



USDA touts improvements in food stamp outreach and delivery

Sara Wyant, Editor, Agri-Pulse

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About two-thirds of all who were eligible participated in the Food Stamp Program (FSP) in 2005, compared with 54% in 2001, according to Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns.

“We have increased our nutrition assistance budget by 70% since 2001 and we proposed that the 2007 Farm Bill do even more to increase access and participation in USDA programs to help those in need.”

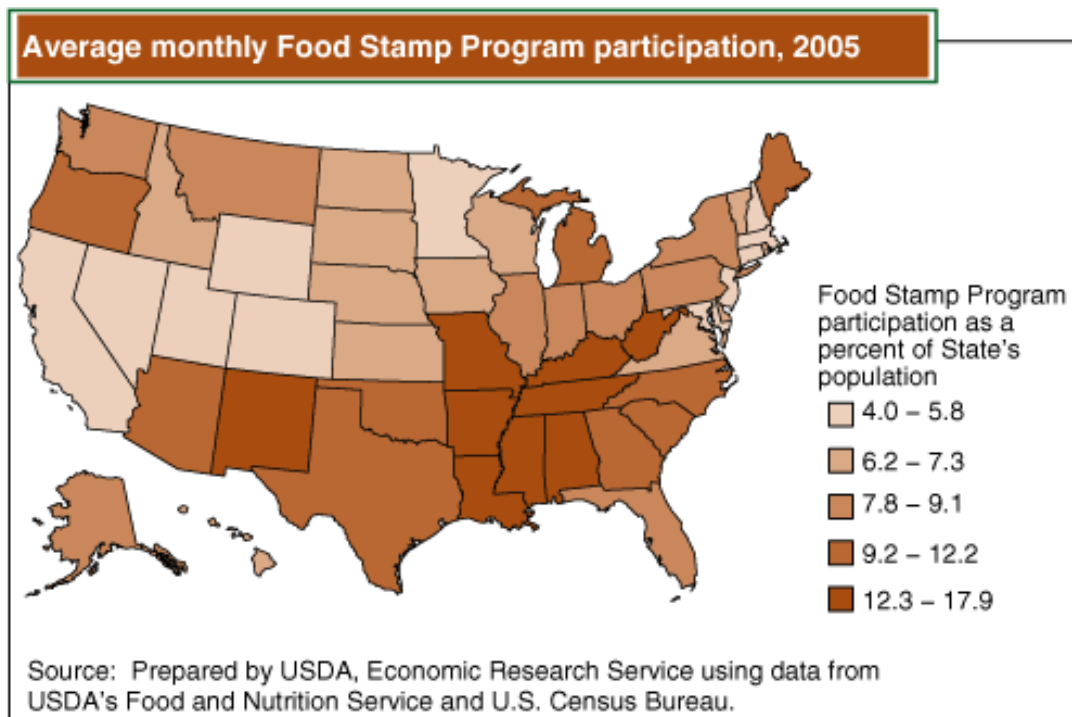
Since 2001, the FSP has grown to serve 9.4 million additional low-income people needing nutrition assistance. This growth can be attributed to a confluence of different factors, including improved outreach, says FNS Spokesperson Jean Daniel. In addition to food stamps, the other major nutrition assistance programs have seen increases since 2001 – 1 million additional children have been added to the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), 1.3 million to the School Breakfast Program (SBP) and 700,000 women, infants and children have been added to the Supplemental Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). Among food stamp households with school-age children, 88% received a free or reduced-price lunch and 68% received a free or reduced-price breakfast. Among those with children under age 5, 64% participated in WIC.

Although many nutrition advocates argue that that it's not enough, food stamp benefits are a vital supplement to the food budgets of the more than 26 million low-income individuals now participating in the FSP each month, says USDA. For example, a family of four could receive as much as \$518 a month to supplement its food budget, and larger families even more.

To ensure access to all who are eligible for the FSP, USDA works with state and local governments, faith- and community-based organizations, food banks and food pantries to provide and encourage outreach, streamline and simplify program rules and award grants. USDA's 2007 Farm Bill proposes to improve access to food stamps by excluding college education and retirement savings accounts when determining eligibility for benefits and eliminating the cap on dependent child care expenses. Over the next 10 years, to improve

nutrition for all who benefit from nutrition programs, USDA proposes \$2.75 billion to purchase fruits and vegetables for all programs and an additional \$500 million in fruits and vegetables for USDA school meals programs.

An average of 25.6 million people, or 8.7% of the U.S. population, received food stamps each month during fiscal year 2005---an increase from 8.1% in 2004. However, Daniels said **the average person receives food stamps only nine months of the year**. Benefits extend to farmers and local communities. **“For every \$5 spent in food stamp benefits, local communities receive \$9.20,”** she explains. Linda Scott Kantor, with USDA’s Economic Research Service, developed the map (below) which illustrates where participation is greatest. Hurricane-ravaged Louisiana had the largest share of its residents receiving food stamps in 2005—17.9%—displacing the District of Columbia, which had led the Nation in participation during 2001-04. Participation shares increased in most States from 2004, despite small declines in Rhode Island, Idaho, Nevada, and Wyoming. Average participation shares were lowest in New Hampshire at 4.0 percent, followed by New Jersey, Wyoming, and Nevada.



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