

### Background

One important measure of a program's performance is the ability to reach its target population. This report – the latest in an annual series – presents estimates of the percentage of eligible persons, by State, who participated in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) during an average month in fiscal year 2008 and in the 2 previous fiscal years.

This report also presents estimates of State participation rates for eligible “working poor” individuals (persons in households with earnings) over the same period. Although SNAP provides an important support for working families, the working poor has participated at rates that are substantially below those for all eligible persons. The addition of State-by-State information on participation among the working poor enables a comparison of these rates to the overall participation rates.

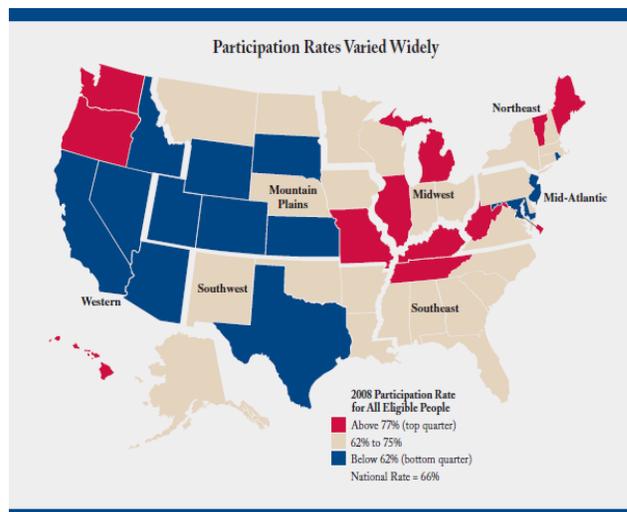
Nationally, the SNAP participation rate among all eligible persons was 67 percent (Leftin, 2010) in fiscal year 2008.<sup>1</sup> The participation rate for eligible working poor individuals was significantly lower (in a statistical sense) at 54 percent.

widened across States. In fiscal year 2008, the participation rate for the working poor was significantly lower than the rate for all SNAP-eligible persons in 37 States compared to 30 States in the previous year. Working poor rates were not significantly different than the rate for all eligible persons in 14 States.

- Some States had consistently high participation rates relative to other States in all 3 fiscal years. In each year from 2006 to 2008, the District of Columbia, Illinois, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, Oregon, Tennessee, Washington and West Virginia had significantly higher participation rates than *two-thirds* of the States.
- Some States had consistently low participation rates relative to other States. California, Colorado, Idaho, New Jersey, Nevada, Utah and Wyoming had significantly lower rates than *two-thirds* of the States in all 3 fiscal years.
- With some exceptions, a State that was ranked at the top or bottom of the distribution of participation rates for all eligible persons was similarly ranked for participation by working poor persons.

### Findings

- SNAP participation rates for all eligible persons varied widely from State to State in fiscal year 2008. State participation rates ranged from a low of 46 percent to a high of 94 percent.
- Twenty States had rates that were significantly higher than the national rate, and 19 States had rates that were significantly lower.
- The gap between participation rates for all SNAP-eligible persons and the working poor



The estimates are derived using a statistical approach known as shrinkage estimation, which draws on data from the Current Population Survey, American Community Survey, and administrative records. The shrinkage estimator averages direct sample estimates of participation rates with predictions from a regression model based on indicators of socioeconomic conditions. Shrinkage estimates are substantially more precise than direct sample estimates from the Current Population Survey. Nevertheless, the estimated participation rates are still based on fairly small samples of households in many States, and the uncertainty associated with these estimates is substantial. Users of these data should take the estimated confidence intervals into account when interpreting differences between States, within a State over time, and between estimates for all eligibles and the working poor.

The numbers of persons eligible for SNAP benefits is estimated by applying SNAP eligibility rules to households in the Current Population Survey. In California, the estimate of eligible persons is adjusted to reflect the fact that about 1.2 million Supplemental Security Income recipients receive a small cash benefit for food assistance and are not

legally eligible for SNAP benefits. Less than half of these recipients would be eligible for SNAP under current rules.

### For More Information

Cunyngham, Karen E., and Laura A. Castner. *Reaching Those in Need: State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2008*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. December 2010.

Leftin, Joshua. *Trends in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates: 2001 to 2008*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. June 2010.

Available online at [www.fns.usda.gov/ora](http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora).

### Acknowledgement

This summary was prepared by Christine Kissmer, Office of Research and Analysis, Food and Nutrition Service.

<sup>1</sup> After the release of the national 2008 SNAP participation rate in Leftin (2010), corrections to Missouri participation data resulted in a 0.5 percentage point drop in the national SNAP participation rate from 66.8 percent to 66.3 percent. The analysis and results presented in Cunyngham (2010) are based on the new data, and the corrected estimated national rate, rounded to 66 percent, appears in the tables and text.

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