

Background

One important measure of a program's performance is its 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 Food Stamp Program (FSP) in an average month in fiscal year 2004 and in the 2 previous 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 the FSP 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.

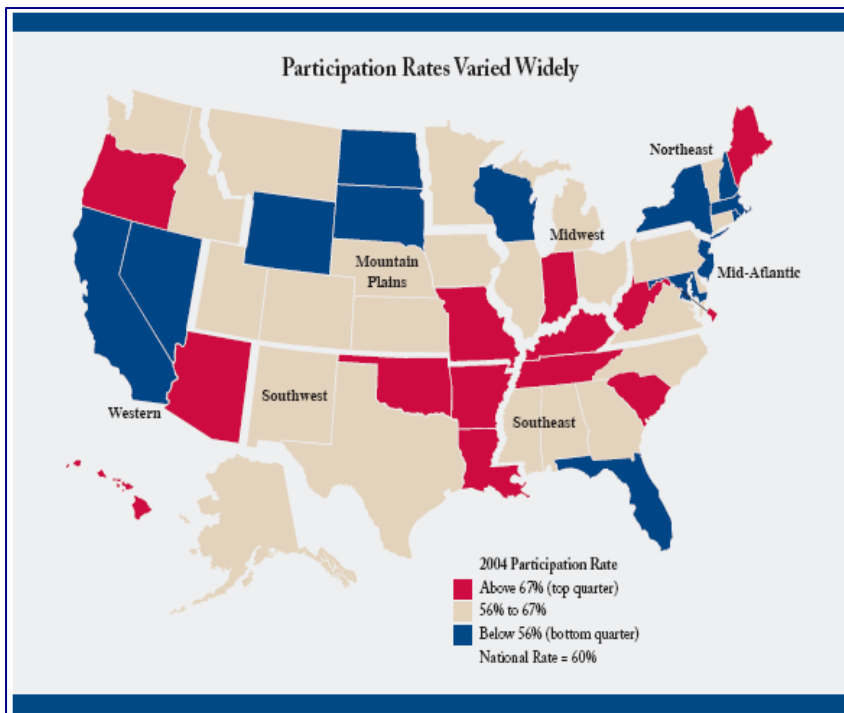
Nationally, the participation rate among all eligible persons was 60 percent in fiscal year 2004. The participation rate for eligible working poor individuals was 51 percent, a significant difference of 9 percentage points.

Findings

- **Although State food stamp participation rates for all eligible persons rose over this period, they continue to vary widely.** In fiscal year 2004, estimated rates for all eligible persons ranged from just below 50 percent in several States to over 80 in several others.
- **In every State, food stamp participation rates for working poor individuals**

were below the rates for all eligible persons. In 10 States, the working poor rate was more than 9 percentage points lower than the rate for all eligible persons.

- **Some States had consistently high participation rates relative to other States in all 3 fiscal years.** In each year from 2002 to 2004, Missouri, Tennessee, Oregon, Maine, West Virginia, Louisiana, Hawaii and Kentucky had significantly higher participation rates than *two-thirds* of the States.
- **Some States had consistently low participation rates relative to other States.** New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Wyoming had significantly lower rates than *two-thirds* of the States in all 3 fiscal years.
- **With a few exceptions, a State ranked at the top or bottom of the distribution of participation rates for all eligible persons was similarly ranked for participation by working poor persons.**



The estimates are derived using a statistical approach known as shrinkage estimation that draws on data from the Current Population Survey, decennial census, 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 even though larger sample sizes in recent years improved the precision of direct estimates for States with smaller populations. 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 population and subgroup estimates.

For More Information

Cunyngham, Karen E., Laura A. Castner and Allen L. Schirm. *Reaching Those in Need: State Food Stamp Participation Rates in 2004*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. for the Food and Nutrition Service. October 2006.

Barrett, Allison, and Anni Poikolainen. *Food Stamp Program Participation Rates: 2004*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. for the Food and Nutrition Service. June 2006.

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