

FOOD STAMP EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAM

Better Data Needed to Understand Who Is Served and What the Program Achieves

Why GAO Did This Study

Since the late 1990s, many funding changes have been made to the Food Stamp E&T Program. In 1997, legislation required states to spend 80 percent of their funds on participants who lose their food stamp benefits if they do not meet work requirements within a limited time frame. The legislation also increased funds by \$131 million to help states serve these participants. But spending rates for the program declined until, in 2001, states spent only about 30 percent of the federal allocation. In 2002, the Congress reduced federal funds to \$110 million a year. While it is too soon to know the impact of these changes, GAO was asked to determine whom the program serves, what services are provided, and what is known about program outcomes and effectiveness.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that USDA collect nationwide data on program participants, require states to collect outcome measures, and work with other agencies on a research agenda that will allow for an effectiveness evaluation.

In comments on a draft of GAO's report, Food and Nutrition Service officials agreed with the benefits of obtaining more information on whom the program is serving and what it is achieving. However, they expressed concern over the costs of implementing GAO's recommendations, particularly GAO's recommendation related to outcome data.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-388.

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Sigurd Nilsen at 202-512-7215 or nilsens@gas.gov.

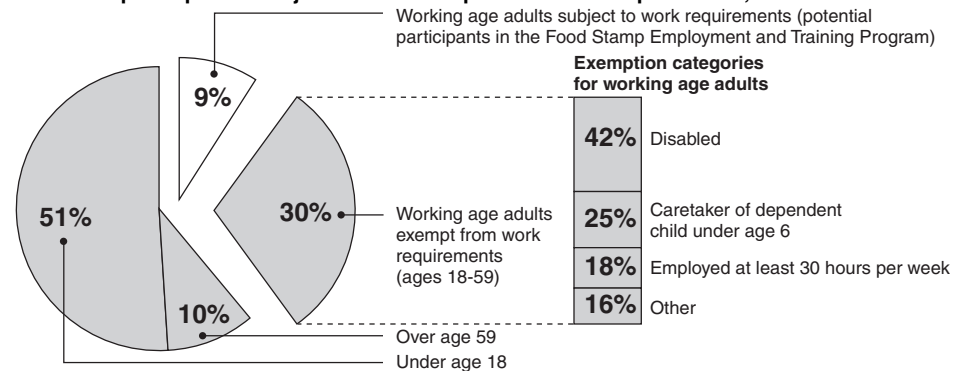
What GAO Found

Food Stamp Employment and Training (E&T) participants are a small proportion of the food stamp population and do not usually receive cash assistance from other programs. While the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) does not collect nationwide data on the number and characteristics of Food Stamp E&T participants, program officials in the 15 states GAO contacted described the population as generally hard to employ because they have little education and a limited work history.

States may provide program participants with a range of employment and training activities that qualify them for food stamp benefits. USDA data show that, in fiscal year 2001, job search accounted for about half of all participant activities. Work experience—whereby participants receive food stamp benefits in exchange for work—accounted for about 25 percent. Food Stamp E&T services are delivered through a variety of local entities, such as welfare offices or one-stop centers—sites designed to streamline the services of many federal employment and training programs. While all but 1 of the 15 states delivered at least some of their Food Stamp E&T services at the one-stops, Food Stamp E&T participants do not usually engage in intensive services provided by other programs at the one-stops. Program officials from most of the 15 states noted that Food Stamp E&T participants generally lack basic skills that allow them to use other program services successfully.

No nationwide data exist on whether the Food Stamp E&T Program helps participants get a job. While some outcome data exist at the state level, it is not clear the outcomes were the result of program participation. USDA has no plans to evaluate the effectiveness of the program nor have the Departments of Labor or Health and Human Services included Food Stamp E&T participants in their studies of the hardest-to-employ.

Food Stamp Recipients Subject to and Exempt from Work Requirements, FY 2001



Food stamp recipients subject to work requirements (1,556,000 recipients)
 Food stamp recipients exempted from work requirements (15,713,000 recipients)

Source: USDA.