

FOOD STAMP PROGRAM PARTICIPATION RATES: JANUARY 1994

Office of Research and Analysis

March 1997

Summary

This report, part of the Food and Consumer Service's series "Current Perspectives on Food Stamp Program Participation," presents the latest participation rates for the Food Stamp Program (FSP). The participation rate -- the proportion of those eligible for food stamps who actually apply for and receive benefits -- is a valuable policy tool that shows whether the program is reaching the intended population and which groups of the eligible population participate at higher or lower rates than other groups. Estimates of rates are based on Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) data for eligibles and FSP administrative data for participants.

The current report shows that in January 1994, rates remained at or near their highest point since the beginning of the series in 1985. Between January 1992 and January 1994, the FSP participation rate for eligible households held steady at 69 percent. Participating households received 81 percent of total potential food stamp benefits in January 1994, similar to the 82 percent in January 1992. Although the overall household participation rate did not change, the participation rate for one-person households increased while the rate for larger households fell. Consequently, the person participation rate declined slightly, from 74 percent in 1992 to 71 percent in 1994.

Other findings include:

Almost all eligible children participated, but only one in three eligible elderly persons participated. The FSP served almost every eligible child under the age of 5 (93 percent) and most children under age 18 (80 percent), but it served only 35 percent of eligible elderly.

African Americans participated at higher rates than other racial/ethnic groups. Eligible households headed by African Americans were more likely to participate (94 percent) than households headed by Hispanics (63 percent) or white non-Hispanics (60 percent).

Single-parent households participated at a higher rate than other types of households. Households containing a single parent with children were more likely to participate (97 percent) than households containing multiple adults and children (73 percent).

The lower the income, the higher the participation rate. The FSP participation rate for households with monthly income below the poverty line was 87 percent, compared to 21 percent for households with income above the poverty line.

The higher the benefit, the higher the participation rate. Only 23 percent of households eligible for the minimum benefit of \$10 participated, compared with 89 percent of those eligible for more than \$150. Households receiving AFDC were more likely to participate than those with earnings or unemployment compensation.

Among the 29 percent of all eligible individuals who did not participate, most were elderly persons, lived in households headed by a white non-Hispanic, lived in households with income above the poverty line, and/or were in households eligible for the lowest benefits. Over half of eligible nonparticipating households had earned income, compared with only 21 percent of participating households.

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