

**Nutrition Assistance Programs Report**

**March 2019**

**US Summary**

<b>Programs</b>	<b>Mar 2018</b>	<b>Feb 2019</b>	<b>Mar 2019</b>
<b>Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)</b>			
Participants (thousands)	38,878	8,384	36,302
Average Benefit (\$)	\$127.17	\$72.48	\$121.22
<b>National School Lunch Program</b>			
Average Daily Participation (thousands)	29,681	29,740	29,591
Participating Children (Free/Reduced)	21,971	22,093	21,929
Percent Free/Reduced Price	74.02%	74.29%	74.11%
Total Snacks Served (in thousands)	21,080	20,139	20,705
<b>School Breakfast Program</b>			
Average Daily Participation (thousands)	14,572	14,602	14,704
Participating Children (Free/Reduced)	12,408	12,459	12,508
Percent Free/Reduced Price	85.15%	85.32%	85.07%
<b>Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)</b>			
Meals Served in Homes (thousands)	39,653	34,178	37,583
Meals Served in Centers (thousands)	139,893	132,311	138,739
Meals Served in Adult Care Centers (thousands)	6,645	6,279	6,678
Percentage of Meals Served Free	77.84%	78.15%	77.92%
<b>Special Supplemental Nutrition Program (WIC)</b>			
Participants (thousands)	6,860	6,328	6,276
Average Benefit (\$)	\$38.34	\$40.64	\$40.95
<b>Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)</b>			
Participants (thousands)	664	687	699
Average Benefit (WIC)	\$23.51	\$24.05	\$25.43
Average Benefit (Elderly)	\$20.23	\$20.80	\$21.17
<b>Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR)</b>			
Participants (thousands)	85	81	81
Total Food Costs (dollars in thousands)	\$5,446	\$6,011	\$5,914
<b>USDA Food Donations (All Programs)</b>			
Entitlement Foods (dollars in thousands)	\$130,849	\$125,818	\$134,054
Bonus Foods (dollars in thousands)	\$59	\$2,092	\$2,205
TEFAP (dollars in thousands)	\$47,134	\$40,354	\$40,693

1. \*\*\* Please Note: Due to the partial Federal government shutdown, most of the February 2019 SNAP benefits were issued early in the month of January 2019. This was done to ensure SNAP recipients would receive their February 2019 benefits in a timely manner. As a result, January 2019's benefits will show a significant increase over the previous month and previous year same month. In addition, February 2019 benefits and participation will show significantly less than January 2019 and February 2018.

National participation in the WIC program totaled 6.2 million in March 2019, down by 520 thousand persons from the March 2018 participation level

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## Impacts of the Early Issuance of SNAP Benefits on Program Data Reporting

To continue access to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits during the lapse in appropriations, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) encouraged state SNAP agencies to use existing authority to issue February 2019 benefits in January 2019 to the extent possible. States worked closely with FNS and EBT processors, and about 86 percent of February SNAP benefits were issued in January.

Because administrative data reporting is designed around regular monthly SNAP issuance, the early issuance results in apparent anomalies in the appearance of the reports of SNAP participation and issuance for the months of January and February. Some small effects will linger into March and April, as states adjust issuance patterns to limit the time that any SNAP household goes without an issuance. We expect reporting to return to normal appearance in May 2019.

The unusual appearance of the data does not reflect significant changes in the number of households receiving SNAP benefits, nor in the average level of benefits they receive; rather, it reflects the way that data is aggregated and summarized over time in state and Federal reports.

The questions and answers below are intended to help explain program data reports for the period:

**Did the early issuance change underlying trends in SNAP participation or issuance?** No. The early issuance impacted only the months in which household issuance and participation are reported. It in no way altered the underlying trends in SNAP participation and benefit levels. The continuing downward trend in SNAP participation is expected to continue.

### How did the early issuance effect January SNAP participation and issuance data reporting?

- Reported January participation rose slightly (by 217,000) over the prior month. This was because the data reflected all ongoing participants from the prior month, new participants for January, and new participants for February who received their first issuance early.
- Total reported SNAP issuance was \$8.7 billion in January, compared to \$4.7 billion in December. This 86 percent increase is a combination of all January benefits and all February benefits that were issued in January, reflecting states' successful early issuance.
- Average benefits per person and household also increased substantially, since most ongoing participants received "two months' worth" of benefits in January because of the early issuance.

**What are the impacts for February participation and issuance reports?** Reported February participation *declined* significantly, as it only reflects participants actually issued benefits in that month, since most had received February benefits in January.

- The participation figure includes a combination of: 1) about 14 percent of ongoing participants whose February benefits were not issued early in January; 2) other new participants for the month of February; and 3) any participants who received early issuance of March benefits in February, as states sought to minimize the gap between issuances resulting from the early issuance of February benefits.
- February issuance shows declines similar in magnitude to participation.

**Will the reporting impacts of early issuance continue beyond February?** Yes. Small impacts are anticipated in March and April, as states continue efforts to return the time between issuances to normal for all participants. We expect this to increase participation and issuance reports slightly above what would otherwise occur. It is expected to moderate, but not reverse, the ongoing decline in participation.

