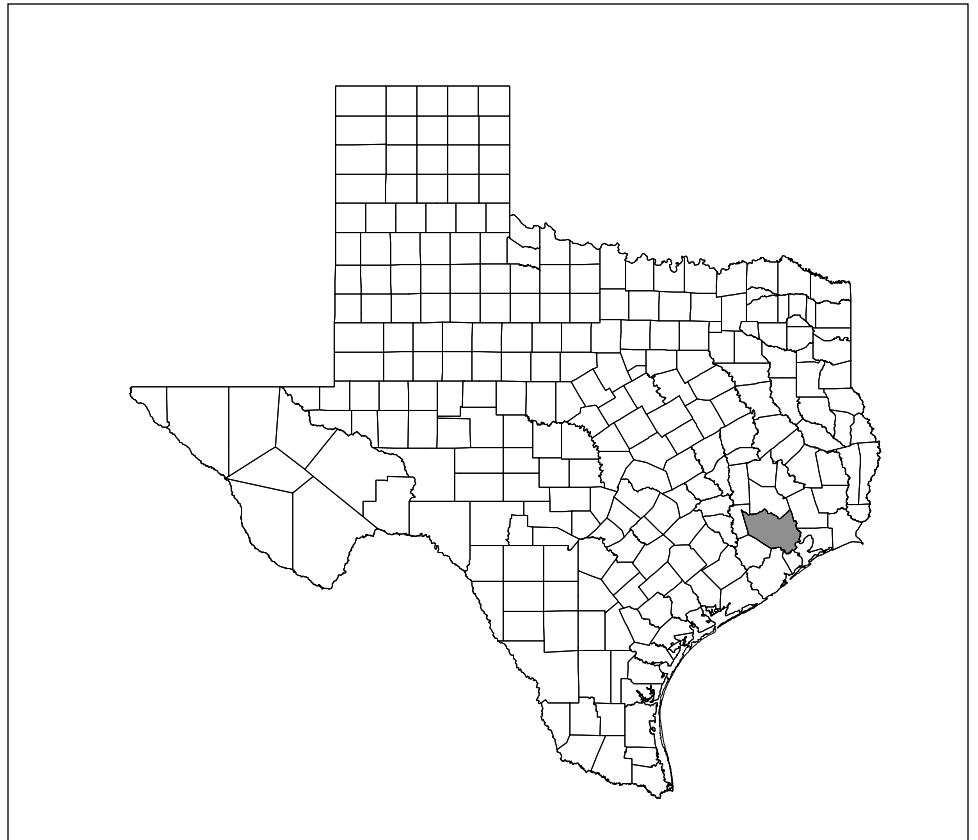
Specifically, to assist the 212 families, Yad Ezra will need \$100,000 to augment the food pantry's current year's budget of \$680,000. Each subsequent year, the organization will need to raise additional money to assist needy legal immigrants. Any additional money could exceed \$100,000 each year, since Yad Ezra did not attempt to identify any new families or individuals whom it was not currently serving and who could be affected by welfare reform. Officials from Yad Ezra believe that Yad

Appendix VIII
Food Assistance in the Detroit Tri-County
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Ezra's effort to replace food stamps for its legal immigrants is not likely to be duplicated by other food pantries because, unlike most other organizations, Yad Ezra serves a specific group of legal immigrants and was able to obtain the necessary resources to meet its needs.

Food Assistance in Houston, Texas

Figure IX.1: Harris County (Houston), Texas



County Profile

Houston, Texas (Harris County) had a population of 3.1 million in 1995. In May 1996, the unemployment rate was 5.1 percent in Houston,¹ while the state unemployment rate was 5.4 percent. The poverty rate in 1995-96 averaged 17 percent. Nationally, in May 1996, the unemployment rate was 5.4 percent, and the poverty rate for 1995-96 averaged 13.8 percent.²

In February 1997, as states were beginning to implement the Welfare Reform Act, over 333,000 individuals in Houston received food stamps. Of this population, about 14,000 were able-bodied adults without dependents, and about 17,000 were legal immigrants. As of September 1997, after many changes to the Food Stamp Program were implemented, the number of able-bodied adults without dependents receiving food stamps had

¹Data for 1996 on the poverty rate for Houston were unavailable.

²Statistics presented are the latest available. Population and poverty rates come from Census Bureau data for 1995 and 1996, respectively. Unemployment rates come from Bureau of Labor Statistics data for 1996.

decreased to about 4,900, and the number of legal immigrants had decreased to about 2,700.

Approach to Providing Food Assistance

The Texas Department of Human Services (TDHS) administers USDA's Food Stamp Program. Texas had obtained a waiver of the work requirement for selected counties; however, it decided not to implement the waiver in Houston because the unemployment rate was less than 10 percent. Therefore, all able-bodied adults in Houston are required to participate in employment and training activities in order to continue receiving food stamps. According to TDHS officials, activities meeting these work requirements include regular employment; self-employment; volunteer work with a business, government entity, or nonprofit organization; and/or participation in the Job Training Partnership Act or the Trade Adjustment Assistance Act Program. In addition, these adults can obtain assistance from the Texas Workforce Commission's Food Stamp Employment and Training Program. The purpose of this program is to move welfare recipients to work as quickly as possible. However, participation in the job search and the job search training component of this program does not satisfy the work requirement.

For legal immigrants, Texas is providing, effective February 1998, targeted food assistance to elderly and disabled legal immigrants who were receiving food stamp benefits as of August 22, 1996, and lost benefits because of welfare reform. Texas is providing about \$18 million for this effort. Benefits will range from \$10 to \$122 per month per individual.

Nonprofit Organizations' Efforts in Providing Food Assistance

The nonprofit organizations that provide direct and indirect food assistance—including food banks and food pantries—in Houston generally operate independently of each other.³ At the time of our visit, most of the organizations reported that their ability to provide food assistance for those needing it had not yet been affected by welfare reform. However, most organizations told us that they expected the amount of food assistance provided by them to increase within the next 2 to 3 years because of welfare reform. In addition, many organizations' officials expressed concern that they may have difficulty in providing food assistance in the future. One organization attributed this difficulty to the fact that so many organizations were competing for the same monetary

³For the purpose of this report, organizations providing direct food assistance include those nonprofit organizations with a role of distributing food to needy individuals. Organizations providing indirect food assistance include those that provide funds, distribute information, provide advocacy or bulk food to direct food assistance providers.

Appendix IX
Food Assistance in Houston, Texas

and food donation resources. Most organizations did not have planned approaches for dealing with the expected increase in the need for their services. However, one organization is considering a reduction in the number of items that it distributes in bags of groceries in order to meet the expected increased need for its services. Table IX.1 list the nonprofit organizations that we contacted.

Table IX.1: Nonprofit Organizations We Contacted Concerned With Food Assistance in Houston, Texas

Organization	Type	Role in food assistance
Gulf Coast Community Services Association	Community service agency	Provides supplemental food for low-income families in emergency situations.
Houston Food Bank	Food bank (local affiliate of Second Harvest)	Distributes food to local charities that care for the needy.
United Way of the Texas Gulf Coast	Community social service agency (local affiliate of United Way)	Distributes funds to community groups that target hunger.
Target Hunger	Community-based Organization	Distributes food in low-income neighborhoods through volunteers who operate food pantries and community gardens.
Research & Development Institute	Community-based Organization	Distributes rice, instant noodles, and canned food within the Vietnamese community.
Community Alliance United in Service	Umbrella organization for social ministry coalitions	Conducts fund-raising activities for member coalitions that provide food assistance.
FEMA Emergency Food and Shelter Program	Federally funded program administered by the United Way of the Texas Gulf Coast	Provides funding that supplements local food assistance programs.
End Hunger Network	Advocacy group	Provides food support for 30 agencies and 110 food pantries.
Associated Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Galveston-Houston (Guadalupe Social Services)	Religious-based organization	Provides emergency food assistance and bags of groceries once a month for senior citizens and disabled persons.

Most organizations had income eligibility requirements for their food assistance services, and several limited their assistance to individuals residing in certain areas. In addition, one organization focused its efforts in the Vietnamese community.

Appendix IX
Food Assistance in Houston, Texas

Funding sources for the nonprofit organizations we visited varied. Most received funding from federal, state, and local government grants and donations from religious organizations and individuals.

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