

REACHING THOSE IN NEED: STATE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM PARTICIPATION RATES IN 2011—SUMMARY

Background

This report – part of an annual series – presents estimates of the percentage of eligible persons, by State, who participated in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) during an average month in fiscal year 2011 and in the 2 previous fiscal years. SNAP eligibility criteria include, but are not limited to, income guidelines and either United States citizenship or legal immigrant status with, for most, at least five years' residency.

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 an important support for working families, the working poor have participated for a number of years 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 SNAP participation rate among all eligible persons was 79 percent in fiscal year 2011 (Eslami and Cunyningham, 2013). The participation rate for eligible working poor individuals was significantly lower statistically, at 67 percent.

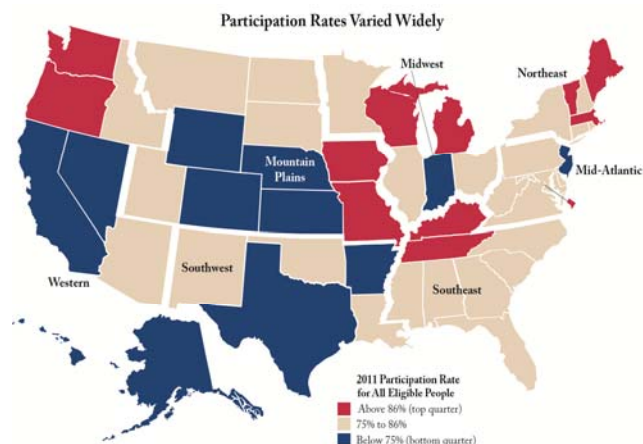
Findings

- **SNAP participation rates for all eligible persons varied widely from State to State in fiscal year 2011.** State participation rates ranged from a low of 57 percent to a high of 100 percent. Twenty-six States had rates that were significantly higher than the national rate, and 12 States had rates that were significantly lower.

- **Some States had consistently high participation rates relative to other States.** In each year from 2009 to 2011, the District of

Columbia, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, Oregon, Tennessee, Vermont, and Washington had significantly higher participation rates than two-thirds of the States.

- **Some States had consistently low participation rates relative to other States.** California, Colorado, Hawaii, Kansas, New Jersey, Nevada, Texas, and Wyoming had significantly lower rates than two-thirds of the States in all 3 fiscal years.



- **Participation rates for the working poor also varied widely across States.** Twenty-one States had rates for the working poor that were significantly higher than the national rate for the working poor, and 10 States had rates that were significantly lower.

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, 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 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 half of this number of SSI recipients would be eligible for SNAP under current program rules.

Periodically, improvements are made in the methods for estimating the direct sample estimates of SNAP-eligible persons that are used in the shrinkage estimation. For this reason, the participation rates cited in this report are not

directly comparable to those presented in prior year reports because of some improvements to the methodology, which are described in Eslami and Cunnyingham (2013).

For More Information

Cunnyingham, Karen (2014). *Reaching Those in Need: State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2011*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (available online at www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis).

Eslami, Esa, and Karen Cunnyingham (2014). *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates: Fiscal Years 2010 and 2011*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (available online at www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis).