

# Food Stamp Access in Urban America: A City-by-City Snapshot



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The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) is the leading national organization working for more effective public and private policies to eradicate domestic hunger and undernutrition. Sign-up for FRAC's weekly News Digest at [www.frac.org](http://www.frac.org).

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Food Stamp Program, the first line of defense against hunger and undernutrition in the U.S., is a critically important but underutilized resource for urban America. In this report FRAC takes a look at food stamps and hunger in 24 of America's largest urban areas,<sup>1</sup> situated in 19 states and the District of Columbia, looking particularly at their food stamp participation measures and the number of unserved people.

The report first shows that urban Americans are more likely to be poor, to suffer from hunger and food insecurity than other Americans, and to have to pay more for food:

- Among the 24 urban areas featured in the report, all but three had a poverty rate higher than the national rate of 13.3 percent in 2005.
- In most of the urban areas, at least one child in four lived below the poverty line in 2005, and in combination the 24 were home to more than two and a quarter million poor children.
- In 2005, 13.5 percent of households in principal cities nationally experienced food insecurity, as compared with 11.0 percent of households in the entire US population.
- A recent USDA study shows that the costs to families to purchase enough food generally were higher in the cities than in their immediate surroundings or in non-metropolitan areas of the same state.

These poverty, food insecurity, and food cost data show just how important federal nutrition programs like food stamps can be to low-income people in urban America.

As of May 2007 in the 24 urban areas, approximately 5.5 million people were receiving food stamps. More than half of the households receiving food stamps contained children, and nearly three quarters (73 percent) of the benefits issued were paid to households with one or more children. One in five urban food stamp households included an elderly person.

Between 2002 and 2007, food stamp caseloads grew in all of the 24 cities and urban counties for which data was available. But millions of people in these large cities and counties who are eligible for food stamps do not receive benefits. Based on its Local Access Indicator, FRAC estimates that only 65 percent of eligible people in the 24 cities and urban counties participated in the program in 2005.

The lowest estimated Local Access Indicators for participation measures in the 24 survey areas were for San Diego County (San Diego), California (31 percent); Clark County (Las Vegas), Nevada (44 percent); Harris County (Houston), Texas (47 percent); and Denver County (Denver), Colorado (48 percent). The highest estimated Local Access Indicators

<sup>1</sup> Because food stamp data are not always available on the city level, in most cases we use county-level data as a proxy for city-level data. See discussion on page 7.

Local Access Indicator (LAI) Participation Measures*	
San Diego (San Diego), CA	31%
Las Vegas (Clark), NV	44%
Houston (Harris), TX	47%
Denver (Denver), CO	48%
Los Angeles (Los Angeles), CA	51%
Boston (Suffolk), MA	51%
Phoenix (Maricopa), AZ	57%
Oakland (Alameda), CA	58%
Seattle (King), WA	58%
Jacksonville (Duval), FL	59%
San Antonio (Bexar), TX	65%
Miami (Miami-Dade), FL	70%
Baltimore (Baltimore), MD	73%
New York, NY	74%
Wichita (Sedgwick), KS	75%
Columbus (Franklin), OH	76%
Atlanta (Fulton), GA	76%
Chicago (Cook), IL	77%
Milwaukee (Milwaukee), WI	80%
Louisville (Jefferson), KY	82%
Philadelphia (Philadelphia), PA	84%
Indianapolis (Marion), IN	86%
Washington, DC	86%
Detroit (Wayne), MI	98%
* See Pg. 19 for LAI Methodology	

were for Wayne County (Detroit), Michigan (98 percent); Washington, DC (86 percent); Marion County (Indianapolis), Indiana (86 percent); and Philadelphia County (Philadelphia), Pennsylvania (84 percent).

Underparticipation in the Food Stamp Program adversely affects not only low-income people who are missing out on benefits but also communities that could be benefiting from more federal dollars circulating in the local economy.

In total, more than \$2.27 billion in federally-funded benefits were left unclaimed by the 24 cities and urban counties in 2005. The places that missed out on the most federal food stamp benefits were Los Angeles County, California (\$564 million); New York, New York (\$335 million); and Harris County (Houston), Texas (\$267 million).

More can be done to connect eligible people with benefits. Food stamp agencies can make it easier for households to sign up, including by allowing them to apply over the telephone and on the Internet. Food stamp outreach projects can get application information to people where they work, go to school, seek health care, and shop. For details on such initiatives, see FRAC's Guide to Food Stamp Outreach Collaborations, posted at [www.frac.org/html/news/fsp\\_guide2006.html](http://www.frac.org/html/news/fsp_guide2006.html)

# INTRODUCTION

The Food Stamp Program is the first line of defense against hunger and undernutrition in the United States. In Fiscal Year 2006, a monthly average of more than 26 million people received benefits, totaling almost \$30.2 billion for the year.<sup>2</sup> Delivered through Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards, which are used like debit cards at authorized food retailers nationwide, food stamp benefits enhance the purchasing power of low-income households and help them put food on the table. Food stamp benefits are fully federally-funded, and the program is largely administered by the states, with federal and state governments sharing the administrative costs nearly equally.

At a time of nationwide concern over both hunger and obesity, the Food Stamp Program's mission to ensure access to nutritious food for all Americans is critically important.<sup>3</sup> The Food Stamp Program is of particular importance to America's big cities, which are home to a disproportionate share of the nation's low-income people. Food stamps not only help individual recipients but also give a boost to local retailers and the local economy, helping to sustain and strengthen struggling communities.

In big cities, however, as in the nation overall, millions of people are eligible for food stamp benefits but not participating. There are several reasons for this. Cities are home to a large share of the nation's immigrants, many of whom are eligible for the Food Stamp Program – thanks in large part to program improvements in legislation in 1998 and 2002 – but are not participating due to language or cultural barriers, concern about stigma, or simply a lack of awareness of their eligibility.<sup>4</sup> In addition, many food stamp offices in cities are overburdened, with caseworkers handling large numbers of clients and many low-income people falling through the cracks.

In response to these challenges, food stamp officials and advocates for low-income people have sought and devised innovative outreach strategies and service improvements. Much work, however, remains to be done.

This paper provides a picture of trends in the Food Stamp Program in America's big cities and urban counties. The analysis focuses on a selection of 24 major U.S. cities, all of which have populations of at least 250,000. We sought a geographically balanced array of cities, so the cities selected are not simply the 24 largest in the United States. Rather, we chose only one city in each state, except for California, Florida, and Texas, which are very large and growing states and are represented by three, two and two cities, respectively. In all other states represented, the largest city in the state is the one featured in the report.

The report discusses the extent of poverty and hunger in urban areas and the obstacles low-income urban residents face in obtaining enough nutritious food. It describes the characteristics of households and individuals receiving food stamps in America's big cities and urban counties. The report then presents FRAC's data on food stamp enrollment trends in the 24 cities and urban counties and provides, for each location, estimates of how many eligible people are not participating in the program and how many federal dollars are being lost to underparticipation.

Because food stamp data is often not available on the city level, in most cases we use county-level data as a proxy for city-level data. Since the Food Stamp Program is usually administered on the county level, and the cities we looked at represent a large share of the population of the counties that include them (generally between 50 and 100 percent), county data are a good surrogate for city data. Data on characteristics of food stamp households are generally on the county level as well. The demographic data on poverty and unemployment in this report are city-level data, however, and the food cost data compare cities with their outlying Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), which may include several counties. In the discussion and tables we specify the relevant geographic units for all data.

<sup>2</sup> See U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (USDA FNS), "Food Stamp Program Participation and Costs," available at [www.fns.usda.gov/pd/fssummary.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/fssummary.htm).

<sup>3</sup> Although it may seem counterintuitive, hunger and obesity both may be linked to an inability to purchase sufficient nutritious food. For more information, see FRAC's Web site page on hunger and obesity at [www.frac.org/html/hunger\\_in\\_the\\_us/hunger&obesity.htm](http://www.frac.org/html/hunger_in_the_us/hunger&obesity.htm).

<sup>4</sup> Food stamp benefits are available to qualified legal permanent residents who have been in the United States five years or more, to qualified legal immigrant children regardless of date of entry, and to qualified refugees, asylees, and disabled immigrants. Food stamp benefits for legal immigrants were largely eliminated by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, but benefits were restored for many in the Agriculture Research, Extension and Education Reform Act of 1998 and the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act (FSRIA) of 2002, also known, respectively, as the 1998 Agricultural Research and 2002 Farm Bills. For more information, see FRAC's report on changes to the Food Stamp Program in the 2002 Farm Bill: [www.frac.org/pdf/implementation081402.PDF](http://www.frac.org/pdf/implementation081402.PDF).

# HUNGER AND POVERTY IN AMERICA'S BIG CITIES

America's big cities are home both to great wealth and persistent hunger, food insecurity, and poverty. Among the 24 big cities covered in this report, all but three had a higher poverty rate than the national rate of 13.3 percent in 2005.<sup>5</sup> (See Table 1.) Detroit had the highest poverty rate, with nearly one of every three of its residents living below the federal poverty level. In Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia, at least one person in five was poor.

The situation is even worse for children in America's big cities. In a majority of the cities, at least one child in four lived below the poverty line in 2005, and in Atlanta and Detroit it was nearly one in two children.

Official poverty statistics may understate the true extent of the problem of urban poverty, since the cost of living is often higher in urban areas than elsewhere in the country. In addition, millions of people in America's big cities are searching for – but are unable to find – jobs. Eighteen of the 24 cities had a higher unemployment rate in 2005 than the Census-reported national rate of 5 percent.

There also is evidence that food insecurity and hunger are more severe in America's urban centers. According to the most recent report on household food security by the Economic Research Service (ERS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 13.5 percent of households in principal cities experienced food insecurity in 2005, as compared with 11.0 percent of households in the entire U.S. population.<sup>6</sup> In this ERS study "principal cities" includes all U.S. cities that are at the center of a geographical unit known as a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which encompasses the surrounding communities with economic and commuting ties to the principal city.<sup>7</sup> Principal cities

5 National poverty and unemployment rates referenced in this section are from the U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS). National data are available at [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet?\\_program=ACS&\\_submenuId=datasets\\_2&\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet?_program=ACS&_submenuId=datasets_2&_lang=en).

6 Households are considered "food insecure" if they were, for at least some of the time during the survey year, "uncertain of having, or unable to acquire, enough food for all household members because they had insufficient money and other resources for food." Households are considered to have "very low food insecurity" if "at times during the year, eating patterns of one or more household members were disrupted and food intake reduced because the household lacked money and other resources for food." See Mark Nord, Margaret Andrews, and Steven Carlson, "Household Food Security in the United States, 2005," Economic Research Report Number 29, USDA ERS (November 2006). The report is available at [www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR29/](http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR29/). For data on food insecurity in MSAs and principal cities, see Table 2.

7 It is important to note that "principal city" is not synonymous with "inner city," which implies low-income neighborhoods within a city's boundaries. If data existed to compare the "inner city"

also had a higher prevalence of "very low food insecurity" (previously called "food insecurity with hunger"): 5.1 percent of principal city households experienced hunger in 2005, as compared with 3.9 percent of households nationwide.<sup>8</sup>

High food costs and inadequate food availability also confront the urban poor. A study by Mark Nord and Ephraim Leibtag (2004) describes a methodology for calculating a "cost-of-enough-food index" from Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS) data.<sup>9</sup> The CPS-FSS data capture households' perceptions of how much money they would need to afford "just enough" food. While the cost-of-enough-food index is not a price index, the price of food likely determines a substantial portion of the variation in the index. Table 2 compares the cost-of-enough-food index between the cities (for 2000 – 2002, the balance of their MSAs, and the non-metropolitan (rural) portions of their states. Seventeen of the 24 cities had cost-of-enough-food indices as high as or higher than the balance of their MSAs, and 19 cities had indices as high as or higher than the non-metropolitan areas of the same state. This pattern suggests that, in most areas, people in cities find they need to spend more to obtain adequate food than people in suburbs or in rural areas.

Similarly, a detailed study of food costs in Boston found that people in three low-income neighborhoods face higher food prices than government assistance programs assume.<sup>10</sup> Researchers investigated the price of the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) market basket for a family of four at small, medium, and large stores.<sup>11</sup> The actual cost of the TFP exceeded the maximum food stamp allotment for a family of four in the small and large stores. Averaging across all stores, the maximum food stamp allotment fell short by almost \$27 per month. When the researchers investigated the cost of a modified TFP with substitutions of healthier

with the U.S. as a whole, the differences likely would be even starker.

8 Nord, Andrews, and Carlson (2006).

9 Mark Nord and Ephraim Leibtag, "Does Food Cost Less in Rural Areas?," USDA ERS (2004). Presented at the annual meeting of the Rural Sociological Society, Sacramento, CA (August 12-15, 2004).

10 John Cook, Vivien Morris, Nicole Neault, and Deborah Frank, "The Real Cost of a Healthy Diet in Boston, Massachusetts," Boston Medical Center (August 2005), available at [http://dcc2.bumc.bu.edu/csnappublic/HealthyDiet\\_Aug2005.pdf](http://dcc2.bumc.bu.edu/csnappublic/HealthyDiet_Aug2005.pdf).

11 The TFP is a basket of food items that meets minimum USDA nutrition standards at the lowest possible cost. USDA uses the estimated cost of the TFP to determine the maximum food stamp allotment. This study was in 2005. Since food stamp eligibility and benefits are not fully indexed for inflation, the gap in all likelihood is greater now.

food products, such as whole grains, the maximum food stamp allotment fell short by about \$148 per month. The disturbing implication of this research is that a healthier diet – containing the foods that USDA and medical experts recommend to promote health, reduce obesity, and prevent disease – is likely well out of reach for many food stamp recipients, at least in one major city.

In addition to high food costs, inadequate food availability is a major challenge to meeting the nutritional needs of urban dwellers. In low-income urban areas, consumers often find relatively few food options:

Large grocery and apparel retail chains historically have ignored inner-city consumer markets because of incorrect perceptions about income, population, and demographics.

Neighborhood-based consumer dollars are relegated to the few, usually small, local retail establishments that offer a narrow selection of higher priced goods.<sup>12</sup>

Low-income people in cities, many of whom lack transportation to get to larger stores, often are forced to rely on small neighborhood stores that offer a limited selection of produce and other fresh products and higher prices.

<sup>12</sup> Orson Watson, "Reducing Costs of Living: Strategies to Improve Affordability in Economically Isolated Neighborhoods," 2003 KIDS COUNT Resource Kit: Countering the Costs of Being Poor, Annie E. Casey Foundation (2003), available at [www.aecf.org/kidscount/2003resource/2\\_reducing.pdf](http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/2003resource/2_reducing.pdf). The full resource kit is available at [www.aecf.org/kidscount/2003resource/resourcekit.pdf](http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/2003resource/resourcekit.pdf).

## CHARACTERISTICS OF FOOD STAMP HOUSEHOLDS IN BIG CITIES

Table 3 provides a statistical profile of food stamp recipients in the counties that contain the 24 urban areas.<sup>13</sup> Except for New York City, all of the characteristics data are on the county level, as the Food Stamp Program Quality Control (FSPQC) database from which they are derived does not have city-level data. This discussion sometimes uses the term "cities" or the names of the cities for simplicity, but readers should be aware that the data refer to the counties containing those cities.

More than half, or 51 percent, of households receiving food stamps among the urban counties contained children in 2005. But Oakland, Los Angeles and San Diego stand out on the high end with 88 percent, 81 percent and 74 percent of households containing children, respectively.

In 15 of the 24 cities, roughly three-quarters (73) percent of all food stamp benefits in 2004 were paid to households with one or more children. Cities where the percentage of benefits going to households with children topped 85

percent included Oakland (93 percent), San Diego (89 percent), San Antonio (86 percent), and Jacksonville (86 percent).

One in five urban food stamp households in the 24 cities included an elderly person in 2004. The largest proportions of households with elderly recipients were in Miami-Dade County (45 percent) and New York City (31 percent).

In two of the 24 cities (Wichita and Seattle), whites made up more than half of all food stamp recipients. The proportion of food stamp recipients who were black was highest in the District of Columbia, Atlanta and Baltimore. The percentage of Hispanic food stamp recipients was highest in San Antonio, Miami and Los Angeles.

<sup>13</sup> The Office of Analysis, Nutrition, and Evaluation (OANE) of USDA FNS releases an annual report on the characteristics of food stamp households. PDF versions of these reports are available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/participation.htm#Characteristics>.

# FOOD STAMP PARTICIPATION IN AMERICA'S BIG CITIES: TRENDS AND SHORTFALLS

Millions of low-income people in America's big cities and urban counties are benefiting from the Food Stamp Program, and food stamp caseloads in these areas (as in the nation as a whole) have grown substantially in the past few years. However, millions more people are eligible for food stamp benefits but not participating in the program. As a result, needy low-income people – and their cities – are missing out on billions of dollars in unclaimed federal funds.

Table 4 presents data on caseload trends in the 24 urban areas – in most instances the counties that include the cities. Table 5 then provides FRAC's estimates of what proportion of eligible people are participating in each of the 24 urban areas and how many federal dollars are being missed.

When food stamp enrollment data was not available on the city level, the data represents the county of which the city is a part. The relevant geographic unit is indicated for each city in the tables. For simplicity, the text will refer to these geographical units collectively as "the cities," but readers should be aware that food stamp data for a particular city generally will reflect the entire county and not the city proper.

## Caseload Trends: 2002 to 2007

Between May 2002 and May 2007, a time when national food stamp growth was 38.1 percent, food stamp caseloads grew in all of the 24 cities surveyed<sup>14</sup> The rate of caseload growth varied widely among the cities, however, and reflected some regional trends. (See Table 4.)

The cities experiencing the highest rates of growth were located primarily in the south and west. Harris County (Houston), Texas saw its caseload almost double in five years (88 percent), and four other counties saw increases of more than 50 percent: Duval County (Jacksonville), Florida; Franklin County (Columbus), Ohio; Bexar County (San Antonio), Texas; Maricopa County (Phoenix), Arizona; and Wayne County (Detroit), Michigan. The box on this page shows the top and bottom five cities in caseload growth from 2002 to 2007.

Nationwide trends contributed to this growth, including slow growth in employment and little to no growth in

<sup>14</sup> For the national and state trends, see FRAC's posting of May 2007 food stamp enrollment data, available at [http://www.frac.org/data/FSPparticipation/2007\\_05.pdf](http://www.frac.org/data/FSPparticipation/2007_05.pdf). FRAC was able to obtain May 2002 and May 2007 data for the 24 survey areas, and all showed an increase in participation over the five year period.

<b>Top and Bottom Five Cities and Urban Counties for Caseload Growth, May 2002 – May 2007</b>	
<b>Top Five</b>	
Harris County (Houston), TX	88.0%
Suffolk County (Boston), MA	81.6%
Duval County (Jacksonville), FL	71.8%
Franklin County (Columbus), OH	56.7%
Bexar County (San Antonio), TX	53.7%
<b>Bottom Five</b>	
Milwaukee (Milwaukee), WI	10.3%
Los Angeles County (Los Angeles), CA	11.3%
Baltimore County (Baltimore), MD	12.0%
Denver (Denver), CO	12.0%
Miami-Dade County (Miami), FL	15.8%

wages since the 2001 recession, the restoration of food stamp benefits to some legal immigrants, other program improvements in the 2002 Farm Bill, and ongoing outreach efforts by food stamp offices and advocates. Part of the increase in food stamp enrollments is also attributable to population growth, especially in the fast-expanding cities of the south and west.

Despite this caseload growth, as will be discussed in the following section, millions of potentially eligible people in these cities are not receiving food stamps – Houston still has the lowest rate on FRAC's measure – even the highest caseload growth should not be taken as a sign that everyone in need of food assistance is being served.

## Participation Gaps

Only 65.1 percent of people who are eligible for food stamps nationwide receive benefits, according to the most recent estimate from the USDA.<sup>15</sup> The reasons why eligible households do not participate are varied. A common reason for nonparticipation is that households simply are not aware that they are eligible for food stamp benefits. Other factors include language barriers, perceptions of stigma surrounding the program, low minimum benefits (especially common for senior citizens), the belief that there is a five-year lifetime limit on benefits (there is not), difficulties getting to food stamp offices during the work day (or at all), and possible deterrent effects from the many verifications required by the program. USDA FNS publishes an annual report on state-level participation

<sup>15</sup> See Kari Wolkwitz, "Trends in Food Stamp Program Participation Rates: 1999 to 2005," USDA (June 2007), available at [www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FILES/Participation/Trends1999-2005.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FILES/Participation/Trends1999-2005.pdf).

rates, but there is no regular estimate of participation at the city level.<sup>16</sup>

Table 5 lists FRAC’s estimates of food stamp participation in the cities for 2005. FRAC’s measure, which we have called the “Local Access Indicator,” is distinct from both USDA’s official participation rates and its program access index.<sup>17</sup> Like the official participation rate, however, FRAC’s Local Access Indicator seeks to estimate what proportion of low-income people who would qualify are actually enrolled in the Food Stamp Program.

The appendix provides a complete discussion of the methodology FRAC uses to calculate the Local Access Indicator. In brief, we estimate the number of people who might qualify for food stamps in each city and then divide the actual food stamp enrollment for May 2005 by this number to yield the Local Access Indicator. To approximate the denominator – the number of people who might qualify for food stamps – we estimate the number of people below 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (the food stamp gross income limit) and then estimate how many of those people are ineligible due to their immigration status or assets.

On average, we estimate that 65 percent of people who might qualify for food stamps participated in the program in these 24 cities. This is slightly lower than the national average of 65.1 percent of eligible people as calculated by USDA. In May 2005, more than 5.2 million people enrolled in the program in these cities, while we estimate that an additional 2.8 million would qualify but did not enroll.

<sup>16</sup> The Brookings Institution has estimated food stamp participation levels and lost benefits in MSAs and large urban counties. See Matt Fellowes and Alan Berube, “Leaving Money (and Food) on the Table: Food Stamp Participation in Major Metropolitan Areas and Counties” (2005), available at [www.brookings.org/metro/pubs/20050517\\_FoodStamp.pdf](http://www.brookings.org/metro/pubs/20050517_FoodStamp.pdf). In addition, a number of state- and city-based advocates have estimated local participation levels. These reports are listed in the Links and Resources section under “Food Stamp Program Participation Data and Studies.” The National Priorities Project’s estimate of low-income receipt of food stamps does not control for non-income eligibility factors and, therefore, does not substitute for other participation rate measures. See National Priorities Project, “Half of Low-Income People Not Receiving Food Stamps,” available at <http://www.nationalpriorities.org/images/stories/nationalprioritiesprojectfoodstampsaugust2007.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> The official USDA participation rates estimate what proportion of people who are eligible for food stamps are enrolled in the program. See Barrett and Poikolainen (2006) and USDA’s annual reports of state-level food stamp participation rates, which are available at [www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/participation.htm#State](http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/participation.htm#State). The program access index (PAI) measures what proportion of low-income people are enrolled in the Food Stamp Program. See USDA’s brief, “Calculating the Food Stamp Program Access Index: A Step-By-Step Guide” (September 2006), available at [www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FILES/Other/PAI2005.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FILES/Other/PAI2005.pdf). See also FRAC’s webpage on the PAI at [www.frac.org/html/federal\\_food\\_programs/programs/PARates.htm](http://www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/programs/PARates.htm).

<b>Top and Bottom Five Cities and Urban Counties for Local Access Indicator, 2005</b>	
<b>Top Five</b>	
Detroit (Wayne), MI	98%
Washington, DC	86%
Indianapolis (Marion), IN	86%
Philadelphia (Philadelphia), PA	84%
Louisville (Jefferson), KY	82%
<b>Bottom Five</b>	
Boston (Suffolk), MA	51%
Los Angeles (Los Angeles), CA	51%
Denver (Denver), CO	48%
Houston (Harris), TX	47%
Las Vegas (Clark), NV	44%
San Diego (San Diego), CA	31%

The lowest Local Access Indicator was 31 percent in San Diego County (San Diego), California. Clark County (Las Vegas), Nevada; Harris County (Houston), Texas; and Denver County (Denver), Colorado also were on the low end of the participation spectrum, each with an indicator below 50 percent.

These indicators generally are consistent with the official USDA participation rates for the states containing these cities. California, Nevada, and Colorado were all in the bottom third of states for food stamp participation in 2004, and Texas falls in the bottom half.<sup>18</sup>

The highest Local Access Indicators for the 24 urban areas surveyed were in Detroit, Michigan; Washington, D.C.; and Marion County (Indianapolis), Indiana, where at least 86 percent of eligible people enrolled in the program in 2005. These results are consistent with USDA participation rates for the states containing these cities. The District of Columbia and Indiana both had participation rates in the top quarter in 2004, and Michigan’s participation rate was in the top third in 2004.<sup>19</sup>

### Missed Benefits

Underparticipation in the Food Stamp Program affects the income, nutrition, and well-being of eligible but non-participating households, which are missing out on benefits to which they are entitled. But it also affects

<sup>18</sup> Karen E. Cunyngnam, Laura A. Castner and Allen L. Schirm, “Reaching Those in Need: State Food Stamp Participation Rates in 2004,” USDA (October 2006), available at [www.fns.usda.gov/oane/menu/Published/FSP/FILES/Participation/reaching2004.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/menu/Published/FSP/FILES/Participation/reaching2004.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> Cunyngnam et al. (2006).

communities that could be benefiting from more federal dollars in the local economy. Food stamp benefits are fully federally funded, meaning that food stamp dollars effectively provide an economic boost for low-income areas. As household food stamp expenditures become revenues for retailers, the funds cycle through the local economy, generating a “multiplier effect.” According to a USDA estimate, under certain conditions each dollar of food stamp benefits generates approximately \$1.80 in economic activity.<sup>20</sup> Increasing participation in the Food Stamp Program enhances local businesses. It also increases tax revenues to local governments, as recipients spend more money on taxable goods.<sup>21</sup>

America’s big cities are missing out on billions of dollars in food stamp benefits that could be lifting residents out of poverty and improving the local economy and tax base. Table 5 presents FRAC’s estimates of the missed benefits in each of the 24 cities and urban counties. The places

<b>Top Five Cities and Urban Counties for Missed Food Stamp Benefits, 2005</b>	
Los Angeles County (Los Angeles), CA	\$564,204,328
New York, NY	\$334,998,172
Harris County (Houston), TX	\$267,112,567
Cook County (Chicago), IL	\$161,670,118
San Diego County, CA	\$135,872,689

that were missing out on the most federal food stamp benefits were Los Angeles County (\$564 million) and New York City (\$335 million). Harris County (Houston),

San Diego County, Cook County (Chicago), and Maricopa County (Phoenix), each lost in excess of \$130 million per year in food stamp benefits. In total, over \$2.27 billion in federally funded benefits were left unclaimed by the 24 big cities and urban counties in 2005.

For a full explanation of the methodology used to estimate these totals, please refer to the methodological appendix. In brief, we used the estimates of people who likely would qualify but are not participating that were derived previously, multiplied them by the average monthly benefit in each jurisdiction, and made adjustments to convert from months to years and to account for the fact that non-participants are generally eligible for lower benefits than participants. In states that have utilized a federal option that allows expands potential food stamp eligibility to working families who receive certain TANF funded services, the methodology may not fully encompass the full pool of people who could qualify in the state.

## CONCLUSION

Since the nation’s big cities are home to a disproportionate share of poor and hungry Americans, expanding access to the Food Stamp Program in cities is a critically important step toward building an America free of hunger. While the principal goal of the Food Stamp Program is to feed hungry people and provide essential nutrition, food stamp benefits also improve health and children’s ability to learn and are a boon to local businesses and a stimulus to local economies. In the face of community-wide economic challenges in cities, such as the loss of well-paying jobs to the suburbs, increasing the amount of federal food

stamp dollars flowing into cities is one effective strategy for pushing along the local economy. As the findings of this report indicate, all of America’s big cities stand to gain many millions of federal dollars per year through comparatively modest efforts to increase participation in the Food Stamp Program. By understanding the size of the challenge for their particular cities, food stamp advocates, government officials, city leaders, and others can help ensure that needy families receive the assistance to which they are entitled.

20 Kenneth Hanson and Elise Golan, “Effects of Changes in Food Stamp Expenditures across the U.S. Economy,” Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Report Number 26-6, USDA (August 2002), available at [www.ers.usda.gov/publications/fanrr26/fanrr26-6/fanrr26-6.pdf](http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/fanrr26/fanrr26-6/fanrr26-6.pdf).

21 For a discussion of the effects of food stamp spending on tax revenues in California, see the California Legislative Analyst’s Office’s (LAO) “Analysis of the 2004-5 Budget Bill” at [http://www.lao.ca.gov/analysis\\_2004/health\\_ss/hss\\_20\\_foodstamps\\_anl04.htm](http://www.lao.ca.gov/analysis_2004/health_ss/hss_20_foodstamps_anl04.htm). The LAO argues that a proposal in the governor’s budget to repeal eligibility expansions in the Food Stamp Program would have a negative impact on the state budget because the tax revenues lost to the state would exceed the state’s share of the administrative savings gained. See also “Lost Dollars, Empty Plates: The Impact of Food Stamps on State and Local Budgets,” by California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA), available at [www.cfpa.net/lostdollars2005overview.doc](http://www.cfpa.net/lostdollars2005overview.doc). CFPA estimates that full participation in the Food Stamp Program by all eligible Californians would enhance the state government budget by \$37 million per year and county government budgets by \$12 million per year.

**Table 1: Demographic and Economic Data, 2005**

City	Population*	Individuals in Poverty	Poverty Rate	Children in Poverty**	Childhood Poverty Rate	Unemployment Rate
Atlanta, GA	394,929	106,236	26.9%	44,377	49.1%	9.5%
Baltimore, MD	608,481	137,517	22.6%	53,154	33.3%	11.4%
Boston, MA	520,702	116,117	22.3%	35,651	32.8%	9.1%
Chicago, IL	2,701,926	575,510	21.3%	218,566	30.8%	11.0%
Columbus, OH	693,983	128,387	18.5%	46,878	27.2%	7.9%
Denver, CO	545,198	83,415	15.3%	29,880	22.1%	6.6%
Detroit, MI	836,056	262,522	31.4%	116,493	44.9%	20.5%
Houston, TX	1,941,430	444,587	22.9%	187,292	35.0%	9.1%
Indianapolis, IN	765,310	115,562	15.1%	46,962	22.3%	9.0%
Jacksonville, FL	768,537	93,762	12.2%	33,205	15.7%	6.5%
Las Vegas, NV	538,653	63,022	11.7%	22,953	15.8%	5.8%
Los Angeles, CA	3,731,437	750,019	20.1%	292,027	29.2%	8.3%
Louisville, KY	547,839	83,819	15.3%	30,022	22.1%	8.5%
Miami, FL	361,701	102,361	28.3%	33,030	39.8%	8.5%
Milwaukee, WI	556,948	138,680	24.9%	61,781	38.1%	12.4%
New York, NY	7,956,113	1,519,618	19.1%	533,089	27.7%	8.4%
Oakland, CA	373,910	68,426	18.3%	23,252	25.3%	10.5%
Philadelphia, PA	1,406,415	344,572	24.5%	131,116	35.4%	12.4%
Phoenix, AZ	1,377,980	225,989	16.4%	95,153	24.0%	5.6%
San Antonio, TX	1,202,223	224,816	18.7%	91,234	26.7%	6.9%
San Diego, CA	1,208,331	163,125	13.5%	59,709	19.8%	5.9%
Seattle, WA	536,946	66,044	12.3%	10,749	12.2%	6.4%
Washington, DC	515,118	97,872	19.0%	35,916	32.2%	9.1%
Wichita, KS	354,582	52,478	14.8%	17,194	18.2%	8.1%
<b>United States</b>	<b>288,378,137</b>	<b>38,354,292</b>	<b>13.3%</b>	<b>13,529,362</b>	<b>18.5%</b>	<b>6.9%</b>

\* The American Community Survey excludes individuals living in certain types of group housing. For that reason, these population figures are slightly lower than official Census population estimates.

\*\* Under age 18.

Source: 2005 American Community Survey, U.S. Census, available at <http://factfinder.census.gov>. All figures are based on a sample of the population.

**Table 2: Cost-of-Enough-Food Index, 2000-2002 Average**

The cost-of-enough-food index is a measure of how costly it would be to purchase “just enough” food for the household’s needs, as reported by households in the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS). It is not a price index, but price differences likely determine a substantial proportion of the variation in the index. The base of the index, i.e. an index of 1.00, is the national average.

Central City Name	City	Balance of MSA	State Non-metro
Atlanta, GA	1.12	1.02	0.91
Baltimore, MD	0.85	1.01	n/a
Boston, MA	1.10	1.06	0.98
Chicago, IL	1.08	1.05	0.83
Columbus, OH	1.01	1.00	0.87
Denver, CO	1.08	1.09	1.01
Detroit, MI	1.09	0.99	0.85
Houston, TX	0.99	1.06	0.92
Indianapolis, IN	0.92	0.90	0.80
Jacksonville, FL	0.99	1.13	1.09
Las Vegas, NV	1.03	1.03	1.00
Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA	1.14	1.07	1.04
Louisville, KY	1.00	0.95	0.91
Miami-Hialeah, FL	1.05	1.05	1.09
Milwaukee-Wausheka, WI	1.06	0.91	0.80
New York, NY	1.21	1.04	0.89
Oakland, CA	1.01	1.19	1.04
Philadelphia, PA	1.14	1.02*	0.92
Phoenix-Mesa, AZ	1.02	0.99	0.92
San Antonio, TX	1.00	0.95	0.93
San Diego, CA	0.96	1.13	1.04
Seattle-Bellevue-Everett, WA	0.95	1.01	0.90
Washington, DC	1.05	1.03**	N.A.
Wichita, KS	0.99	0.86	0.88

n/a indicates that the state that includes the city has no non-metropolitan area.

\*Balance of MSA for Philadelphia includes Pennsylvania suburbs only (excludes New Jersey).

\*\*Balance of MSA for Washington, DC includes Virginia suburbs only (excludes Maryland).

Source: FRAC calculation with assistance from Mark Nord, using the methodology described in Mark Nord and Ephraim Leibtag, “Does Food Cost Less in Rural Areas,?” USDA ERS. Presented at the annual meeting of the Rural Sociological Society, Sacramento, CA (August 12-15, 2004).

**Table 3: Characteristics of Food Stamp Households in Urban Counties, 2005**

City (County), State	Percentage of households with		Percent of Benefits to HHs with Children	Percentage of recipients who are			
	Child (ren)	Elderly Person		White	Black	Hispanic	Other Race
Atlanta (Fulton), GA	51%	5%	76%	8%	91%	0%	0%
Baltimore (Baltimore), MD	54%	10%	75%	9%	89%	1%	1%
Boston (Suffolk), MA	54%	19%	76%	21%	37%	32%	10%
Chicago (Cook), IL	50%	17%	74%	13%	63%	20%	2%
Columbus (Franklin), OH	60%	11%	85%	40%	57%	0%	0%
Denver (Denver), CO	52%	18%	79%	25%	28%	44%	3%
Detroit (Wayne), MI	45%	15%	67%	20%	77%	1%	1%
Houston (Harris), TX	60%	18%	81%	17%	43%	38%	2%
Indianapolis (Marion), IN	52%	13%	75%	34%	60%	6%	0%
Jacksonville (Duval), FL	65%	14%	86%	41%	55%	4%	0%
Las Vegas (Clark), NV	47%	24%	75%	38%	29%	25%	6%
Los Angeles (Los Angeles), CA	74%	4%	84%	9%	24%	60%	7%
Louisville (Jefferson), KY	46%	19%	72%	39%	56%	4%	0%
Miami (Miami-Dade), FL	36%	45%	58%	2%	29%	68%	1%
Milwaukee (Milwaukee), WI	60%	11%	83%	19%	68%	10%	3%
New York, NY	40%	31%	62%	18%	35%	41%	5%
Oakland (Alameda), CA	88%	0%	93%	8%	45%	19%	27%
Philadelphia (Philadelphia), PA	45%	20%	69%	17%	62%	19%	1%
Phoenix (Maricopa), AZ	65%	11%	83%	31%	14%	49%	6%
San Antonio (Bexar), TX	66%	7%	88%	6%	13%	80%	0%
San Diego (San Diego), CA	81%	5%	89%	26%	23%	45%	5%
Seattle (King), WA	35%	21%	57%	44%	35%	9%	12%
Washington, DC	43%	12%	66%	2%	97%	1%	0%
Wichita (Sedgwick), KS	56%	12%	81%	51%	33%	12%	3%

Source: 2005 Food Stamp Program Quality Control Data, USDA FNS OANE, available at <http://host4.mathematica-mpr.com/fns/fnsqcddata/index.htm> (statistical software known as SAS is needed to access the databases).

**Table 4: Urban Food Stamp Enrollment Trends, 2002-2007**

City (County), State	Data Level*	Food Stamp Enrollment, persons				Change in Caseload		
		May 2007	April 2007	May 2006	May 2002	1-mo.	1-yr.	5-yr.
Atlanta (Fulton), GA	County	104,525	104,006	102,380	73,782	0.5%	2.1%	41.7%
Baltimore (Baltimore), MD	City	107,612	107,601	106,511	96,056	0.0%	1.0%	12.0%
Boston (Suffolk), MA	City	75,791	75,570	70,068	41,739	0.3%	8.2%	81.6%
Chicago (Cook), IL	County	658,420	648,250	650,253	508,133	1.6%	1.3%	29.6%
Columbus (Franklin), OH	County	124,034	121,558	121,756	79,164	2.0%	1.9%	56.7%
Denver (Denver), CO	City-Co.	46,742	46,528	48,186	41,724	0.5%	-3.0%	12.0%
Detroit (Wayne), MI	City	297,174	296,696	262,607	196,937	0.2%	13.2%	50.9%
Houston (Harris), TX	County	304,284	300,534	342,362	161,885	1.2%	-11.1%	88.0%
Indianapolis (Marion), IN	County	114,082	114,398	115,898	81,977	-0.3%	-1.6%	39.2%
Jacksonville (Duval), FL	County	71,348	70,258	67,861	41,520	1.6%	5.1%	71.8%
Las Vegas (Clark), NV	County	92,626	91,637	87,155	73,385	1.1%	6.3%	26.2%
Los Angeles (Los Angeles), CA	County	601,909	600,191	620,489	540,608	0.3%	-3.0%	11.3%
Louisville (Jefferson), KY	County	87,166	86,288	84,185	60,669	1.0%	3.5%	43.7%
Miami (Miami-Dade), FL	County	284,521	279,315	296,138	245,677	1.9%	-3.9%	15.8%
Milwaukee (Milwaukee), WI	County	140,397	140,563	143,185	127,305	-0.1%	-1.9%	10.3%
New York, NY	City	1,095,953	1,101,345	1,098,225	821,179	-0.5%	-0.2%	33.5%
Oakland (Alameda), CA	County	68,461	67,694	67,990	51,848	1.1%	0.7%	32.0%
Philadelphia (Philadelphia), PA	City-Co.	311,460	312,914	297,196	241,430	-0.5%	4.8%	29.0%
Phoenix (Maricopa), AZ	County	268,002	265,992	262,521	175,146	0.8%	2.1%	53.0%
San Antonio (Bexar), TX	County	178,179	177,273	190,460	115,923	0.5%	-6.4%	53.7%
San Diego (San Diego), CA	County	89,939	88,863	83,262	68,902	1.2%	8.0%	30.5%
Seattle (King), WA	County	92,334	93,840	98,050	68,155	-1.6%	-5.8%	35.5%
Washington, DC	City	83,455	83,024	84,787	71,685	0.5%	-1.6%	16.4%
Wichita (Sedgwick), KS	City	42,085	40,910	42,607	31,860	2.9%	-1.2%	32.1%

n/a signifies that the data is not available.

\*This column indicates whether the data is for the city itself or the county that contains it. "City-Co." indicates that the city and county are coterminous, so the data represents both. Atlanta, Columbus, and Houston are not completely contained within one county, but in all cases more than 90 percent of the city's population lives within one county, so only the primary county is represented here. New York City contains five counties: New York, Bronx, Kings, Queens, and Richmond.

Source: City and/or state food stamp/human service agencies. FRAC gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the following people at city and state food stamp agencies: Joseph Argenio, Richard Arnold, Yvonne Boyd, Peter Bull, John Camp, Brian Campbell, Phuoc Cao, Lori Duffy, Terry Drum, Paul Fraunholtz, Frederick Hodges III, Ralph Jones, Joyce Kelly, Mitchell Li, Rosemary Malone, Ricky May, Laurie McCool, Ross McDonald, Michael McKenzie, Idara Nickelson, George Noonan, Maria Pimentel, Bob Reardon, Garrett Skelton, Aldona Vaitkus, and Kent Waltmire.

**Table 5: Local Access Indicator and Unclaimed Benefits, 2005**

City (County), State	Data Level	Enrollment, May 2005 (persons)	Est. Eligible Persons, 2005	Est. Eligible Non-participants 2005	Local Access Indicator	Average Benefit, May 2005	Est. Unclaimed Benefits, 2005
Atlanta (Fulton), GA	County	102,809	136,109	33,300	<b>76%</b>	\$100.88	\$27,009,474
Baltimore (Baltimore), MD	City	101,102	138,065	36,963	<b>73%</b>	\$97.38	\$28,938,323
Boston (Suffolk), MA	City	56,140	109,327	53,187	<b>51%</b>	\$83.65	\$35,770,495
Chicago (Cook), IL	County	622,801	806,794	183,993	<b>77%</b>	\$109.29	\$161,670,118
Columbus (Franklin), OH	County	117,403	155,498	38,095	<b>76%</b>	\$101.77	\$31,171,104
Denver (Denver), CO	City-Co.	44,313	91,980	47,667	<b>48%</b>	\$127.35	\$48,806,601
Detroit (Wayne), MI	City	251,646	257,393	5,747	<b>98%</b>	\$89.54	\$4,137,784
Houston (Harris), TX	County	320,753	681,872	361,119	<b>47%</b>	\$92.00	\$267,112,567
Indianapolis (Marion), IN	County	112,937	131,738	18,801	<b>86%</b>	\$100.17	\$15,142,135
Jacksonville (Duval), FL	County	63,012	107,018	44,006	<b>59%</b>	\$89.43	\$31,640,909
Las Vegas (Clark), NV	County	90,780	207,975	117,195	<b>44%</b>	\$88.97	\$83,829,153
Los Angeles (Los Angeles), CA	County	641,440	1,260,115	618,675	<b>51%</b>	\$113.43	\$564,205,328
Louisville (Jefferson), KY	County	81,297	98,653	17,356	<b>82%</b>	\$95.40	\$13,312,722
Miami (Miami-Dade), FL	County	305,891	436,650	130,759	<b>70%</b>	\$90.06	\$94,680,600
Milwaukee (Milwaukee), WI	County	140,207	176,303	36,096	<b>80%</b>	\$80.83	\$23,458,059
New York, NY	City	1,091,241	1,478,692	387,451	<b>74%</b>	\$107.54	\$334,998,172
Oakland (Alameda), CA	County	69,302	119,728	50,426	<b>58%</b>	\$84.30	\$34,177,279
Philadelphia (Philadelphia), PA	City-Co.	292,972	347,207	54,235	<b>84%</b>	\$94.49	\$41,202,883
Phoenix (Maricopa), AZ	County	272,631	478,852	206,221	<b>57%</b>	\$96.80	\$160,497,814
San Antonio (Bexar), TX	County	178,822	273,133	94,311	<b>65%</b>	\$85.00	\$64,452,145
San Diego (San Diego), CA	County	81,671	261,167	179,496	<b>31%</b>	\$94.15	\$135,872,689
Seattle (King), WA	County	95,735	166,382	70,647	<b>58%</b>	\$91.25	\$51,832,015
Washington, DC	City	85,051	99,012	13,961	<b>86%</b>	\$95.85	\$10,759,071
Wichita (Sedgwick), KS	City	41,842	55,514	13,672	<b>75%</b>	\$90.95	\$9,997,412
<b>Total</b>		<b>5,261,798</b>	<b>8,075,178</b>	<b>2,813,380</b>	<b>65%</b>		<b>\$2,274,674,851</b>

See the appendix for a description of the methodology used to estimate the Local Access Indicator and unclaimed benefits.

Source: FRAC calculations based on data from city and state food stamp human services agencies.

# LINKS AND RESOURCES

## General Information on the Food Stamp Program

Food Research and Action Center's main page on food stamps: [www.frac.org/html/federal\\_food\\_programs/programs/fsp.html](http://www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/programs/fsp.html)

FNS main page on the Food Stamp Program: [www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/](http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/)

FNS's annual report "Characteristics of Food Stamp Households": [www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FSPPartHH.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FSPPartHH.htm)

FRAC's annual report "State of the States: A Profile of Food and Nutrition Programs Across the Nation": [www.frac.org/SOS2007.pdf](http://www.frac.org/SOS2007.pdf)

"Why Food Stamps Matter: Talking Points" by FRAC, America's Second Harvest –The Nation's Food Bank Network, and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities: [www.frac.org/Press\\_Release/05.20.05.html](http://www.frac.org/Press_Release/05.20.05.html)

The National Anti-Hunger Organizations' (NAHO) "Blueprint to End Hunger": [www.frac.org/Blueprint%20to%20End%20Hunger.pdf](http://www.frac.org/Blueprint%20to%20End%20Hunger.pdf)

FRAC's report, "An Advocate's Guide to the Disaster Food Stamp Program": [www.frac.org/pdf/dfspguide06.pdf](http://www.frac.org/pdf/dfspguide06.pdf)

The Hatcher Group's and FRAC's Toolkit, "Take the Challenge: Living on a Food Stamp Budget": [www.frac.org/pdf/FSC\\_Toolkit.pdf](http://www.frac.org/pdf/FSC_Toolkit.pdf)

## Food Stamp Program Participation Data and Studies

Annual FNS reports on state participation rates: [www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FSPPartState.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FSPPartState.htm)

FNS Brief "Calculating the Food Stamp Program Access Index: A Step-By-Step Guide": [www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FILES/Other/PAI2005.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FILES/Other/PAI2005.pdf)

Final rule explaining the Program Access Index (PAI), which replaced the PAR (see Section E): [www.fns.usda.gov/cga/Federal-Register/2005/020705.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cga/Federal-Register/2005/020705.pdf)

Monthly national and state food stamp participation data: [www.frac.org/html/federal\\_food\\_programs/programs/fsp participation.html](http://www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/programs/fsp participation.html)

National food insecurity profile: [www.frac.org/pdf/foodsecprofile2005.pdf](http://www.frac.org/pdf/foodsecprofile2005.pdf)

Brookings Institution report "Leaving Money (and Food) on the Table: Food Stamp Participation in Major Metropolitan Areas and Counties": [www.brookings.org/metro/pubs/20050517\\_FoodStamp.pdf](http://www.brookings.org/metro/pubs/20050517_FoodStamp.pdf)

Children's Defense Fund – New York report "Giving New York's Children a Fair Start in Life: Supports for Working Families": [www.cdfny.org/RR/reports/workingfamilies.pdf](http://www.cdfny.org/RR/reports/workingfamilies.pdf)

Nutrition Consortium of New York State report "Don't Lose Out! Make Your County Stronger with the Federal Food Stamp Program": [www.hungernys.org/programs/foodstamps/trendreport.html](http://www.hungernys.org/programs/foodstamps/trendreport.html)

Legal Services Advocacy Project's "Food Support Report" (Minnesota): [www.lsapmn.org/RTF1.cfm?pagename=Food%20Stamp%20Report](http://www.lsapmn.org/RTF1.cfm?pagename=Food%20Stamp%20Report)

Indiana Coalition on Housing and Homelessness Issues (ICHHI) report "Is Indiana Getting Its Fair Share?": [www.ichhi.org/downloads/reportspublications/final\\_fair\\_share\\_report\\_2005.pdf](http://www.ichhi.org/downloads/reportspublications/final_fair_share_report_2005.pdf)

California Food Policy Advocates report "Lost Dollars, Empty Plates: The Impact of Food Stamps on State and Local Budgets": [www.cfpa.net/lostdollars2005overview.doc](http://www.cfpa.net/lostdollars2005overview.doc)

National Priorities Project's report "Half of Low-Income People Not Receiving Food Stamps,": [www.nationalpriorities.org/images/stories/nationalprioritiesprojectfoodstampsaugust2007.pdf](http://www.nationalpriorities.org/images/stories/nationalprioritiesprojectfoodstampsaugust2007.pdf)

## **Food Stamp Outreach**

Food Stamp Program toll-free information number: 1-800-221-5689

FNS' Food Stamp Outreach Resource Center: [www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/coalition/resources.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/coalition/resources.htm)

FNS' Food Stamps Eligibility Pre-screening Tool: <http://209.48.219.49/fns/>

FRAC's Guide to Food Stamp Outreach Collaborations: [www.frac.org/html/news/fsp\\_guide2006.html](http://www.frac.org/html/news/fsp_guide2006.html)

## **National Agencies and Organizations Conducting State and Local Food Stamp Work:**

National League of Cities (NLC) Benefits for Working Families webpage: [www.nlc.org/iyef/program\\_areas/family\\_economic\\_success/427.cfm](http://www.nlc.org/iyef/program_areas/family_economic_success/427.cfm)

NLC Cities Weekly article on multibenefit outreach initiative: [www.nlc.org/Newsroom/Nation\\_s\\_Cities\\_Weekly\\_v2/Weekly\\_NCW/2004\\_v2/03\\_v2/08\\_v7/2921.aspx](http://www.nlc.org/Newsroom/Nation_s_Cities_Weekly_v2/Weekly_NCW/2004_v2/03_v2/08_v7/2921.aspx)

National Conference of State Legislatures: [www.ncsl.org/statefed/humserv/hunger.htm](http://www.ncsl.org/statefed/humserv/hunger.htm)

American Public Human Services Association: [www.aphsa.org/home/news.asp](http://www.aphsa.org/home/news.asp)

United States Conference of Mayors (USCM): <http://usmayors.org/USCM/home.asp>

USCM's Hunger and Homelessness Survey: [www.usmayors.org/uscm/hungersurvey/2004/onlinereport/HungerAndHomelessnessReport2004.pdf](http://www.usmayors.org/uscm/hungersurvey/2004/onlinereport/HungerAndHomelessnessReport2004.pdf)

Annie E. Casey Foundation's Making Connections initiative: [www.aecf.org/initiatives/mc/](http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/mc/)

Making Connections sites: [www.aecf.org/initiatives/mc/sites/](http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/mc/sites/)

## Methodological Appendix and Worksheet

This appendix describes the methodology used to calculate FRAC’s Local Access Indicator and estimates of lost federal benefits. It is also intended to be used as a worksheet by advocates who are interested in replicating the Local Access Indicator for other local jurisdictions or in updating FRAC’s estimates for future years. Each step includes a sample calculation for Los Angeles County.

Due to the complexity of food stamp rules and the limitations of the data used, this methodology involves several estimates, simplifications and omissions. This methodology is not as comprehensive as USDA’s methodology for calculating the official state food stamp participation rates. Any numbers generated with this methodology, including those published in this report, should be treated as estimates only. A listing of limitations of the methodology follows each step. Most of the limitations are on the “generous” side, meaning that they tend to reduce the estimated number of eligible people and hence increase the Local Access Indicator.

To determine how closely this methodology reproduces existing food stamp participation estimates, FRAC replicated the 2002 state-level participation levels using the local access indicator methodology. The Pearson correlation coefficient between FRAC’s Local Access Indicator and published USDA participation rates was 0.87 (where 0 indicates no correlation and 1 indicates perfect correlation). This is a strong level of correlation.

In addition to enrollment and benefits data from state food stamp agencies, the methodology relies on two external data sources within the U.S. Census. One is the American Community Survey (ACS), which reports data annually, and the other is the 2000 Census Summary File 3 (SF-3). Links to access these data sets (accurate as of July 2007) appear below:

ACS 2005: [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet?\\_program=ACS&\\_submenuId=&\\_lang=en&\\_ts=](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet?_program=ACS&_submenuId=&_lang=en&_ts=)

2000 Census SF-3: [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet?\\_program=DEC&\\_submenuId=&\\_lang=en&\\_ts=](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet?_program=DEC&_submenuId=&_lang=en&_ts=)

Simply follow each link, select either “County” or “Place” (if you are working with city-level data) under “geographic type,” and find your state and county/city. Note that ACS data before 2005 is available only for counties and cities with populations of 250,000 or greater, but jurisdictions over 65,000 people were added to the ACS starting in 2005. Once you have selected your location, use the table numbers that appear within the steps below to find the appropriate data.

### Step 1: Income Eligibility

First we estimate how many people in each city pass the gross income test for food stamp eligibility by determining how many people live below 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). The ACS currently reports how many people live below 125 percent of the FPL but not 130 percent, but we use data from the 2000 Census to derive the ratio of the population under 130 percent of the FPL to the population under 125 percent of the FPL. We then multiply the population living below 125 percent of poverty by this ratio to estimate the number of people living below 130 percent of poverty in 2005.

		Sample: L.A. County	Your City
1.1	Obtain the number of people living below 125 percent of the national Federal Poverty Level from <b>ACS Table B17002</b> .	2,180, 217	

1.2	Obtain the ratio of the number of people living below 130 percent of the FPL to the number of people living below 125 percent of the FPL from <b>Census 2000 SF-3 Table PCT50</b> . [This table is disaggregated by age, so you will need to add together people in different age categories but the same income levels to derive this ratio.]	1.0483	
1.3	Multiply the result of step 1.1 by the result of step 1.2. This is the estimate of income-eligible people.	2,285,603	

Limitations:

- Because ACS data are drawn from a sample of the population, they are subject to some range of statistical error. This limitation applies to all steps that involve ACS data.
- The ACS survey is limited to the U.S. population living in households and excludes those living in institutions, college dormitories, and group quarters. Since some people in such living quarters may be eligible for food stamps, this limitation reduces the estimated number of eligible people.
- Using the ratio of people under 130 percent of the FPL to people under 125 percent of the FPL introduces some error, since the ratio comes from a different year. However, this ratio seems unlikely to change significantly in a four-year period.
- Some people, such as certain senior citizens, may be eligible for food stamps with incomes higher than 130 percent of the FPL. This limitation also reduces the estimated number of eligible people.

## Step 2: Immigration Status

The result of step 1.3 includes some people who are income-eligible for food stamps but ineligible due to their immigration status. Step 2 approximates the number of people in this category.

		Sample: L.A. County	Your City
2.1	Obtain the number of foreign-born non-citizens who arrived in the U.S. in the year 2000 or later from <b>ACS Table B05005</b> .	521,974	
2.2	Multiply the result of step 2.1 by 5/6. Most immigrants must be Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs) for 5 years before they can be eligible for food stamps. The result of step 2.1 represents all foreign-born non-citizens who entered in 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, or 2005, so multiplying by 5/6 approximates the number of people who have been LPRs for less than 5 years.	434,978	
2.3	Obtain the percentage of foreign-born non-citizens who were below 100 percent of the FPL in 2000 from <b>Census 2000 SF-3 Table PCT51</b> . Data on non-citizens below 130 percent of the FPL are not available, so step 2.5 corrects for this.	0.2709	

2.4	Obtain the ratio of the number of people living below 130 percent of the FPL to the number of people living below 100 percent of the FPL from <b>Census 2000 SF-3 Table PCT50</b> . Note that this calculation is similar to step 1.2.	1.3992	
2.5	Multiply the result of step 2.1 by the result of step 2.3 and then by the result of step 2.4. This is an estimate of people below 130 percent of the FPL who have been LPRs for less than 5 years.	164,847	
2.6	Subtract the result of step 2.5 from the result of step 1.3. This is an estimate of how many people are eligible according to income and immigration status.	2,120,756	

Limitations:

- Steps 2.3 – 2.5 introduce some error, since poverty status is unlikely to be randomly distributed among immigrants arriving in different years (step 2.3) and the income profile of immigrants may not be proportional to the income profile of the population at large (step 2.4). There may also be some error from using data from different years.
- We are not able to account for immigrants who are refugees, asylees, or children under 18, all of whom may be eligible regardless of entry date. This limitation reduces the estimated number of eligible people.

### Step 3: Resource Eligibility

To be eligible for food stamps, households may only have \$2,000 in countable resources (or \$3,000 if at least one person in the household is age 60 or older or is disabled). The USDA estimates that 20.1 percent of people who would otherwise be eligible for food stamps are ineligible due to resources.<sup>22</sup>

		Sample: L.A. County	Your City
3.1	Multiply the result of step 2.6 by 0.799. This approximates the number of people who are eligible according to income, immigration status, and resources.	1,694,484	

Limitations:

- The main limitation of this step is that the 20.1 percent estimate is a nationwide average. There may be variation in resources in different regions of the country (e.g., if more people have cars in the west) or between urban and rural settings (e.g., if fewer people have cars in cities).
- The 20.1 percent estimate is based on numbers of households, while the rest of the methodology is based on numbers of persons. It is not clear if this limitation biases the estimates in one direction or the other.

### Step 4: SSI (California Only)

This step applies to cities in California only. If your city is not in California, skip to Step 5. In California, individuals

22 This estimate is from Table 2 of Carole Trippe and Bruce Schechter, "Tables Describing the Asset and Vehicle Holdings of Low-Income Households in 2002," USDA (May 2007), available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/menu/Published/FSP/FILES/ProgramDesign/AssetVehicle2002.pdf>.

receiving cash assistance in the form of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) are ineligible for Food Stamps. This step subtracts those individuals from those who are otherwise eligible.

		Sample: L.A. County	Your City
4.1	Calculate the proportion of people below the FPL who are receiving SSI in your city from <b>ACS Table B17015</b> . Subtract this proportion from 1 to obtain the proportion of people below the FPL who are not receiving SSI.	0.744	
4.2	Multiply the result of step 3.1 by the result of step 4.1. This is an estimate of the number of people who are eligible for food stamps and also not receiving SSI.	1,260,115	

Limitations:

- The ACS only provides data on people receiving SSI below 100 percent of the FPL, rather than 130 percent of the FPL as would be most desirable. Since it is likely that the proportion of people receiving SSI is lower between 100 and 130 percent of the FPL than below 100 percent of FPL, this limitation once again decreases the estimated number of eligible people.
- This step assumes that immigration and asset eligibility are randomly distributed among people receiving and not receiving SSI. This may not hold true.

**Step 5: Local Access Indicator**

The result of step 3.1 (or step 4.2 in California) is an estimate of the total number of eligible people in the city. We now use this estimate and the number of people actually enrolled to calculate FRAC’s Local Access Indicator.

		Sample: L.A. County	Your City
5.1	Obtain the number of actual food stamp recipients in a month (or an average across months) in 2005. FRAC used May 2005 in this report.	641,440	
5.2	Divide the result of step 5.1 by the result of step 3.1 (or step 4.2 in California) and multiply by 100. This is FRAC’s Local Access Indicator.	51%	

Limitations:

- There are other factors affecting eligibility that we have been unable to account for in this methodology, such as ABAWD (able-bodied adult without dependent) status, restrictions on students and strikers, and work and training requirements

## Step 6: Lost Benefits

The final step in the process is to estimate how much in federal benefits was lost in the city due to under-participation in the Food Stamp Program.

		Sample: L.A. County	Your City
6.1	Obtain the average monthly food stamp benefit per person for the same month (or average of months) as in step 5.1.	\$113.43	
6.2	Subtract the result of step 5.1 from the result of step 3.1 (or, in California, step 4.2). This is the estimated number of non-participating eligible people.	618,675	
6.3	Multiply the result of step 6.1 by the result of step 6.2.	\$70,174,792	
6.4	Multiply the result of step 6.3 by 0.67. Eligible but non-participating people would, on average, receive lower benefits than participating people because people who would receive lower benefits have less of an incentive to participate. Based on USDA data, FRAC estimates that, on average, an eligible non-participant would receive 67 percent of the benefits of a participant. <sup>1</sup>	\$47,017,111	
6.5	Multiply the result of step 6.4 by 12 to convert from months to years.	\$564,205,328	

### Limitations:

- Once again, the 67 percent figure is a national average, so there may be regional or urban-rural variation in the relative levels of benefits for which participants and non-participants are eligible.