

REACHING THOSE IN NEED: ESTIMATES OF STATE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM PARTICIPATION RATES IN 2015—SUMMARY

Background

This report – part of an annual series – presents estimates of the percentage of eligible persons, by State, who participated in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) during an average month in fiscal year (FY) 2015 and in the two previous fiscal years. SNAP eligibility criteria include income and resource guidelines and certain nonfinancial criteria.

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 important support for working families, historically, the working poor have participated at rates that are substantially below those for all eligible persons. 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 83 percent in FY 2015 (Farson Gray and Cunyningham, 2017). The participation rate for eligible working poor individuals was significantly lower statistically, at 72 percent.

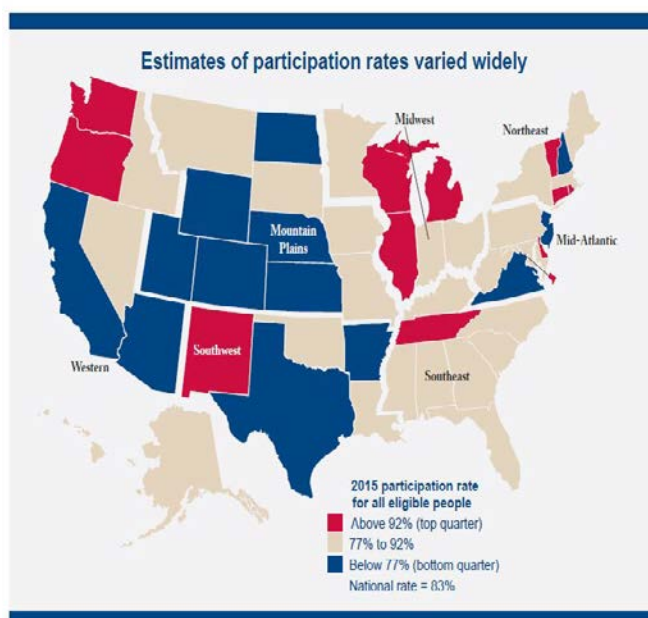
The participation rates presented here use SNAP administrative data to estimate the number of participants in each State and Census Bureau survey data to estimate the number of eligible individuals. The use of different data sources for these figures means that there is substantial uncertainty associated with estimates for some States. In particular, estimated numbers of eligible individuals in a given State can approach or equal 100 percent of the corresponding estimates of participants. Users of this report should be mindful that this reflects uncertainties in the estimates, rather than an “exact” 100 percent participation rate, and that these rates are best

viewed as a relative measure of how a State’s rate compares to the national average.

Findings

SNAP participation rate estimates for all eligible persons varied widely from State to State in FY 2015. State participation rates ranged from a low of 59 percent (Wyoming) to a high of 100 percent (Delaware, Illinois, Michigan, New Mexico, Oregon, and Washington). In 20 States and the District of Columbia, the rates were significantly higher than the national rate, and in 17 States, the rates were significantly lower.

Some States have consistently high participation rate estimates relative to other States. In each year from 2013 to 2015, the District of Columbia, Delaware, Illinois, Michigan, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin had significantly higher participation rates than two-thirds of the States.



Some States have consistently low participation rate estimates relative to other States.

Arkansas, Arizona, California, New Jersey, North Dakota, Texas, Utah, and Wyoming had significantly lower rates than two-thirds of the States in all 3 fiscal years.

Participation rate estimates for the working poor also varied widely across States.

Nineteen States had rates for the working poor that were significantly higher than the national rate for the working poor, and 13 States plus the District of Columbia had rates that were significantly lower. In no State was the rate for working poor people higher than the rate for all eligible people.

Every year, the participation rate estimates vary slightly from previous reports because the data are updated and the regression model variables are chosen to best predict the participation rate for all 3 years.

For this reason, the participation rates cited in this report are not directly comparable to those presented in prior year reports (Cunningham, 2017).

Methodological Notes

The State participation rate estimates are derived using a statistical approach known as shrinkage estimation, developed to improve precision when sample sizes are small. Data come from the Current Population Survey, American Community Survey, and administrative records. While shrinkage estimates are substantially more precise than direct sample estimates, the estimated participation rates are still based on fairly small samples of households in many States. Users of these data should take the estimated confidence intervals into account when interpreting differences between States and within a State over time and between estimates for all eligibles and the working poor.

The number 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 from the State and are not eligible to receive SNAP benefits. In the absence of this exclusion, about 700,000 SSI recipients would be eligible for SNAP under current program rules.

For More Information

Cunningham, Karen (2018). *Reaching Those in Need: Estimates of State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2015*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (available online at www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis).

Farson Gray, Kelsey and Karen Cunningham (2017). *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates: Fiscal Year 2015*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (available online at www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis).