

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

## Local Access Indicator (LAI) Participation Measures\*

San Diego (San Diego), CA	27%
Las Vegas (Clark), NV	43%
Jacksonville (Duval), FL	51%
Seattle (King), WA	51%
Los Angeles (Los Angeles), CA	52%
Boston (Suffolk), MA	55%
Houston (Harris), TX	55%
Denver (Denver), CO	59%
Oakland (Alameda), CA	60%
Phoenix (Maricopa), AZ	60%
New York, NY	66%
San Antonio (Bexar), TX	67%
Baltimore (Baltimore), MD	75%
Atlanta (Fulton), GA	77%
Chicago (Cook), IL	80%
Miami (Miami-Dade), FL	80%
Philadelphia (Philadelphia), PA	81%
Wichita (Sedgwick), KS	83%
Columbus (Franklin), OH	85%
Louisville (Jefferson), KY	86%
Detroit (Wayne), MI	90%
Milwaukee (Milwaukee), WI	90%
Indianapolis (Marion), IN	94%
Memphis (Shelby), TN	99%

\* See Pg. 22 for LAI Methodology

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## ABOUT FRAC

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.

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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 20 states, looking particularly at their food stamp participation measures and the number of unserved people.

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

- Among the 24 urban areas featured in the report, all but four had a poverty rate higher than the national rate of 13.1 percent in 2004.
- In most of the urban areas, at least one child in four lived below the poverty line in 2004, and in combination the 24 were home to more than two and a quarter million poor children.
- In 2004, 15.4 percent of households in principal (not necessarily inner) cities nationally experienced food insecurity, as compared with 11.9 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 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 are to low-income people in urban America.

In the 24 urban areas we studied, between 2001 and 2006, food stamp caseloads grew in all those 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 66 percent of eligible people in the 24 cities and urban counties participated in the program in 2004.

The lowest estimated Local Access Indicators for participation measures were for San Diego County (San Diego), California (27 percent); Clark County (Las Vegas), Nevada (43 percent); King County (Seattle), Washington (51 percent); and Duval County (Jacksonville), Florida (51 percent).

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<sup>1</sup> Because food stamp data are not always available on the city level, in most cases we use county-level data for the urban areas. Since the Food Stamp Program is usually administered on the county level, and the cities represent a large share of the population of the counties that include them (generally between 50 and 100 percent), county data also are a good surrogate for city data.



The highest estimated Local Access Indicators were for Shelby County (Memphis), Tennessee; Marion County (Indianapolis), Indiana; Milwaukee County (Milwaukee), Wisconsin; and Wayne County (Detroit), Michigan. In each of them 90 percent or more of eligible people accessed food stamp benefits.

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 \$1.9 billion in federally-funded benefits were left unclaimed by the 24 cities and urban counties in 2004. The places that were missing out on the most federal food stamp benefits were Los Angeles County, California (\$463 million); New York, New York (\$430 million); and Harris County (Houston), Texas (\$168 million).

Much 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 ([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 2005, a monthly average of more than 25 million people received benefits, totaling almost \$28.6 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 legal 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. But much work remains to be done.

This paper provides a picture of trends and promising practices in the Food Stamp Program in America's big cities and urban counties. The analysis focuses on a selection of 24 major U.S.

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<sup>2</sup> See U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (USDA FNS), "Food Stamp Program Participation and Costs," at [www.fns.usda.gov/pd/fssummar.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/fssummar.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 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. Undocumented immigrants are not eligible. 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 legal immigrants 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).

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 the 24 largest in the United States, although they are all among the largest. 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 often are 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.

## I. Hunger and Poverty in America's Big Cities

America's big cities are home to both great wealth and persistent hunger, food insecurity, and poverty. Among the 24 big cities covered in this report, all but four had a higher poverty rate than the national rate of 13.1 percent in 2004.<sup>5</sup> (See Table 1.) 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. Detroit had the highest poverty rate, with one of every three of its residents living below the federal poverty level. In Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Houston, Memphis, Miami, Milwaukee, New York City, 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 2004, and in Atlanta and Detroit it was nearly one in two children.

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<sup>5</sup> 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?\\_lang=en&\\_program=ACSS&\\_submenuId=datasets\\_2](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet?_lang=en&_program=ACSS&_submenuId=datasets_2).



In addition, millions of people in America's big cities are searching for – but are unable to find – jobs. Twenty-two of the 24 cities had a higher unemployment rate in 2004 than the Census-reported national rate of 7.2 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), 15.4 percent of households in principal cities experienced food insecurity in 2004, as compared with 11.9 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 also had a higher prevalence of food insecurity with hunger: 5.1 percent of principal city households experienced hunger in 2004, 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, 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>

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<sup>6</sup> 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 “food insecure with hunger” if “one or more household members were hungry, at least some time during the year, because they couldn't afford enough food.” See Mark Nord, Margaret Andrews, and Steven Carlson, “Household Food Security in the United States, 2004,” Economic Research Report Number 11, USDA ERS (October 2005). The report is available at [www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err11/](http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err11/). For data on food insecurity in MSAs and principal cities, see Table 2.

<sup>7</sup> 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” with the U.S. as a whole, the differences likely would be even starker.

<sup>8</sup> Nord, Andrews, and Carlson (2005), *supra* note 6.

<sup>9</sup> 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).

<sup>10</sup> 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).

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 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.

## II. 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.

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<sup>11</sup> 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.

<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).

<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 [www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/participation.htm#Characteristics](http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/participation.htm#Characteristics).

More than half, or 55 percent, of households receiving food stamps among the urban counties in 2004 contained children. But San Diego and Los Angeles Counties stand out on the high end, with 92 percent and 75 percent of households containing children, respectively.

In 15 of the 24 cities, roughly 75 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 San Diego (98 percent), San Antonio (90 percent), Phoenix (87 percent), and Houston (86 percent).

Nearly one in six 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 (47 percent) and New York City (33 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 Atlanta and Baltimore. The percentage of Hispanic food stamp recipients was highest in San Antonio and Miami.

### **III. 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 were not available on the city level, the data represent 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: 2001 to 2006*

Between May 2001 and May 2006, a time when national food stamp growth was 50.9 percent, food stamp caseloads grew in all of the 24 cities for which data were available.<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. Two urban counties in the region saw their caseloads more than double in five years: Harris County (Houston), Texas (127 percent) and Maricopa County (Phoenix), Arizona (116 percent growth). Cities outside these regions experienced less dramatic but still substantial caseload growth as well, including Duval County (Jacksonville), Florida, and Franklin County (Columbus), Ohio, with roughly 90 percent and 88 percent increases in recipients, respectively, from 2001 to 2006. The box on this page shows the top and bottom five cities in caseload growth from 2001 to 2006.

<b>Top and Bottom Five Cities/Urban Counties for Caseload Growth, May 2001 – May 2006</b>	
<b>Top Five</b>	
Harris County (Houston), TX	127.0%
Maricopa County (Phoenix), AZ	116.0%
Duval County (Jacksonville), FL	89.8%
Franklin County (Columbus), OH	88.4%
Bexar County (San Antonio), TX	79.1%
<b>Bottom Five</b>	
Los Angeles County (Los Angeles), CA	8.1%
Baltimore County (Baltimore), MD	14.7%
San Diego County (San Diego), CA	18.0%
Miami-Dade County (Miami), FL	19.9%
Philadelphia County (Philadelphia), PA	21.3%

Nationwide trends contributed to this growth, including the recession early in the decade, slow growth in employment and wages since the 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, so the caseload growth should not be taken as a sign that everyone in need of food assistance is being served.

### *Participation Gaps*

Only 60.5 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,

<sup>14</sup> For the national and state trends, see FRAC's posting of May 2006 food stamp enrollment data, available at [www.frac.org/html/news/fsp/2006.5\\_FSP.html](http://www.frac.org/html/news/fsp/2006.5_FSP.html). FRAC was able to obtain May 2001 and May 2006 data for 22 of the 24 cities, and all showed an increase in participation over the five year period.

<sup>15</sup> See Allison Barrett and Anni Poikolainen, "Food Stamp Program Participation Rates: 2004," USDA (June 2006), available at [www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FILES/Participation/FSPPart2004.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FILES/Participation/FSPPart2004.pdf).

perceptions of stigma surrounding the program, low minimum benefits (especially common for senior citizens) that people feel are not worth a burdensome application process, the belief that there is a five-year time 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 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 2004. 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 used to calculate the Local Access Indicator. In brief, we estimated the number of people who might qualify for food stamps in each city and then divided the actual food stamp enrollment for May 2004 by this number to yield the Local Access Indicator. To approximate the denominator – the number of people who might qualify for food stamps – we estimated the number of people below 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (the food stamp gross income limit) and then estimated how many of those people are ineligible due to their immigration status or assets.

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<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."

<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), *supra* note 15, and USDA's annual reports of state-level food stamp participation rates, 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 Web page 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).

On average, we estimate that 66 percent of people who might qualify for food stamps participated in the program in these 24 cities. This is slightly higher than the national average of 60.5 percent of eligible people as calculated by USDA. In May 2004, more than 5 million people enrolled in the program in these cities, while 2.6 million more likely would qualify but did not enroll.

The lowest Local Access Indicator was 27 percent in San Diego County (San Diego), California. Clark County (Las Vegas), Nevada; Duval County (Jacksonville), Florida;

King County (Seattle), Washington; and Los Angeles County (Los Angeles), California were also on the low end of the participation spectrum, each with an indicator below 55 percent.

<b>Top and Bottom Five Cities and Urban Counties for Local Access Indicator, 2004</b>	
<b>Top Five</b>	
Shelby County (Memphis), TN	99%
Marion County (Indianapolis), IN	94%
Milwaukee County (Milwaukee), WI	90%
Detroit, MI	90%
Jefferson County (Louisville), KY	86%
<b>Bottom Five</b>	
Los Angeles County (Los Angeles), CA	52%
King County (Seattle), WA	51%
Duval County (Jacksonville), FL	51%
Clark County (Las Vegas), NV	43%
San Diego County (San Diego), CA	27%

These indicators generally are consistent with the official USDA participation rates for the states containing these cities. California, Florida, and Nevada were all in the bottom quarter of states for food stamp participation in 2003; King County (Seattle) is the only surprise, as Washington falls in the middle range for state participation rates.<sup>18</sup>

The highest Local Access Indicators were in Shelby County (Memphis), Tennessee; and Marion County (Indianapolis), Indiana, where at least 94 percent of eligible people enrolled in the program in 2004. Again, this is consistent with state data: out of all the states, Tennessee and Indiana were within the top 15 states for food stamp participation in 2003, with Tennessee second overall.<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 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

<sup>18</sup> Laura A. Castner and Allen L. Schirm, “Reaching Those in Need: State Food Stamp Participation Rates in 2003,” USDA (November 2005), available at [www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FILES/Participation/Reaching2003.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FILES/Participation/Reaching2003.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Castner and Schirm (2005), *supra* note 18.

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 that were missing out on the most federal food stamp benefits were Los Angeles County (\$463 million) and New York City (\$430 million). Harris County (Houston), San Diego County, Maricopa County (Phoenix), and Cook County (Chicago) each lost in excess of \$100 million per year in food stamp benefits. In total, more than \$1.9 billion in federally funded benefits were left unclaimed by the 24 big cities and urban counties in 2004.

<b>Top Five Cities and Urban Counties for Missed Food Stamp Benefits, 2004</b>	
Los Angeles County (Los Angeles), CA	\$462,787,080
New York, NY	\$430,061,952
Harris County (Houston), TX	\$168,366,934
San Diego County, CA	\$148,495,467
Maricopa County (Phoenix), AZ	\$124,518,794

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.

## 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

<sup>20</sup> 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).

<sup>21</sup> 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 [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’s analysis is 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 <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.

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.



**Table 1: Demographic and Economic Data, 2004**

City	Population*	Individuals in Poverty	Poverty Rate	Children in Poverty**	Childhood Poverty Rate	Unemployment Rate
Atlanta, GA	348,907	97,158	27.8%	42,014	48.1%	10.5%
Baltimore, MD	605,702	144,893	23.9%	53,383	34.6%	13.3%
Boston, MA	521,866	98,989	19.0%	28,447	26.9%	7.5%
Chicago, IL	2,704,677	571,727	21.1%	219,762	31.0%	11.6%
Columbus, OH	696,576	116,668	16.7%	40,354	23.5%	8.1%
Denver, CO	542,525	81,948	15.1%	32,932	24.8%	8.3%
Detroit, MI	836,851	280,948	33.6%	120,218	47.8%	18.9%
Houston, TX	1,940,592	379,562	19.6%	155,477	29.5%	8.8%
Indianapolis, IN	763,753	99,701	13.1%	42,388	19.9%	9.5%
Jacksonville, FL	760,802	102,499	13.5%	40,258	19.3%	8.3%
Las Vegas, NV	534,630	61,932	11.6%	22,697	16.9%	7.5%
Los Angeles, CA	3,728,806	672,763	18.0%	245,159	25.3%	7.8%
Louisville, KY	538,438	84,302	15.7%	34,250	25.4%	8.4%
Memphis, TN	625,478	153,761	24.6%	62,709	38.5%	11.7%
Miami, FL	323,272	91,542	28.3%	29,577	41.3%	9.2%
Milwaukee, WI	551,196	143,358	26.0%	62,419	41.3%	12.7%
New York, NY	7,895,185	1,600,574	20.3%	581,324	30.7%	8.3%
Oakland, CA	363,012	71,469	19.7%	27,452	34.0%	8.9%
Philadelphia, PA	1,408,588	351,305	24.9%	130,240	35.7%	14.2%
Phoenix, AZ	1,332,770	210,457	15.9%	85,265	22.2%	6.3%
San Antonio, TX	1,191,281	235,657	19.8%	99,963	29.9%	9.5%
San Diego, CA	1,240,399	161,755	13.0%	60,545	19.9%	5.3%
Seattle, WA	555,475	95,837	17.3%	19,758	22.0%	8.8%
Wichita, KS	343,551	41,842	12.2%	11,377	13.0%	8.2%
United States	284,577,956	37,161,510	13.1%	13,245,202	18.4%	7.2%

\* 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: 2004 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
Memphis, TN	1.03	1.00	0.88
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
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).

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, 2004**

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	44	13	70	8	92	0	0
Baltimore (Baltimore), MD	48	12	70	10	90	0	0
Boston (Suffolk), MA	62	11	77	21	36	31	12
Chicago (Cook), IL	43	23	70	10	65	21	2
Columbus (Franklin), OH	58	15	82	41	53	4	2
Denver (Denver), CO	43	21	73	21	28	46	4
Detroit (Wayne), MI	53	17	75	17	79	1	2
Houston (Harris), TX	69	15	86	10	45	42	4
Indianapolis (Marion), IN	63	10	83	45	52	3	0
Jacksonville (Duval), FL	57	15	78	27	70	4	0
Las Vegas (Clark), NV	51	24	80	38	34	23	4
Los Angeles (Los Angeles), CA	75	2	83	13	20	63	3
Louisville (Jefferson), KY	54	9	77	47	51	1	0
Memphis (Shelby), TN	55	15	79	12	87	0	0
Miami (Miami-Dade), FL	33	47	57	3	26	71	0
Milwaukee (Milwaukee), WI	60	12	82	19	68	11	2
New York, NY	32	33	52	14	28	57	11
Oakland (Alameda), CA	61	16	77	12	41	19	29
Philadelphia (Philadelphia), PA	47	21	71	15	62	18	5
Phoenix (Maricopa), AZ	70	11	87	32	12	48	8
San Antonio (Bexar), TX	74	11	90	8	15	78	0
San Diego (San Diego), CA	92	3	98	19	27	44	9
Seattle (King), WA	42	17	65	51	22	9	17
Wichita (Sedgwick), KS	51	13	78	57	29	9	4

Source: 2004 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, 2001-2006**

City (County), State	Data Level*	Food Stamp Enrollment, persons				Change in Caseload		
		May 2006	April 2006	May 2005	May 2001	1-mo.	1-yr.	5-yr.
Atlanta (Fulton), GA	County	102,380	102,490	102,809	65,265	-0.1%	-0.4%	56.9%
Baltimore (Baltimore), MD	City	106,511	106,281	101,102	92,893	0.2%	5.4%	14.7%
Boston (Suffolk), MA	City	70,068	69,688	57,052	n/a	0.5%	22.8%	n/a
Chicago (Cook), IL	County	650,253	649,236	622,801	474,020	0.2%	4.4%	37.2%
Columbus (Franklin), OH	County	121,756	n/a	117,403	64,631	n/a	3.7%	88.4%
Denver (Denver), CO	City-Co.	48,186	48,186	44,313	37,920**	0.0%	8.7%	27.1%
Detroit (Wayne), MI	City	262,607	260,864	251,646	177,623	0.7%	4.4%	47.4%
Houston (Harris), TX	County	342,362	353,855	320,753	150,848	-3.2%	6.7%	127.0%
Indianapolis (Marion), IN	County	115,898	115,728	112,937	69,028	0.1%	2.6%	67.9%
Jacksonville (Duval), FL	County	67,861	66,594	63,012	35,761	1.9%	7.7%	89.8%
Las Vegas (Clark), NV	County	87,155	87,176	90,780	53,506	0.0%	-4.0%	62.9%
Los Angeles (Los Angeles), CA	County	620,489	620,423	641,440	573,980	0.0%	-3.3%	8.1%
Louisville (Jefferson), KY	County	84,185	83,303	81,297	52,821	1.1%	3.6%	59.4%
Memphis (Shelby), TN	County	182,319	179,782	174,497	116,427	1.4%	4.5%	56.6%
Miami (Miami-Dade), FL	County	296,138	294,252	305,891	246,943	0.6%	-3.2%	19.9%
Milwaukee (Milwaukee), WI	County	143,185	142,825	140,207	107,521	0.3%	2.1%	33.2%
New York, NY	City	1,098,225	1,097,110	1,091,241	841,010	0.1%	0.6%	30.6%
Oakland (Alameda), CA	County	67,990	68,011	69,302	60,155	0.0%	-1.9%	35.4%
Philadelphia (Philadelphia), PA	City-Co.	297,196	297,449	292,972	244,960	-0.1%	1.4%	21.3%
Phoenix (Maricopa), AZ	County	262,521	265,129	272,631	121,542	-1.0%	-3.7%	116.0%
San Antonio (Bexar), TX	County	190,460	194,437	178,822	106,328	-2.0%	6.5%	79.1%
San Diego (San Diego), CA	County	83,262	82,222	81,671	70,555	1.3%	1.9%	18.0%
Seattle (King), WA	County	98,050	98,907	95,735	62,664	-0.9%	2.4%	56.5%
Wichita (Sedgwick), KS	City	42,607	42,887	41,842	25,913***	-0.7%	1.8%	64.4%

n/a signifies that the data are not available.

\*This column indicates whether the data are for the city itself or the county that contains it. "City-Co." indicates that the city and county are coterminous, so the data represent 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.

\*\*May 2001 data were not available for Denver. The enrollment listed here is for September 2001.

\*\*\*May 2001 data were not available for Wichita. The enrollment listed here is for June 2001.

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: Rick Allgeyer, Joseph Argenio, Richard Arnold, Richard Burgis, Yvonne Boyd, Peter Bull, Phuoc Cao, Mike Cunningham, Lynn M. Draschil, Lori Duffy, Terry Drum, Erin Falsetta, Frederick Hodges III, Ralph Jones, Mitchell Li, Rosemary Malone, Ricky May, Laurie McCool, Ross McDonald, Michael McKenzie, Idara Nickelson, Maria Pimentel, Pamela Raymond, Bob Reardon, Terry A. Salacina, Garrett Skelton, Robert Stalter, and Kent Waltmire.

**Table 5: Local Access Indicator and Unclaimed Benefits, 2004**

City (County), State	Data Level	Enrollment May 2004 (persons)	Est. Eligible Persons, 2004	Est. Eligible Non-participants 2004	Local Access Indicator	Average Benefit, May 2004	Est. Unclaimed Benefits, 2004
Atlanta (Fulton), GA	County	100,523	129,951	29,428	77%	\$95.41	\$22,574,113
Baltimore (Baltimore), MD	City	98,303	130,979	32,676	75%	\$91.34	\$23,996,392
Boston (Suffolk), MA	City	52,045	94,503	42,458	55%	\$80.07	\$27,563,992
Chicago (Cook), IL	County	592,295	744,290	151,995	80%	\$97.40	\$119,026,677
Columbus (Franklin), OH	County	107,520	126,837	19,317	85%	\$93.41	\$14,507,384
Denver (Denver), CO	City-Co.	47,478	80,989	33,511	59%	n/a	n/a
Detroit (Wayne), MI	City	232,741	258,267	25,526	90%	\$81.30	\$16,685,121
Houston (Harris), TX	County	291,628	532,331	240,703	55%	\$87.00	\$168,366,934
Indianapolis (Marion), IN	County	107,962	115,322	7,360	94%	\$94.47	\$5,590,206
Jacksonville (Duval), FL	County	58,147	113,514	55,367	51%	\$86.04	\$38,300,765
Las Vegas (Clark), NV	County	91,570	215,645	124,075	43%	\$83.53	\$83,326,437
Los Angeles (Los Angeles), CA	County	633,121	1,219,636	586,515	52%	\$98.14	\$462,787,080
Louisville (Jefferson), KY	County	77,476	89,969	12,493	86%	\$89.44	\$8,983,686
Memphis (Shelby), TN	County	167,225	168,770	1,545	99%	\$87.78	\$1,090,386
Miami (Miami-Dade), FL	County	304,011	382,259	78,248	80%	\$84.48	\$53,147,544
Milwaukee (Milwaukee), WI	County	142,159	157,401	15,242	90%	\$70.86	\$8,683,587
New York, NY	City	987,074	1,493,467	506,393	66%	\$105.63	\$430,061,952
Oakland (Alameda), CA	County	63,544	105,619	42,075	60%	\$79.36	\$26,846,139
Philadelphia (Philadelphia), PA	City-Co.	276,008	339,496	63,488	81%	\$86.89	\$44,352,437
Phoenix (Maricopa), AZ	County	257,738	428,323	170,585	60%	\$90.79	\$124,518,794
San Antonio (Bexar), TX	County	171,014	256,920	85,906	67%	\$81.00	\$55,945,423
San Diego (San Diego), CA	County	80,502	295,941	215,439	27%	\$85.73	\$148,495,467
Seattle (King), WA	County	84,675	164,976	80,301	51%	\$83.64	\$53,999,660
Wichita (Sedgwick), KS	City	40,245	48,783	8,538	83%	\$85.05	\$5,838,301
Total		5,065,004	7,694,188	2,629,184	66%		\$1,944,457,366

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/participation.htm#Characteristics](http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/participation.htm#Characteristics)

FRAC's annual report "State of the States: A Profile of Food and Nutrition Programs Across the Nation":  
[www.frac.org/State\\_Of\\_States/2006/2006\\_SOS\\_Report.pdf](http://www.frac.org/State_Of_States/2006/2006_SOS_Report.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)

### *Food Stamp Program Participation Data and Studies*

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

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/foodsecprofile2004.pdf](http://www.frac.org/pdf/foodsecprofile2004.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/reportpublications/final\\_fair\\_share\\_report\\_2005.pdf](http://www.ichhi.org/downloads/reportpublications/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)

### ***Food Stamp Outreach***

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

FNS’s 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’s 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 Work:***

National League of Cities (NLC) Benefits for Working Families Web page:

[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/weekly\\_ncw/2004/03/08/2921.cfm](http://www.nlc.org/Newsroom/nation_s_cities_weekly/weekly_ncw/2004/03/08/2921.cfm)

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*:

<http://www.usmayors.org/uscm/hungersurvey/2004/online/online/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 2006) appear below:

ACS 2004:

[http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet?\\_program=ACS&\\_submenuId=datasets\\_2&\\_lang=en&\\_ts=](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet?_program=ACS&_submenuId=datasets_2&_lang=en&_ts=)

2000 Census SF-3:

[http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet?\\_program=DEC&\\_submenuId=datasets\\_1&\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet?_program=DEC&_submenuId=datasets_1&_lang=en)



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 will be added to the ACS starting in 2005 (to be released in 2006). 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 2004.

		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> .	2,193,645	
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.	2,299,680	

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> .	419,976	
2.2	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 2.4 corrects for this.	0.2709	
2.3	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	
2.4	Multiply the result of step 2.1 by the result of step 2.2 and then by the result of step 2.3. This is an estimate of people below 130 percent of the FPL who have been LPRs for less than 5 years.	159,161	
2.5	Subtract the result of step 2.4 from the result of step 1.3. This is an estimate of how many people are eligible according to income and immigration status.	2,140,519	

Limitations:



- Steps 2.2 – 2.4 introduce some error, since poverty status is unlikely to be randomly distributed among immigrants arriving in different years (step 2.2) and the income profile of immigrants may not be proportional to the income profile of the population at large (step 2.3). 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). FRAC estimates that 24.5 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 2.5 by 0.755. This approximates the number of people who are eligible according to income, immigration status, and resources.	1,616,092	

#### Limitations:

- The main limitation of this step is that the 24.5 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).
- There are additional limitations in the calculation of the 24.5 percent estimate. Please refer to the footnote below for a discussion of these limitations.

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<sup>22</sup> This estimate was derived from data in Randy Rosso, “Tables Describing the Asset and Vehicle Holdings of Low-Income Households in 1999,” USDA (September 2003), available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FILES/ProgramDesign/AssetVehicle.pdf>. Table 1 provides data on the numbers of households enrolled in food stamps, eligible but not participating in food stamps, asset-ineligible for food stamps, and income-ineligible for food stamps in 1999. Since the data come from 1999, they predate changes in eligibility rules that increased the asset limit for some households and reduced the number of disqualifying vehicles. To correct for this, we obtain from Table 24 the estimated number of households that were ineligible in 1999 but had become eligible because of these rule changes in 2003. We subtract this number from the number of asset-ineligible households in Table 1. Using the adjusted data from Table 1, we divide the number of asset-ineligible but income-eligible households by the total number of income-eligible households to yield an estimate of the proportion of otherwise eligible households that are asset-ineligible (24.5 percent).

There are two limitations in this calculation. First, the number of households who were newly eligible in 2003 includes households who became eligible due to changes in eligibility requirements for immigrants. These households are counted as having become asset-eligible, so the 24.5 percent estimate likely underestimates the number of asset-ineligible people. Note that most of the limitations that tend to bias the estimates in a particular direction have decreased the estimated numbers of eligible people, but this limitation increases the estimated numbers of eligible people. The second limitation is that this calculation 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 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 ACS Table B17015. Subtract this proportion from 1 to obtain the proportion of people below the FPL who are <i>not</i> receiving SSI.	0.755	
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.	1,219,363	

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 2004. FRAC used May 2004 in this report.	633,121	
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.	52%	

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.	\$98.14	
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.	586,515	
6.3	Multiply the result of step 6.1 by the result of step 6.2.	\$57,560,582	
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>23</sup>	\$38,565,590	
6.5	Multiply the result of step 6.4 by 12 to convert from months to years.	\$462,787,080	

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.

<sup>23</sup> Estimate derived from Table A-1 (p. 29) in Karen Cunyningham, “Trends in Food Stamp Program Participation Rates: 1999 to 2002,” USDA (2004), available at <http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/pdfs/fns99-02rates.pdf>.

