

## EVALUATION OF DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS TO END CHILDHOOD HUNGER (EDECH): THE KENTUCKY TICKET TO HEALTHY FOOD PROJECT (SUMMARY)

### Background

The 2010 Child Nutrition Reauthorization provided funding to test innovative strategies to end childhood hunger and food insecurity. Demonstration projects were funded in Chickasaw Nation, Kentucky, Navajo Nation, Nevada, and Virginia. This report provides the results of the Kentucky demonstration project, The Kentucky Ticket to Healthy Food Project, (TTHF project) that was implemented by the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services.

### Description of the TTHF Project

**Objective:** To reduce child food insecurity in rural households by raising Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to offset higher transportation costs and further strengthen SNAP work incentives.

**Target Population:** SNAP households with: (1) positive net income, (2) at least one child under the age of 18 by the end of the demonstration period, and (3) living in 17 geographically isolated and poor counties in eastern Kentucky.

**Intervention:** Households were randomly assigned to either a treatment (n=6,006) or control group (n=6,393). Households in the treatment group received an extra monthly SNAP benefit amount through two new intervention-related deductions to the SNAP benefit formula: (1) a fixed deduction, depending on county of residence, for transportation costs for six round trips to the grocery store per month; and (2) an earnings deduction equal to 10 percent of earned income for households with at least one employed household member. Households in the control group continued to receive their regular monthly SNAP benefit amounts.

### Methods

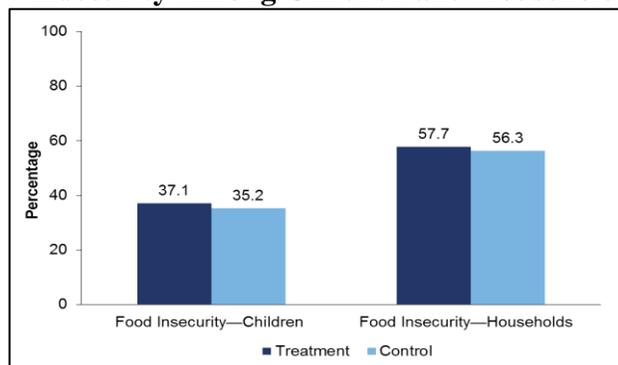
The TTHF project operated for 15 months, from January 2017 through March 2018. The evaluation used a rigorous randomized controlled trial design to estimate the impact of the project on food insecurity among children and, secondarily, on

household and adult food insecurity. Data were collected via baseline and follow-up telephone surveys and administrative records.

### Findings

**The TTHF project did not reduce the prevalence of food insecurity among children or households.** Thirty-seven percent of treatment households and 35 percent of control households reported food insecurity among children (FI-C) at follow-up (Figure 1). Furthermore, 57 percent of treatment households and 56 percent of control households reported food insecurity at the household level.

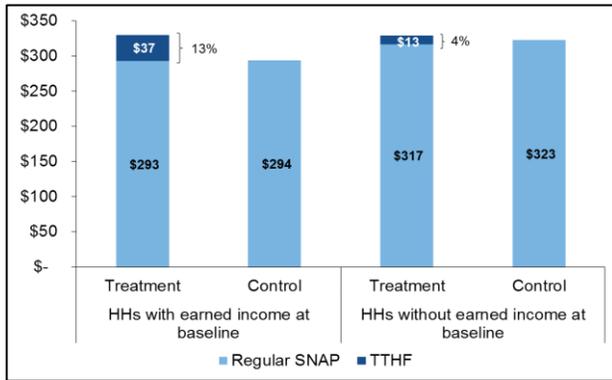
**Figure 1. Impact of the TTHF Project on Food Insecurity Among Children and Households**



Note: Follow-up sample size = 1,623. TTHF, Ticket to Healthy Food

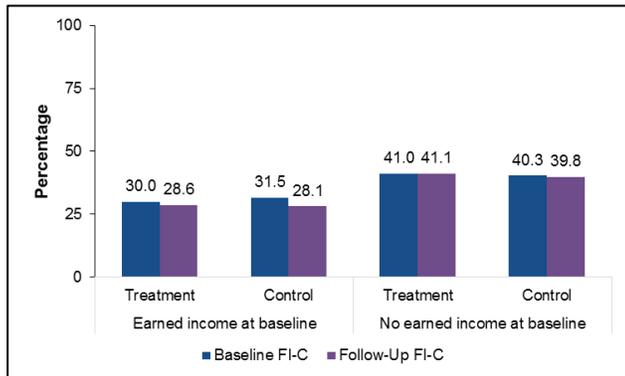
The extra SNAP benefit received as part of the TTHF project was larger for households with earnings (\$37) than households without earned income (\$13), but the additional benefit did not impact rates of FI-C in either group compared to the treatment groups (Figures 2 and 3).

**Figure 2. Average Regular SNAP and TTHF SNAP Benefits Among Households With and Without Earned Income**



Note: Kentucky SNAP administrative data (n=1,639). SNAP=Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. TTHF= Ticket to Healthy Food. HHs=Households

**Figure 3: Rates of Food Insecurity Among Children at Baseline and Follow-Up in Households With or Without Earned Income**



Note: Baseline sample size = 2,194. Follow-up sample size = 1,623. FI-C, Food Insecurity among Children

**The TTHF project did not reduce the prevalence of FI-C among subgroups of households, including single-parent households and households with at least one teen.** In addition, treatment and control households experienced changes in their household employment or wages, housing stability, and household composition at similar rates, which suggests these factors do not account for the lack of impact on food insecurity rates.

**Treatment households on average received \$22 in extra SNAP benefits per month, which increased total food spending by \$20.** Thus the TTHF project was successful in increasing spending on food; however, this increase was not enough to reduce food insecurity among children or

households. An increase of \$22 translates to just \$5.50 per person per month for a family of four.

**The TTHF project did not affect households' shopping behavior at follow-up.** Treatment and control households traveled approximately 12 miles to the store where they bought most of their food. About four out of five households primarily shopped at a grocery store or supermarket. Given the extra benefits were meant to reduce transportation costs, meaning households could have traveled farther to stores where they could buy perishable and other foods at lower cost. Alternatively, households might have considered the additional funds as providing an opportunity to shop at more conveniently located stores.

**The TTHF project successfully delivered the extra SNAP benefits to treatment households.** Without households having to take any action, the regular and extra SNAP benefits appeared on households' existing EBT cards as a single combined monthly benefit, which they could use to purchase the same foods at the same places with the same EBT card as with regular SNAP benefits.

**Over half of the project costs went to funding the extra SNAP benefits.** By the end of the evaluation, \$1.4 million was spent, with the largest share spent on providing the extra SNAP benefits (55 percent). The remaining funds were spent on vendor or partner costs (35 percent) and labor costs (9 percent). On average, the total cost per treatment group household over 36 months (startup and implementation) was \$519—\$287 in extra SNAP benefits for 15 months, \$180 for vendor and partner costs, \$46 for labor, and \$5 for non-labor resources.

**For More Information**

Gothro, A, Chojnacki, G, Kleinman, R, et al. *Evaluation of Demonstration Projects to End Childhood Hunger (EDECH): The Ticket to Healthy Food Project.* Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, April 2019. Project Officer: Michael P. Burke. Available online at: [www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis](http://www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis).