

**OBESITY AND NUTRITION  
ASSISTANCE PROGRAM  
PARTICIPATION:**

**Can We Tell If There Is A Cause  
And Effect Relationship**

# OBESITY, POVERTY, AND PARTICIPATION IN NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

[WWW.FNS.USDA.GOV/OANE](http://WWW.FNS.USDA.GOV/OANE)

# THE UNITED STATES HAS A SAFETY NET OF FEDERAL FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS.

- ✦ First Line Of Defense Against Hunger And Food Insecurity
- ✦ Provide Millions Of Low-income Americans Access To A Healthy And Nutritious Diet.
- ✦ Offer A Powerful Tool To Improve Nutrition Among Low-income People.

# Four Major Food Assistance Programs

Food Stamp Program - FSP

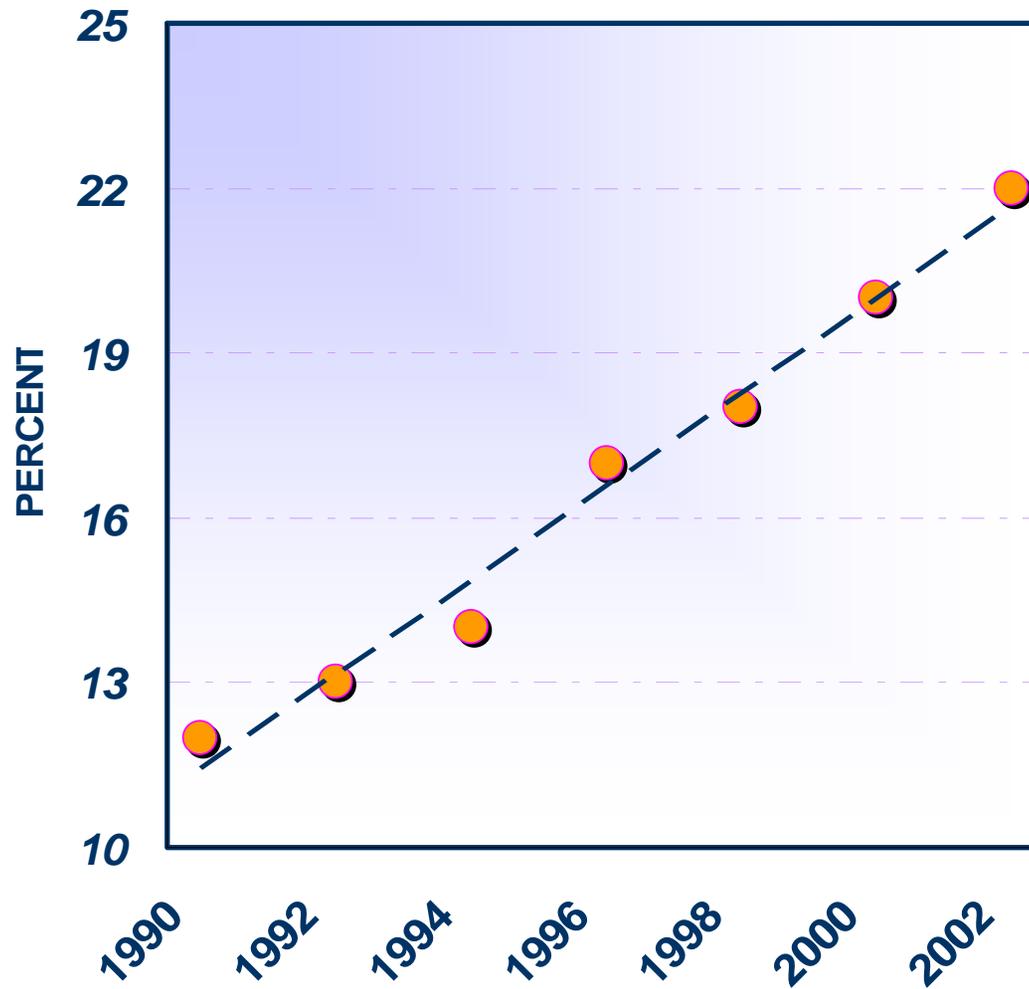
National School Lunch Program - NSLP

School Breakfast Program - SBP

Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women,  
Infants, and Children - WIC

**THESE PROGRAMS MAKE AN  
IMPORTANT DIFFERENCE IN THE  
LIVES OF LOW-INCOME PEOPLE**

### Trend in Adult Obesity 1990 - 2002\*



\* Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, CDC:  
Percent of adult respondents who reported Body Mass Index to be 30 or more.

✦ Many low-income individuals are both Overweight and participants in one or more nutrition assistance programs.

✦ With the dramatic increase in the prevalence of obesity, there has been some debate about the relationship between participation in federal nutrition assistance programs, and obesity

# Panel of Experts Convened

March 2004 Washington DC

Multidisciplinary panel of experts

Rigorous critical review of the research literature

Assess the methodological strengths and  
Limitations of then current research findings

The Panel Was Tasked To Answer the  
Following Questions

### QUESTION 1:

Does a sound empirical basis exist for determining the relationship among obesity, poverty, and participation in USDA food assistance programs?

### QUESTION 2:

What research approaches, are necessary and feasible to fill current knowledge gaps?

# Panel Consensus Statement

# Question 1:

**Does a sound empirical basis exist for determining the relationship among obesity, poverty, and participation in USDA food assistance programs?**

- ✦ There isn't enough evidence to conclude that there is a causal relationship among any of four major nutrition assistance programs and obesity.
- ✦ There is some evidence that poverty is related to both obesity and program participation in some sub groups of the low-income population.
- ✦ The published research is sparse. No study has fully addressed important issues related to research design and measurement necessary to establish a causal relationship

# Question 2

**What research approaches, are necessary and feasible to fill current knowledge gaps?**

- ✦ A large longitudinal study is the optimal strategy to use.
- ✦ A research agenda that includes a mix of small in-depth exploratory research approaches may indicate whether investment in a large-scale longitudinal study is warranted to provide the best possible evidence.
- ✦ The high costs of collecting accurate information on dietary intake, height and weight associated with such a project raises a question about the appropriate level of investment to address this issue.

# The Federal Nutrition Programs Address Both Hunger And Obesity

THERE IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT WORK  
THAT CAN BE DONE THROUGH THESE  
PROGRAMS

USE THEIR BUILT-IN ACCESS TO PEOPLE  
AT RISK, TO PROVIDE THE NECESSARY  
TOOLS TO HAVE A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE  
THROUGH EATING NUTRITIOUS FOOD AND  
BEING ACTIVE

**Action Steps**

**We Can**

**Take Now**

- ✦ Help at-risk families gain access to federal nutrition programs.
- ✦ Improve access in low-income communities
- ✦ Strengthen the nutritional benefits of these programs
- ✦ Expand prevention and intervention efforts through nutrition education to reverse the rising trend of overweight in the United States
- ✦ Train pediatric providers in neighborhood health centers to screen for both obesity and hunger
- ✦ Ensure that school meals and vending machines meet the highest standards for nutritional quality to encourage healthier eating among students.
- ✦ Offer incentives to supermarkets to establish stores in low-income areas that currently lack access to affordable, healthy food.
- ✦ Increase the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables in low-income communities
- ✦ Bring in farmers markets and enable them to accept food stamps.
- ✦ Promote sports and activity programs in low-income communities
- ✦ Expand recreational opportunities for children at summer meal sites.

**LIVE LONG AND PROSPER**

**EAT SMART**

**PLAY HARD**