

### **Background**

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) helps low-income individuals purchase food so that they can obtain a nutritious diet. One important measure of program performance is the ability to reach its target population, as indicated by the percentage of people eligible for benefits under federal income and asset rules who actually participate. This report is the latest in a series on SNAP participation rates. Estimates are based on the March 2011 Current Population Survey and program administrative data for Fiscal Year (FY) 2010. The findings represent participation rates for FY 2010.

### **Findings**

On average, 51 million individuals were eligible for benefits each month in 2010, and 38 million received them. While the program served 75 percent of all eligible individuals, the program provided 94 percent of the benefits that all eligible individuals could receive. This is because the neediest individuals eligible for higher benefits participated at higher rates than other eligible persons.

Participation rates were relatively high for children, individuals in households with incomes between 1 and 50 percent of poverty, and recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), following historical trends. At least 88 percent of all eligibles from these groups participated.

In contrast, participation rates for eligible elderly and individuals living in households with incomes above poverty were much lower – 35 percent and 36 percent, respectively.

The participation rate for nondisabled childless adults subject to work registration was 67 percent, while eligible noncitizens participated at a rate of only 52 percent. The participation rate for households with earnings was lower than

average at 65 percent. The participation rate for individuals in rural households (86 percent) was higher than that for individuals in urban households (73 percent).

### **Methodological Notes**

The participation rates cited in this report are not consistent or comparable to those presented in prior year reports because of methodological improvements (see Appendix C).

As in past reports, individuals in households with income above the federal SNAP income guidelines are removed from the participant count unless every member receives cash Supplemental Security Income, TANF, or State General Assistance benefits (known as pure cash public assistance). Beginning in this report for FY 2010, individuals in households that are not pure cash public assistance with assets above the federal SNAP limits are removed from the participant count by using a regression equation based on Survey of Income and Program Participation data that predicts asset eligibility.

The additional improvements include the following:

- Updating the asset eligibility equation and using newer data for estimating who is asset-eligible;
- Improving the process for estimating which noncitizens are eligible; and
- Improving the simulation of a fiscal year by more closely matching SNAP policies with concurrent economic factors.

### **For More Information**

Eslami, Esa, Joshua Leftin, and Mark Strayer. (2012). *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates: Fiscal Year 2010*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the Food and Nutrition Service (available online at [www.fns.usda.gov/ora](http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora)).

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