

SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOOD SECURITY SURVEY: IMPACTS OF URBANICITY AND FOOD ACCESS ON FOOD SECURITY (SUMMARY)

Background

A 2013 study, *Measuring the Effect of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation on Food Security*, found that participating in SNAP for 6 months was associated with a decrease in food insecurity by about 5 to 10 percentage points, including households with food insecurity among children. This study used data from the SNAP Food Security (SNAPFS) survey collected from October 2011 through February 2012. A total of 9,811 households were interviewed in 30 States.

To better understand how a household's urbanicity and geographic access to food can affect food security, data from the SNAPFS survey were analyzed and two white papers were produced:

- *SNAP Participation and Urban and Rural Food Security*
- *SNAP Participation, Food Security, and Geographic Access to Food*

Methods

Households were designated as urban or rural based on the Census tract designation for the households' self-reported residential address.

For geographic access, four measures were used to determine whether a household had a high or low level of access to food:

- *Distance to Nearest Supermarket.* Level of access was determined by whether the household was located greater than or less than/equal to the median distance to a supermarket, superstore, or larger grocery store (referred to as "supermarket"). For urban households, the median distance was

0.6 miles. For rural households, the median distance was 3.9 miles.

- *Density.* Level of access was determined by whether there were more than or less than/equal to the median number of supermarkets in the household's local area. The local area was 1 mile and the median number of supermarkets was 2 for urban households, and the measures were 5 miles and 1 supermarket for rural households.
- *Potential Access.* Level of potential access was determined by whether or not the household's local area contained at least one supermarket.
- *Realized Access.* Level of access was determined by whether households' self-reported travel distance to the store at which they purchase most of their food was more than or less than/equal to the median distance. For urban households, the median distance was 3 miles. For rural households, the median distance was 10 miles.

The papers present both descriptive and multivariate analyses. The descriptive, tabular analyses examine how the prevalence of food insecurity differed by household urbanicity and level of access to food. Multivariate analysis was used to estimate the association between household food security and urbanicity or food access while accounting for differences in household characteristics and circumstance.

Key Findings

The prevalence of food insecurity was similar in urban and rural households. The prevalence of child food insecurity was higher in urban areas than in rural areas. However, when household characteristics and circumstances

were accounted for in the multivariate analyses, living in an urban area was not associated with child food insecurity.

The effect of SNAP participation on food security was similar for both urban and rural households. Both groups saw a decline in food insecurity by about 5 to 10 percentage points after participating in SNAP for 6 months. The effect on child food insecurity also did not vary by urbanicity.

About three-quarters of SNAP households reported buying most of their groceries at supermarkets or grocery stores. Less than 1 percent of households purchased most of their groceries at convenience stores.

The median travel time to buy groceries varies only by 5 minutes for urban and rural SNAP households. The median self-reported travel time was 10 minutes for urban households and 15 minutes for rural households.

Geographic access to food was generally not associated with the prevalence of food insecurity. The findings were similar for both urban and rural households for each of the four measures of food access.

For urban households, participating in SNAP reduced food insecurity in both high- and low-access areas. However, the decline was statistically larger for households with high access.

For rural households, evidence was mixed as to whether SNAP participation was associated with reduced food insecurity depending on the access measure used. However, the reductions in food security were similar for households in both low- and high-access areas.

For More Information

Mabli, James. *SNAP Participation and Urban and Rural Food Security*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, March 2014.

Mabli, James. *SNAP Participation, Food Security, and Geographic Access to Food*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, March 2014.

Mabli, James, Jim Ohls, Lisa Dragoset, Laura Castner, and Betsy Santos. *Measuring the Effect of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation on Food Security*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, August 2013.

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