

## REACHING THOSE IN NEED: FOOD STAMP PARTICIPATION RATES IN THE STATES IN 2001

Office of Research and Analysis

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### Background

This report is the latest in a series of publications presenting estimates of the percentage of eligible persons, by State, who participate in the Food Stamp Program. This issue presents food stamp participation rates for States in an average month in fiscal year 2001 and for the two previous fiscal years. These estimates differ slightly from those reported last year because of the change in the reference period from the month of September to the average month across the fiscal year, and improvements in data and methods.

### Findings

Food stamp participation rates continue to vary widely among States in fiscal year 2001. Estimated rates in some States were below 50 percent; in others, the estimated rates exceeded 70 percent.

Some States have had consistently high participation rates relative to other States. In all 3 fiscal years from 1999 to 2001, West Virginia, Hawaii, Maine, Kentucky, the District of Columbia, Michigan, and Vermont have had significantly higher participation rates than two-thirds of the States. Missouri, Illinois, Louisiana, Alaska, Tennessee, and Pennsylvania have had significantly higher rates than half of the States. Some States have had consistently low participation rates relative to other States.

Kansas, California, New Jersey, and Florida have had significantly lower rates than half of the States in all three years. North Carolina, Arizona, Idaho, Texas, Nevada, and Massachusetts have had significantly lower rates than two-thirds of the States. In most States, participation rates remained unchanged between fiscal year 2000 and 2001. Although the margin of error in estimating changes in a State's rates over short periods can be substantial, the data suggests that food stamp participation rates may have improved in Oregon, North Dakota and Wisconsin.

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 even though larger sample sizes in recent years improved the precision of direct estimates for States with smaller populations. 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 and within a State over time.

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