

TRENDS IN FOOD STAMP PARTICIPATION RATES: 1994-2000

Office of Research and Analysis

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Background

This report is the latest in a series on trends in Food Stamp Program (FSP) participation rates, based on the Current Population Survey. This report focuses on changes in rates from 1994 to 2000.

Findings

Overall Trends

The report shows that after declining for five consecutive years, participation rates rose by 2 percentage points between 1999 and 2000, from 57 to 59 percent. This may signal an end to a period of declining participation rates. Participation rates fell by 17 percentage points between 1994 and 1999, from 74 to 57 percent. While both the number of individuals eligible for food stamps and the number of individuals receiving food stamps fell between 1994 and 2000, the decline in the number of participants was less than the decline in the number of eligible individuals for the first time in five years, resulting in a small increase in the overall participation rate.

Trends Among Subgroups

Participation rates among most subgroups increased in 2000 after declining for the past five years. Participation rate increases were highest for individuals living in households with earnings, households headed by single parents, and households with incomes below 50 percent of poverty, and for children. In 2000, participation rates were 50 percent for households with earnings, 91 percent for households headed by single parents, 93 percent for households with incomes below half the poverty line, and 72 percent for households with children.

By contrast, participation rates were fairly stable among the elderly and disabled, only fluctuating modestly and without a clear trend. Throughout this period, about 30 percent of eligible seniors participated. Among the disabled, slightly more than half participated during this period.

Participation rates continued to fall among legal immigrants and citizen children living with noncitizens. In 2000, less than 45 percent of eligible legal immigrants and only 38 percent of eligible U.S. born children of immigrants participated.

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