

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

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

San Diego (San Diego), CA	26%
Houston (Harris), TX	40%
Jacksonville (Duval), FL	43%
Las Vegas (Clark), NV	45%
Boston (Suffolk), MA	48%
Oakland (Alameda), CA	49%
Los Angeles (Los Angeles), CA	52%
Phoenix (Maricopa), AZ	54%
San Antonio (Bexar), TX	59%
New York, NY	61%
Denver (Denver), CO	63%
Seattle (King), WA	63%
Miami (Miami-Dade), FL	68%
Louisville (Jefferson), KY	71%
Columbus (Franklin), OH	73%
Baltimore (Baltimore), MD	75%
Atlanta (Fulton), GA	76%
Chicago (Cook), IL	77%
Indianapolis (Marion), IN	81%
Wichita (Sedgwick), KS	84%
Philadelphia (Philadelphia), PA	85%
Washington, DC	86%
Detroit (Wayne), MI	88%
Milwaukee (Milwaukee), WI	92%
Memphis (Shelby), TN	97%

\* See Pg. 26 for LAI Methodology

September 2005  
(Revised April 2006)

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## **ABOUT FRAC**

The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) is the leading national organization working for more effective public and private policies to eradicate domestic hunger and undernutrition.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This report was prepared by Shawn Powers, Emerson National Hunger Fellow, under the supervision of Ellen Vollinger, FRAC Legal Director. Randy Rosso, Senior Policy Analyst at FRAC, provided technical assistance. Michael Melmed provided research support and Philip Colvin provided editorial assistance.

FRAC thanks Emerson National Hunger Fellows Larisa Bowman and Kevin Anderson for assistance on the revised edition of this report.

FRAC gratefully acknowledges the following funders whose support has helped to make possible our work on the Food Stamp Program in 2004-5:

Anonymous Donors  
The California Endowment  
The Annie E. Casey Foundation  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
General Mills Foundation  
Joyce Foundation  
Land O'Lakes Foundation  
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger  
The Moriah Fund  
New Directions Foundation  
New Prospect Foundation  
Public Welfare Foundation  
Charles H. Revson Foundation  
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 4 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 Emerson National Hunger Fellows program.

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## Executive Summary

The Food Stamp Program, the first line of defense against hunger and undernutrition in the U.S., is a critically important but underutilized resource for urban America. In this report FRAC takes a look at food stamps and hunger in 25 of America's largest urban areas,<sup>1</sup> situated in 20 states and the District of Columbia, looking particularly at their food stamp participation measures and the number of unserved people.

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

- Among the 25 urban areas featured in the report, all but three had a poverty rate higher than the national rate of 12.7 percent in 2003.
- In most of the urban areas, at least one child in four lived below the poverty line in 2003, and in combination the 25 were home to over two million poor children.
- In 2003, 14.8 percent of households in central cities nationally experienced food insecurity, as compared with 11.2 percent of households in the entire U.S. population.
- A recent USDA study shows that the costs to families to purchase enough food generally were higher in the cities than in their immediate surroundings or in non-metropolitan areas of the same state.

These poverty, food insecurity and food cost data show just how important food stamps are to low-income people in urban America.

As of May 2005 in the 25 urban areas, approximately 5.4 million people were receiving food stamps. More than half of the households receiving food stamps contained children, and nearly 80 percent of the benefits issued were paid to households with one or more children. One in five urban food stamp households included an elderly person.

Between 2000 and 2005, food stamp caseloads grew in all but one of the 25 cities and urban counties. But millions of people in these large cities and counties who are eligible for food stamps

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

do not receive benefits. FRAC estimates that only 66 percent of eligible people in the 25 cities and urban counties participated in the program in 2003. Under FRAC's measure—which is called the Local Access Indicator—the 25 urban areas' food stamp participation varied from 26 percent to more than 90 percent.

The lowest estimated Local Access Indicators for participation measures were for San Diego County, California (26 percent); Harris County (Houston), Texas (40 percent); and Duval County (Jacksonville), Florida (43 percent). The highest estimated Local Access Indicators were for Milwaukee County, Wisconsin; and Shelby County (Memphis), Tennessee, where 90 percent or more of eligible people accessed food stamp benefits.

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

In total, nearly \$2.1 billion in federally-funded benefits were left unclaimed by the 25 cities and urban counties in 2003. The places that were missing out on the most federal food stamp benefits were New York, New York (\$478 million); Los Angeles County, California (\$410 million); and Harris County (Houston), Texas (\$227 million).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The report was revised in April 2006 to correct caseload data for Alameda County. The revisions affected that jurisdiction's numbers and ranking, but had only slight effect on the national figures.

## Introduction

The Food Stamp Program is the first line of defense against hunger and undernutrition in the United States. In Fiscal Year 2004, a monthly average of 24 million people received benefits, totaling \$24.6 billion for the year.<sup>3</sup> Delivered through Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards, which may be used like debit cards at authorized food retailers nationwide, food stamp benefits enhance the purchasing power of low-income households and help them to 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 of ensuring access to nutritious food for all Americans is critically important.<sup>4</sup> The Food Stamp Program is of particular importance to America's big cities, which are home to a disproportionate share of the nation's low-income people. Food stamps not only help individual recipients. They also give a boost to local retailers and the local economy, helping to sustain and strengthen struggling communities.

In big cities, however, as in the nation overall, millions of people are eligible for food stamp benefits but not participating. There are several reasons for this. Cities are home to a large share of the nation's immigrants, many of whom are eligible for the Food Stamp Program—thanks in large part to program improvements in legislation in 1998 and 2002—but are not participating due to language or cultural barriers, concern about stigma, or simply a lack of awareness of their eligibility.<sup>5</sup> In addition, many food stamp offices in cities are overburdened, with caseworkers handling large numbers of clients and many low-income people falling through the cracks.

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<sup>3</sup> See Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), "Food Stamp Program Participation and Costs," available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/fssummar.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Although it may seem counterintuitive, hunger and obesity both may be linked to an inability to purchase sufficient nutritious food. For more information, see FRAC's webpage on hunger and obesity at [http://www.frac.org/html/hunger\\_in\\_the\\_us/hunger&obesity.htm](http://www.frac.org/html/hunger_in_the_us/hunger&obesity.htm).

<sup>5</sup> Food stamp benefits are available to qualified legal permanent residents who have been in the United States five years or more, to qualified legal immigrant children regardless of date of entry, and to qualified refugees, asylees and disabled immigrants. Food stamp benefits for legal immigrants were largely eliminated by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, but benefits were restored for many in the Agriculture Research, Extension and Education Reform Act of 1998 and the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act (FSRIA) of 2002, also known, respectively, as the 1998 Agricultural Research and 2002 Farm Bills. For more

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 remains to be done.

This paper provides a picture of trends and promising practices in the Food Stamp Program in America's big cities and urban counties. The analysis focuses on a selection of 25 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 25 largest in the United States. Rather, we chose only one city in each state, except for California, Texas and Florida, 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 then 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 25 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. It concludes with examples of promising practices to improve service in urban food stamp offices and reach more eligible but nonparticipating people.

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

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

America's big cities are home to both great wealth and persistent hunger, food insecurity and poverty. Among the 25 big cities covered in this report, all but three had a higher poverty rate than the national rate of 12.7 percent in 2003<sup>6</sup> (See Table 1). Detroit had the highest poverty rate,

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information, see FRAC's report on changes to the Food Stamp Program in the 2002 Farm Bill: <http://www.frac.org/pdf/implementation081402.PDF>.

<sup>6</sup> National poverty and unemployment rates referenced in this section are from the U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS). National data are available at <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Products/Profiles/Single/2003/ACS/US.htm>.

with three in ten of its residents living below the federal poverty level. In Atlanta, Baltimore, Houston, Los Angeles, Memphis, Miami, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia, at least one person in five was poor.

The situation is even worse for children in America's big cities. In a majority of the cities, at least one child in four lived below the poverty line in 2003, and in Atlanta and Detroit it was two children in five.

Official poverty statistics may understate the true extent of the problem of urban poverty, since the cost of living is often higher in urban areas than elsewhere in the country. In addition, millions of people in America's big cities are searching for—but are unable to find—jobs. Twenty of the 25 cities had a higher unemployment rate in 2003 than the Census-reported national rate of 7.6 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), 14.8 percent of households in central cities experienced food insecurity in 2003, as compared with 11.2 percent of households in the entire U.S. population.<sup>7</sup> In this ERS study "central cities" includes all U.S. cities that are at the center of a geographical unit known as a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which includes the surrounding communities with economic and commuting ties to the central city.<sup>8</sup> Central cities also had a higher prevalence of food insecurity with hunger: 4.7 percent of central city households experienced hunger in 2003, as compared with 3.5 percent of households nationwide.<sup>9</sup>

High food costs and inadequate food availability also confront the urban poor. A study by Nord and Leibtag (2004) describes a methodology for calculating a "cost-of-enough-food index" from Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS) data.<sup>10</sup> The CPS-FSS data capture households' perceptions of how much money they would need to afford "just enough" food. While the cost-of-enough-food index is not a price index, the price of food likely determines a substantial portion of the variation in the index. Table 2 compares the cost-of-enough-food index between the cities, the balance of their MSAs, and the non-metropolitan (rural) portions of their states. Nineteen of the 25 cities had cost-of-enough-food indices as high as or higher than the

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<sup>7</sup> Households are considered "food insecure" if they were, for at least some of the time during the survey year, "uncertain of having, or unable to acquire, enough food for all household members because they had insufficient money and other resources for food." Households are considered "food insecure with hunger" if "one or more household members were hungry, at least some time during the year, because they couldn't afford enough food." See Nord, Mark, Margaret Andrews and Steven Carlson (2004). *Household Food Security in the United States, 2003*. USDA Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Report Number 42. Available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/fanrr42/>. For data on food insecurity in MSAs and central cities, see Section 1, Table 2.

<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that "central 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 more stark.

<sup>9</sup> Nord, Andrews and Carlson (2004).

<sup>10</sup> Nord, Mark and Ephraim Leibtag (2004). "Does Food Cost Less in Rural Areas?" Economic Research Service, USDA. Presented at the annual meeting of the Rural Sociological Society, Sacramento, CA, August 12-15, 2004.

balance of their MSAs, and 20 cities had indices as high as or higher than the non-metropolitan areas of the same state. This pattern suggests that, in most areas, people in cities find they need to spend more to obtain adequate food than people in suburbs or in rural areas.

Similarly, a detailed study of food costs in Boston found that people in three low-income neighborhoods face higher food prices than government assistance programs assume.<sup>11</sup> Researchers investigated the price of the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) market basket for a family of four at small, medium, and large stores.<sup>12</sup> The actual cost of the TFP exceeded the maximum food stamp allotment for a family of four in the small and large stores. Averaging across all stores, the maximum food stamp allotment fell short by almost \$27 per month. When the researchers investigated the cost of a modified TFP with substitutions of healthier food products, such as whole grains, the maximum food stamp allotment fell short by about \$148 per month. The disturbing implication of this research is that a healthier diet—containing the foods that USDA and medical experts recommend to promote health, reduce obesity, and prevent disease—is likely well out of reach for many food stamp recipients, at least in one major city.

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

Large grocery and apparel retail chains historically have ignored inner-city consumer markets because of incorrect perceptions about income, population, and demographics. Neighborhood-based consumer dollars are relegated to the few, usually small, local retail establishments that offer a narrow selection of higher priced goods.<sup>13</sup>

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

## II. Characteristics of Food Stamp Households in Big Cities

Table 3 provides a statistical profile of food stamp recipients in the counties that contain the 25 urban areas, along with national-level statistics.<sup>14</sup> Except for New York City and Washington, DC, all of the characteristics data are on the county level, as the Food Stamp Program Quality Control

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<sup>11</sup> Cook, J.T. *et al.* (2005). “The Real Cost of a Healthy Diet in Boston, Massachusetts.” Boston Medical Center.

<sup>12</sup> The TFP is a basket of food items that meets minimum USDA nutrition standards at the lowest possible cost. USDA uses the estimated cost of the TFP to determine the maximum food stamp allotment.

<sup>13</sup> Watson, Orson (2003). “Reducing Costs of Living: Strategies to Improve Affordability in Economically Isolated Neighborhoods.” In *2003 KIDS COUNT Resource Kit: Countering the Costs of Being Poor*. Anne E. Casey Foundation. Available at [http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/2003resource/2\\_reducing.pdf](http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/2003resource/2_reducing.pdf). Full resource kit available at <http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/2003resource/resourcekit.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> The Office of Analysis, Nutrition, and Evaluation (OANE) of FNS releases an annual report on the characteristics of food stamp households. PDF versions of these reports are available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/participation.htm#Characteristics>.

(FSPQC) database from which they are derived does not have city-level data. This discussion sometimes uses the term “cities” or the names of the cities for simplicity, but readers should be aware that the data refer to the counties containing those cities.

For most variables—with the notable exception of racial background—the average among the urban counties is comparable to nationwide values. However, there is considerable variation among the urban areas themselves.

More than half of households receiving food stamps among the urban counties contained children in 2003. The national number for all recipients was 55 percent. But San Diego and Los Angeles Counties stand out on the high end with 93 percent and 78 percent of households containing children, respectively.

Across the urban counties, as is the case nationwide, nearly 80 percent of all food stamp benefits in 2003 were paid to households with one or more children. Cities where the percentage of benefits going to households with children topped 85 percent included San Diego (96 percent), San Antonio (89 percent), Houston (89 percent), Memphis (88 percent), and Phoenix (86 percent).

Nearly one in five urban food stamp households in the 25 cities included an elderly person in 2003. The largest proportions of households with elderly recipients were in Miami-Dade County (46 percent of households) and New York City (33 percent).

Consistent with overall demographic patterns, the proportion of food stamp recipients who were black was considerably higher in the cities than nationwide. The percentage of Hispanic food stamp recipients among the cities also was substantially higher than the national rate, with Miami the highest at 68 percent. The variation from city to city was considerable: in Suffolk County (Boston), Denver, New York City, and the urban areas of the southwest, one quarter to one half of food stamp recipients were Hispanic.

### **III. Food Stamp Participation in America’s Big Cities: Trends and Shortfalls**

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

Table 4 presents data on caseload trends in the 25 urban areas—in most instances the counties that include the cities. Table 5 then provides FRAC’s estimates of what proportion of eligible people are participating in each of the 25 urban areas and how many federal dollars are being missed.

Where 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: 2000 to 2005***

Between May 2000 and May 2005, a time when national food stamp growth was 49.3 percent, food stamp caseloads grew in almost all of the 25 cities.<sup>15</sup> The rate of caseload growth varied widely among the cities, however, and reflected some regional trends (See Table 4).

The cities experiencing the highest rates of growth were located in the south and west. Two urban counties in the region saw their caseloads more than double in five years: Maricopa County (Phoenix), Arizona (174 percent growth) and Harris County (Houston), Texas (123 percent). Cities outside these regions experienced less dramatic but still substantial caseload growth as well, including Marion County (Indianapolis), Indiana, with a 98.7 percent increase in recipients from 2000 to 2005. The box on this page shows the top and bottom five cities in caseload growth from 2000 to 2005.

<b>Top and Bottom Five Cities and Urban Counties for Caseload Growth, May 2000-May 2005</b>	
<b>Top Five</b>	
Maricopa County (Phoenix), AZ	174.4%
Harris County (Houston), TX	123.4%
Marion County (Indianapolis), IN	98.7%
Clark County (Las Vegas), NV	94.9%
Duval County (Jacksonville), FL	86.5%
<b>Bottom Five</b>	
Miami-Dade County (Miami), FL	17.6%
Philadelphia County, PA	12.1%
Washington, DC	10.1%
Baltimore, MD	4.1%
San Diego County, CA	-11.7%

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

Despite this caseload growth, as will be discussed in the following section, millions of potentially eligible people in these cities are not receiving food stamps, so the caseload growth should not be taken as a sign that everyone in need of food assistance is being served.

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<sup>15</sup> For the national and state trends, see FRAC’s posting of May 2005 food stamp enrollment data, available at [http://www.frac.org/html/news/fsp/05.05\\_FSP.html](http://www.frac.org/html/news/fsp/05.05_FSP.html). FRAC was able to obtain May 2000 and May 2005 data for 21 of the 25 cities; only one of the 21 showed a five year decline.

## ***Participation Gaps***

Only 56 percent of people who are eligible for food stamps nationwide receive benefits, according to the most recent estimate from the USDA.<sup>16</sup> The reasons why eligible households do not participate are varied. A common reason for nonparticipation is that households simply are not aware that they are eligible for food stamp benefits. Other factors include language barriers, perceptions of stigma surrounding the program, low minimum benefits (especially common for senior citizens), the belief that there is a five-year time limit on benefits (there is not), difficulties getting to food stamp offices during the work day (or at all), and possible deterrent effects from the many verifications required by the program. FNS publishes an annual report on state-level participation rates, but there is no regular estimate of participation at the city level.<sup>17</sup>

Table 5 lists FRAC's estimates of food stamp participation in the cities for 2003. FRAC's measure, which we have called the "Local Access Indicator," is distinct from both USDA's official participation rates and its program access index.<sup>18</sup> Like the official participation rate, however, the Local Access Indicator seeks to estimate what proportion of low-income people who would qualify are actually enrolled in the Food Stamp Program.

The appendix provides a complete discussion of the methodology FRAC used to calculate the Local Access Indicator. In brief, we estimated the number of people who might qualify for food stamps in each city and then divided the actual food stamp enrollment for May 2003 by this number to yield the local access indicator. To approximate the denominator—the number of people who might qualify for food stamps—we estimated the number of people below 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (the food stamp gross income limit) and then estimated how many of those people are ineligible due to their immigration status or assets.

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<sup>16</sup> See Cunyngnam, Karen (2005). "Food Stamp Program Participation Rates: 2003." U.S. Department of Agriculture. Available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FILES/Participation/FSPPart2003.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> The Brookings Institution has estimated food stamp participation levels and lost benefits in MSAs and large urban counties. See Fellowes, Matt and Alan Berube (2005). "Leaving Money (and Food) on the Table: Food Stamp Participation in Major Metropolitan Areas and Counties." Available at [http://www.brookings.org/metro/pubs/20050517\\_FoodStamp.pdf](http://www.brookings.org/metro/pubs/20050517_FoodStamp.pdf). In addition, a number of state- and city-based advocates have estimated local participation levels. These reports are listed in the Links and Resources section under "Food Stamp Program Participation Data and Studies."

<sup>18</sup> The official USDA participation rates estimate what proportion of people who are eligible for food stamps are enrolled in the program. See Cunyngnam (2005) and USDA's annual reports of state-level food stamp participation rates, which are available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/participation.htm#State>. The program access index (PAI) measures what proportion of low-income people are enrolled in the Food Stamp Program. See FRAC's webpage on the PAI at [http://www.frac.org/html/federal\\_food\\_programs/programs/PARates.htm](http://www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/programs/PARates.htm).

On average, we estimate that 66 percent of people who might qualify for food stamps participated in the program in these 25 cities. This is somewhat higher than the national average of 56 percent of eligible people as calculated by USDA. More than 4.6 million people enrolled in the program in these cities, while 2.9 million more likely would qualify but did not enroll.

<b>Top and Bottom Five Cities and Urban Counties for Local Access Indicator, 2003</b>	
<b>Top Five</b>	
Shelby County (Memphis), TN	97%
Milwaukee County, WI	92%
Detroit MI	88%
Washington, DC	86%
Philadelphia, PA	85%
<b>Bottom Five</b>	
Boston, MA	48%
Clark County (Las Vegas), NV	45%
Duval County (Jacksonville), FL	43%
Harris County (Houston), TX	40%
San Diego County, CA	26%

The lowest Local Access Indicator was 26 percent in San Diego County, California. Harris County (Houston), Texas; Duval County (Jacksonville), Florida; Clark County

(Las Vegas), Nevada; and Boston, Massachusetts were also on the low end of the participation spectrum, each with an indicator below 50 percent.

These indicators generally are consistent with the official USDA participation rates for the states containing these cities. California, Texas, Florida, Nevada, and Massachusetts were all in the bottom quarter of states for food stamp participation in 2002.<sup>19</sup>

The highest Local Access Indicators were in Shelby County (Memphis), Tennessee; and Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, where at least 90 percent of eligible people enrolled in the program in 2003. Again, this is consistent with state data: Tennessee was in the top quarter of states for food stamp participation in 2002, and Wisconsin was in the middle 50 percent.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Missed Benefits***

Underparticipation in the Food Stamp Program affects the income, nutrition and well-being of eligible but non-participating households, which are missing out on benefits to which they are entitled. But it also affects communities that could be benefiting from more federal dollars in the local economy. Food stamp benefits are fully federally funded, meaning that food stamp dollars effectively provide an economic boost for low-income areas. As household food stamp expenditures become revenues for retailers, the funds cycle through the local economy, generating a “multiplier effect.” According to a USDA estimate, under certain conditions each dollar of food stamp benefits generates approximately \$1.80 in economic activity.<sup>21</sup> Increasing participation in

<sup>19</sup> Castner, Laura A. and Allen L. Schirm (2005). “Reaching Those in Need: State Food Stamp Participation Rates in 2002.” U.S. Department of Agriculture. Available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FILES/Participation/Reaching2002.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> See Hanson, Kenneth and Elise Golan (2002). “Effects of Changes in Food Stamp Expenditures Across the U.S. Economy.” (Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Report Number 26-6). Available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/fanrr26/fanrr26-6/fanrr26-6.pdf>.

the Food Stamp Program enhances local businesses. It also increases tax revenues to local governments, as recipients spend more money on taxable goods.<sup>22</sup>

America’s big cities are missing out on billions of dollars in food stamp benefits that could be lifting residents out of poverty and improving the local economy and tax base. Table 5 presents FRAC’s estimates of the missed benefits in each of the 25 cities and urban counties. The places that were missing out on the most federal food stamp benefits were New York City (\$478 million), Los Angeles County (\$410 million), and Harris County (\$227 million). San Diego County, Maricopa County (Phoenix), and Cook County (Chicago) each also lost in excess of \$100 million per year in food stamp benefits. In total, nearly \$2.1 billion in federally-funded benefits were left unclaimed by the 25 big cities and urban counties in 2003.

New York, NY	\$477,549,191
Los Angeles County, CA	\$409,973,076
Harris County (Houston), TX	\$227,469,102
San Diego County, CA	\$144,189,327
Maricopa County (Phoenix), AZ	\$143,466,297

For a full explanation of the methodology used to estimate these totals, please refer to the methodological appendix. In brief, we used the estimates of people who likely would qualify but are not participating that were derived previously, multiplied them by the average monthly benefit in each jurisdiction, and made adjustments to convert from months to years and to account for the fact that non-participants are generally eligible for lower benefits than participants.

#### **IV. Expanding Access to Food Stamps in America’s Big Cities: Promising Practices**

This section discusses some examples of promising practices to help expand access to food stamps in America’s large cities. It is not intended to be a comprehensive look at available strategies, but to feature a sampling of innovative efforts now under way in cities around the country. The practices generally fall into two categories: outreach initiatives, which focus on ways to get more potentially eligible households to apply for food stamps, and office operations, which address the service food stamp applicants receive at food stamp offices.

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<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of the effects of food stamp spending on tax revenues in California, see the California Legislative Analyst’s Office’s (LAO) “Analysis of the 2004-5 Budget Bill” at [http://www.lao.ca.gov/analysis\\_2004/health\\_ss/hss\\_20\\_foodstamps\\_anl04.htm](http://www.lao.ca.gov/analysis_2004/health_ss/hss_20_foodstamps_anl04.htm). The LAO argues that a proposal in the governor’s budget to repeal eligibility expansions in the Food Stamp Program would have a negative impact on the state budget because the tax revenues lost to the state would exceed the state’s share of the administrative savings gained. See also “Lost Dollars, Empty Plates: The Impact of Food Stamps on State and Local Budgets,” by California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA), available at <http://www.cfpa.net/lostdollars2005overview.doc>. CFPA estimates that full participation in the Food Stamp Program by all eligible Californians would enhance the state government budget by \$37 million per year and county government budgets by \$12 million per year.

Since an estimated 2.9 million people were eligible for food stamps but not participating in the 25 big cities in 2003, outreach is essential to expanding participation in the Food Stamp Program. Outreach efforts seek to connect potentially eligible but nonparticipating households with food stamp benefits, and may involve educating people about the reach of the program, providing a preliminary assessment of eligibility, helping people to fill out the application and obtain the necessary verifications, or accompanying applicants to the food stamp office.<sup>23</sup> Among promising practices in outreach are those from Philadelphia and Memphis discussed below.

The local food stamp office is the gateway through which low-income people access food stamp benefits. It is critically important to ensure high-quality service there. Unfortunately, many food stamp offices in America's big cities lack adequate levels of funding, technical resources, and personnel. Long waits, antiquated computer and phone systems, overloaded caseworkers, and insufficient support for non-English-speaking clients have been cited as frequent problems. While more funding and caseworkers are essential to ensure better customer service in fundamental ways, food stamp offices and advocacy organizations have produced a number of innovative strategies to improve service. Promising practices in food stamp office operations from Washington, DC, Los Angeles County, and the Chicago area are discussed below.

### ***Prescreening and Application Assistance: Philadelphia***

While one of the major challenges of food stamp outreach is reaching people who do not know that they are eligible for benefits, it is also critically important to help those who are already aware or become aware of their eligibility to apply for benefits. The Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger (GPCAH), with a grant from USDA, conducted in September 2002 a food stamp outreach campaign involving university students and community and faith-based volunteers. The volunteers conducted pre-screenings and estimated potential benefit levels over a telephone hotline and at food stamp fairs in local grocery stores, but did not assist clients with the actual application process.

According to the final report on the project that was submitted to USDA, 45 percent of those deemed eligible for food stamps actually applied for benefits. For too many others, however, prescreening alone "did not provide sufficient incentive to overcome barriers to food stamp application." Therefore, in its subsequent outreach work, GPCAH will include "a strong emphasis on helping clients fill out applications to see if higher enrollment rates will result."<sup>24</sup> GPCAH's experience indicates that the most effective outreach strategies involve both pre-screening for potential benefits and assisting clients with the application process.

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<sup>23</sup> For more information on food stamp outreach, see FNS Food Stamp Outreach Resource Center, available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/coalition/resources.htm>.

<sup>24</sup> Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger (2005). "Final Evaluation: Using Volunteer Outreach to Improve Access to the Food Stamp Program."

### ***Multibenefit Outreach: Memphis***

Multibenefit outreach initiatives in several cities are attempting to connect needy families with benefits by generating applications both for food stamps and for other benefit programs at the pre-screening site. Memphis was one of six cities—along with Cleveland, Milwaukee, Oakland, New Haven, and Seattle—selected by the National League of Cities (NLC) in 2004 to receive technical assistance on multibenefit outreach projects as part of NLC’s “Helping Working Families” project.<sup>25</sup>

The City of Memphis contracted with Seedco, a national community development intermediary, to launch a computer-based screening tool called EarnBenefits, which is programmed with the eligibility requirements of the Food Stamp Program and 22 other benefit programs.<sup>26</sup> The tool has been provided to community-based organizations (CBOs) that serve low-income people, and it enables staff at those organizations to generate and submit online applications for those benefits for which clients are deemed eligible. CBO staff also may facilitate phone interviews with food stamp caseworkers (Tennessee requires only one face-to-face interview within 12 months of the application) and participate in the call at the client’s request. Similar programs are in varying stages of development in other cities under the NLC multibenefit initiative.

### ***Serving Immigrant Households: Washington, DC***

In order to improve food stamp service to legal immigrant households in the District of Columbia, D.C. Hunger Solutions collaborated with the Income Maintenance Administration (IMA) to produce a cultural sensitivity training curriculum for food stamp (and Medicaid and TANF) caseworkers. The training features guest speakers from immigrant communities who share the stories of their journeys to the U.S., their experience with public benefits (or the lack thereof) in their home countries, their reasons for emigrating, their perceptions of public benefits in the U.S., and their experience trying to access benefits in the District. Kim Perry, director of D.C. Hunger Solutions, reports that it has been “amazing watching [agency staff] being transformed” by hearing immigrants’ stories. The IMA was so pleased with the pilot training that it has been incorporated permanently into caseworker training in the District.

### ***Customer Service Yardsticks: Los Angeles County***

In conjunction with its report “Serving Up Solutions,” which offers recommendations and best practices for the Food Stamp Program in Los Angeles County, California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) developed a rubric for evaluating service in local food stamp offices and identifying areas

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<sup>25</sup> For further information on the NLC multibenefit outreach initiative, see [http://www.nlc.org/Newsroom/nation\\_s\\_cities\\_weekly/weekly\\_ncw/2004/03/08/2921.cfm](http://www.nlc.org/Newsroom/nation_s_cities_weekly/weekly_ncw/2004/03/08/2921.cfm).

<sup>26</sup> See also the website for EarnBenefits in Memphis at <http://memphis.earnbenefits.org/home/>.

for improvement.<sup>27</sup> These “Customer Service Yardsticks” cover various categories of service including office accessibility, engagement with community partners, office atmosphere, staff development, and personnel accountability. The Yardsticks focus on objective, easy-to-measure indicators, such as:

- whether clients can submit applications beyond 5 p.m. or on weekends,
- whether the office has a publicized standard application procedure for assisting clients with Limited English Proficiency, and
- whether staff receive anti-hunger and courtesy standards training.

This simple checklist provides an excellent tool for food stamp professionals and advocates in big cities and elsewhere to identify strengths and weaknesses in office service.

### ***Community Quality Councils and Document Receipts: Chicago Area***

In many areas food stamp officials and advocates have jointly convened working groups and other collaborative efforts to improve service in the Food Stamp Program. The Illinois Hunger Coalition (IHC), in partnership with the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), has organized a number of Community Quality Councils (CQCs) which bring together advocates, community members and IDHS officials. Most of the CQCs have been convened in Chicago and surrounding counties. The CQCs enable food stamp recipients and local office staff to share their experiences, to identify problems in the local food stamp offices, and to brainstorm solutions for those problems in a non-confrontational environment. Diane Doherty, executive director of IHC, said that the CQCs have helped address misconceptions for both clients and caseworkers. For example, the CQCs have helped office workers understand the difficulties clients sometimes face in obtaining emergency food and helped clients understand some of the obstacles that staff face—such as a shortage of personnel and resources—which sometimes make it difficult to run the program smoothly.

One major accomplishment of the CQCs in Illinois was the implementation of a document receipt system in local food stamp offices. Through the CQCs, advocates and clients raised the concern that food stamp offices were losing documents that clients had provided for verification of eligibility. The CQCs’ solution was to develop a receipt that lists all documentation provided by the client and is signed by an office worker. IDHS regional directors have reported that the receipts have helped improve supervision and organization at food stamp offices and provided more accountability. In addition, IHC reports fewer calls to hunger hotlines about lost paperwork from offices that have implemented the document receipt.

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<sup>27</sup> CFPA produced the report in partnership with the Congressional Hunger Center, the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank, the Los Angeles County Department of Social Services, and the USDA Western regional office. The report “Serving up Solutions” is available at [http://www.cfpa.net/forum\\_materials/2004/ServingUpSolutions.pdf](http://www.cfpa.net/forum_materials/2004/ServingUpSolutions.pdf) and the customer service yardsticks are available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/coalition/resources/ServingUpSolutionsYardsticks.doc>.

## **Conclusion**

Since the nation's big cities are home to a disproportionate share of poor and hungry Americans, expanding access to the Food Stamp Program in cities is a critically important step toward building an America free of hunger. While the principal goal of the Food Stamp Program is to feed hungry people and provide essential nutrition, food stamp benefits also improve health and children's ability to learn, and are a boon to local businesses and a stimulus to local economies. In the face of community-wide economic challenges in cities, such as the loss of well-paying jobs to the suburbs, increasing the amount of federal food stamp dollars flowing into cities is one effective strategy for pushing along the local economy. As the findings of this report indicate, all of America's big cities stand to gain many millions of federal dollars per year through comparatively modest efforts to increase participation in the Food Stamp Program.

In the face of many challenges, city leaders, food stamp officials and advocates have been designing innovative and effective strategies for improving service and reaching more eligible people. Collaboration and understanding among all stakeholders are needed to maximize the effectiveness of these efforts. By understanding the size of the challenge for their particular cities, learning from the experiences of other cities and replicating best practices, food stamp advocates and professionals can help ensure that needy families receive the assistance to which they are entitled.

**Table 1: Demographic and Economic Data, 2003**

City	Population*	Individuals in Poverty	Poverty Rate	Children in Poverty**	Childhood Poverty Rate	Unemployment Rate
Atlanta, GA	369,393	86,796	23.5%	35,918	41.2%	12.0%
Baltimore, MD	602,773	124,314	20.6%	42,539	27.8%	14.4%
Boston, MA	540,772	102,857	19.0%	33,485	29.6%	12.3%
Chicago, IL	2,722,562	523,772	19.2%	201,980	28.3%	11.9%
Columbus, OH	698,057	114,764	16.4%	40,336	23.0%	7.9%
Denver, CO	544,759	68,072	12.5%	22,612	17.2%	7.6%
Detroit, MI	879,575	263,800	30.0%	110,328	40.3%	19.0%
Houston, TX	1,938,502	392,184	20.2%	158,190	29.3%	8.9%
Indianapolis, IN	762,590	103,662	13.6%	40,320	19.3%	8.5%
Jacksonville, FL	747,516	105,590	14.1%	44,703	21.5%	6.7%
Las Vegas, NV	518,313	64,418	12.4%	20,360	14.1%	6.5%
Los Angeles, CA	3,719,310	743,732	20.0%	291,164	29.7%	10.2%
Louisville, KY	254,145	72,825	15.4%	27,244	29.8%	5.8%
Memphis, TN	599,972	139,981	23.3%	54,973	34.1%	10.1%
Miami, FL	382,959	105,622	27.9%	30,169	36.4%	9.9%
Milwaukee, WI	599,843	122,561	20.4%	69,273	34.4%	14.9%
New York, NY	7,902,897	1,499,718	19.0%	530,013	27.8%	9.1%
Oakland, CA	382,369	56,234	14.7%	20,330	22.4%	10.4%
Philadelphia, PA	1,423,538	315,042	22.1%	102,981	27.9%	12.0%
Phoenix, AZ	1,319,037	230,723	17.5%	95,605	25.1%	7.9%
San Antonio, TX	1,193,652	220,163	18.5%	96,822	28.4%	9.3%
San Diego, CA	1,220,734	176,198	14.5%	56,819	19.0%	6.2%
Seattle, WA	530,009	52,598	9.9%	8,174	10.2%	9.5%
Washington, DC	528,759	105,050	19.9%	37,676	35.1%	11.2%
Wichita, KS	351,215	46,571	13.3%	20,365	21.8%	8.7%
United States	282,909,885	35,846,289	12.7%	12,673,283	17.3%	7.6%

Source: U.S. Census, 2003 American Community Survey. Available at <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/>. All figures are based on a sample of the population. For upper- and lower-bound estimates and for further data, see the ACS data profiles, available at <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Products/Profiles/Single/2003/ACS/index.htm>.

\* 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.

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

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

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

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

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).

**Table 3: Characteristics of Food Stamp Households in Urban Counties, 2003**

City (County), State	Percentage of households with		Percent of Benefits to HHs with Children	Percentage of recipients who are**			
	Child (ren)	Elderly Person		White	Black	Hispanic	Other Race
Atlanta (Fulton), GA	56	12	80	7	93	0	0
Baltimore (Baltimore), MD	51	13	76	10	89	0	0
Boston (Suffolk), MA	60	17	79	20	36	36	8
Chicago (Cook), IL	46	18	72	11	73	15	1
Columbus (Franklin), OH	44	20	70	44	54	0	2
Denver (Denver), CO	45	25	78	22	34	41	3
Detroit (Wayne), MI	53	13	78	22	75	2	0
Houston (Harris), TX	66	22	89	12	55	28	4
Indianapolis (Marion), IN	64	10	83	38	60	2	0
Jacksonville (Duval), FL	61	8	84	23	68	8	0
Las Vegas (Clark), NV	53	21	79	43	30	23	3
Los Angeles (Los Angeles), CA	78	4	86	13	26	53	6
Louisville (Jefferson), KY	50	17	76	40	54	1	2
Memphis (Shelby), TN	65	12	88	9	90	1	0
Miami (Miami-Dade), FL	36	46	63	2	29	68	0
Milwaukee (Milwaukee), WI	61	11	79	20	63	10	4
New York, NY	41	33	72	14	28	44	5
Oakland (Alameda), CA	66	3	79	14	38	11	37
Philadelphia (Philadelphia), PA	53	15	74	16	64	17	3
Phoenix (Maricopa), AZ	69	11	86	32	12	49	6
San Antonio (Bexar), TX	68	15	89	8	14	77	1
San Diego (San Diego), CA	93	2	96	27	19	42	10
Seattle (King), WA	40	19	61	49	27	7	18
Washington, DC	42	11	63	2	97	1	1
Wichita (Sedgwick), KS	48	18	76	54	36	7	2
Nationwide	55	18	79	42	34	18	4

**Table 4: Urban Food Stamp Enrollment Trends, 2000-2005**

City (County), State	Data Level*	Food Stamp Enrollment, persons				Change in Caseload		
		May 2005	April 2005	May 2004	May 2000	1-mo.	1-yr.	5-yr.
Atlanta (Fulton), GA	County	102,809	102,347	100,523	60,069	0.5%	2.3%	71.2%
Baltimore (Baltimore), MD	City	101,102	100,348	98,303	97,103	0.8%	2.8%	4.1%
Boston (Suffolk), MA	City	56,140	56,272	51,686	n.a.	-0.2%	8.6%	n.a.
Chicago (Cook), IL	County	622,801	622,966	592,295	488,179	0.0%	5.2%	27.6%
Columbus (Franklin), OH	County	117,403	114,020	107,520	n.a.	3.0%	9.2%	n.a.
Denver (Denver), CO	City-Co.	n.a.	49,547**	47,478	36,244	n.a.	4.4%	36.7%
Detroit (Wayne), MI	City	251,646	250,722	232,741	176,535	0.4%	8.1%	42.5%
Houston (Harris), TX	County	320,059	322,348	291,628	143,283	-0.7%	9.7%	123.4%
Indianapolis (Marion), IN	County	112,937	112,689	107,962	56,849	0.2%	4.6%	98.7%
Jacksonville (Duval), FL	County	63,012	61,306	58,147	33,790	2.8%	8.4%	86.5%
Las Vegas (Clark), NV	County	90,780	91,272	91,570	46,581	-0.5%	-0.9%	94.9%
Los Angeles (Los Angeles), CA	County	665,018	665,689	633,121	555,964	-0.1%	5.0%	19.6%
Louisville (Jefferson), KY	County	81,297	80,977	77,476	51,014	0.4%	4.9%	59.4%
Memphis (Shelby), TN	County	174,794	174,324	167,225	n.a.	0.3%	4.5%	n.a.
Miami (Miami-Dade), FL	County	309,118	303,017	307,239	262,894	2.0%	0.6%	17.6%
Milwaukee (Milwaukee), WI	County	140,207	140,568	142,159	101,559	-0.3%	-1.4%	38.1%
New York, NY	City	1,091,241	1,091,049	987,074	905,795	0.0%	10.6%	20.5%
Oakland (Alameda), CA	County	69,302	69,015	63,544	n.a.	0.0%	9.0%	n.a.
Philadelphia (Philadelphia), PA	City-Co.	292,972	293,144	276,008	261,357	-0.1%	6.1%	12.1%
Phoenix (Maricopa), AZ	County	277,098	277,289	257,738	100,993	-0.1%	7.5%	174.4%
San Antonio (Bexar), TX	County	178,131	178,213	171,014	107,582	0.0%	4.2%	65.6%
San Diego (San Diego), CA	County	82,959	81,576	82,318	93,980	1.7%	0.8%	-11.7%
Seattle (King), WA	County	94,931	95,744	84,675	59,663	-0.8%	12.1%	59.1%
Washington, DC	City	86,284	85,993	87,602	78,378	0.3%	-1.5%	10.1%
Wichita (Sedgwick), KS	City	41,872	41,430	40,245	24,669	1.1%	4.0%	69.7%

n.a. signifies that the data are not available.

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

\*\*April and May 2005 data were not available for Denver. The enrollment listed here is for January 2005.

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, Phuoc Cao, Mike Cunningham, Terry Drum, Frederick Hodges III, Ralph Jones, Mitchell Li, Rosemary Malone, Ricky May, Ross McDermott, Michael McKenzie, Wanda Murray, Maria Pimentel, Pamela Raymond, Bob Reardon, Bob Retrum, Garrett Skelton, Larry Van de Sande, Kent Waltmire, and Marc Wichman.

**Table 5: Local Access Indicator and Unclaimed Benefits, 2003**

City (County), State	Data Level	Enrollment, May 2003 (persons)	Est. Eligible Persons, 2003	Est. Eligible Non-participants 2003	Local Access Indicator	Avg Benefit, May 2003	Est. Unclaimed Benefits, 2003
Atlanta (Fulton), GA	County	92,143	120,603	28,460	<b>76%</b>	\$91.02	<b>\$20,826,644</b>
Baltimore (Baltimore), MD	City	97,162	129,382	32,220	<b>75%</b>	\$88.47	<b>\$22,917,466</b>
Boston (Suffolk), MA	City	45,722	95,135	49,413	<b>48%</b>	\$75.05	<b>\$29,815,742</b>
Chicago (Cook), IL	County	536,509	694,405	157,896	<b>77%</b>	\$95.16	<b>\$120,806,597</b>
Columbus (Franklin), OH	County	95,756	130,612	34,856	<b>73%</b>	\$89.40	<b>\$25,054,574</b>
Denver (Denver), CO	City-Co.	40,744	64,645	23,901	<b>63%</b>	\$85.29	<b>\$16,388,861</b>
Detroit (Wayne), MI	City	213,512	241,378	27,866	<b>88%</b>	\$78.35	<b>\$17,553,825</b>
Houston (Harris), TX	County	221,597	553,977	332,380	<b>40%</b>	\$85.12	<b>\$227,469,102</b>
Indianapolis (Marion), IN	County	95,430	117,767	22,337	<b>81%</b>	\$93.51	<b>\$16,793,736</b>
Jacksonville (Duval), FL	County	44,872	103,854	58,982	<b>43%</b>	\$85.32	<b>\$40,460,215</b>
Las Vegas (Clark), NV	County	86,445	191,130	104,685	<b>45%</b>	\$85.21	<b>\$71,718,552</b>
Los Angeles (Los Angeles), CA	County	606,881	1,158,739	551,858	<b>52%</b>	\$92.40	<b>\$409,973,101</b>
Louisville (Jefferson), KY	County	69,973	98,872	28,899	<b>71%</b>	\$85.00	<b>\$19,749,370</b>
Memphis (Shelby), TN	County	151,524	156,474	4,950	<b>97%</b>	\$86.36	<b>\$3,436,852</b>
Miami (Miami-Dade), FL	County	275,078	405,877	130,799	<b>68%</b>	\$82.03	<b>\$86,264,419</b>
Milwaukee (Milwaukee), WI	County	138,658	150,062	11,404	<b>92%</b>	\$70.28	<b>\$6,443,848</b>
New York, NY	City	870,813	1,436,496	565,683	<b>61%</b>	\$105	<b>\$477,549,191</b>
Oakland (Alameda), CA	County	56,748	115,303	58,555	<b>49%</b>	\$77.00	<b>\$36,250,229</b>
Philadelphia (Philadelphia), PA	City-Co.	252,850	297,940	45,090	<b>85%</b>	\$85.68	<b>\$31,062,059</b>
Phoenix (Maricopa), AZ	County	238,652	439,984	201,332	<b>54%</b>	\$88.63	<b>\$143,466,297</b>
San Antonio (Bexar), TX	County	143,997	243,954	99,957	<b>59%</b>	\$77.00	<b>\$61,881,249</b>
San Diego (San Diego), CA	County	78,153	303,200	225,047	<b>26%</b>	\$79.69	<b>\$144,189,327</b>
Seattle (King), WA	County	76,345	122,052	45,707	<b>63%</b>	\$80.67	<b>\$29,645,754</b>
Washington, DC	City	83,333	96,524	13,191	<b>86%</b>	\$91.83	<b>\$9,739,375</b>
Wichita (Sedgwick), KS	City	39,244	46,742	7,498	<b>84%</b>	\$68.20	<b>\$4,111,515</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>4,652,141</b>	<b>7,515,107</b>	<b>2,862,966</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>\$84.87</b>	<b>\$2,073,567,875</b>

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

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

## **Links and Resources**

### ***General Information on the Food Stamp Program***

Food Research and Action Center's main page on food stamps:

[http://www.frac.org/html/federal\\_food\\_programs/programs/fsp.html](http://www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/programs/fsp.html)

FNS main page on the Food Stamp Program:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/>

FNS's annual report "Characteristics of Food Stamp Households":

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/participation.htm#Characteristics>

FRAC's annual report "State of the States: A Profile of Food and Nutrition Programs Across the Nation":

[http://www.frac.org/State\\_Of\\_States/2005/Report.pdf](http://www.frac.org/State_Of_States/2005/Report.pdf)

"Why Food Stamps Matter: Talking Points" by FRAC, America's Second Harvest—The Nation's Food Bank Network, and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities:

[http://www.frac.org/Press\\_Release/05.20.05.html](http://www.frac.org/Press_Release/05.20.05.html)

The National Anti-Hunger Organizations' (NAHO) "Blueprint to End Hunger":

<http://www.frac.org/Blueprint%20to%20End%20Hunger.pdf>

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

Annual FNS reports on state participation rates:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/participation.htm#State>

Information on and state rankings for USDA's Participation Access Rate (PAR):

[http://www.frac.org/html/federal\\_food\\_programs/programs/PARates.htm](http://www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/programs/PARates.htm)

Final rule explaining the Program Access Index (PAI), which replaced the PAR (see Section E):

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cga/Federal-Register/2005/020705.pdf>

Monthly national and state food stamp participation data:

[http://www.frac.org/html/federal\\_food\\_programs/programs/fspparticipation.html](http://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":

[http://www.brookings.org/metro/pubs/20050517\\_FoodStamp.pdf](http://www.brookings.org/metro/pubs/20050517_FoodStamp.pdf)

Children's Defense Fund – New York report "Giving New York's Children a Fair Start in Life: Supports for Working Families":

<http://www.cdfny.org/RR/reports/workingfamilies.pdf>

Nutrition Consortium of New York State report "Don't Lose Out! Make Your County Stronger with the Federal Food Stamp Program":

<http://www.hungernys.org/programs/foodstamps/trendreport.html>

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

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

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

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

FNS's Food Stamp Outreach Resource Center:  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/coalition/resources.htm>

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

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

### ***National Agencies and Organizations Conducting City-Based Work:***

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

NLC *Cities Weekly* article on multibenefit outreach initiative:  
[http://www.nlc.org/Newsroom/nation\\_s\\_cities\\_weekly/weekly\\_ncw/2004/03/08/2921.cfm](http://www.nlc.org/Newsroom/nation_s_cities_weekly/weekly_ncw/2004/03/08/2921.cfm)

American Public Human Services Association:  
<http://www.aphsa.org/home/news.asp>

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

USCM's *Hunger and Homelessness Survey*:  
<http://www.usmayors.org/uscm/hungersurvey/2004/online/HungerAndHomelessnessReport2004.pdf>

Anne E. Casey Foundation's *Making Connections* initiative:  
<http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/mc/>

*Making Connections* sites:  
<http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/mc/sites/>

## Methodological Appendix and Worksheet

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

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

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

In addition to enrollment and benefits data from state food stamp agencies, the methodology relies on two external data sources within the U.S. Census. One is the American Community Survey (ACS), which reports data annually, and the other is the 2000 Census Summary File 3 (SF-3). Links to access these data sets (accurate as of August 2005) appear below:

ACS 2003:

[http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTGeoSearchByListServlet?ds\\_name=ACS\\_2003\\_EST\\_G00\\_&lang=en&ts=139938255899](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTGeoSearchByListServlet?ds_name=ACS_2003_EST_G00_&lang=en&ts=139938255899)

2000 Census SF-3:

[http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/CTGeoSearchByListServlet?ds\\_name=DEC\\_2000\\_SF3\\_U&lang=en&ts=139938321645](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/CTGeoSearchByListServlet?ds_name=DEC_2000_SF3_U&lang=en&ts=139938321645)

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 are currently available only for counties and cities with populations of 250,000 or greater, but smaller jurisdictions will be added to the ACS in future years. 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 2003.

		<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 <b>ACS Table PCT062</b> .	2,180,119	
1.2	Obtain the ratio of the number of people living below 130 percent of the FPL to the number of people living below 125 percent of the FPL from <b>Census 2000 SF-3 Table PCT50</b> . [This table is disaggregated by age, so you will need to add together people in different age categories but the same income levels to derive this ratio.]	1.0483	
1.3	Multiply the result of step 1.1 by the result of step 1.2. This is the estimate of income-eligible people.	2,285,500	

#### Limitations:

- Because ACS data are drawn from a sample of the population, they are subject to some range of statistical error. This limitation applies to all steps that involve ACS data.
- The ACS survey is limited to the U.S. population living in households and excludes those living in institutions, college dormitories, and group quarters. Since some people in such living quarters may be eligible for food stamps, this limitation reduces the estimated number of eligible people.
- Using the ratio of people under 130 percent of the FPL to people under 125 percent of the FPL introduces some error, since the ratio comes from a different year. However, this ratio seems unlikely to change significantly in a 3-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.

		<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 <b>ACS Table P040</b> .	324,870	
2.2	Multiply the result of step 2.1 by 5/4. 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, or 2003, so multiplying by 5/4 approximates the number of people who have been LPRs for less than 5 years.	406,088	
2.3	Obtain the percentage of foreign-born non-citizens who were below 100 percent of the FPL in 2000 from <b>Census 2000 SF-3 Table PCT51</b> . Data on non-citizens below 130 percent of the FPL are not available, so step 2.4 corrects for this.	0.2709	
2.4	Obtain the ratio of the number of people living below 130 percent of the FPL to the number of people living below 100 percent of the FPL from <b>Census 2000 SF-3 Table PCT50</b> . Note that this calculation is similar to step 1.2.	1.3992	
2.5	Multiply the result of step 2.2 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.	153,898	
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.	2,131,602	

### Limitations:

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

### ***Step 3: Resource Eligibility***

To be eligible for food stamps, households may only have \$2,000 in countable resources (or \$3,000 if at least one person in the household is age 60 or older or is disabled). FRAC estimates that 24.5 percent of people who would otherwise be eligible for food stamps are ineligible due to resources.<sup>28</sup>

		<i>Sample: L.A. County</i>	<i>Your City</i>
3.1	Multiply the result of step 2.6 by 0.755. This approximates the number of people who are eligible according to income, immigration status, and resources.	1,609,360	

#### Limitations:

- The main limitation of this step is that the 24.5 percent estimate is a nationwide average. There may be variation in resources in different regions of the country (e.g., if more people have cars in the west) or between urban and rural settings (e.g., if fewer people have cars in cities).
- There are additional limitations in the calculation of the 24.5 percent estimate. Please refer to the footnote below for a discussion of these limitations.

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<sup>28</sup> This estimate was derived from data in Rosso, Randy (2003). "Tables Describing the Asset and Vehicle Holdings of Low-Income Households in 1999." U.S. Department of Agriculture. Available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FILES/ProgramDesign/AssetVehicle.pdf>. Table 1 provides data on the numbers of households enrolled in food stamps, eligible but not participating in food stamps, asset-ineligible for food stamps, and income-ineligible for food stamps in 1999. Since the data come from 1999, they predate changes in eligibility rules that increased the asset limit for some households and reduced the number of disqualifying vehicles. To correct for this, we obtain from table 24 the estimated number of households that were ineligible in 1999 but had become eligible because of these rule changes in 2003. We subtract this number from the number of asset-ineligible households in table 1. Using the adjusted data from table 1, we divide the number of asset-ineligible but income-eligible households by the total number of income-eligible households to yield an estimate of the proportion of otherwise eligible households that are asset-ineligible (24.5 percent).

There are two limitations in this calculation. First, the number of households who were newly eligible in 2003 includes households who became eligible due to changes in eligibility requirements for immigrants. These households are counted as having become asset-eligible, so the 24.5 percent estimate likely underestimates the number of asset-ineligible people. Note that most of the limitations that tend to bias the estimates in a particular direction have decreased the estimated numbers of eligible people, but this limitation increases the estimated numbers of eligible people. The second limitation is that this calculation is based on numbers of households, while the rest of the methodology is based on numbers of persons. It is not clear if this limitation biases the estimates in one direction or the other.

#### ***Step 4: SSI (California Only)***

This step applies to cities in California only. If your city is not in California, skip to Step 5. In California, individuals receiving cash assistance in the form of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) are ineligible for Food Stamps. This step subtracts those individuals from those who are otherwise eligible.

		<i>Sample: L.A. County</i>	<i>Your City</i>
4.1	Calculate the proportion of people below the FPL who are receiving SSI in your city from <b>ACS Table PCT067</b> . Subtract this proportion from 1 to obtain the proportion of people below the FPL who are <i>not</i> receiving SSI.	0.720	
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.	1,158,739	

#### Limitations:

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

#### ***Step 5: Local Access Indicator***

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

		<i>Sample: L.A. County</i>	<i>Your City</i>
5.1	Obtain the number of actual food stamp recipients in a month (or an average across months) in 2003. FRAC used May 2003 in this report.	606,881	
5.2	Divide the result of step 5.1 by the result of step 3.1 (or step 4.2 in California) and multiply by 100. This is FRAC's Local Access Indicator.	52%	

#### Limitations:

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

### ***Step 6: Lost Benefits***

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

		<i>Sample: L.A. County</i>	<i>Your City</i>
6.1	Obtain the average monthly food stamp benefit per person for the same month (or average of months) as in step 5.1.	\$92.40	
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.	551,858	
6.3	Multiply the result of step 6.1 by the result of step 6.2.	\$50,991,679	
6.4	Multiply the result of step 6.3 by 0.67. Eligible but non-participating people would, on average, receive lower benefits than participating people because people who would receive lower benefits have less of an incentive to participate. Based on USDA data, FRAC estimates that, on average, an eligible non-participant would receive 67 percent of the benefits of a participant. <sup>29</sup>	\$34,164,425	
6.5	Multiply the result of step 6.4 by 12 to convert from months to years.	\$409,973,101	

#### **Limitations:**

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

<sup>29</sup> Estimate derived from Table A-1 (p. 29) in Cunnyngnam, Karen (2004). "Trends in Food Stamp Program Participation Rates: 1999 to 2002." U.S. Department of Agriculture. Available at <http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/pdfs/fns99-02rates.pdf>.