

SNAP Access in Urban America: A City-by-City Snapshot

September 2009

Executive Summary

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (the new federal name for the nation's Food Stamp Program) is the first line of defense against hunger and undernutrition in the U.S. and a critically important but underutilized resource for urban America. In this report, FRAC examines SNAP/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 local SNAP/Food Stamp participation measures, numbers of unserved people, and consequences for individuals and local economies.

Urban Poverty and Hunger

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 big cities covered in this report, all but three had poverty rates equal to or higher than the national rate of 13.3 percent in 2007.
- In a majority of the cities, at least one child in four lived below the poverty line in 2007, and in combination the 24 were home to more than two million poor children.
- In 2007, 13.5 percent of households in principal cities experienced food insecurity, as compared with 11.1 percent of households in the entire U.S. population.
- A USDA study found 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 states.

SNAP/Food Stamps as an Anti-Recession Tool

These poverty, food insecurity, and food cost data underscore how important it is to have federal nutrition programs like SNAP/Food Stamps to serve low-income people in urban America. SNAP/Food Stamps is a federal entitlement program structured to respond to increases in need, whether due to national or local economic downturns, natural disasters, or other factors.

As of May 2009 in the 24 urban areas, approximately 7.1 million people were receiving SNAP/Food Stamps. Between 2004 and 2009, SNAP/Food Stamp caseloads grew in all of the 24 cities and urban counties for which data were available. In May 2009, a time of economic stress across the country, 1.2 million more individuals in the 24 survey cities were receiving SNAP/Food Stamps compared to a year earlier.

Since 2007, federal lawmakers have strengthened SNAP/Food Stamps, first through the 2008 Farm Bill and then through the 2009 American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA). The effects of a stronger program are shown in

City (County), State	LAI	Est. Unclaimed Benefits, 2007
Atlanta (Fulton), GA	75%	\$20,719,886
Baltimore (Baltimore), MD	87%	\$9,382,703
Boston (Suffolk), MA	68%	\$25,625,750
Chicago (Cook), IL	83%	\$85,348,257
Columbus (Franklin), OH	75%	\$25,824,413
Denver (Denver), CO	43%	\$36,957,922
Detroit (Wayne), MI	92%	\$17,025,271
Houston (Harris), TX	46%	\$203,724,572
Indianapolis (Marion), IN	85%	\$11,488,769
Jacksonville (Duval), FL	68%	\$19,205,516
Las Vegas (Clark), NV	66%	\$35,878,802
Los Angeles (Los Angeles), CA	50%	\$399,058,388
Louisville (Jefferson), KY	88%	\$7,105,881
Miami (Miami-Dade), FL	73%	\$58,842,659
Milwaukee (Milwaukee), WI	79%	\$17,715,489
New York, NY	73%	\$271,456,381
Oakland (Alameda), CA	60%	\$29,468,454
Philadelphia (Philadelphia), PA	93%	\$13,386,210
Phoenix (Maricopa), AZ	59%	\$115,961,074
San Antonio (Bexar), TX	66%	\$47,174,971
San Diego (San Diego), CA	35%	\$107,673,097
Seattle (King), WA	52%	\$93,628,467
Washington, DC	82%	\$10,267,301
Wichita (Sedgwick), KS	78%	\$6,191,790
Total	67%	\$1,669,112,023

¹ Because SNAP/Food Stamp data are not always available on the city level, in most cases we use data for the counties in which are the cities as a proxy for city-level data.

significant part through increased SNAP/Food Stamp benefits. Between May 2007 and May 2009, the average SNAP/Food Stamp monthly benefit for individuals increased from \$95.38 to \$133.65. Based on USDA research, it is estimated that each dollar in federal SNAP/Food Stamp benefits generates nearly twice that in economic activity. Total spending for program benefits in May 2009 due to ARRA raises and increased program participation was \$4.6 billion, bringing the estimated total economic stimulative impact of SNAP/Food Stamp benefits that month to more than \$8.4 billion.

Remaining Gaps

Nonetheless, millions of people in large cities and counties who are eligible for SNAP/Food Stamps do not receive benefits. Based on its Local Access Indicator, FRAC estimates that only 67 percent of eligible people in the 24 cities and urban counties participated in the program in December 2007, with rates in individual cities ranging from 35 percent to 93 percent.

The lowest estimated Local Access Indicators for participation measures in the 24 survey areas were for San Diego County (San Diego), California (35 percent); County (Houston), Texas (46 percent); Los Angeles County (Los Angeles), California (50 percent); and King County (Seattle), Washington (52 percent).

The highest estimated Local Access Indicators were for Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (93 percent); Wayne County (Detroit), Michigan (92 percent); Jefferson County

(Louisville), Kentucky (88 percent); Baltimore, Maryland (87 percent); and Marion County (Indianapolis), Indiana (85 percent).

Underparticipation in SNAP/Food Stamps 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 \$1.6 billion in federally-funded benefits was left unclaimed by the 24 cities and urban counties in 2007. The places that missed out on the most SNAP/Food Stamps benefits were Los Angeles County (Los Angeles), California (\$399 million); New York, New York (\$271 million); Harris County (Houston), Texas (\$203 million); Maricopa County (Phoenix), Arizona (\$115 million); and San Diego County (San Diego), California (\$107 million).

More can be done to connect eligible people with benefits. SNAP/Food Stamp agencies can make it easier for households to sign up, such as allowing them to apply over the telephone and on the Internet. SNAP/Food Stamp outreach projects can get application information to people where they work, go to school, seek health care, and shop. For an analysis of barriers to participation, see FRAC's report on Access and Access Barriers to Getting Food Stamps, posted at www.frac.org/pdf/FSPaccess.pdf. For details on outreach initiatives, see FRAC's Guide to Food Stamp Outreach Collaborations, posted at www.frac.org/html/news/fsp_guide2006.html

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.

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Introduction

SNAP/Food Stamps is the first line of defense against hunger and undernutrition in the United States. In Fiscal Year 2008, a monthly average of more than 28 million people received benefits, totaling more than \$34.6 billion for the year.² The deepening recession since has pushed up participation rapidly. By May 2009, SNAP/Food Stamp participation rose to 34.4 million people.

SNAP/Food Stamps was reauthorized in the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (also known as the Farm Bill). As part of this legislation the federal name of the program was changed from the Food Stamp Program to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).³

Delivered through Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards, which are used like debit cards at authorized food retailers nationwide, SNAP/Food Stamp benefits enhance the purchasing power of low-income households and help them put food on the table. SNAP/Food Stamp benefits are fully federally-funded, and the program is largely administered by the states, with the federal and state governments sharing the administrative costs nearly equally.

At a time of nationwide concern over both hunger and obesity, SNAP/Food Stamp's mission to ensure access to nutritious food for all Americans is critically important.⁴ SNAP/Food Stamps is of particular importance to America's big cities, which are home to a disproportionate share of the nation's low-income people. SNAP/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 February 2009, President Barack Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), commonly known as the economic recovery package, which included an increase in SNAP/Food Stamp benefits. Effective April 1, 2009, the maximum SNAP/Food Stamp benefit increased nationwide by 13.6 percent. Since April, implementation of the federal economic recovery package has meant higher benefits for all SNAP/Food Stamp households—for example, \$80 more per month for a household of four. The increase in benefits also

SNAP: Helping Achieve the 2015 Goal

Increasing participation in SNAP/Food Stamps would also help achieve President Barack Obama's goal of ending childhood hunger by 2015. As the nation's most important direct defense against hunger, it is the nutrition program that can do the most to eliminate childhood hunger, and do so by helping families use the normal commercial food outlets used by other Americans. Improving SNAP/Food Stamps is one of FRAC's seven strategies to reach the President's goal; to learn more, visit www.endingchildhunger2015.org

bolstered the stimulative effect of SNAP/Food Stamp spending on local economies. Total spending for program benefits in May 2009 due to ARRA raises and increased program participation rose to \$4.6 billion, bringing the estimated total economic stimulative impact of SNAP/Food Stamps benefits to more than \$8.4 billion in May 2009.

In big cities, however, as in the nation overall, millions of people are eligible for SNAP/Food Stamp benefits but not participating. There are several reasons for this. Cities are home to a large share of the nation's immigrants, many of whom are eligible for SNAP/Food Stamps – 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.⁵ In addition, many SNAP/Food Stamp offices in cities are overburdened, with caseworkers handling very large caseloads and many low-income people falling through the cracks.

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

This paper provides a picture of trends in SNAP/Food Stamps in America's big cities and urban counties. The analysis focuses on a selection of 24 major U.S. cities, all of which have populations of at least 250,000. We sought a geographically balanced array of cities, so the cities

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

³ For information about which states are using the federal name SNAP and which are using other names for the program, see the USDA FNS chart available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/roll-out/state-chart.pdf>

⁴ 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.

⁵ SNAP/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. SNAP/Food Stamp benefits for legal immigrants were largely eliminated by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, but benefits were restored for many in the Agriculture Research, Extension and Education Reform Act of 1998 and the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act (FSRIA) of 2002, also known, respectively, as the 1998 Agricultural Research and 2002 Farm Bills. For more information, see FRAC's report on changes to the Food Stamp Program in the 2002 Farm Bill: www.frac.org/pdf/implementation081402.PDF

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 first discusses the extent of poverty and hunger in urban areas and the obstacles low-income urban residents face in obtaining enough nutritious food. The report then presents FRAC's data on SNAP/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.

Hunger and Poverty in America's Big Cities

America's big cities are home both to great wealth and persistent hunger, food insecurity, and poverty. Among the 24 big cities covered in this report, all but three had a poverty rate equivalent to or higher than the national rate of 13.3 percent in 2007.⁶ (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, Houston, Miami, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia, at least one person in five was poor (See Table 1).

Seventeen of the 24 cities had a higher unemployment rate in 2007 than the Census-reported national rate of 6.6 percent. The situation is even worse for children in America's big cities. In a majority of the survey cities, at least one child in three lived below the poverty line in 2007, and in Detroit it was nearly one in two children.

Official poverty statistics may understate the true extent of the problem of urban poverty, since the federal poverty level is a single national figure but the cost of living is often higher in urban areas than elsewhere in the country.

There also is evidence that food insecurity and hunger are more severe in America's urban centers. According to the most recent report on household food security by the Economic Research Service (ERS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 13.5 percent of households in

Because SNAP/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 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.

The demographic data on poverty and unemployment in this report are city-level data, however, and the food cost data compare cities with the outlying parts of their Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), which may include several counties. In the discussion and tables we specify the relevant geographic units for all data.

principal cities experienced food insecurity in 2007, as compared with 11.1 percent of households in the entire U.S. population.⁸ 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.⁹ 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 2007, as compared with 4.1 percent of households nationwide.¹⁰

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.¹¹ The CPS-FSS data capture households'

⁶ National poverty and unemployment rates referenced in this section are from the U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS) 2005-2007. National data are available at

http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en

⁷ Given the limits of census data reporting, this report uses data from 2007 because it is the most recent year census data is available for the factors needed to calculate SNAP/Food Stamp participation, using the FRAC methodology.

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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 "inner city" areas with the U.S. as a whole, the differences likely would be even starker.

¹⁰ Nord, Andrews, and Carlson (2006).

¹¹ 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).

perceptions of how much money they would need to afford “just enough” food. While the cost-of-enough-food index is not a price index, the price of food likely determines a substantial portion of the variation in the index. Table 2 compares the cost-of-enough-food index between the cities for 2000 – 2002, the balance of their MSAs, and the non-metropolitan (rural) portions of their states. Seventeen of the 24 cities had cost-of-enough-food indices as high as or higher than the balance of their MSAs, and 19 cities had indices as high as or higher than the non-metropolitan areas of the same state. This pattern suggests that, in most areas, people in cities find they need to spend more to obtain adequate food than people in suburbs or in rural areas.

Similarly, a detailed 2008 study of food costs in Boston and Philadelphia found that people in eight low-income neighborhoods face higher food prices than government assistance programs assume.¹² Researchers investigated the price of the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) market basket for a family of four at small, medium, and large stores.¹³ The actual cost of the TFP exceeded the maximum SNAP/Food Stamp allotment for a family of four in both cities. Averaging across all stores, the maximum SNAP/Food Stamp allotment fell short by almost \$210 per month, in

Boston, and \$263 per month, in Philadelphia. 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 SNAP/Food Stamp recipients.

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 often offer a narrow selection of higher priced goods.¹⁴ 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.

¹² Julie Thayer, Carolyn Murphy, John Cook, Stephanie Ettinger de Cuba, Rosa DaCosta, Mariana Chilton. “The Real Cost of a Healthy Diet: Coming Up Short,” CSNAP at Boston Medical Center and The Philadelphia Grow Project at Drexel University (September 2008), available at http://www.childrenshealthwatch.org/upload/resource/RCOHD_Report_Final.pdf

¹³ The cost of the TFP is a benchmark for national policies, which guides nutrition and other safety net programs.

¹⁴ 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. The full resource kit is available at <http://www.aecf.org/upload/publicationfiles/2003%20resource%20kit.pdf>.

SNAP/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 SNAP/Food Stamps, and SNAP/Food Stamp caseloads in these areas (as in the nation as a whole) have grown substantially in the past few years, even before the recession. However, millions more people are eligible for SNAP/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 trends in the number of participants in the 24 urban areas (in most instances the counties that include the cities).¹⁵ Table 4 then provides FRAC's estimates of what proportion of eligible people are participating in each of the 24 urban areas (as of December 2007), and how many federal dollars are being missed.

Caseload Trends: 2004 to 2009

Between May 2004 and May 2009, a time when the national growth in the number of SNAP/Food Stamp participants was 43.5 percent, SNAP/Food Stamp caseloads grew in all of the 24 cities surveyed.¹⁶ The rate of caseload growth varied widely among the cities. (See Table 4.)

The cities experiencing the highest rates of growth were geographically dispersed. Suffolk County (Boston), MA saw its caseload almost double in five years (97 percent), and five other urban areas saw increases of more than 50 percent: Duval County (Jacksonville), Florida; King County (Seattle), Washington; Maricopa County (Phoenix), Arizona; San Diego County (San Diego), California; and Baltimore City, Maryland. The box on this page shows the top and bottom five cities in caseload growth from 2004 to 2009.

Nationwide trends contributed to this growth, including slow growth in employment and little to no growth in wages after the 2001 recession, the restoration in federal legislation of SNAP/Food Stamp benefits to some legal immigrants, other program improvements in the 2002 Farm Bill, and ongoing outreach efforts by SNAP/Food Stamp offices and advocates. Part of the increase in

Top and Bottom Five Cities and Urban Counties for Percentage Caseload Growth, May 2004 – May 2009	
Top Five	
Boston (Suffolk), MA	97.6%
Jacksonville (Duval), FL	90.7%
Seattle (King), WA	83.4%
Phoenix (Maricopa), AZ	74.5%
San Diego (San Diego), CA	63.0%
Bottom Five	
Philadelphia, PA	29.0%
Milwaukee (Milwaukee), WI	29.0%
Wichita (Sedgwick), KS	26.7%
Washington, DC	17.6%
Los Angeles (Los Angeles), CA	16.9%

SNAP/Food Stamp enrollments is also attributable to population growth, especially in the fast-expanding cities of the south and west, and increasing rates of unemployment.

State and local factors also account for some of the variation in percentages of urban area caseload growth. Positive factors include SNAP/Food Stamp outreach campaigns, streamlined applications, easing of face-to-face interview requirements, and policies increasing access for working families and older Americans. Percentage increases also reflect to some extent the baseline participation level from which a city started.

Despite this caseload growth, as will be discussed in the following section, millions of potentially eligible people in these cities are not receiving SNAP/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

Nationally, only 66 percent of people who are eligible for SNAP/Food Stamps receive benefits, according to the most recent (2007) estimate from the USDA.¹⁷ 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

¹⁵ When SNAP/Food Stamp enrollment data were not available on the city level, the data represents the county of which the city is a part. The relevant geographic unit is indicated for each city in the tables. For simplicity, the text will refer to these geographical units collectively as "the cities," but readers should be aware that SNAP/Food Stamp data for a particular city generally will reflect the entire county and not the city proper.

¹⁶ For the national and state trends, see FRAC's posting of June 2009 food stamp enrollment data, available at <http://www.frac.org>.

¹⁷ See Joshua Leftin and Kari Wolkwitz, "Trends in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates: 2000 to 2007," USDA (June 2009), available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/Published/snap/FILES/Participation/Trends2000-2007.pdf>

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

SNAP/Food Stamp benefits. Other factors include language barriers, perceptions of stigma surrounding the program, low minimum benefits (especially common for senior citizens), the belief that there is a five-year lifetime limit on benefits (there is not), difficulties getting to SNAP/Food Stamp offices during the work day (or at all), difficulties in getting appointments at said offices, and possible deterrent effects from the many verifications required by the program.

In addition to the national estimates, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) publishes an annual report on the various state-level participation rates, but there is no regular estimate of participation at the city level.¹⁹

Table 4 lists FRAC's estimates of SNAP/Food Stamp participation in the cities for December 2007. FRAC's measure, which we have called the "Local Access Indicator," is different in certain respects from both USDA's official participation rates and its program access index.²⁰ 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 SNAP/Food Stamps.

The appendix provides a complete discussion of the methodology FRAC uses to calculate the Local Access Indicator. In brief, we estimate the number of people who might qualify for SNAP/Food Stamps in each city and then divide the actual SNAP/Food Stamp enrollment for December 2007 by this number to yield the Local Access Indicator. To approximate the denominator – the number of people who might qualify for SNAP/Food Stamps – we estimate the number of people below 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (the SNAP/Food Stamp gross income limit) and then estimate how many of those

¹⁹ The Brookings Institution has estimated SNAP/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 SNAP/Food Stamps does not control for non-income eligibility factors and, therefore, does not substitute for other participation rate measures. See National Priorities Project, "Half of Low-Income People Not Receiving Food Stamps," available at http://www.nationalpriorities.org/images/stories/nationalprioritiesprojectfoods_tampsaugust2007.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 generally are enrolled in the Food Stamp program. See USDA's brief, "Calculating the Food Stamp Program Access Index: A Step-By-Step Guide" (October 2007), available at www.fns.usda.gov/OANE/menu/Published/FSP/FILES/Other/pai2006.pdf. See also FRAC's webpage on the PAI at www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/programs/PARates.htm.

Top and Bottom Urban Areas for Local Access Indicator, 2007	
Top Five	
Philadelphia (Philadelphia), PA	93%
Detroit (Wayne), MI	92%
Louisville (Jefferson), KY	88%
Baltimore (Baltimore), MD	87%
Indianapolis (Marion), IN	85%
Bottom Five	
Seattle (King), WA	52%
Los Angeles (Los Angeles), CA	50%
Houston (Harris), TX	46%
Denver (Denver), CO	43%
San Diego (San Diego), CA	35%

people are ineligible due to their immigration status or assets.

On average, we estimate that 67 percent of people who might qualify for SNAP/Food Stamps participated in the program in these 24 cities. This is virtually identical to the national average of 66 percent of eligible people as calculated by USDA. In December 2007, 5.7 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 35 percent in San Diego County (San Diego), California. Denver County (Denver), Colorado; Harris County (Houston), Texas; Los Angeles County (Los Angeles), California; and King County (Seattle), Washington also were on the low end of the participation spectrum, each with an indicator at or below 52 percent.

The highest Local Access Indicators for the 24 urban areas surveyed were in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Wayne County (Detroit), Michigan; Jefferson County (Louisville), Kentucky; Baltimore, Maryland; and Marion County (Indianapolis), Indiana, where at least 85 percent of eligible people were enrolled in the program.

Missed Benefits

Underparticipation in SNAP/Food Stamps affects the economic security, nutrition, health, and well-being of eligible but non-participating households, who 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. SNAP/Food Stamp benefits are fully federally funded, meaning that SNAP/Food Stamp dollars effectively provide an economic boost for low-income areas.

As household SNAP/Food Stamp expenditures become revenues for retailers, the funds cycle through the local economy, generating a substantial "multiplier effect."

Top Five Urban Areas for Missed SNAP/Food Stamp Benefits, 2007	
Los Angeles (Los Angeles), CA	\$399,058,388
New York, NY	\$271,456,381
Houston (Harris), TX	\$203,724,572
Phoenix (Maricopa), AZ	\$115,961,074
San Diego (San Diego), CA	\$107,673,097

According to a USDA estimate, each dollar of SNAP/Food Stamp benefits generates \$1.84 in economic activity.²¹ Increasing participation in SNAP/Food Stamps enhances local businesses. It also increases tax revenues to local governments, as recipients spend more of their cash on taxable goods.²²

America’s big cities are missing out on billions of dollars in SNAP/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 missed out on the

most federal SNAP/Food Stamp benefits were Los Angeles County (Los Angeles), California (\$399 million); New York, New York (\$271 million); Harris County (Houston), Texas (\$203 million); Maricopa County (Phoenix), Arizona (\$115 million); and San Diego County (San Diego), California (\$107 million). Miami-Dade County (Miami), Florida; Cook County (Chicago), Illinois; and King County (Seattle), Washington, also each lost in excess of \$50 million per year in SNAP/Food Stamp benefits. In total, more than \$1.6 billion in potential federally-funded benefits were left unclaimed by the 24 big cities and urban counties in 2007.

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 on average are 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 SNAP/Food Stamps in cities is a critically important step toward building an America free of hunger. While the principal goal of SNAP/Food Stamps is to feed hungry people and provide essential nutrition, SNAP/Food Stamp benefits also improve health and children’s ability to learn and are a boon to local businesses and a stimulus to local economies. In the face of community-wide economic challenges in cities, increasing the amount of federal SNAP/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 – typically tens or hundreds of millions – of federal dollars per year through comparatively modest efforts to increase participation in SNAP/Food Stamps. By understanding the size of the challenge for their particular cities, SNAP/Food Stamp advocates, government officials, city leaders, and others can help ensure that needy families receive the assistance to which they are entitled.

²¹ 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 <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/fanrr26/fanrr26-6/fanrr26-6.pdf>

²² For a discussion of the effects of SNAP/Food Stamp spending on tax revenues in California, see the California Legislative Analyst’s Office’s (LAO) “Analysis of the 2004-5 Budget Bill” at http://www.lao.ca.gov/analysis_2004/health_ss/hss_20_foodstamps_anl04.htm. The LAO argued that a proposal in the governor’s budget to repeal eligibility expansions in the Food Stamp Program would have a negative impact on the state budget because the tax revenues lost to the state would exceed the state’s share of the administrative savings gained. See also “Lost Dollars, Empty Plates: The Impact of Food Stamps on State and Local Budgets,” by California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA), available at www.cfpa.net/lostdollars2005overview.doc. In 2005, CFPA estimated that full participation in the Food Stamp Program by all eligible Californians would enhance the state government budget by \$37 million per year and county government budgets by \$12 million per year.

Table 1: Demographic and Economic Data, 2005-2007

City	Population	Individuals in Poverty	Poverty Rate	Children in Poverty*	Child Poverty Rate
Atlanta, GA	439,275	97,301	23.3%	36,594	39.9%
Baltimore, MD	639,493	127,955	20.7%	45,622	30.0%
Boston, MA	600,980	118,618	20.8%	34,779	30.9%
Chicago, IL	2,740,224	563,644	21.0%	206,659	31.0%
Columbus, OH	724,095	143,623	20.3%	48,630	28.1%
Denver, CO	576,842	102,248	18.0%	36,502	26.7%
Detroit, MI	837,711	267,656	32.5%	110,113	45.7%
Houston, TX	2,034,749	436,117	21.8%	177,436	33.0%
Indianapolis, IN	790,815	122,225	15.8%	48,010	23.6%
Jacksonville, FL	797,966	101,008	13.0%	36,742	17.9%
Las Vegas, NV	558,892	62,887	11.4%	23,508	15.9%
Los Angeles, CA	3,770,590	713,454	19.3%	263,411	28.2%
Louisville, KY**	560,454	89,912	16.3%	32,916	24.4%
Miami, FL	352,064	92,787	27.0%	26,386	36.8%
Milwaukee, WI	584,007	143,016	25.2%	60,343	37.2%
New York, NY	8,246,310	1,534,512	18.9%	521,398	27.8%
Oakland, CA	372,247	66,741	18.1%	22,456	26.2%
Philadelphia, PA	1,454,382	345,938	24.5%	126,307	35.1%
Phoenix, AZ	1,440,018	245,304	17.3%	101,724	24.8%
San Antonio, TX	1,267,984	225,883	18.3%	92,564	26.5%
San Diego, CA	1,264,263	161,427	13.3%	51,386	17.9%
Seattle, WA	565,809	71,208	13.0%	12,235	14.1%
Washington, DC	585,267	104,680	18.8%	32,864	29.3%
Wichita, KS	356,564	51,809	14.8%	17,418	19.0%
United States	298,757,310	38,567,903	13.3%	13,262,891	18.3%

* Under age 18.

**Includes the Louisville/ Jefferson County metropolitan area

Source: 2005-2007 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 does not reflect the actual difference in prices among metropolitan areas, but how much people feel they would need to spend which is likely determined in large part by price differences. An index of 1.00 is the national average.

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

N/A indicates that the state that includes the city has no non-metropolitan area.

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

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

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

Table 3: Urban SNAP/Food Stamp Enrollment Trends, 2004-2009

City (County), State	Data Level*	SNAP/Food Stamp Enrollment, Persons				Change in Caseload (percent)		
		May 2009	April 2009	May 2008	May 2004	1-mo.	1-yr.	5-yr.
Atlanta (Fulton), GA	County	136,068	132,882	107,821	N/A	2.4	26.2	N/A
Baltimore (Baltimore), MD	City-Co.	149,251	146,010	120,735	98,303	2.2	23.6	51.8
Boston (Suffolk), MA	County	120,714	130,054	109,236	61,105	-7.2	10.5	97.6
Chicago (Cook), IL	County	778,323	777,458	691,062	592,295	0.1	12.6	31.4
Columbus (Franklin), OH	County	158,961	154,865	135,048	107,520	2.6	17.7	47.8
Denver (Denver), CO	City-Co.	62,187	61,320	47,097	N/A	1.4	32.0	N/A
Detroit (Wayne), MI	County	421,736	412,416	379,764	309,150	2.3	11.1	36.4
Houston (Harris), TX	County	385,213	395,127	315,115	276,559	-2.5	22.2	39.3
Indianapolis (Marion), IN	County	145,241	140,892	119,262	107,962	3.1	21.8	34.5
Jacksonville (Duval), FL	County	110,867	106,038	82,255	58,147	4.6	34.8	90.7
Las Vegas (Clark), NV	County	134,050	131,519	103,546	89,916	1.9	29.5	49.1
Los Angeles (Los Angeles), CA	County	754,831	743,136	645,243	645,582	1.6	17.0	16.9
Louisville (Jefferson), KY	County	107,367	105,128	92,483	77,476	2.1	16.1	38.6
Miami (Miami-Dade), FL	County	409,518	396,406	316,353	303,774	3.3	29.4	34.8
Milwaukee (Milwaukee), WI	County	183,419	178,259	147,790	142,159	2.9	24.1	29.0
New York, NY	City	1,473,304	1,444,403	1,226,492	987,074	2.0	20.1	49.3
Oakland (Alameda), CA	County	85,386	84,209	74,283	63,860	1.4	14.9	33.7
Philadelphia (Philadelphia), PA	City-Co.	365,503	361,133	332,427	283,410	1.2	9.9	29.0
Phoenix (Maricopa), AZ	County	444,664	428,479	323,529	254,771	3.8	37.4	74.5
San Antonio (Bexar), TX	County	210,996	213,354	178,290	163,203	-1.1	18.3	29.3
San Diego (San Diego), CA	County	133,039	129,364	103,851	81,618	2.8	28.1	63.0
Seattle (King), WA	County	155,299	154,494	94,243	84,688	0.5	64.8	83.4
Washington, DC	City	99,259	97,579	86,713	84,404	1.7	14.5	17.6
Wichita (Sedgwick), KS	City	50,987	49,631	43,208	40,245	2.7	18.0	26.7
United States		34,409,460	33,758,137	28,435,823	23,975,602	1.9	21.0	43.5

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. Atlanta, Columbus, and Houston are not completely contained within one county, but in all cases more than 90 percent of the city's population lives within one county, so only the primary county is represented here. New York City contains five counties: New York, Bronx, Kings, Queens, and Richmond.

Source: City and/or state SNAP/Food Stamp/human service agencies. FRAC gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the following people at city and state SNAP/Food Stamp agencies: Joseph Argenio, Richard Arnold, Kara Bertke Wentte, Yvonne Boyd, Peter Bull, Glenda Burke, John Camp, Brian Campbell, Phuoc Cao, Joe DeMartino, Lori Duffy, Jennifer Maldonado-Ong, Ross McDonald, Sue McGinn, Mike Papin, Bob Reardon, Lucy Smith, Terri Stangl, and Kent Waltmire.

Table 4: Local Access Indicator and Unclaimed Benefits, 2007

City (County), State	Data Level	Enrollment , Dec 2007 (persons)	Est. Eligible Persons, 2007	Est. Eligible Non-participants 2007	Local Access Indicator	Average Benefit per recipient, Dec 2007*	Est. Unclaimed Benefits, 2007
Atlanta (Fulton), GA	County	106,427	141,889	35,462	75%	\$110.66	\$20,719,886
Baltimore (Baltimore), MD	City-Co.	117,205	134,047	16,842	87%	\$105.51	\$9,382,703
Boston (Suffolk), MA	County	89,915	131,892	41,977	68%	\$115.62	\$25,625,750
Chicago (Cook), IL	County	677,762	819,605	141,843	83%	\$113.96	\$85,348,257
Columbus (Franklin), OH	County	129,743	174,106	44,363	75%	\$110.25	\$25,824,413
Denver (Denver), CO	City-Co.	46,874	108,828	61,954	43%	\$112.98	\$36,957,922
Detroit (Wayne), MI	County	373,761	404,885	31,124	92%	\$103.60	\$17,025,271
Houston (Harris), TX	County	314,836	691,194	376,358	46%	\$102.52	\$203,724,572
Indianapolis (Marion), IN	County	117,712	138,120	20,408	85%	\$106.62	\$11,488,769
Jacksonville (Duval), FL	County	77,892	114,168	36,276	68%	\$100.27	\$19,205,516
Las Vegas (Clark), NV	County	135,917	205,769	69,852	66%	\$97.28	\$35,878,802
Los Angeles (Los Angeles), CA	County	630,965	1,265,547	634,582	50%	\$119.10	\$399,058,388
Louisville (Jefferson), KY	County	90,886	103,787	12,901	88%	\$104.32	\$7,105,881
Miami (Miami-Dade), FL	County	303,164	413,658	110,494	73%	\$100.86	\$58,842,659
Milwaukee (Milwaukee), WI	County	143,506	181,120	37,614	79%	\$89.20	\$17,715,489
New York, NY	City	1,129,368	1,550,779	421,411	73%	\$122.00	\$271,456,381
Oakland (Alameda), CA	County	72,319	121,383	49,064	60%	\$113.75	\$29,468,454
Philadelphia (Philadelphia), PA	City-Co.	327,903	352,632	24,729	93%	\$102.52	\$13,386,210
Phoenix (Maricopa), AZ	County	298,465	509,560	211,095	59%	\$104.04	\$115,961,074
San Antonio (Bexar), TX	County	183,555	276,132	92,577	66%	\$96.51	\$47,174,971
San Diego (San Diego), CA	County	99,039	284,873	185,834	35%	\$109.74	\$107,673,097
Seattle (King), WA	County	93,597	179,883	86,286	52%	\$205.51	\$93,628,467
Washington, DC	City	87,079	105,668	18,589	82%	\$104.61	\$10,267,301
Wichita (Sedgwick), KS	City	42,308	54,071	11,763	78%	\$99.69	\$6,191,790
Total Survey Cities		5,690,198	8,463,596	2,773,398	67%		\$1,669,112,023

*The average benefit in December 2007 represents the actual average benefit received by SNAP/Food Stamp participants in December 2007. This should not be confused with the calculated benefit of eligible non-participants. 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 SNAP/Food Stamp human services agencies.

Links and Resources

General Information on SNAP/Food Stamps

Food Research and Action Center's main page on SNAP/Food Stamps: www.frac.org/html/actioncenters/fsindex.html

FNS main page on SNAP/Food Stamps: www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/

FNS's annual report "Characteristics of SNAP/Food Stamp Households": www.fns.usda.gov/ora/MENU/Published/snap/snapPartHH.htm

FRAC's Report, "Ending Childhood Hunger by 2015: The Essential Strategies to Achieving the President's Goal": www.frac.org/pdf/endingchildhunger_2015paper.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

SNAP/Food Stamps Participation Data and Studies

Monthly national and state SNAP/Food Stamp participation data: www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/programs/fsp participation.html

FRAC's 2009 SNAP/Food Stamp Access Calculator: www.frac.org

Annual FNS reports on state participation rates: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/SNAPmain.htm>

FNS Brief "Calculating the Food Stamp Program Access Index: A Step-By-Step Guide": <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/MENU/published/snap/FILES/Other/pai2006.pdf>

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

SNAP/Food Stamp Outreach

SNAP/Food Stamps toll-free information number: 1-800-221-5689

FNS's SNAP/Food Stamp Outreach Plan: http://www.fns.usda.gov/FSP/outreach/guidance/Outreach_Plan_Guidance.pdf

FNS's SNAP/Food Stamps Eligibility Pre-screening Tool: <http://www.snap-step1.usda.gov/fns/>

FRAC's Report, "Heat and Eat: Using Federal Nutrition Programs to Soften Low-Income Households' Food/Fuel Dilemma": www.frac.org/pdf/heat_and_eat09.pdf

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

FRAC's toolkit, "SNAP/Food Stamp Toolkit for Changing Times: Rebranding, Program Improvements and Economic Hardship": www.frac.org/SNAP_toolkit_changing_timesOCT2008.htm

The Hatcher Group's and FRAC's Toolkit, "Take the Challenge: Living on a Food Stamp Budget": www.frac.org/pdf/FSC_Toolkit.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

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

Indiana Coalition on Housing and Homelessness Issues (ICHHI) report "Is Indiana Getting Its Fair Share?": http://www.ichhi.org/clientuploads/Indiana_Institute_For_Working_Families_2007/FAIR_SHARE_REPORT_2006_FINAL.pdf

National Priorities Project's report "Half of Low-Income People Not Receiving Food Stamps": <http://www.nationalpriorities.org/images/stories/nationalprioritiesprojectfoodstampsauqust2007.pdf>

FRAC's Guide to SNAP/Food Stamp Outreach Collaborations: http://www.frac.org/html/news/fsp_guide2006.html

FRAC'S Toolkit "10 Ways to Promote the Recovery Act's SNAP/Food Stamp Increases": http://www.frac.org/Legislative/action_center/arra_econ_recov_implementation.htm

AARP's Benefit QuickLINK Map of States: https://www.benefitscheckup.org/snap?partner_id=56

National Agencies and Organizations Conducting State and Local Work:

National League of Cities (NLC) Benefits for Working Families webpage:
www.nlc.org/IYEF/PROGRAM AREAS/family_economic_access_v2/428.aspx

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

NLC *Cities Weekly* article on federal nutrition programs:
www.nlc.org/articles/articleItems/NCW72709/FedNutrition.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*:
<http://usmayors.org/hungersurvey/2004/onlinereport/HungerAndHomelessnessReport2004.pdf>

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

AARP and AARP Foundation:
www.aarp.org

National Council of La Raza:
www.nclr.org

Methodological Appendix and Worksheet

This appendix describes the methodology used to calculate FRAC’s SNAP/Food Stamp 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 SNAP/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 SNAP/Food Stamp participation rates. In states that have utilized a federal option that allows expanded SNAP/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.

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 tend to undercount the estimated number of eligible people and overestimate the percentage of people participating in each of these urban areas (i.e., increase the Local Access Indicator) in this report.

In addition to enrollment and benefits data from state SNAP/Food Stamp agencies, the FRAC LAI methodology relies on data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS). The FRAC LAI methodology has been updated from previous years as the ACS now provides 3-year estimates for areas with populations of 20,000 or more. While not as current as single year estimates, the larger sample size of the 3-year estimates allows for more reliability and for more areas to be included. A link to the data set, available on the Census Bureau’s American FactFinder, appears below:

http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTGeoSearchByListServlet?ds_name=ACS_2007_3YR_G00_&lang=en&ts=263402950816

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. Once you have selected your location, use the table numbers that appear within the steps below to find the appropriate data.

The FRAC LAI methodology has been updated from previous years to use December SNAP/Food Stamp data. The December 2007 data are the most recent from 2007 that affect denominators used in our methodology. December 2007 also was the official beginning of the economic recession.

Step 1: Income Eligibility

First we estimate how many people in each city have income less than the gross income limit for SNAP/Food Stamp eligibility by determining how many people live below 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).

		<i>Sample: L.A. County</i>	<i>Your City</i>
1.1	Obtain the number of people living below 125 percent of the national Federal Poverty Level from ACS Table B17002.	2,072,502	
1.2	Multiply the result of the first step by 1.05, 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. This is the estimate of income-eligible people ²³ .	2,176,127	

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 national average. While this ratio varies little at the state level, there may be more variability at the local level.

²³ The ACS data available on American FactFinder currently reports how many people live below 125 percent of the FPL, not 130 percent. FRAC therefore derived the ratio of the population under 130 percent of the FPL to the population under 125 percent of the FPL by analyzing the ACS using the DataFerret program provided by the Census Bureau. We can 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. For 2007, the national ratio was 1.05.

- Some people, such as certain senior citizens, as well as persons in states that have increased the gross income test generally, may be eligible for SNAP/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 1.2 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.

		<i>Sample: L.A. County</i>	<i>Your City</i>
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.	599,796	
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 SNAP/Food Stamps. The result of step 2.1 represents all foreign-born non-citizens who entered from 2000, but as the 3-year estimate covers 2005 to 2007, multiplying by 5/7 approximates the number of people who have been LPRs for fewer than 5 years.	428,426	
2.3	Multiply the result of step 2.2 by .80. This step adjusts for the fact that immigrant children are not subject to the 5 year bar on LPRs. Based on data from the Department of Homeland Security, 20 percent of new LPRs are under 18 years old ²⁴ .	342,741	
2.4	Obtain the number of foreign-born non-citizens who were <i>below</i> 100 percent of the FPL in the past twelve months from ACS C17025.	452,850	
2.5	Obtain the number of foreign-born non-citizens who were <i>above</i> 100 percent of the FPL in the past twelve months from ACS C17025.	1,557,963	
2.6	Obtain the percentage of foreign-born non-citizens who are below 100 percent of the FPL by dividing step 2.4 by the sum of steps 2.4 and 2.5 [non-citizens below 100/(non-citizens below 100 + non-citizens above 100)].	0.23	
2.7	Multiply the result of step 2.3 by the result of step 2.6. This is an estimate of people below 100 percent of the FPL who have been LPRs for less than 5 years.	77,188	
2.8	Multiply the result of step 2.7 by 1.39, the ratio of the number of foreign-born non-citizens living below 130 percent of the FPL to the number living below 100 percent of the FPL ²⁵ .	107,291	
2.9	Subtract the result of step 2.8 from the result of step 1.2. This is an estimate of how many people are eligible according to income and immigration status.	2,068,836	

Limitations:

- Step 2.2 introduces some error both as it assumes that the number of immigrants who enter each year is constant, and because the formula requires assuming the mid-point of the 3-year estimate as the cut off point
- Steps 2.4 – 2.8 introduce some error, since poverty status is unlikely to be randomly distributed among immigrants arriving in different years
- Step 2.8 introduces some error as the income profile of immigrants may not be proportional to the income profile of the population at large.
- Using the ratio of people under 130 percent of the FPL to people under 100 percent of the FPL introduces some error, since the ratio comes from a national average.

²⁴ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Profiles on Legal Permanent Residents: 2007, <http://www.dhs.gov/ximgtn/statistics/data/dslpr.shtm>.

²⁵ The ACS data available on American FactFinder currently report foreign-born non-citizens living below 100 percent of the FPL but not 130 percent. Instead the ratio of non-citizens under 130 percent of the FPL to those under 100 percent of the FPL was derived by analyzing data for the population as a whole from the ACS using DataFerret. For 2007, the national ratio was 1.39.

- We are not able to account for immigrants who are refugees or asylees, who may be eligible regardless of entry date. This limitation reduces the estimated number of eligible people.
- California operates a state-level SNAP/Food Stamps 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 SNAP/Food Stamps, in 2007, households may have only \$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.²⁶

		Sample: L.A. County	Your City
3.1	Multiply the result of step 2.9 by 0.799. This approximates the number of people who are eligible according to income, immigration status, and resources.	1,653,000	

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 areas in California only. If your area 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	Obtain the number of families with income <i>below</i> 100 percent of the FPL who are receiving SSI in your city from ACS Table C17015 (add together those with and without Social Security).	62,109	
4.2	Obtain the total number of families with income <i>below</i> 100 percent of the FPL in your city from ACS Table C17015.	264,977	
4.3	Divide the results of step 4.1 by step 4.2 to calculate the proportion of people below 100 percent of the FPL who are receiving SSI.	.23	
4.4	Subtract the results of step 4.3 from 1 to obtain the proportion of people below the FPL who are <i>not</i> receiving SSI.	.77	
4.5	Multiply the result of step 3.1 by the result of step 4.4. This is an estimate of the number of people who are eligible for food stamps and also not receiving SSI.	1,265,547	

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.
- The ACS only reports SSI information on the family level. This formula assumes that the proportion of individuals receiving SSI is similar to that of families.

²⁶ This estimate is from Table 2 of Carole Trippe and Bruce Schechter, "Tables Describing the Asset and Vehicle Holdings of Low-Income Households in 2002," USDA (May 2007), available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/menu/Published/FSP/FILES/ProgramDesign/AssetVehicle2002.pdf>.

- 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 4.5 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.

		<i>Sample: L.A. County</i>	<i>Your City</i>
5.1	Obtain the number of actual SNAP/Food Stamp recipients in a month (or an average across months) in 2007. FRAC used December 2007 in this report.	630,965	
5.2	Divide the result of step 5.1 by the result of step 3.1 (or step 4.5 in California) and multiply by 100. This is FRAC's Local Access Indicator.	49.9	

Limitations:

- There are other factors affecting eligibility that we have been unable to account for in this methodology, such as time limits for ABAWDs (able-bodied adult without dependent), 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 SNAP/Food Stamps.

		<i>Sample: L.A. County</i>	<i>Your City</i>
6.1	Obtain the average monthly SNAP/Food Stamp benefit per person for the same month (or average of months) as in step 5.1.	\$119.10	
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.	634,582	
6.3	Multiply the result of step 6.1 by the result of step 6.2.	\$75,579,240	
6.4	Multiply the result of step 6.3 by 0.44. 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 44 percent of the benefits of a participant. ²⁷	\$33,254,866	
6.5	Multiply the result of step 6.4 by 12 to convert from months to years.	\$399,058,388	

Limitations:

- Once again, the 44 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.

²⁷ Estimate derived from Table 1 (p. 10) in J. Leftin and K. Wolkwitz, "Trends in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates: 2000 to 2007," USDA (2009), available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/Published/SNAP/FILES/Participation/Trends2000-2007.pdf>