

## Sources of Data

Data for this study came from USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), the agency that administers the Food Stamp Program at the Federal level. The data were generated from the National Data Bank, which is based on data submitted by the State reporting agencies.<sup>6</sup> The data consisted of State-level estimates of food stamp caseloads (people and households) and benefits issued by month, from March 2005 to March 2006. The monthly data are reported for the Food Stamp Program and DFSP combined—that is, the data set does not separate the DFSP from the regular Food Stamp Program.

Data used in the analysis are limited to the 50 States and the District of Columbia (data on Guam and Virgin Islands were excluded) (see box, “Geographic and Temporal Categories”). Examination of Mississippi's reported food stamp caseloads for September-November 2005 suggests that it did not account for people enrolled through the DFSP. Therefore, we adjusted caseload data for this one State for September-November 2005 to account for the apparent underreporting.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup>All data are subject to revision as State reporting agencies finalize data. This analysis is based on data as of September 13, 2006.

<sup>7</sup>Although examination of the Mississippi data indicates that the benefits issued seemed reasonable, the benefits per person appeared to be excessively large at over \$200 per person per month, which was about 70 percent larger than the benefits per person for Louisiana during the same peak-impact period. Furthermore, reported enrollment of new cases by the DFSP was as large as reported cases in the regular Food Stamp Program, which should have included the DFSP cases, along with the regular program cases. For these reasons, we adjusted the Mississippi caseload data for September-November 2005, assuming the reported benefits issued were correct. The new monthly caseload for September-November was estimated as the August caseload multiplied by the percentage change in monthly benefits issued between August and the adjusted month multiplied by the ratio of the percentage change in caseload to the percentage change in benefits issued for Louisiana over the same period. This adjustment increased the caseload by 416,348 people in September, 396,440 in October, and 72,256 in November.

## Geographic and Temporal Categories

States were grouped into three categories according to the degree to which they were affected by the hurricanes (see figure):

- “Disaster States.” Gulf Coast States hardest hit by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and/or Wilma—Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. These five States accounted for 21 percent of total food stamp caseloads during the pre-hurricane period.
- “Major Evacuee States.” Six States (excluding the five Disaster States) that received large numbers of evacuees from the Gulf Coast States. These six States include the four States closest to the disaster areas—Georgia, Tennessee, Arkansas, and Oklahoma—and two other States that issued over \$1 million in food stamp benefits to evacuees—North Carolina and Illinois.\* During the pre-hurricane period, the Major Evacuee States accounted for 18 percent of total food stamp caseloads.
- “Unaffected States.” The other 39 States and the District of Columbia not directly affected by the hurricanes. These States accounted for 61 percent of total food stamp caseloads during the pre-hurricane period. Although these States’ caseloads may have been affected indirectly by the hurricanes via evacuees relocating to the State or via employees of firms that did business in a hurricane-affected area, the impact is thought to be small relative to the hurricanes’ impact in the Disaster and Major Evacuee States.

The study period of March 2005 to March 2006 was divided into three distinct periods:

- “Pre-Hurricane.” The 6 months immediately preceding the hurricanes (March 2005-August 2005).
- “Peak-Impact.” The 3 months during which the storms’ impact on the Food Stamp Program was greatest (September 2005-November 2005).
- “Post-Hurricane.” The 4 months from December 2005 to March 2006.

\*Four non-Disaster States reported providing over \$1 million in benefits to evacuees: Arkansas (\$5.3 million), Georgia (\$4.6 million), Illinois (\$1.4 million), and North Carolina (\$1.2 million). The two other States included in our list of Major Evacuee States—Tennessee and Oklahoma—reported \$0.7 million and \$0.4 million in benefits to evacuees, respectively.

### Disaster, Major Evacuee, and Unaffected States

