

Background

One important measure of a program's performance is the ability to reach its target population. This report – the latest in an annual series – presents estimates of the percentage of eligible persons, by State, who participated in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) during an average month in fiscal year 2009 and in the 2 previous fiscal years.

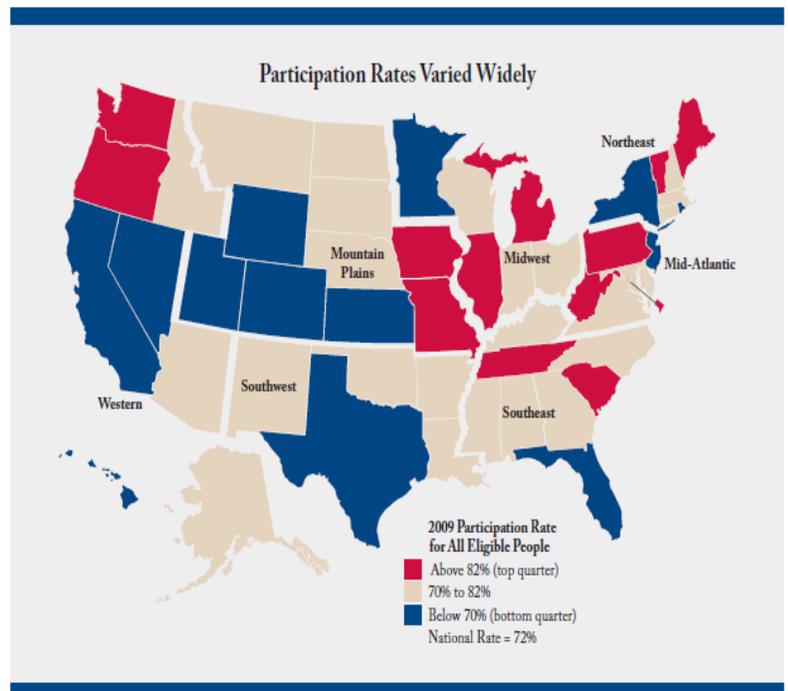
This report also presents estimates of State participation rates for eligible “working poor” individuals (persons in households with earnings) over the same period. Although SNAP provides an important support for working families, the working poor have participated at rates that are substantially below those for all eligible persons. The addition of State-by-State information on participation among the working poor enables a comparison of these rates to the overall participation rates.

Nationally, the SNAP participation rate among all eligible persons was 72 percent (Leftin, 2011) in fiscal year 2009. The participation rate for eligible working poor individuals was significantly lower (in a statistical sense) at 60 percent.

Findings

- SNAP participation rates for all eligible persons varied widely from State to State in fiscal year 2009. State participation rates ranged from a low of 53 percent to a high of 100 percent.
- Eighteen States had rates that were significantly higher than the national rate, and 12 States had rates significantly lower.

- In 35 States, the participation rate for the working poor was significantly lower than the rate for all SNAP-eligible persons. Working poor rates were not significantly different than the rate for all eligible persons in 16 States.
- Some States had consistently high participation rates relative to other States in all 3 fiscal years. In each year from 2007 to 2009, Iowa, Illinois, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, Oregon, Tennessee, Washington and West Virginia had significantly higher participation rates than *two-thirds* of the States.
- Some States had consistently low participation rates relative to other States. California, New Jersey, Nevada, Utah and Wyoming had significantly lower rates than *two-thirds* of the States in all 3 fiscal years.



Methodological Notes

The estimates are derived using a statistical approach known as shrinkage estimation, which draws on data from the Current Population Survey, American Community Survey, 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 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, within a State over time, and between estimates for all eligibles and the working poor.

Periodically, improvements are made in the methods for estimating the direct sample estimates of SNAP-eligible persons that are used in the shrinkage estimation. The participation rates cited in this report are not directly comparable to those presented in prior year reports because of some improvements to the methodology, which are described in Leftin (2011).

Since the focus of this report is on participation by persons eligible for SNAP benefits, the estimate of eligible persons in California is adjusted to reflect the fact that about 1.3 million Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients receive a small cash benefit for food assistance and are not legally eligible to receive SNAP benefits. In the absence of this exclusion, about half of this number of SSI recipients would be eligible for SNAP under current program rules.

For More Information

Cunyngham, Karen E. *Reaching Those in Need: State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2009*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. December 2011.

Leftin, Joshua, Esa Eslami, and Mark Strayer. *Trends in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates: Fiscal Year 2002 to Fiscal Year 2009*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. August 2011.

Available online at www.fns.usda.gov/ora.

Acknowledgement

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