
CHARACTERISTICS OF FOOD STAMP HOUSEHOLDS: FISCAL YEAR 2000 (Advance Report)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE

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The Food Stamp Program (FSP) is the nation's largest food assistance program. In fiscal year 2000, it served an average of 17.2 million people per month. Almost \$15.0 billion was paid out in food stamps that year, with an average benefit of \$73 per person.

Food stamps are available to most low-income households with few resources to supplement their food purchases and help them maintain a healthy diet. In fiscal year 2000, food stamps were over one-fifth of the average participating household's total monthly income (cash plus food stamps). If the value of food stamps were included in gross income, 15.5 percent of food stamp households would move from below to above half the poverty line (Figure 1).

I. COMPOSITION OF FOOD STAMP HOUSEHOLDS

In fiscal year 2000, the majority (53.9 percent) of food stamp households contained children (Table 1). Of these households, over two-thirds (68.4 percent) were single-parent households, 14.5 percent were headed by married parents, and 9.7 percent had no members over the age of 17 participating in the FSP. Households with children had an average size of 3.4 individuals and received an average monthly food stamp benefit of \$234. Single-parent households (3.2 individuals on average) received an average benefit of \$230, and married-couple households with children (4.6 individuals on average) received an average benefit of \$269.

Households containing elderly individuals represented 21.0 percent of all food stamp households. Over three-quarters of them (79.5 percent) lived alone and received an average monthly benefit of \$44. Households containing elderly and other individuals, either elderly or non-elderly, received an average benefit of \$116.

Over one-quarter of food stamp households contained disabled individuals (27.5 percent). Of these households, over half (57.2 percent) lived alone, receiving an average benefit of \$47. Households with disabled individuals and others, either disabled or non-disabled, received an average benefit of \$169.

In households without children, elderly, or disabled individuals, 92.5 percent lived alone, receiving an average benefit of \$116. Households with multiple non-elderly, non-disabled adults and no children received an average benefit of \$189.

II. BENEFITS AND INCOME OF FOOD STAMP HOUSEHOLDS

In fiscal year 2000, 79.8 percent of all benefits went to households with children, 17.3 percent went to households with disabled individuals, and 7.8 percent went to households containing elderly individuals. The average monthly food stamp benefit in fiscal year 2000 was \$158 per household. The majority (61.8 percent) of food stamp households received monthly benefits of

FIGURE 1

POVERTY STATUS OF FOOD STAMP HOUSEHOLDS WITH AND WITHOUT FOOD STAMPS, 2000

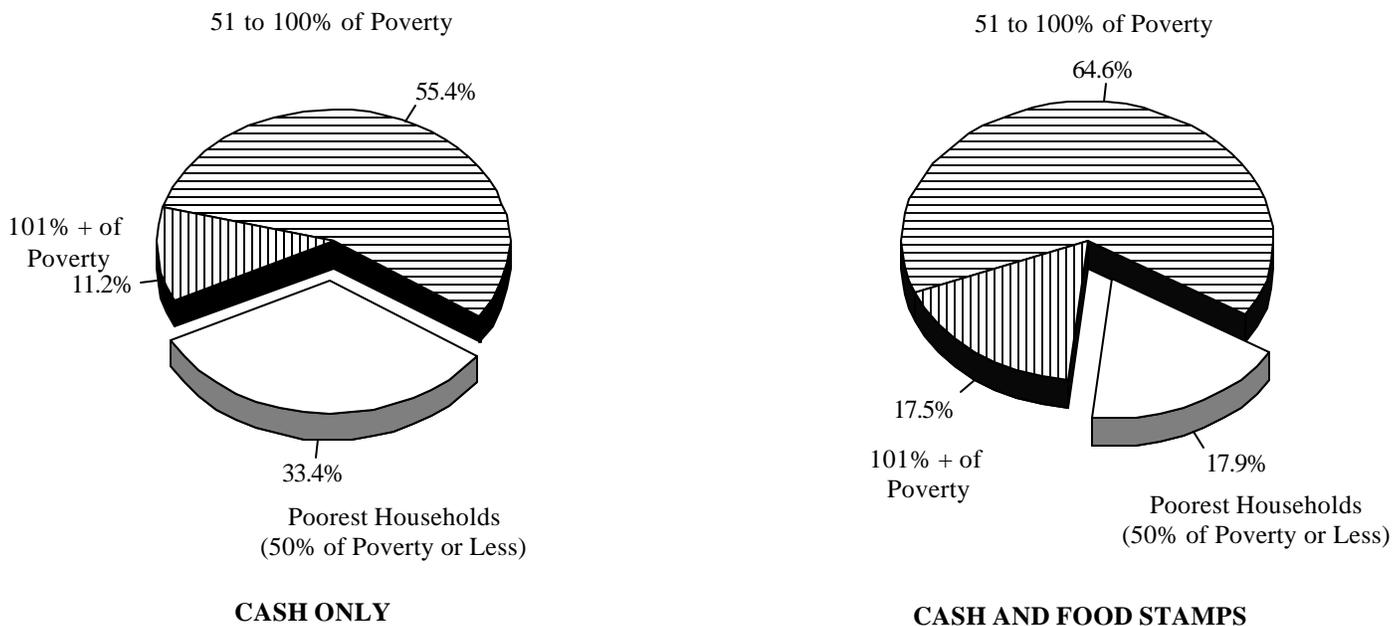
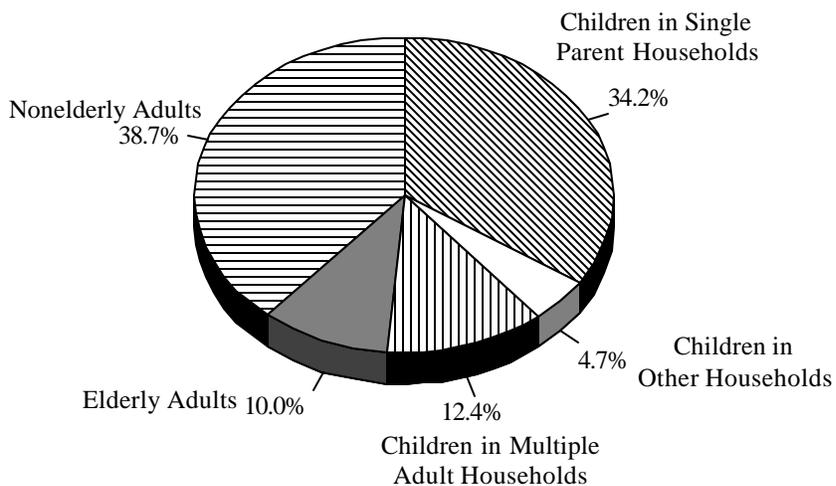


FIGURE 2

DISTRIBUTION OF FOOD STAMP PARTICIPANTS, 2000



Source: 2000 Food Stamp Quality Control sample.

over \$100, and 32.4 percent received over \$200 (Table 2).

The average monthly gross income of food stamp households was \$620 (Table 3). Over one-quarter of households (27.2 percent) had earnings. Over three-quarters (78.7 percent) received unearned income from one or more sources. The most common forms of unearned income were Supplemental Security Income (SSI), received by 31.7 percent; Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), received by 25.8 percent; and Social Security, received by 25.5 percent. Other sources of unearned income were General Assistance (GA), Unemployment Compensation, contributions, child support, veterans' benefits and educational loans. Over 8 percent of all participating households had no gross income.

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF FOOD STAMP PARTICIPANTS

In fiscal year 2000, 38.7 percent of all food stamp participants were non-elderly adults and 10.0 percent were elderly adults (age 60 or older). Slightly over half (51.3 percent) of all food stamp participants were children, most of whom lived in single-parent households (Figure 2).

Among adult participants (age 18 or older), 70.7 percent were women, and 29.3 percent were men (Table 4). Of the participating children, one-third (32.5 percent) were preschool age (0 to 4 years), and two-thirds (67.5 percent) were school age (5 to 17 years).

Slightly more than one-quarter (25.8 percent) of non-elderly adult participants (18 to 59 years) were disabled. One-third (33.8 percent) of participating non-elderly adult males were disabled, compared to 22.5 percent of participating non-elderly adult females.

Among all food stamp participants, 4.4 percent were non-citizens. Non-citizens were a slightly

smaller proportion of female participants (4.1 percent) compared to male participants (4.8 percent).

Adults subject to time limits and work requirements made up 2.0 percent of all participants, 1.6 percent of female participants and 2.7 percent of male participants.

The largest proportion of food stamp participants was white, non-Hispanic (40.0 percent), followed by African-American, non-Hispanic (35.8 percent) and Hispanic (18.5 percent). The remaining participants were Asian, Native American, or of another race or ethnicity (Table 5).

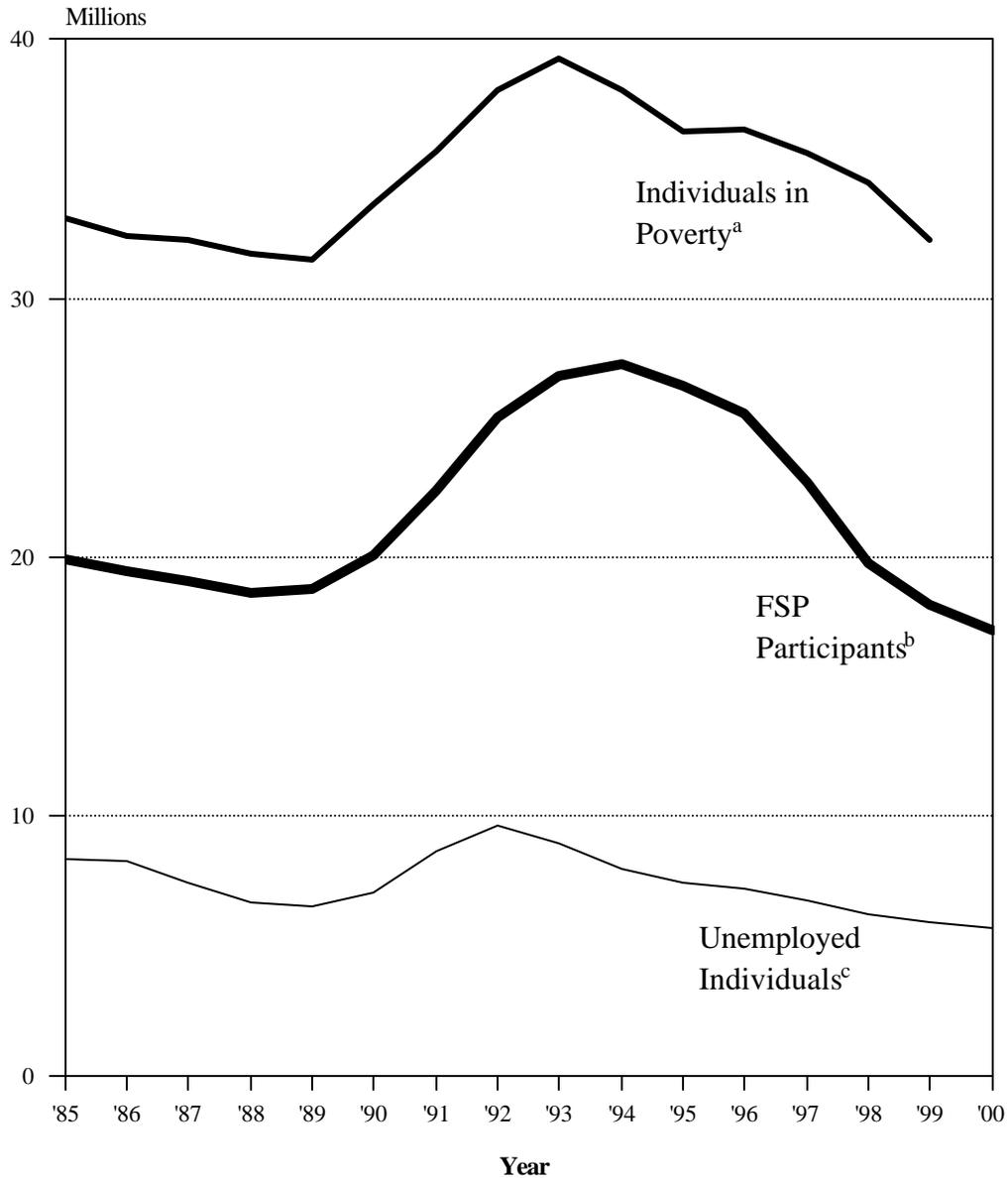
III. CHARACTERISTICS OF FOOD STAMP HOUSEHOLDS BY STATE

In fiscal year 2000, almost half (48.2 percent) of all food stamp households were located in eight states: California, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Texas (Table 6). The average monthly food stamp benefit varied by state, reflecting differences in income, expenses, household size, and composition. Average monthly benefits were largest in Alaska, Hawaii, Guam, and the Virgin Islands because the maximum allotment is set higher in those areas to accommodate higher costs of living. Within the contiguous United States, food stamp benefits were highest (greater than \$195) in Arizona, South Dakota and Texas—states with above-average household sizes. Conversely, average monthly food stamp benefits were lowest (less than \$125) in Maine and Vermont—states with above-average gross household incomes and below-average household sizes.

The average total of all deductions claimed by participating food stamp households was \$298 (Table 7). The proportion of households claiming a deduction varied from 59.4 percent claiming the excess shelter deduction to 1.1 percent claiming the child support payment deduction.

FIGURE 3

**FOOD STAMP PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS,
UNEMPLOYED INDIVIDUALS AND INDIVIDUALS IN POVERTY, 2000**



^aAnnual values. The number of individuals in poverty in Fiscal Year 2000 was not available when this report went to print. Source: Bureau of the Census, Poverty in the United States: 1999, Series P60-210.

^bAverage monthly values. Source: Food and Nutrition Service, Fiscal Years 1985-2000 FSP Participation and Issuance.

^cAverage monthly values. Source: Economic Report of the President, 2001 Table B-36.

V. CHANGES OVER TIME

The number of individuals participating in the FSP grew substantially from 1989 to 1994 and then declined steadily through July 2000 (Figure 3). Specifically, the number of food stamp participants rose from 18.9 million individuals in 1989 to a record high of 28.0 million in March 1994 and fell to 16.9 million in July 2000. The number of participants then rose slightly to 17.0 million in September 2000.

The percentage of participants who are children has remained relatively stable over time (Table 8). At the same time, the percentage of households with children has declined steadily from 1992 to 2000, with the most significant decline occurring between 1998 and 2000.¹

While the percentage of households with children is decreasing, both the percentage of households with elderly individuals and the percentage of households with disabled individuals are increasing. Although the number of elderly in the FSP has remained stable over time, a decrease in non-elderly participants has resulted in a rise in the proportion of households with elderly from a low of 15.4 percent in 1992 to 21.0 percent in 2000. The proportion of participating households with disabled individuals rose from 18.9 percent in 1995 to 27.5 percent in 2000.²

The proportionate increases in participation by households with disabled and elderly individuals have been accompanied by similar increases in the percentage of households with SSI and Social Security (Table 9). The proportion of households with SSI increased from 19.6 percent in 1990 to 31.7 percent in 2000, and the proportion with Social Security increased from 19.0 percent in 1990 to 25.5 percent in 2000.

The percentage of participating households with AFDC/TANF has declined from 42.0 percent in 1990 to 25.8 percent in 2000. At the same time,

the percentage of households with earnings increased from 19.0 percent in 1990 to 27.2 percent in 2000.

ECONOMIC CHANGES. Changes in the economy are among the factors that affect participation in the FSP. Figure 3 shows that the surge in FSP participation from 1989 through 1994 was associated with a worsening economy, and the drop in participation since 1994 has been accompanied by an improving economy. Both the number of FSP participants and the number of unemployed individuals are now below the numbers in the late 1980s.

LEGISLATIVE CHANGES. Changes in legislation also affect participation in the FSP. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), enacted August 1996, disqualified most permanent resident aliens from participation in the FSP, placed time limits on unemployed able-bodied adults without dependents, and replaced the AFDC program with the TANF program. The Balanced Budget Act of 1997 allowed states to exempt 15 percent of the unemployed able-bodied, childless adults from the FSP time-limits beginning in FY 1998.

Effective November 1, 1998, the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act restored eligibility to child, elderly, and disabled permanent resident aliens who were present in the United States when welfare reform was enacted in 1996. Additionally, it extended the exemption for refugees, asylees, and deportees from five to seven years.

VI. DESCRIPTION OF THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

The FSP is unique among means-tested assistance programs in two important ways. First, it offers assistance to nearly all financially needy households, regardless of almost any non-financial categorical criteria. Second, instead of cash, it

provides benefits in the form of coupons or electronic benefits that can be redeemed for food in any of about 155,000 authorized stores across the nation. The cost of providing food stamps to needy individuals is funded fully by the federal government. Administrative costs are shared by federal, state, and local governments

ELIGIBILITY. To be eligible for food stamps, a household's assets, gross income, and net income (which is based on gross income less deductions permitted under the FSP) must not exceed specified levels that vary by household size, composition, and location. Most permanent resident aliens are ineligible to participate in the FSP, and most able-bodied, non-working, childless adults are limited to 3 months of FSP benefits in any 36-month period.

FOOD STAMP BENEFIT COMPUTATION AND ISSUANCE. Benefits are computed by subtracting 30 percent of a household's net income from the maximum benefit amount. That maximum is 100 percent of the June cost of the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) for a family of four, adjusted for household size and location. The TFP is based on the cost of a market basket of food that provides an economical and nutritious diet. In fiscal year 2000, the maximum benefit for a family of four in the contiguous United States was \$426 per month. Program participants receive their monthly benefits through the mail, directly from the local office, or through an electronic benefit transfer (which is similar to a bank card).

VII. DATA

The estimates presented here are based on data extracted from the Food Stamp Program Quality Control System (FSPQC), which is an ongoing review of food stamp households designed to measure the accuracy with which eligibility and benefit determinations are made. All estimates are based on a full-year sample of 46,963 households.

Food and Nutrition Service administrative records indicate that the FSP served 17.2 million individuals in fiscal year 2000, and food stamp households received an average benefit of \$170 per month. The figures in the attached tables indicate that there are 17.1 million participants with an average household benefit of \$158. These figures vary from the administrative figures because they are estimates from the FSPQC, which weights data by households rather than individuals or benefits. Administrative figures are based on a monthly census of actual FSP participation and benefit issuance.

NOTES

¹The average household size declined slightly, from 2.37 individuals in 1999 to 2.33 individuals in 2000, reflecting the faster drop in participants compared to households. The average number of children living in households with children rose from 2.19 in 1999 to 2.22 in 2000, thus allowing the percentage of participants who are children to remain relatively constant while the percentage of households with children fell.

²The increase in the proportion of households with disabled individuals from 1994 to 1995 is due in part to a change in the definition of households with disabled individuals. However, using the pre-1995 definition, the proportion of households with disabled members still increased from 12.5 percent to 13.3 percent.

Table 1 -- Selected Characteristics of Participating Food Stamp Households, 2000

Household type	Participating households		Average monthly values (dollars)			Average household size (persons)	Percent of Total Benefit Dollars
	Number (thousands)	Percent	Food stamp benefit	Gross income	Net income		
Total	7,335	100.0	158	620	355	2.3	100.0
Children	3,955	53.9	234	727	436	3.4	79.8
Single-adult households	2,704	36.9	230	667	387	3.2	53.8
Married-couple households	573	7.8	269	1081	715	4.6	13.3
Other multiple-adult households	294	4.0	276	933	606	4.4	7.0
Children only households	382	5.2	174	465	233	2.1	5.8
Other	1	0.0	352	639	403	4.5	0.0
Elderly	1,542	21.0	59	617	356	1.3	7.8
Living alone	1,226	16.7	44	564	308	1.0	4.6
Not living alone	316	4.3	116	821	546	2.4	3.2
Disabled	2,017	27.5	99	711	440	2.0	17.3
Living alone	1,154	15.7	47	565	294	1.0	4.7
Not living alone	863	11.8	169	906	635	3.3	12.6
Other	837	11.4	121	192	57	1.1	8.8
Single-person	774	10.5	116	170	45	1.0	7.7
Multiple-person	64	0.9	189	462	202	2.1	1.0

Source: 2000 Food Stamp Program Quality Control sample.

Table 2 -- Monthly Food Stamp Benefits of Participating Food Stamp Households, 2000

Monthly food stamp benefit	Participating households	
	Number (thousands)	Percent
Total	7,335	100.0
\$0-50	1,800	24.5
\$51-100	1,005	13.7
\$101-150	1,563	21.3
\$151-200	590	8.0
\$201-250	853	11.6
\$251-300	381	5.2
\$301 +	1,143	15.6

Source: 2000 Food Stamp Program Quality Control sample.

Table 3 -- Selected Economic Characteristics of Participating Food Stamp Households, 2000

Income source	Participating households		Persons in households with source		Average income (dollars)		Average food stamp benefit (dollars)	Average household size (persons)
	Number (thousands)	Percent	Number (thousands)	Percent	Gross	From source		
Total	7,335	100.0	17,091	100.0	620	(n/a)	158	2.3
Earned income	1,993	27.2	6,550	38.3	942	749	192	3.3
Wages and salaries	1,857	25.3	6,133	35.9	959	770	190	3.3
Self-employment	129	1.8	418	2.4	750	384	226	3.2
Other earned income	34	0.5	104	0.6	863	429	178	3.0
Unearned income	5,775	78.7	13,016	76.2	646	529	145	2.3
TANF	1,891	25.8	6,091	35.6	677	374	228	3.2
General Assistance	395	5.4	515	3.0	413	213	112	1.3
Supplemental Security Income	2,324	31.7	4,173	24.4	670	403	89	1.8
Social Security	1,870	25.5	2,957	17.3	683	515	70	1.6
Unemployment	130	1.8	445	2.6	827	536	202	3.4
Contribution	265	3.6	767	4.5	586	201	219	2.9
Child Support	485	6.6	1,705	10.0	809	242	227	3.5
Other unearned income	616	8.4	1,354	7.9	725	195	124	2.2
No Income	617	8.4	1,107	6.5	0	0	209	1.8

Source: 2000 Food Stamp Program Quality Control sample.

Table 4 -- Selected Characteristics of Food Stamp Participants, 2000

Participant Characteristic	All participants		Female Participants		Male Participants	
	Number (thousands)	Percent	Number (thousands)	Percent	Number (thousands)	Percent
Total	17,091	100.0	10,198	100.0	6,891	100.0
Age						
Child	8,765	51.3	4,313	42.3	4,451	64.6
4 or Less	2,846	16.7	1,388	13.6	1,458	21.2
5-17	5,919	34.6	2,925	28.7	2,993	43.4
Nonelderly Adult	6,623	38.7	4,667	45.8	1,954	28.4
18-35	3,396	19.9	2,594	25.4	803	11.7
36-59	3,226	18.9	2,074	20.3	1,151	16.7
Elderly (60 or More)	1,702	10.0	1,216	11.9	485	7.0
Unknown Age	2	0.0	1	0.0	1	0.0
Disabled	2,197	12.9	1,302	12.8	895	13.0
Children (0-17)	256	1.5	98	1.0	158	2.3
Nonelderly Adults (18-59)	1,710	10.0	1,050	10.3	660	9.6
Elderly Adults (60-64)	231	1.4	154	1.5	77	1.1
Citizenship						
Citizen	16,291	95.3	9,750	95.6	6,539	94.9
Non-Citizen	745	4.4	417	4.1	327	4.8
Able-bodied Adults Living in Households Without Children and Subject to Work Registration^a	347	2.0	159	1.6	188	2.7

Source: 2000 Food Stamp Program Quality Control sample.

^a These participants are age 18-49, not disabled, not living with participating children under age 18, and not exempt from from work registration. With some exceptions (for example, those in waiver areas or receiving state exemptions), these participants must meet work requirements or face time limits on benefit receipt.

Table 5 -- Race/Ethnicity of Food Stamp Participants, 2000

Race	Participants	
	Number (thousands)	Percent
Total	17,091	100.0
White, Non-Hispanic	6,837	40.0
African-American, Non-Hispanic	6,123	35.8
Hispanic	3,168	18.5
Asian	591	3.5
Native American	290	1.7
Other	83	0.5

Source: 2000 Food Stamp Program Quality Control sample.

Table 6 -- Selected Characteristics of Participating Food Stamp Households by State, 2000

State	Total (thousands)	Percent of all households	Average monthly amount					Average house- hold size (persons)
			Food stamp benefit (dollars)	Gross income (dollars)	Net income (dollars)	Total deduction (dollars)	Countable assets (dollars)	
Total	7,335	100.0	158	620	355	298	156	2.3
Alabama	156	2.1	178	592	334	297	133	2.5
Alaska	13	0.2	294	938	600	407	179	3.0
Arizona	96	1.3	208	560	308	293	113	2.7
Arkansas	99	1.3	172	606	367	280	136	2.5
California	672	9.2	170	700	456	260	170	2.8
Colorado	70	1.0	148	601	336	304	288	2.2
Connecticut	84	1.1	142	585	333	292	150	2.1
Delaware	13	0.2	157	627	367	293	56	2.4
Dist. of Col.	36	0.5	179	465	282	223	30	2.4
Florida	416	5.7	142	601	331	302	282	2.1
Georgia	230	3.1	165	609	357	282	183	2.4
Guam	7	0.1	430	585	256	389	44	3.2
Hawaii	54	0.7	265	664	371	324	248	2.1
Idaho	23	0.3	150	677	421	300	213	2.4
Illinois	338	4.6	164	540	300	290	104	2.2
Indiana	128	1.7	159	602	355	283	240	2.4
Iowa	53	0.7	142	648	407	270	256	2.3
Kansas	53	0.7	131	630	374	283	145	2.1
Kentucky	168	2.3	152	602	390	252	231	2.4
Louisiana	192	2.6	185	598	346	289	123	2.6
Maine	52	0.7	117	624	331	323	184	1.8
Maryland	101	1.4	164	522	269	295	69	2.2
Massachusetts	110	1.5	137	674	391	309	145	2.2
Michigan	272	3.7	150	674	359	344	71	2.3
Minnesota	91	1.2	158	485	296	283	245	2.1
Mississippi	109	1.5	159	608	396	238	164	2.5
Missouri	180	2.5	157	597	336	302	117	2.3
Montana	25	0.3	156	640	349	330	331	2.3
Nebraska	35	0.5	137	670	391	300	206	2.2
Nevada	28	0.4	168	582	296	336	80	2.3
New Hampshire	18	0.2	144	640	333	344	198	2.1
New Jersey	152	2.1	155	591	303	313	83	2.2
New Mexico	64	0.9	172	649	408	271	116	2.7
New York	720	9.8	143	660	287	409	38	2.0
North Carolina	209	2.9	155	581	343	276	214	2.3
North Dakota	14	0.2	151	663	357	337	445	2.3
Ohio	279	3.8	135	639	388	275	168	2.2
Oklahoma	107	1.5	157	611	381	273	115	2.4
Oregon	114	1.6	133	586	336	291	265	2.0
Pennsylvania	352	4.8	139	618	365	280	213	2.2
Rhode Island	33	0.5	140	675	406	285	186	2.3
South Carolina	122	1.7	162	564	343	256	118	2.4
South Dakota	16	0.2	198	635	340	343	227	2.7
Tennessee	215	2.9	144	605	382	263	227	2.3
Texas	489	6.7	197	595	340	292	99	2.7
Utah	33	0.4	163	647	366	319	179	2.4
Vermont	20	0.3	124	732	423	326	218	2.2
Virgin Islands	5	0.1	322	507	302	228	101	3.0
Virginia	150	2.1	134	615	378	263	238	2.2
Washington	133	1.8	135	632	376	279	128	2.2
West Virginia	96	1.3	163	597	344	293	208	2.4
Wisconsin	77	1.0	143	726	463	301	184	2.5
Wyoming	9	0.1	176	669	401	316	359	2.7

Source: 2000 Food Stamp Program Quality Control sample.

Table 7 - Average Values of Deductions for Participating Food Stamp Households, 2000

Deduction	Households with Deduction		Average Amount of Deduction (Dollars)	
	Number (thousands)	Percent	All Households	With Deduction
Total Deductions	7,335	100.0	298	298
Standard	7,335	100.0	135	135
Excess Shelter	4,357	59.4	111	186
Earned Income	1,990	27.1	41	150
Medical	326	4.4	6	124
Dependent Care	290	4.0	5	125
Child Support Payment	79	1.1	2	162

Source: 2000 Food Stamp Program Quality Control sample.

**Table 8 -- Selected Characteristics of Food Stamp Households Over Time
Fiscal Year 1990-Fiscal Year 2000**

Fiscal Year	Total		Children		Elderly		Disabled	
	Participants (thousands)	Households (thousands)	Children (percent of all participants)	Households with children (percent of all)	Elderly (percent of all participants)	Households with elderly (percent of all)	Disabled (percent of all participants)	Households with disabled (percent of all)
2000	17,091	7,335	51.2	53.9	10.0	21.0	12.9	27.5
1999	18,149	7,670	51.5	55.7	9.4	20.1	12.0	26.4
1998	19,969	8,246	52.8	58.3	8.2	18.2	10.8	24.4
1997	23,117	9,452	51.4	58.3	7.9	17.6	9.9	22.3
1996	25,926	10,552	51.0	59.5	7.3	16.2	8.8	20.2
1995	26,955	10,883	51.5	59.7	7.1	16.0	8.2	18.9 ^a
1994	28,009	11,091	51.4	61.1	7.0	15.8	5.5	12.5
1993	27,595	10,791	51.5	62.1	6.8	15.5	4.7	10.7
1992	25,775	10,059	51.9	62.2	6.6	15.4	4.1	9.5
1991	22,988	8,863	52.1	60.4	7.0	16.5	3.8	9.0
1990	20,440	7,811	49.6	60.3	7.7	18.1	3.7	8.9

^a Beginning in 1995, disabled households are defined as households with at least one member under age 65 who received SSI, or at least one member age 18 to 61 who received Social Security, veterans benefits, or other government benefits as a result of a disability. For years prior to 1995, disabled households are defined as households with SSI but no members over age 59. The substantial increase in the percentage of households with a disabled member between 1994 and 1995 is due in part to the change in the definition of disabled households. Using the previous definition, 13.3 percent of households included a disabled person in fiscal year 1995.

Source: Food Stamp Program Quality Control samples.

Table 9 -- Sources of Income Among Food Stamp Households Over Time Fiscal Year 1990-Fiscal Year 2000

Fiscal Year	Earned Income		AFDC/TANF		GA		SSI ^a		Social Security		No Income	
	Number (thousands)	Percent										
2000	1,993	27.2	1,891	25.8	395	5.4	2,324	31.7	1,870	25.5	617	8.4
1999	2,058	26.8	2,096	27.3	435	5.7	2,315	30.2	1,897	24.7	649	8.5
1998	2,167	26.3	2,591	31.4	486	5.9	2,263	27.4	1,924	23.3	724	8.8
1997	2,284	24.2	3,270	34.6	588	6.2	2,460	26.0	1,999	21.1	868	9.2
1996	2,379	22.5	3,866	36.6	677	6.4	2,538	24.1	2,034	19.3	1,078	10.2
1995	2,329	21.4	4,171	38.3	786	7.2	2,461	22.6	2,019	18.6	1,053	9.7
1994	2,374	21.4	4,225	38.1	769	6.9	2,371	21.4	1,998	18.0	1,132	10.2
1993	2,226	20.6	4,253	39.4	809	7.5	2,097	19.4	1,908	17.7	1,047	9.7
1992	2,035	20.2	3,972	39.5	871	8.7	1,847	18.4	1,748	17.4	963	9.6
1991	1,757	19.8	3,590	40.5	916	10.3	1,646	18.6	1,585	17.9	733	8.3
1990	1,484	19.0	3,278	42.0	830	10.6	1,530	19.6	1,483	19.0	577	7.4

^a A portion of the difference in the proportion of households with SSI from 1996 through 1999 is likely due to changes in the identification of SSI recipients.

Source: Food Stamp Program Quality Control samples.