WIC and FMNP Modernization Annual Evaluation Report - 2024

In 2021, Congress provided the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Administration (FNA) with $390 million and waiver authority for outreach, innovation, and program modernization in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP). The WIC and FMNP Modernization Evaluation tracks the progress and outcomes of these efforts.

This first annual report provides an overview of the WIC and FMNP modernization efforts underway and highlights early implementation findings, covering activities from September 2022 – September 2024.

Key Findings

Why

How

Additional Information

WIC and FMNP Modernization Grants

- We awarded grants to all 88 WIC state agencies to modernize technology and service delivery, improve the shopping experience, and improve access to farmers' markets.
- As of September 2024, many WIC and FMNP state agency projects were in the planning (pre-implementation) stage (Table 1).
- Total WIC participation increased from 6.24 million participants in FY 2021 to 6.58 million in FY 2023. This upward trend continued into FY 2024. WIC participation grew to 6.84 million

in September 2024 (Figure 1). As WIC and FMNP modernization progresses, the WIC and FMNP Modernization Evaluation will determine whether these efforts are associated with changes in participation and other outcomes.

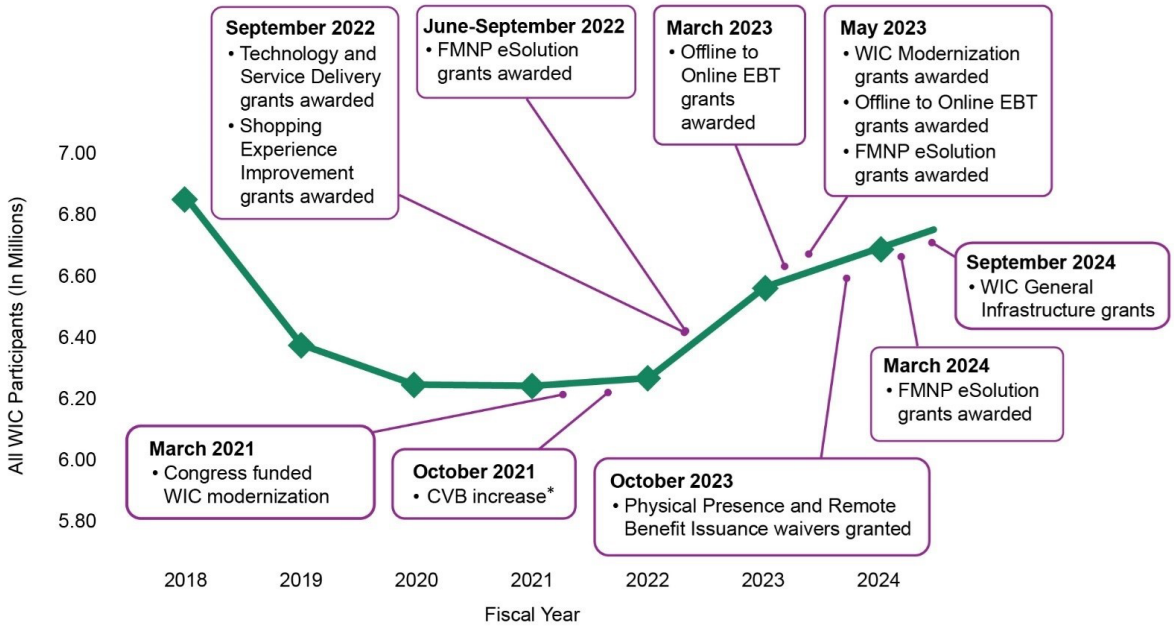


Figure 1. Annual WIC participation.
Participation is averaged over the fiscal year (October to September) and the marker is at the midpoint (April 30). Participation data are available. EBT = Electronic Benefit Transfer; CVB = Cash Value Benefits; WIC = Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children; FMNP = WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program.
*The CVB increase was funded separately from WIC modernization.

Table 1. Grants and stage of implementation, by focus area, as of September 2024.

	Modernizing Technology and Service Delivery	Improving the Shopping Experience	Improving Access to Farmers' Markets	Across Focus Areas

Grant	• WIC Technology and Service Delivery Improvement grants • Offline to Online EBT grants	WIC Shopping Experience Improvement grants	FMNP eSolution grants	• WIC Modernization grants • WIC General Infrastructure grants
Year(s) awarded	FY 2022 and 2023	FY 2022 and 2023	FY 2022, 2023, and 2024	FY 2023 and 2024
Number of grants awarded	51	21	37	95
Number of state agencies participating	75	21	37	88
Funding amount	$75,161,144	$10,984,204	$9,172,475	$106,767,651
Stage of Implementation				
Planning	14	4	3	64
Implementing	36	15	26	31
Complete	1	2	8	0

WIC and FMNP Modernization Waivers

In 2021, Congress gave us time-limited authority through Sept. 30, 2024 to grant waivers for WIC and FMNP state agencies to support modernization. We approved 1,069 waivers across 24 waiver categories. All 88 WIC state agencies received Physical Presence and Remote Issuance waivers. As of September 2024, 80 WIC state agencies (91%) have implemented the Physical Presence waiver, and 72 WIC state agencies (82%) have implemented the Remote Issuance waiver.

- Physical Presence waivers give WIC state agencies the option to allow participants to enroll and re-enroll in WIC, if they are deemed eligible, without visiting a clinic in person.
- Remote Issuance waivers give WIC state agencies the option to issue WIC food instruments and benefits remotely, so that participants do not have to pick up their food instruments or benefits in person.

Most waivers are in effect through Sept. 30, 2026, or until we end evaluation efforts, whichever is later.

Early Implementation Highlights and Challenges

- Two WIC state agencies successfully converted from offline electronic benefit transfer (EBT) technology to online EBT by September 2024. Offline EBT technology limits state agencies to issuing and modifying benefits in person. Modernizing to online EBT technology enables WIC families to receive benefits without having to visit a WIC clinic and makes online shopping possible.
- Six WIC state agencies have developed and implemented plain language materials and resources for WIC participants to use while shopping in stores or online. The most common materials include shopping lists in multiple languages, document translation, and shopping education videos.
- Of the 37 FMNP state agencies awarded grants to transition to electronic purchasing methods (eSolutions), 24 reported successfully procuring and implementing eSolutions throughout their service areas by September 2024.
- State agencies have experienced several challenges while planning and implementing modernization projects. The most common challenges experienced through September 2024 include project and implementation delays, staffing issues, cost constraints, and competing priorities.

Why FNA Did This Study

This brief is part of the WIC and FMNP Modernization Evaluation series. In 2021, Congress provided a one-time appropriation of $390 million and waiver authority to support WIC and FMNP modernization (PL 117-2). Evaluation of the modernization efforts allows us to track the progress and outcomes of these efforts. The evaluation is in the early stages, so this brief provides an initial look at implementation progress and findings.

How FNA Did This Study

- For this first annual report, the evaluation team examined the early implementation experiences of WIC state agencies, drawing on FNA administrative data and grantee progress reports covering activities through September 2024.
- We will soon begin additional data collection efforts to support this evaluation. Future reports will draw on interviews with WIC state agencies; case studies of local agency modernization efforts; surveys of WIC participants, staff, and vendors; reports from cooperative agreements; and data from other FNA data collections.

Background

- We received funding and waiver authority to support WIC modernization through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (PL 117-2).
- Federal agencies must comply with the Paperwork Reduction Act. Before collecting data from the public, we publish the data collection plan and ask the public for comments. You may read the 60-day request for public comments.

Resources

- We used data from this evaluation to create an interactive data visualization: WIC and FMNP Modernization Dashboard.
- Series webpage: WIC and FMNP Modernization Evaluation

Programs This Study Evaluates

- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
- WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP)

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