



CHARACTERISTICS OF SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM HOUSEHOLDS: FISCAL YEAR 2018 (SUMMARY)

Background

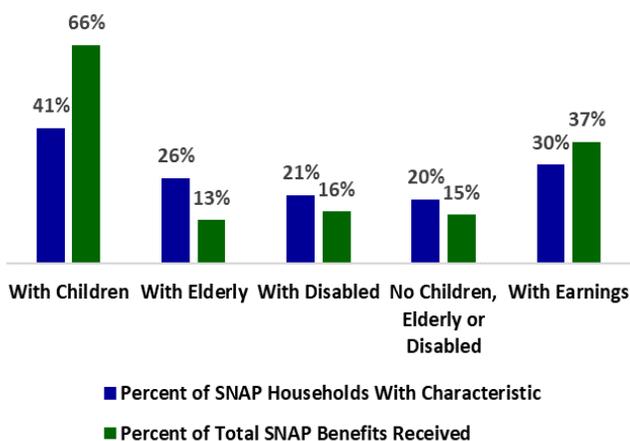
In Fiscal Year (FY) 2018, about 39.7 million people living in 19.7 million U.S. households participated in the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in an average month; while, in FY 2017, 41.5 million people living in 20.6 million U.S. households participated in SNAP.

This report provides information about the demographic and economic circumstances of SNAP households in FY 2018.

General Characteristics

One-third of SNAP participants were non-disabled, non-elderly adults, including parents and caregivers, in FY 2018. Seven percent of all participants were able-bodied adults age 18-49 in childless households. Forty-four percent of participants were under age 18; 14 percent were age 60 or older; and 9 percent were nonelderly adults with a disability.

Share of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Benefits Received by Households With Select Characteristics



Only 30 percent of SNAP households had earnings in FY 2018. More than half (54 percent) of households with children had earnings, while 19 percent of SNAP households had no cash income of any kind in the month the data were collected. Only 19 percent of households had gross income above the poverty line, while 38 percent had income at or below half the poverty line. Average gross income for all SNAP households was \$844 per month, down from \$857 (in inflation-adjusted dollars) in FY 2017.

For the average SNAP household, 22 percent of the monthly funds (gross income plus SNAP benefits) came from SNAP. When added to gross income, SNAP benefits brought total monthly funds above the poverty line for less than 10 percent of SNAP households. SNAP benefits plus gross income brought total monthly funds above 50 percent of the poverty line for an additional 11 percent of SNAP households.

Roughly 60 percent of SNAP households received income from at least one other source of unearned income. Less than 5 percent of all SNAP households received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families benefits, and only 3 percent received State General Assistance benefits. Nearly 30 percent of SNAP households received Social Security, and 23 percent received Supplemental Security Income benefits given to the aged and disabled.

Almost 40 percent of SNAP households received the maximum benefit for their family size. Only 9 percent received the minimum benefit (\$15), which is only available to households with one or two members.

The average SNAP household size was only two people, with nearly 55 percent of SNAP households containing only one person. This varied considerably by household composition. Households with children were larger, averaging 3.3 members, while households with elderly participants were smaller, averaging 1.2 members.

Most SNAP households lived in major metropolitan areas, with very few living in rural areas. Eighty-two percent of SNAP households lived in or near large cities, while about 10 percent lived in or near smaller cities and towns and 6 percent lived in rural areas.

Changes Over Time

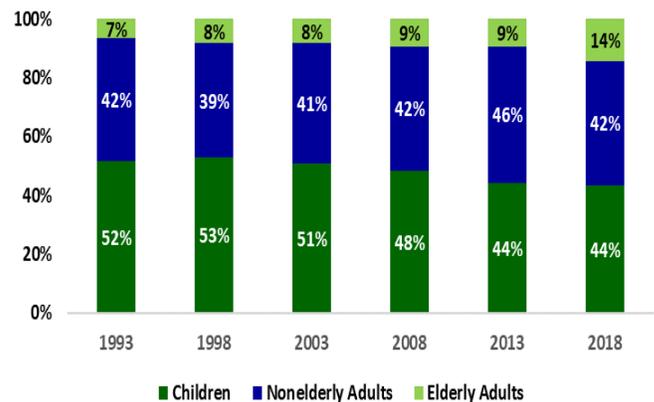
Notable changes in the characteristics of SNAP participants in the last 25 years include:

The primary form of income among SNAP participants shifted from welfare to work. In 1993, 39 percent of all SNAP households received Federal cash welfare benefits and 21 percent had earnings. In 2018, less than 5 percent received Federal cash welfare, while 30 percent had earnings.

After doubling between 1993 and 2015, the share of SNAP households with zero gross income has declined in recent years. In 1993, 10 percent of SNAP households had zero gross income. This share increased over the next 22 years, peaking at 22 percent in 2015. Since then, zero-income households have decreased to 19 percent of the SNAP caseload.

The percentage of households with elderly individuals has increased more than 10 percentage points over the past 25 years. In 1993, less than 16 percent of SNAP households included one or more elderly members. By 2018, it increased to 26 percent. While overall SNAP participation has decreased since FY 2013, the number of elderly participants continues to grow.

Share of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participants by Age: 1993-2018



SNAP households have gotten smaller. In 1993, the average household size was 2.6 persons. In 2018, the average had fallen to 2.0 persons.

For More Information

Cronquist, Kathryn. (2019) *Characteristics of USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2018*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research Under Contract No. AG-3198-F-18-0005. Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Project Officer: Jenny Genser. Available online at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/research-analysis>.