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

City (County), State	Local Access Indicator
Atlanta (Fulton), GA	72%
Baltimore, MD	86%
Boston (Suffolk), MA	67%
Chicago (Cook), IL	76%
Columbus (Franklin), OH	69%
Denver (Denver), CO	42%
Detroit (Wayne), MI	98%
Houston (Harris), TX	51%
Indianapolis (Marion), IN	83%
Jacksonville (Duval), FL	57%
Las Vegas (Clark), NV	44%
Los Angeles (Los Angeles), CA	50%
Louisville (Jefferson), KY	81%
Miami (Miami-Dade), FL	75%
Milwaukee (Milwaukee), WI	89%
New York, NY	72%
Oakland (Alameda), CA	55%
Philadelphia (Philadelphia), PA	85%
Phoenix (Maricopa), AZ	56%
San Antonio (Bexar), TX	72%
San Diego (San Diego), CA	29%
Seattle (King), WA	57%
Washington, D.C.	83%
Wichita (Sedgwick), KS	77%
Total	**67.8%**

Food Research and Action Center
October 2008

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.

Sign-up for FRAC's Weekly News Digest at www.frac.org.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was prepared by Fatima Carson, Emerson Hunger Fellow, 14th Class. It builds on earlier reports, including the original version prepared by Shawn Powers, Emerson National Hunger Fellow, 11th Class. The report and its updates were authored under the supervision of Ellen Vollinger, FRAC Legal Director. FRAC Senior Policy Analyst Rachel Cooper and former FRAC Senior Policy Analyst Randy Rosso provided technical assistance.

FRAC gratefully acknowledges the following funders whose support has helped to make possible our work on the Food Stamp Program in 2008:

A.M. Fund
Anonymous Donors
The Atlantic Philanthropies
The Annie E. Casey Foundation
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
General Mills Foundation
Land O'Lakes Foundation
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
The Moriah Fund
New Directions Foundation
Presbyterian Hunger Program
Taste of the NFL
UPS Foundation

The Food Research and Action Center gratefully acknowledges the invaluable assistance of many advocates and public employees who provided information for this report. Please refer to Table 3 for a complete list of sources for food stamp enrollment and benefits data.

FRAC also gratefully acknowledges the support of the Congressional Hunger Center, which sponsors the Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellows program.

Contents

Executive Summary 4
Introduction 6
Hunger and Poverty in America's Big Cities 8
Food Stamp Participation in America's Big Cities: Trends and Shortfalls 10
    Caseload Trends: 2003 to 2008 10
    Participation Gaps 10
    Missed Benefits 12
Conclusion 13
Table 1: Demographic and Economic Data, 2006 14
Table 2: Cost-of-Enough-Food Index, 2000-2002 Average 15
Table 3: Urban Food Stamp Enrollment Trends, 2003-2008 16
Table 4: Local Access Indicator and Unclaimed Benefits, 2006 17
Links and Resources 18
Methodological Appendix and Worksheet 20

Executive Summary

The Food Stamp Program, the first line of defense against hunger and undernutrition in the United States, 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,[1] situated in 19 states and the District of Columbia, looking particularly at their food stamp participation measures and the number of unserved people.[2]

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 one had a poverty rate higher than the national rate of 13.3 percent in 2006.
- In most of the urban areas, at least one child in four lived below the poverty line in 2006, and in combination the 24 were home to more than two million poor children.
- In 2006, 13.2 percent of households in principal cities nationally experienced food insecurity, as compared with 10.9 percent of households in the entire U.S. population.
- A recent U.S. Department of Agriculture (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 2008 in the 24 urban areas, approximately 5.7 million people were receiving food stamps.

City (County), State	Local Access Indicator
Atlanta (Fulton), GA	72%
Baltimore (Baltimore), MD	86%
Boston (Suffolk), MA	67%
Chicago (Cook), IL	76%
Columbus (Franklin), OH	69%
Denver (Denver), CO	42%
Detroit (Wayne), MI	98%
Houston (Harris), TX	51%
Indianapolis (Marion), IN	83%
Jacksonville (Duval), FL	57%
Las Vegas (Clark), NV	44%
Los Angeles (Los Angeles), CA	50%
Louisville (Jefferson), KY	81%
Miami (Miami-Dade), FL	75%
Milwaukee (Milwaukee), WI	89%
New York, NY	72%
Oakland (Alameda), CA	55%
Philadelphia (Philadelphia), PA	85%
Phoenix (Maricopa), AZ	56%
San Antonio (Bexar), TX	72%
San Diego (San Diego), CA	29%
Seattle (King), WA	57%
Washington, D.C.	83%
Wichita (Sedgwick), KS	77%
Total	**67.8%**

Between 2003 and 2008, food stamp caseloads grew in all of the 24 cities and urban counties for which data were 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 68 percent of eligible people in the 24 cities and urban counties participated in the program in 2006.

The lowest estimated Local Access Indicators for participation measures in the 24 survey areas were for San Diego County (San Diego), California (29 percent); Denver County (Denver), Colorado (42 percent); Clark County (Las Vegas), Nevada (44 percent); Los Angeles County (Los Angeles), California (50 percent); and Harris County (Houston), Texas (51 percent).

[1] 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.

[2] As of October 1, 2008, the new national name for the Food Stamp Program is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

The highest estimated Local Access Indicators were for Wayne County (Detroit), Michigan (98 percent); Milwaukee County (Milwaukee), Wisconsin (89 percent); Baltimore, Maryland (86 percent); Philadelphia County (Philadelphia), Pennsylvania (85 percent); Washington, D.C. (83 percent); and Marion County (Indianapolis), Indiana (83 percent).

Underparticipation in the Food Stamp Program/SNAP 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, nearly $1.5 billion in federally-funded benefits were left unclaimed by the 24 cities and urban counties in 2006. The places that missed out on the most federal food stamp benefits were Los Angeles County, California ($353 million); New York, New York ($241 million); and Harris County (Houston), Texas ($164 million).

More can be done to connect eligible people with benefits. Food stamp/SNAP 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/SNAP 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.

Introduction

The Food Stamp Program is the first line of defense against hunger and undernutrition in the United States. In Fiscal Year 2007, a monthly average of more than 26 million people received benefits, totaling almost $30.4 billion for the year.[3]

The Food Stamp Program was reauthorized in the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, also known as the Farm Bill.[4] Effective October 1, 2008, the Food Stamp Program has been renamed nationally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). States need not use the "SNAP" name, and a number are not doing so. More importantly, the new law includes increases in benefits for millions of Americans and allows more families to save for education and retirement without losing food stamp/SNAP eligibility. These improvements are important to cities and families because they strengthen the safety-net for millions of Americans and bring resources to the families and cities most in need.

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.[5] 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, subject to restrictive eligibility rules, and even those who are eligible for the Food Stamp Program often are not participating due to language or cultural barriers, concern about stigma, or simply a lack of awareness of their eligibility.[6] 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.[7]

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

[3] 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/fssummar.htm

[4] P.L.100-246; see USDA FNS Memorandum, "Food Stamp Provisions of the Farm Bill," July 3, 2008, available at www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/rules/Memo/08/070308.pdf

[5] 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

[6] 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, "Get Ready for Food Stamp Reauthorization Changes in Your State" (August 2002, revised February 2003): http://frac.org/pdf/implementation081402.PDF

[7] For more background on needed service improvements, see FRAC, "Access and Access Barriers to Getting Food Stamps: A Review of the Literature" (March 2008), available at http://www.frac.org/pdf/FSPaccess.pdf

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 it 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 usually is 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.

Hunger and Poverty in America's Big Cities

America's big cities typically are home both to great wealth and persistent hunger, food insecurity, and poverty. Among the 24 big cities covered in this report, all but one had a higher poverty rate than the national rate of 13.3 percent in 2006. [8] (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, Columbus, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C., 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 2006, 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 often is 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. Seventeen of the 24 cities had a higher unemployment rate in 2006 than the Census-reported national rate of 6.4 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), 13.2 percent of households in principal cities experienced food insecurity in 2006, as compared with 10.9 percent of households in the entire U.S. population.[9] 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.[10] Principal cities also had a higher prevalence of "very low food insecurity" (previously called "food insecurity with hunger"): 5.0 percent of principal city households experienced hunger in 2006, as compared with 4.0 percent of households nationwide.[11]

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.[12] 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.

[8] 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/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en

[9] 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, 2006," Economic Research Report Number 49, USDA ERS (November 2007). The report is available at http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR49/ For data on food insecurity in MSAs and principal cities, see Table 2.

[10] 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.

[11] Nord, Andrews, and Carlson (2006).

[12] 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).

Similarly, a recent detailed study of food costs in Boston and Philadelphia found that people in four low-income neighborhoods in each city face considerably higher food prices than government assistance programs assume.[13] Researchers investigated the price of the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) market basket for a family of four at small, medium, and large stores. The TFP is the federal government's estimate of what it would cost to purchase a minimally adequate diet. The actual cost of the TFP exceeded the maximum food stamp allotment for a family of four: by 39 percent Boston and by 49 percent in Philadelphia. The maximum monthly food stamp allotment fell short by about $210 in Boston and by $263 in Philadelphia.

Moreover, researchers found that many of the items that make up the TFP were not available in participating stores; the "most commonly missing items were also some of the healthiest:" fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grain products, low-fat dairy products, and fish and lean meats. 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 these major cities.

While the cost of food rose by 7.5 percent from August 2007 to August 2008, the cost of the TFP rose even faster (by 10.5 percent).[14] The price of the TFP market basket, calculated each year in June, determines the amount of the food stamp monthly allotment households can get during the following fiscal year, starting October 1st. The new maximum allotment for a family of four for FY 2009 is an increase of 8.5 percent over FY 2008 levels (the amount necessary to purchase the Thrifty Food Plan in June 2008) but short of the amount needed to purchase the same plan in more recent months.

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.[15]

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.

[13] See Julie Thayer, Carolyn Murphy, John Cook, Stephanie Ettinger de Cuba, Rosa DaCosta, and Mariana Chilton, "Coming Up Short: High food costs outstrip food stamp benefits," (September 2008), available at www.c-snap.org/upload/resource/RCOHD_Report_Final.pdf See also information on The Real Cost of a Healthy Diet Project of C-SNAP at Boston Medical Center and The Philadelphia Grow Clinic at Drexel University, available at www.c-snap.org/page.php?id=131, and 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://www.c-snap.org/upload/resource/healthy_diet_8_05.pdf

[14] FRAC Facts: Rising Food Costs and the Thrifty Food Plan, available at www.frac.org/pdf/thriftyfoodplan.pdf

[15] 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/upload/publicationfiles/2003%20resource%20kit.pdf

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 3 presents data on caseload trends in the 24 urban areas – in most instances the counties that include the cities. Table 4 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: 2003 to 2008

Between May 2003 and May 2008, a time when national food stamp growth was 32 percent, food stamp caseloads grew in all of the 24 cities surveyed.[16] The rate of caseload growth varied widely among the cities, however, and reflected some regional trends. (See Table 3)

The cities experiencing the highest rates of growth were geographically dispersed. Duval County (Jacksonville), Florida saw its caseload almost double in five years (83 percent), and four other counties saw increases of more than 40 percent: Suffolk County (Boston), Massachusetts; Harris County (Houston), Texas; Franklin County (Columbus), Ohio; and New York City, New York. The box on this page shows the top and bottom five cities in caseload growth from 2003 to 2008.

Top and Bottom Five Cities and Urban Counties for Percentage Growth in the Number of Beneficiaries, May 2003 – May 2008	
Top Five	
Duval County (Jacksonville), FL	83.3%
Suffolk County (Boston), MA	65.5%
Harris County (Houston), TX	61.8%
Franklin County (Columbus), OH	41.0%
New York City, NY	40.8%
Bottom Five	
Sedgwick County (Wichita), KS	10.1%
Jefferson County (Louisville), KY	9.9%
Washington, D.C.	7.8%
Milwaukee County (Milwaukee), WI	6.6%
Los Angeles County (Los Angeles), CA	4.1%

Nationwide trends and events contributed to this growth in food stamp participation. Those included: slow growth in employment and little to no increase in median 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 – 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 67 percent of people who are eligible for food stamps nationwide receive benefits, according to the

[16] For the national and state trends, see FRAC's posting of May 2008 food stamp enrollment data, available at http://www.frac.org/html/news/fsp/2008.05_FSP.htm

most recent estimate from USDA.[17] This number has been increasing, but too slowly. The reasons why eligible households do not participate are varied.[18] 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 food stamp benefits (there is not, as there is in the "TANF" program), 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.[19]

Table 4 lists FRAC's estimates of food stamp participation in the cities for 2006. FRAC's measure, which we have called the "Local Access Indicator," is distinct from both USDA's official state-by-state participation rates and its state program access index.[20]

Top and Bottom Five Cities and Urban Counties for Local Access Indicator, 2006	
Top Five	
Detroit (Wayne), MI	98%
Milwaukee (Milwaukee), WI	89%
Baltimore, MD	86%
Philadelphia (Philadelphia), PA	85%
Washington, D.C.	83%
Indianapolis (Marion), IN	83%
Bottom Five	
Houston (Harris), TX	51%
Los Angeles (Los Angeles), CA	50%
Las Vegas (Clark), NV	44%
Denver (Denver), CO	42%
San Diego (San Diego), CA	29%

Like the official participation rate, however, FRAC's Local Access Indicator seeks to estimate what proportion of low-income people who would qualify in theory, are enrolled in actuality 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 quality for food stamps in each city and then divide the actual food stamp enrollment for May 2006 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 generally applicable food stamp gross income limit) and then estimate how many of those people are ineligible due to their immigration status or assets. (This is discussed in more detail in Steps 1 to 3 of the Appendix.)

On average, we estimate that 67.8 percent of people who might qualify for food stamps participated in the program in these 24 cities. This is just slightly higher than the national average of 67 percent of eligible

[17] See Kari Wolkwitz, "Trends in Food Stamp Program Participation Rates: 2000 to 2006," USDA (June 2008), available at http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/snap/FILES/Participation/Trends2000-2006.pdf

[18] Access and Access Barriers to Getting Food Stamps: A Review of the Literature, available at www.frac.org/Access_Barriers_Food_StampsFEB2008.htm

[19] 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 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 www.nationalpriorities.org/images/stories/nationalprioritiesprojectfoodstampsaugust2007.pdf

[20] 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/FSPPartState.htm . 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" (August 2008), available at http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/snap/FILES/Other/pai2007.pdf See also FRAC's webpage on the PAI at http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/snap/FILES/Other/pai2007.pdf www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/programs/PARates.htm.

people as calculated by USDA. In May 2006, more than 5.3 million people enrolled in the program in these cities, while we estimate that an additional 2.8 million would qualify but did not enroll.

The lowest Local Access Indicator was 29 percent in San Diego County (San Diego), California. Denver County (Denver), Colorado; Clark County (Las Vegas), Nevada; Los Angeles County (Los Angeles), California; Harris County (Houston), Texas; and Alameda County (Oakland), California were on the low end of the participation spectrum, each with an indicator at or below 55 percent.

These numbers generally are consistent with the official USDA participation rates for the states containing these cities. California, Nevada, and Colorado were all in the bottom five states for food stamp participation in 2005 (the most recent data available), and Texas fell in the bottom 15.[21]

The highest Local Access Indicators for the 24 urban areas surveyed were in Wayne County (Detroit), Michigan; Milwaukee County (Milwaukee), Wisconsin; Baltimore, Maryland; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Washington, D.C.; and Marion County (Indianapolis), Indiana, where at least 83 percent of eligible people enrolled in the program in 2006. While the May 2006 Milwaukee and Baltimore indicators are higher than the 2005 performance by their states overall, the other high-scoring urban areas were consistent with USDA participation rates for the states containing these cities. The District of Columbia, Indiana and Pennsylvania all had participation rates in the top 20 in 2005, and Michigan's participation rate was in the top ten in 2005.[22]

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 stamp benefits generates $1.84 in economic activity.[23]

Top Five Cities and Urban Counties for Missed Food Stamp Benefits, 2006	
Los Angeles County (Los Angeles), CA	$352,899,541
New York, NY	$241,331,874
Harris County (Houston), TX	$163,555,476
Cook County (Chicago), IL	$108,054,006
Maricopa County (Phoenix), AZ	$105,655,232

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.[24]

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 4 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

[21] Karen E. Cunnyngham, Laura A. Castner and Allen L. Schirm, "Reaching Those in Need: State Food Stamp Participation Rates in 2005," USDA (October 2007), available at www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/snap/FILES/Participation/Reaching2005.pdf

[22] Cunnyngham et al. (2006).

[23] 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

[24] 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_foodstampsanl04.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 not only would benefits be lost, but 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. 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. (This does not include the billions of dollars of benefits brought into the state.)

were Los Angeles County ($353 million), New York City ($241 million) and Harris County (Houston) ($164 million). Cook County (Chicago), Maricopa County (Phoenix), and San Diego County (San Diego), each lost in excess of $100 million per year in food stamp benefits. In total, nearly $1.5 billion in federally-funded benefits were left unclaimed by the 24 big cities and urban counties in 2006.

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 somewhat lower benefits than participants (the neediest people are most likely to apply first). In states that have utilized a federal option that allows expanded 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 birth outcomes, health and children's ability to learn and are a boon to local businesses and a stimulus to local economies.

In the face of a severe economic downturn and rising food prices, increasing the amount of federal food stamp dollars flowing into cities is an essential strategy for responding. As the findings of this report indicate, all of America's big cities stand to gain many millions of federal dollars per year through efforts – even 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, 2006

City	Population*	Individuals in Poverty	Poverty Rate	Children in Poverty**	Childhood Poverty Rate	Unemployment Rate
Atlanta, GA	442,887	97,003	23.2%	38,441	40.1%	9.8%
Baltimore, MD	631,366	118,798	19.5%	41,738	27.5%	10.7%
Boston, MA	575,187	108,617	19.8%	29,638	27.3%	6.4%
Chicago, IL	2,749,283	571,313	21.2%	124,220	21.3%	9.8%
Columbus, OH	718,477	144,832	20.7%	49,556	28.8%	8.1%
Denver, CO	566,974	112,155	20.0%	31,469	24.4%	6.6%
Detroit, MI	834,116	265,600	32.5%	107,179	44.3%	22.2%
Houston, TX	2,074,828	434,683	21.3%	176,898	32.1%	8.4%
Indianapolis, IN	789,306	125,684	16.3%	49,826	24.1%	8.7%
Jacksonville, FL	799,875	109,541	14.0%	39,720	19.1%	6.0%
Las Vegas, NV	569,753	62,704	11.2%	22,231	14.4%	6.0%
Los Angeles, CA	3,773,846	705,154	19.0%	260,413	27.5%	6.7%
Louisville, KY	559,526	93,297	17.0%	34,683	25.7%	7.3%
Miami, FL	358,091	94,530	26.9%	27,420	36.0%	5.7%
Milwaukee, WI	563,079	142,944	26.2%	60,178	38.5%	10.3%
New York, NY	8,214,426	1,547,152	19.2%	539,388	28.2%	7.8%
Oakland, CA	377,256	70,294	18.8%	26,646	29.3%	10.3%
Philadelphia, PA	1,448,394	354,135	25.1%	128,591	35.3%	12.4%
Phoenix, AZ	1,429,637	242,347	17.2%	97,976	24.1%	4.7%
San Antonio, TX	1,273,374	224,665	18.1%	93,191	26.7%	6.8%
San Diego, CA	1,261,251	162,352	13.4%	50,083	17.2%	4.9%
Seattle, WA	562,106	67,483	12.5%	13,679	16.1%	5.3%
Washington, D.C.	581,530	108,100	19.6%	36,678	32.6%	8.5%
Wichita, KS	356,995	53,831	15.3%	18,003	19.5%	7.6%
United States	299,398,485	38,757,253	13.3%	13,285,569	18.3%	6.4%

* 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: 2006 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, D.C.	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 Economic Research Service. Presented at the annual meeting of the Rural Sociological Society, Sacramento, CA (August 12-15, 2004).

Table 3: Urban Food Stamp Enrollment Trends, 2003-2008

City (County), State	Data Level*	Food Stamp Enrollment, persons				Change in Caseload		
		May 2008	April 2008	May 2007	May 2003	1-mo.	1-yr.	5-yr.
Atlanta (Fulton), GA	County	107,821	105,543	104,525	92,143	2.2%	3.2%	17.0%
Baltimore, MD	City	120,735	119,634	107,612	97,162	0.9%	12.2%	24.3%
Boston (Suffolk), MA	City	82,136	81,244	75,791	49,631	1.1%	8.4%	65.5%
Chicago (Cook), IL	County	691,062	681,382	658,420	536,309	1.4%	5.0%	28.9%
Columbus (Franklin), OH	County	135,048	133,343	124,034	95,756	1.3%	8.9%	41.0%
Denver (Denver), CO	City-Co.	47,097	47,323	46,742	41,421	-0.5%	0.8%	13.7%
Detroit (Wayne), MI	City	296,734	294,912	297,174	213,512	0.6%	-0.1%	39.0%
Houston (Harris), TX	County	315,115	316,797	304,284	194,799	-0.5%	3.6%	61.8%
Indianapolis (Marion), IN	County	119,262	118,592	114,082	95,430	0.6%	4.5%	25.0%
Jacksonville (Duval), FL	County	82,255	80,080	71,348	44,872	2.7%	15.3%	83.3%
Las Vegas (Clark), NV	County	110,961	109,368	92,626	86,445	1.5%	19.8%	28.4%
Los Angeles (Los Angeles), CA	County	632,025	627,862	601,909	606,881	0.7%	5.0%	4.1%
Louisville (Jefferson), KY	County	92,483	92,201	87,166	84,185	0.3%	6.1%	9.9%
Miami (Miami-Dade), FL	County	316,353	311,026	284,521	271,890	1.7%	11.2%	16.4%
Milwaukee (Milwaukee), WI	County	147,790	146,036	140,397	138,658	1.2%	5.3%	6.6%
New York, NY	City	1,226,492	1,143,509	1,095,953	870,813	7.3%	11.9%	40.8%
Oakland (Alameda), CA	County	72,820	72,548	68,461	56,748	0.4%	6.4%	28.3%
Philadelphia (Philadelphia), PA	City-Co.	325,551	323,529	311,460	251,405	0.6%	4.5%	29.5%
Phoenix (Maricopa), AZ	County	323,529	317,562	268,002	233,542	1.9%	20.7%	38.5%
San Antonio (Bexar), TX	County	178,290	181,001	178,179	131,243	-1.5%	0.1%	35.8%
San Diego (San Diego), CA	County	101,773	100,405	89,939	74,282	1.4%	13.2%	37.0%
Seattle (King), WA	County	94,243	95,234	92,334	76,347	-1.0%	2.1%	23.4%
Washington, D.C.	City	86,713	85,574	83,455	80,409	1.3%	3.9%	7.8%
Wichita (Sedgwick), KS	City	43,208	42,812	42,085	39,244	0.9%	2.7%	10.1%

n/a signifies that the data is 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 for those cities. 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, Glenda Burke, John Camp, Brian Campbell, Phuoc Cao, Joe DeMartino, Lori Duffy, Terry Drum, Vicki Jessup, Ricky May, Ross McDonald, Mike Papin, Bob Reardon, Garrett Skelton, David Smalley, Robert Stalter, Aldona Vaitkus, and Kent Waltmire.

Table 4: Local Access Indicator and Unclaimed Benefits, May 2006

City (County), State	Data Level	Enroll-ment, May 2006 (persons)	Estimated Number of Eligible Persons, 2006	Estimated Number of Eligible Non-par-ticipants, 2006	Local Access Indicator	Average Benefit, May 2006	Estimated Unclaimed Benefits, 2006
Atlanta (Fulton), GA	County	102,380	141,583	39,203	72%	$101.78	$20,588,820
Baltimore, MD	City	106,511	123,369	16,858	86%	$98.01	$8,525,623
Boston (Suffolk), MA	City	70,068	104,743	34,675	67%	$81.72	$14,621,588
Chicago (Cook), IL	County	650,253	850,317	200,064	76%	$104.67	$108,054,006
Columbus (Franklin), OH	County	121,756	175,994	54,238	69%	$106.10	$29,694,003
Denver (Denver), CO	City-Co.	48,210	114,457	66,247	42%	$112.53	$38,466,639
Detroit (Wayne), MI	City	262,607	267,851	5,244	98%	$94.26	$2,550,585
Houston (Harris), TX	County	342,362	675,032	332,670	51%	$95.28	$163,555,476
Indianapolis (Marion), IN	County	115,898	139,258	23,360	83%	$99.67	$12,013,983
Jacksonville (Duval), FL	County	67,861	119,047	51,186	57%	$91.33	$24,122,058
Las Vegas (Clark), NV	County	87,155	197,340	110,185	44%	$88.85	$50,516,076
Los Angeles (Los Angeles), CA	County	620,489	1,248,913	628,424	50%	$108.83	$352,899,541
Louisville (Jefferson), KY	County	84,185	104,344	20,159	81%	$97.25	$10,115,988
Miami (Miami-Dade), FL	County	296,138	397,082	100,944	75%	$91.42	$47,618,030
Milwaukee (Milwaukee), WI	County	143,185	160,725	17,540	89%	$83.42	$7,550,044
New York, NY	City	1,098,225	1,521,404	423,179	72%	$110.52	$241,331,874
Oakland (Alameda), CA	County	66,459	121,342	54,883	55%	$100.78	$28,540,521
Philadelphia (Philadelphia), PA	City-Co.	297,196	348,474	51,278	85%	$96.46	$25,522,784
Phoenix (Maricopa), AZ	County	262,521	472,853	210,332	56%	$97.35	$105,655,232
San Antonio (Bexar), TX	County	190,460	263,549	73,089	72%	$91.46	$34,493,155
San Diego (San Diego), CA	County	83,262	285,130	201,868	29%	$96.92	$100,955,640
Seattle (King), WA	County	98,161	172,174	74,013	57%	$94.93	$36,254,439
Washington, D.C.	City	84,787	101,791	17,004	83%	$97.01	$8,511,719
Wichita (Sedgwick), KS	City	42,607	55,664	13,057	77%	$91.60	$6,171,469
Total		**5,342,736**	**8,162,436**	**2,819,700**	**67.8%**	**$97.17**	**$1,478,329,293**

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

FNS main page on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (formerly the Food Stamp Program): www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/

FNS' annual report "Characteristics of Food Stamp Households":
www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/SNAP/FILES/Participation/2007Characteristics.pdf

FRAC's annual report "State of the States: A Profile of Food and Nutrition Programs Across the Nation": www.frac.org/SOS%202007%20Report.pdf

FRAC's Report, "Access and Access Barriers to Getting Food Stamps: A Review of the Literature":
www.frac.org/Access_Barriers_Food_StampsFEB2008.htm

FRAC's Report, "Guide to Food Stamp Outreach Collaborations":
www.frac.org/pdf/fspguide06/fspguide06.pdf

The National Anti-Hunger Organizations' (NAHO) "Blueprint to End Hunger":
www.frac.org/pdf/blueprint2008.pdf

FRAC's report, "An Advocate's Guide to the Disaster Food Stamp Program":
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

"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

Food Stamp Program Participation Data and Studies

Annual FNS reports on state participation rates:
www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/snap/SNAPPartState.htm

FNS Brief "Calculating the Food Stamp Program Access Index: A Step-By-Step Guide":
www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/SNAP/FILES/Other/pai2007.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

Monthly national and state food stamp participation data:
www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/programs/fspparticipation.html

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

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

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

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

California Food Policy Advocates report "Lost Dollars, Empty Plates: The Impact of Food Stamps on State and Local Budgets": 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

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/default.htm

FNS' Food Stamps Eligibility Pre-screening Tool: www.foodstamps-step1.usda.gov/fns/

FRAC's Guide to Food Stamp Outreach Collaborations: 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: www.nlc.org/ASSETS/2EBA4F749F324321BB0299A7A75903A4/hwfactionkit.pdf

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

National Conference of State Legislatures: www.ncsl.org/statefed/humserv/hunger.htm

American Public Human Services Association: 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/hhsurvey2007/hhsurvey07.pdf

AARP Foundation: www.aarp.org/money/lowincomehelp/quicklink/

Annie E. Casey Foundation's *Making Connections* initiative: www.aecf.org/Home/MajorInitiatives/MakingConnections.aspx

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=

2000 Census SF-3:
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 2006.

		Sample: L.A. County	*Your City*
1.1	Obtain the number of people living below 125 percent of the national Federal Poverty Level from **ACS Table B17002**.	2,073,418	
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 **Census 2000 SF-3 Table PCT50.** [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.	2,173,642	

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.
- 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 **ACS Table B05005**.	589,600	
2.2	Multiply the result of step 2.1 by 5/7. 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, 2005, or 2006 so multiplying by 5/7 approximates the number of people who have been LPRs for less than 5 years.	421,143	
2.3	Obtain the percentage of foreign-born non-citizens who were below 100 percent of the FPL in 2000 from **Census 2000 SF-3 Table PCT51**. 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 **Census 2000 SF-3 Table PCT50.** Note that this calculation is similar to step 1.2.	1.3992	
2.5	Multiply the result of step 2.2 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.	159,604	
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.	2,014,038	

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.
- California operates a state-level food stamp program that provides benefits to legal permanent residents. FRAC's LAI calculations do not take into account participants in the California state-level food stamp program. To accurately account for the state level participants when calculating city LAIs would require a different methodology to be used.

Step 3: Resource Eligibility

To be eligible for food stamps prior to October 2008, 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.[25]

		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.	1,609,216	

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 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 *not* receiving SSI.	0.7761	
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.	1,248,913	

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.

[25] 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 www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/SNAP/FILES/ProgramDesign/AssetVehicle2002.pdf.

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 2006. FRAC used May 2006 in this report.	620,489	
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.	50%	

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 underparticipation 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.	$108.83	
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.	628,424	
6.3	Multiply the result of step 6.1 by the result of step 6.2.	$68,391,384	
6.4	Multiply the result of step 6.3 by 0.43. 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 43 percent of the benefits of a participant.[26]	$29,408,295	
6.5	Multiply the result of step 6.4 by 12 to convert from months to years.	$352,899,541	

Limitations:

- Once again, the 43 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.

[26] Estimate derived from Table A-1 (p. 19) in Kari Wolkwitz, "Trends in Food Stamp Program Participation Rates: 2000 to 2006," USDA (2008), available at www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/fsptrends00-06.pdf.