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"The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little."

-- Franklin D. Roosevelt

## **Building a Healthy America with Food Stamps**

# Building a Healthy America: A Profile of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is called food stamps in Alaska. It helps low-income people buy food. A U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Program, it is managed by the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Division of Public Assistance in Alaska. Nationally, SNAP use has been increasing even as unemployment declines. This represents a break with historic patterns as more eligible recipients such as those working part-time jobs take advantage of the program. The USDA Food and Nutrition Service Office of Research and Analysis released a comprehensive report on the status of the SNAP program in April 2012. Here are a few highlights.

## Who participates?

- Although 75% of all recipients participate for less than a year, the elderly, disabled adults and single parents account for the largest portion of long-term food stamp participants
- Individuals with children participate at a significantly higher rate than individuals who live in households without children
- Participation rates are lowest amongst the elderly and non-disabled childless adults subject to work registration requirements
- Of non-participants who are eligible, 27% would not apply even if they knew they were eligible personal independence was the reason given
- Most eligible elderly choose to participate in Meals-on-Wheels programs instead of food stamps

### On average, food stamp households spend:

- 25% of their income on food eaten at home
- 2% of their income on food away from home
- 43% of their income on housing

Vegetables, fruits, grain products, meat and meat alternatives account for most of the money value of food used by food stamp households; nearly 75% of food purchased for home consumption.

#### Income:

- 40% live in households with earnings
- Households with a zero net income have doubled in the past 20 years
- 71% deducted shelter expenses, the average was \$459
- Nearly 80% of food stamp benefits are used within the first half of the month
- 30% are employed
- 21% receive Social Security, 8% receive Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)
- 10% receive Child Support
- 4% receive General Assistance
- 6% receive Unemployment

### **Alaska Facts**

Individuals receiving Food Stamps in Alaska:	2007	56,181
http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/15SNAPpartPP.htm	2008	56,977
	2009	64,385
	2010	76,445
	2011	86,044

During FY2011, food stamps brought in \$175,503,811 million federal dollars into Alaska:

Federal Dollars per Month \$14,625,318

Average Household Benefit \$426 Average Monthly Caseload 34,360 Average Monthly Participants 85,749 Average Household Size 2.5 Average Monthly Applicants 3,994

Division of Public AssistanceFY11 Statewide Profiles

### What about Fraud?

The food stamp program is often targeted as wasteful and riddled with fraud, yet the food stamp fraud rate has declined sharply in recent years and is now one percent of the \$75.3 billion annual program – or about \$750 million a year. Trafficking (illegal use) nationally comes to about 1 cent per every \$1.00 issued. One percent is not even a rounding error in federal budgeting. A recent article in *The Fiscal Times* suggests the scope of fraud pales in comparison to fraudulent activity in government contracting. <a href="http://www.thefiscaltimes.com/Articles/2012/04/25/The-Fight-Over-Food-Stamps-and-Farm-Subsidies.aspx#page2">http://www.thefiscaltimes.com/Articles/2012/04/25/The-Fight-Over-Food-Stamps-and-Farm-Subsidies.aspx#page2</a>

# **Projections**

Nationally, the USDA 2013 budget anticipates rising employment and household income will reduce the need for nutrition assistance through food stamps and lead to fewer program participants, even as food stamps serve a larger share of those eligible. Key performance measures for 2013 are to increase the percentage of eligible people participating in the program; improve the historically high payment accuracy rate; support participation in major nutrition assistance programs for all eligible people who seek assistance; decrease the prevalence of obesity among children and adolescents; increase distribution of nutrition guidance, education and promotion tools; and increase the amount of food stamp benefits redeemed at direct market farmers and farmers markets. http://www.obpa.usda.gov/budsum/FY13budsum.pdf

### Resources

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities: SNAP Helps Struggling Families Put Food on the Table <a href="http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=3744">http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=3744</a>

Building Healthy America Report

http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/MENU/published/snap/FILES/Other/BuildingHealthyAmerica.pdf

The Alaska Food Coalition is here to help. Copies of Alaska Food Coalition White Papers are available Online: <a href="http://www.alaskafood.org/whitepapers.shtml">http://www.alaskafood.org/whitepapers.shtml</a> for additional information, contact Vanessa Salinas, Alaska Food Coalition Manager: <a href="mailto:afc@foodbankofalaska.org">afc@foodbankofalaska.org</a>

**NEXT MONTH:** Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR)