

**NUTRITION ASSISTANCE STUDY AND EVALUATION PLAN
FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE
FISCAL YEAR 2007**

January 9, 2007

America's food and nutrition assistance programs form a nationwide nutrition safety net to help low-income families and individuals escape hunger and improve nutrition. Together, these programs touch the lives of one in five Americans over the course of a year. This preliminary study and evaluation agenda will support innovations to improve program access and program integrity and is part of a long term investment in the means to demonstrate results. The priorities set forth below are subject to change pending the availability of funds.

- **National Survey of WIC Participants** – The National Survey of WIC Participants periodically collects data on a nationally representative sample of approximately 3,000 program participants via personal interviews. Previous national surveys were conducted in 1984, 1988, and 1998 to identify key participant characteristics not available through State WIC management information systems and update information on nutritional risks, sources of food assistance, family composition, health insurance coverage, and other policy-relevant topics. The survey also provides critical support for FNS compliance with the Improper Payments Information Act (IPIA) and a Presidential Management Agenda goal (improved financial performance with better information on benefit payments and participant characteristics). The new survey will expand upon the previous design to provide national estimates of income certification error and the dollar level of certification-related overpayment and underpayment in the Program. In addition, information from this survey will be used by FNS, State and local agencies in decision-making to update services to most effectively meet participants' needs.
- **Measuring Program Access, Trends, and Impacts** – This project supports several key analytic tools (including microsimulation) to address program participation trends and impacts. It provides annual estimates of the percentage of eligible individuals who receive food stamps, for the nation as a whole and for individual states, providing a key measure of the program's effectiveness in reaching its target population. The project also generates annual reports on the characteristics of food stamp participants. In addition, the project provides the primary mechanism through which FNS estimates the caseload and budgetary impact of actual and proposed policy changes.
- **Evaluation of Changes to Partial Breastfeeding Reimbursement in the WIC Food Package** – As part of its proposed changes to the WIC food package, now included in a proposed rule, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) recommended elimination of partial reimbursement of breastfeeding with the goal of increasing the incentives to breastfeed. However, because the change would reduce benefit levels for some women who are reimbursed for both formula and partial breastfeeding, IOM called for a national impact evaluation before nationwide implementation. This evaluation would assess the impact of the change on the duration and frequency of breastfeeding and the incidence of drop-out from participation in WIC. Fiscal year 2007 funds will be used to develop the research design and

instrumentation, obtain OMB clearance and initiate sample selection. Contingent on the content and timing of the WIC food package interim final rule, data collection and analysis options may be funded in fiscal year 2008.

- **Assessing Food Expenditures and Diet Quality** – Recent performance reviews identified a need for better information on the effect of food stamp participation on hunger and diet quality. As a necessary first step, this project will begin to fill gaps in the information on the nature and strength of the relationship between food stamp participation, expenditures across major consumer needs (including food), and the quality of the household food supply. It will use data from the 1996 National Survey of Food Stamp Participants and the Consumer Expenditure Survey to compare spending on key goods and services among participants, low-income consumers and all consumers, determine if an increase in food expenditures is associated with an increase in nutrient availability and nutritional quality of foods used at home, and identify factors that influence the relationship. Demonstration of a positive relationship between food expenditures and the quality of the household food supply would suggest the desirability of further research to explore the subsequent link between an improved household food supply and individual dietary intake. If the analysis fails to demonstrate this relationship, there would be reason to question the value of research focused on program impacts on individual dietary intake.
- **Understanding the Determinants of Food Stamp Participation** – One barrier to improving measures of program results is selection bias – unobserved differences between program participants and eligible non-participants that may introduce bias into measured outcomes. To assess the extent and feasibility of controlling that bias, a better understanding is needed of the characteristics and circumstances that influence a decision to participate in the Food Stamp Program. This project will review available research on the determinants of participation among different types of households and use existing survey data to see how well econometric models can classify eligible households as participants and non-participants.
- **Feasibility of Explaining Interstate Differences in Food Stamp Administrative Costs** – The cost of administering the Food Stamp Program is roughly \$5 billion per year (of which the Federal government pays about half). A recent analysis shows that inflation-adjusted administrative costs rose by 50 percent between 1989 and 2001. The rising cost of administration is perceived to be one reason that many States are considering substantial restructuring of program operations. Moreover, average annual costs per case varied widely across States, from a minimum of \$149 to a maximum of \$1,165, and the reasons for this variation are not well known. This project will examine the feasibility of collecting State-by-State information on a variety of factors – office policies and practices, staffing ratios, salary and benefit scales, organizational structures, office space costs, ADP investments, for example – expected to have some influence on administrative costs and the feasibility of using such data to explain variations in administrative costs between States.
- **CACFP Improper Payments Data Collection Pilot Project** – The Improper Payments Information Act (IPIA) requires that Federal agencies calculate the amount of erroneous payments in their programs. The family day care portion of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) poses significant challenges to IPIA compliance because Federal

payments are for meals claimed but there are no straightforward ways to monitor meals actually served in a Family Day Care Home setting (claims are aggregated on a monthly basis, meals are rarely served at standard times, attendance of children fluctuates, and the presence of an observer in the home may affect children under care as well as the behavior of the provider). This pilot project will examine the feasibility of making payment error estimates by comparing claims to parent recollections, sign in logs, a combination of the two, and statistical projections from in-home observations. The project will estimate the costs of feasible methods so that the cost and likely validity of a national study can be estimated.

- **Food and Nutrition Information Center** – These funds will support the Food and Nutrition Information Center within the National Agricultural Library to systematically store and disseminate information on USDA’s food assistance programs, nutrition education, and related nutrition topics.