

**FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE
RESEARCH & EVALUATION PLAN – FISCAL YEAR 2008**

SEPTEMBER 10, 2007

Food Stamp Program

Food Stamp Modernization and Innovation Projects

The fiscal year 2008 budget requests funding to study the impact of new Food Stamp Program service delivery models on erroneous payments, administrative costs, and program access. Many States are re-examining their approach to operating the Food Stamp Program and other assistance programs. The goals of these re-engineering efforts are to improve access to program benefits, reduce administrative costs, and maintain or improve the current high level of payment accuracy. In general, modernization efforts focus on streamlining food stamp certification by making greater use of on-line applications and automated data matching, simplifying interview and reporting procedures, and engaging the private sector, community and faith-based service organizations to assist with client applications.

Measuring Program Access, Trends and Impacts

This ongoing project supports several key analytic tools (including microsimulation models) to address program participation trends and impacts. It provides annual estimates of the percentage of eligible individuals who receive food stamps 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. A new contract is needed in 2008 to continue these services.

Model for Food Stamp Nutrition Education and Evaluation

Documenting the results of nutrition education in terms of concrete changes to dietary behaviors remains a challenge for both FNS and its State and local partners. This project would address that challenge by competitively selecting a set of 4 to 6 demonstration projects based on their potential to incorporate key features of the *Guiding Principles for Food Stamp Nutrition Education* – e.g., targeting women and children in food stamp eligible households, using behaviorally-focused messages, concentrating on a small number of outcomes – and their capacity to incorporate a strong impact assessment. Demonstration projects would be evaluated with respect to their success in implementing the *Guiding Principles*, impacts on nutrition-related behaviors, and cost-effectiveness. Results would provide a set of best practices and models for both nutrition education and evaluation. The funds requested would support the costs of the evaluation.

Enhancing the Violation-Prone Profile to Manage Retailers

For some time, FNS has performed various analyses to identify the subset of retailers participating in the Food Stamp Program who are more likely to violate program rules so that we may target monitoring and investigation resources. In general, the value of most identification strategies declines as retailers figure out at least some of the screening variables. Fortunately, access to retailer data has also increased over time. The results of preliminary work indicate the potential value of using information now in the Store Tracking and Redemption System (STARS) database to update the current profile of violators. The proposed research will assess any difference in the capacity of current and updated models to identify potential violators.

Child Nutrition Programs

School Food Purchase Study

This study will utilize a methodology similar to previous food purchase studies to provide updated national estimates of food acquisitions made by public school districts participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP). It will examine the type and volume of foods purchased directly by public school districts and the relative importance of foods donated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The study will also examine procurement practices and operating characteristics of these school districts and their relationship to food costs. Of particular interest is the use and perceived value of CN labeled products to school districts and what product information is obtained by districts from manufacturers for non-CN labeled products.

School Nutrition Dietary Assessment (SNDA) IV

PART commits FNS to conduct a SNDA study every 5 years to measure the progress schools are making toward meeting school meal nutrient standards. SNDA-III collected data in School Year 2004-05. SNDA-IV would allow FNS to monitor school meals as offered to students and as served (selected) by students. Unlike SNDA-III, this study would not include the collection of student dietary intake data. The plan is to award the base contract in fiscal year 2008 to cover research design, instrumentation development and the OMB package. A line item has been included in the fiscal year 2009 budget request to fund data collection, analyses and report preparation.

Assessment of CACFP Sponsor Tiering Determinations

To address OMB's requirements for annual data relative to the Improper Payments Information Act of 2002, FNS assesses the accuracy of tiering classifications by sponsors of family day care homes for Tier I or Tier II levels of reimbursement. The assessment is conducted annually with a nationally representative sample of CACFP sponsors and produces annual estimates of the rates and erroneous payment dollars associated with improper sponsor tiering decisions. The program assessment has been funded from the Child Nutrition Program. This contract will

employ the same methodology as used in the 2006 through 2008 assessments. It will fund a base contract for 2009 with options to repeat an assessment in 2010 and 2011.

WIC Program

Evaluation of Birth Month Breastfeeding Changes in WIC Food Packages

When recommending new WIC food packages, the Institute of Medicine strongly urged FNS to conduct research assessing the effect of birth month changes in provision of infant formula. Initial work on this project began in fiscal year 2007 and involves collection of data at the local WIC agency level; this will provide the funding needed to implement recipient-level data collection for the project. The findings from this study will influence the decisions on supplemental food packages in the critical first months following birth when FNS moves from interim to final rules.

WIC Participant Characteristics 2008

The biannual WIC participant characteristics compilations are a primary means by which FNS measures the characteristics of program recipients. This reserves money to fund the options necessary to complete data collection and analysis for 2008 data.

WIC Special Project Grants 2008

Competitive grants to States on topics of interest to the WIC program.

Other

Food and Nutrition Information Center

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.