

REACHING THOSE IN NEED: FOOD STAMP PARTICIPATION RATES IN THE STATES IN 1999

Office of Research and Analysis

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Background

This is the fourth report in a series of publications presenting estimates of the percentage of eligible persons, by State, who participate in the Food Stamp Program (FSP). This issue presents food stamp participation rates for States in September 1999 and the change between September 1994 and September 1999. This information can be used to assess recent trends in program performance and focus efforts for improvement.

This report also presents revised estimates of FSP participation rates for States in September of 1994 to 1998. These estimates differ from those previously reported because of improvements in data and estimation methods.

Findings

Food stamp participation rates varied widely among States. Estimated rates in some States were below 50 percent; in others, the estimated rates exceeded 70 percent.

Participation rates fell in every region of the country and in most States between September 1994 and September 1999. Nationwide, the food stamp participation rate fell by 17 percentage points. Participation rates in 41 States were significantly lower in 1999 than in 1994. Participation rates were significantly higher in

1999 than in 1994 only in the District of Columbia. More recent data for the nation as a whole suggest that participation rates may have increased between 1999 and 2000.

A few States have had consistently high participation rates relative to other States. In at least four of the six years for which estimates are derived, Hawaii, Maine, Vermont, and West Virginia have had significantly higher participation rates than two-thirds of the States. Alaska, Michigan, and Pennsylvania have had significantly higher rates than half of the States. Idaho, Kansas, and Nevada have had significantly lower rates than half of the States in at least four of the six years.

The estimates are derived using a statistical approach known as shrinkage estimation that draws on data from the Current Population Survey, the decennial census, 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 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 and within a State over time.

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