## STATE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM PARTICIPATION RATES IN 2011

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a central component of American policy to alleviate hunger and poverty. The program's main purpose is "to permit low-income households to obtain a more nutritious diet...by increasing their purchasing power" (Food and Nutrition Act of 2008). SNAP is the largest of the domestic food and nutrition assistance programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service. During fiscal year 2013, the program served over 47 million people in an average month at a total annual cost of over $\$ 76$ billion in benefits.
The national SNAP participation rate is the percentage of eligible people in the United States who actually participate in the program. SNAP eligibility criteria include, but are not limited to, income guidelines and either United States citizenship or legal immigrant status with, for
most, at least five years' residency. SNAP provides an important support for the "working poor"people who are eligible for SNAP benefits and live in households in which someone earns income from a job. In 2011, over 18 million SNAP participants-41 percent of all SNAP participants-lived in households that had income from earnings, up from 30 percent of all participants in 1996, the year in which more emphasis was placed on work for public assistance recipients through the enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act.
Recent studies have examined national participation rates as well as participation rates for socioeconomic and demographic subgroups (Eslami and Cunnyngham 2013), and State rates for all eligible people and for the working poor (Cunnyngham 2012). This document presents estimates of SNAP partici-
pation rates for all eligible people and for the working poor by States for fiscal year 2011. These estimates can be used to assess recent program performance and focus efforts to improve access.

## Participation Rates in 2011

Seventy-nine percent of eligible people in the United States received SNAP benefits in fiscal year 2011. Participation rates varied widely from State to State, however. Twenty-six States had rates that were significantly higher (in a statistical sense) than the national rate, and 12 States had rates that were significantly lower. Among the regions, the Midwest Region had the highest participation rate. Its 85 percent rate was significantly higher than the rates for all of the other regions except the Southeast Region. The Western Region's participation rate of 68 percent was significantly lower than the rates for all of the other regions. (See the last page for a map showing regional boundaries.)

In 2011, 67 percent of eligible working poor in the United States participated in SNAP, but as with participation rates for all eligible people, rates for the working poor varied widely across States. Twentyone States had rates for the working poor that were significantly higher than the national rate for the working poor, and 10 States had rates that were significantly lower.
While 79 percent of all eligible people in the United States participated in 2011, only 67 percent of the eligible working poor participated, a significant difference of over 11 percentage points. In 38 States, the participation rate for the
$\square$

## How Many Were Eligible in 2011? What Percentage Participated?

Eligible
People
(Thousands)

| 211 | Maine |
| :---: | :---: |
| 636 | Oregon |
| 887 | Washington |
| 128 | District of Columbia |
| 1,719 | Michigan |
| 72 | Vermont |
| 1,289 | Tennessee |
| 1,019 | Missouri |
| 872 | Kentucky |
| 736 | Wisconsin |
| 800 | Massachusetts |
| 392 | Iowa |
| 374 | West Virginia |
| 445 | New Mexico |
| 692 | Oklahoma |
| 137 | Delaware |
| 1,942 | Ohio |
| 388 | Connecticut |
| 982 | Alabama |
| 255 | Idaho |
| 1,858 | Pennsylvania |
| 2,001 | Illinois |
| 1,645 | North Carolina |
| 2,029 | Georgia |
| 171 | Rhode Island |
| 3,474 | Florida |
| 698 | Maryland |
| 1,006 | South Carolina |
| 750 | Mississippi |
| 1,142 | Arizona |
| 125 | South Dakota |
| 3,422 | New York |
| 1,072 | Virginia |
| 353 | Utah |
| 123 | New Hampshire |
| 1,090 | Louisiana |
| 587 | Minnesota |
| 149 | Montana |
| 68 | North Dakota |
| 644 | Arkansas |
| 4,965 | Texas |
| 1,218 | Indiana |
| 420 | Nevada |
| 425 | Kansas |
| 248 | Nebraska |
| 125 | Alaska |
| 1,008 | New Jersey |
| 658 | Colorado |
| 232 | Hawaii |
| 6,129 | California |
| 60 | Wyoming |
| 8,204 | Midwest Region |
| 12,048 | Southeast Region |
| 5,188 | Northeast Region |
| 5,275 | Mid-Atlantic Region |
| 3,497 | Mountain Plains Region |
| 7,836 | Southwest Region |
| 9,826 | Western Region |

8,204 Midwest Region
12,048 Southeast Region
5,188 Northeast Region
3,497 Mountain Plains Region
7,836 Southwest Region
9,826 Western Region


A confidence interval expresses our uncertainty about the true value of a participation rate. Each interval displayed here is a 90-percent confidence interval. One interpretation of such an interval is that there is a 90-percent chance that the true participation rate falls within the estimated bounds. For example, while our best estimate is that Georgia's participation rate was 83 percent in 2011, the true rate may have been higher or lower. However, the chances are 90 in 100 that the true rate was between 79 and 88 percent.

## How Many Working Poor Were Eligible in 2011? What Percentage Participated?

Eligible
Working Poor
(Thousands)
83 Maine
288 Oregon
841 Michigan
137 West Virginia
340 Wisconsin
394 Washington
208 Iowa
146 Idaho
233 New Mexico
716 Pennsylvania
448 Missouri
27 Vermont
557 Tennessee
64 South Dakota
387 Alabama
426 South Carolina
318 Mississippi
1,010 Georgia
792 Ohio
271 Arkansas
33 North Dakota
Montana
359 Oklahoma
492 Louisiana
693 North Carolina
583 Arizona
532 Indiana
66 Delaware
363 Kentucky
509 Virginia
210 Utah
1,395 New York
278 Minnesota
295 Massachusetts
152 Connecticut
980 Illinois
,428 Florida
54 New Hampshire
2,753 Texas
287 Maryland
75 Rhode Island
233 Kansas
132 Nebraska
191 Nevada
59 Alaska
458 New Jersey
29 Wyoming
350 Colorado
36 District of Columbia
138 Hawaii
3,171 California

| 3,762 | Midwest Region |
| :--- | :--- |
| 5,181 | Southeast Region |
| 2,209 | Mid-Atlantic Region |
| 1,773 | Mountain Plains Region |
| 2,080 | Northeast Region |
| 4,109 | Southwest Region |
| 4,971 | Western Region |

24,085 United States

3,762 Midwest Region
,181 Southeast Region
2,209 Mid-Atlantic Region
2,080 Northeast Region
4,109 Southwest Region
4,971 Western Region

Participation Rates and Confidence Intervals
(Participation Rate $=100 \times$ Number of People Participating $\div$ Number of People Eligible)
(Estimated participation rates are in red; estimated bounds of confidence intervals are in black.)


$66 \% 67 \% \quad 69 \%$

[^0]working poor in 2011 was-like the national rate for the working poorsignificantly lower than the rate for all eligible people. In 13 of these States, the difference between the rate for the working poor and the rate for all eligible people was significantly greater than the 11 percentage point difference between the national rates. In no State was the rate for the working poor significantly higher than the rate for all eligible people.

## State Comparisons

The estimated participation rates presented here are based on fairly small samples of households in each State. Although there is substantial uncertainty associated with the estimates for some States and with comparisons of estimates from different States, the estimates for 2011 show whether a State's participation rate for all eligible people was probably at the top, at the bottom, or in the middle of the distribution. Maine and Oregon were very likely at the top, with higher rates for all eligible people than all other States. In contrast, Wyoming, California, and Hawaii likely had lower rates than other States.

Similarly, it is possible to determine that some States were probably at the top, at the bottom, or in the middle of the distribution of rates for the working poor in 2011. Maine was very likely ranked at the top, with a higher rate for the working poor than most States. In contrast, California, Hawaii, and the District of Columbia likely had lower rates than most States.

How a State compares with other States may fluctuate over time due to statistical variability in estimated rates and true changes in rates. The statistical variability is sufficiently great that a large change in a State's rate from the prior year should be interpreted cautiously, as should
differences between the rates of that State and other States. It may be incorrect to conclude that program performance in the State has improved or deteriorated dramatically. Despite this uncertainty, the estimated participation rates for all eligible people and the working poor suggest that some States have been fairly consistently in the top or bottom of the distribution of rates in recent years. In all 3 years from 2009 to 2011, the District of Columbia, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, Oregon, Tennessee, Vermont, and Washington had significantly higher participation rates for all eligible people than two-thirds of the States. An additional State-Massachusettshad a significantly higher rate than half of the States. Minnesota had significantly lower rates than half of the States in all 3 years, while California, Colorado, Hawaii, Kansas, New Jersey, Nevada, Texas, and Wyoming had significantly lower rates than two-thirds of the States.

A State ranked near the top or bottom of the distribution of participation rates for all eligible people is likely to be ranked near the top or bottom, respectively, of the distribution of participation rates for the working poor. Although the rankings of States by participation rates for the working poor and for all eligible people are generally similar, they do not exactly match. Eight States (Arkansas, Idaho, Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi, Montana, West Virginia, and Wyoming) are ranked significantly higher for all 3 years when ranked by their participation rate for the working poor than when ranked by their participation rate for all eligible people. In contrast, 6 States-Connecticut, Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Tennessee-and the District of Columbia are ranked significantly lower for all 3 years when ranked by their participation rate for the working poor than
when ranked by their participation rate for all eligible people.

## Estimation Method

The estimates presented here were derived using shrinkage estimation methods developed to improve precision when sample sizes are small, as they are for most states in the Current Population Survey (Cunnyngham et al. 2013, and Cunnyngham et al. forthcoming). Drawing on data from the Current Population Survey, the American Community Survey, and administrative records, the shrinkage estimator averaged direct sample estimates of participation rates with predictions from a regression model. To further improve precision, the shrinkage estimator used data for all the states, all three years, and both groups (all eligible individuals and the working poor) to derive each estimate.

The direct sample estimates were obtained by applying SNAP eligibility rules to households in the Current Population Survey to estimate numbers of eligible people and by using SNAP administrative data to estimate numbers of participating people. Eslami and Cunnyngham (2013) present details on the estimation methods used to derive the direct sample estimates. The direct sample estimates differ methodologically from estimates developed for prior reports. The motivation for the methodological improvements was to increase the precision of the estimates and allow us to better account for differences between the data used to estimate the number of participants and the data used to estimate the number of eligible individuals.

The regression predictions of participation rates were based on observed indicators of socio-

## Participation Rates

|  | All Eligible People |  |  | Working Poor |  |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 |
| Alabama | 71\% | 76\% | 85\% | 63\% | 69\% | 76\% |
| Alaska | 60\% | 68\% | 68\% | 55\% | 61\% | 60\% |
| Arizona | 65\% | 77\% | 79\% | 57\% | 70\% | 71\% |
| Arkansas | 65\% | 71\% | 74\% | 65\% | 72\% | 74\% |
| California | 48\% | 52\% | 57\% | 32\% | 40\% | 44\% |
| Colorado | 54\% | 66\% | 66\% | 38\% | 57\% | 54\% |
| Connecticut | 70\% | 77\% | 85\% | 51\% | 60\% | 66\% |
| Delaware | 70\% | 74\% | 85\% | 58\% | 62\% | 69\% |
| District of Columbia | 81\% | 87\% | 99\% | 34\% | 39\% | 46\% |
| Florida | 63\% | 76\% | 82\% | 48\% | 63\% | 66\% |
| Georgia | 65\% | 75\% | 83\% | 57\% | 68\% | 74\% |
| Hawaii | 59\% | 64\% | 61\% | 47\% | 49\% | 44\% |
| Idaho | 62\% | 78\% | 85\% | 59\% | 76\% | 80\% |
| Illinois | 73\% | 79\% | 84\% | 55\% | 62\% | 66\% |
| Indiana | 65\% | 72\% | 71\% | 65\% | 72\% | 70\% |
| Iowa | 77\% | 84\% | 87\% | 70\% | 78\% | 81\% |
| Kansas | 56\% | 66\% | 69\% | 45\% | 60\% | 63\% |
| Kentucky | 83\% | 88\% | 90\% | 65\% | 70\% | 69\% |
| Louisiana | 72\% | 71\% | 77\% | 69\% | 67\% | 72\% |
| Maine | 99\% | 100\% | 100\% | 91\% | 94\% | 100\% |
| Maryland | 66\% | 69\% | 81\% | 52\% | 54\% | 64\% |
| Massachusetts | 77\% | 83\% | 88\% | 55\% | 63\% | 66\% |
| Michigan | 81\% | 94\% | 99\% | 78\% | 88\% | 91\% |
| Minnesota | 61\% | 71\% | 77\% | 48\% | 61\% | 67\% |
| Mississippi | 66\% | 70\% | 79\% | 64\% | 66\% | 74\% |
| Missouri | 80\% | 89\% | 91\% | 66\% | 76\% | 79\% |
| Montana | 57\% | 73\% | 75\% | 52\% | 71\% | 73\% |
| Nebraska | 65\% | 71\% | 69\% | 56\% | 64\% | 61\% |
| Nevada | 52\% | 60\% | 69\% | 44\% | 51\% | 61\% |
| New Hampshire | 68\% | 80\% | 78\% | 56\% | 69\% | 65\% |
| New Jersey | 54\% | 61\% | 67\% | 42\% | 51\% | 57\% |
| New Mexico | 70\% | 77\% | 86\% | 65\% | 74\% | 80\% |
| New York | 65\% | 74\% | 79\% | 53\% | 64\% | 67\% |
| North Carolina | 67\% | 74\% | 83\% | 54\% | 64\% | 71\% |
| North Dakota | 71\% | 75\% | 75\% | 68\% | 71\% | 74\% |
| Ohio | 72\% | 80\% | 85\% | 63\% | 71\% | 74\% |
| Oklahoma | 71\% | 78\% | 85\% | 59\% | 65\% | 72\% |
| Oregon | 97\% | 100\% | 100\% | 82\% | 90\% | 93\% |
| Pennsylvania | 73\% | 81\% | 84\% | 69\% | 77\% | 80\% |
| Rhode Island | 64\% | 79\% | 82\% | 48\% | 64\% | 64\% |
| South Carolina | 72\% | 76\% | 80\% | 67\% | 72\% | 76\% |
| South Dakota | 63\% | 78\% | 79\% | 60\% | 74\% | 76\% |
| Tennessee | 90\% | 94\% | 95\% | 74\% | 76\% | 77\% |
| Texas | 55\% | 64\% | 72\% | 44\% | 58\% | 65\% |
| Utah | 64\% | 75\% | 79\% | 51\% | 64\% | 68\% |
| Vermont | 84\% | 92\% | 97\% | 67\% | 77\% | 79\% |
| Virginia | 67\% | 74\% | 79\% | 56\% | 67\% | 69\% |
| Washington | 87\% | 95\% | 100\% | 69\% | 76\% | 82\% |
| West Virginia | 86\% | 86\% | 86\% | 90\% | 86\% | 87\% |
| Wisconsin | 71\% | 83\% | 89\% | 68\% | 79\% | 84\% |
| Wyoming | 57\% | 62\% | 57\% | 55\% | 60\% | 57\% |
| Mid-Atlantic Region | 68\% | 74\% | 80\% | 59\% | 66\% | 70\% |
| Midwest Region | 72\% | 81\% | 85\% | 63\% | 72\% | 76\% |
| Mountain Plains Region | 67\% | 77\% | 78\% | 55\% | 68\% | 69\% |
| Northeast Region | 69\% | 77\% | 82\% | 55\% | 65\% | 68\% |
| Southeast Region | 70\% | 78\% | 84\% | 58\% | 67\% | 72\% |
| Southwest Region | 60\% | 67\% | 75\% | 51\% | 62\% | 68\% |
| Western Region | 57\% | 64\% | 68\% | 41\% | 50\% | 55\% |

There is substantial uncertainty associated with most of these estimates. Confidence intervals that measure the uncertainty in the estimates for 2009 and 2010 are presented in Cunnyngham et al. (forthcoming). These confidence intervals are generally about as wide as the confidence intervals that are presented in this document for the 2011 estimates.
economic conditions, such as the percentage of the total State population receiving SNAP benefits. The regression model was chosen for its strong predictive ability for all three years. Because of differences between the years being estimated as well as methodological changes, the regression model differs slightly from the one developed for the prior report.

The shrinkage estimates presented here are substantially more precise than the direct sample estimates from the Current Population Survey. Estimates for 2009 and 2010 differ from estimates presented in Cunnyngham (2012) because of differences in (1) the three years being jointly estimated, (2) the direct sample estimation methodology, and (3) the regression model.

The estimates for all eligible people include individuals in households that pass all applicable federal SNAP income and asset tests or in which all members receive cash public assistance. People eligible solely through State categorical eligibility policies are not included in the estimates presented here. The estimates for eligible working poor include people who are eligible for SNAP as defined above and live in a household in which a member earns money from a job.

Because the Current Population Survey does not collect data on participation in the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, the estimates presented here were not adjusted to reflect the fact that participants in that program were not eligible to receive SNAP benefits at the same time (Eslami and Cunnyngham 2013). The Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations served about 78,000 people in 2011, so the effects of such adjustments would be negligible in almost all States. Because our focus in this document is on
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## How Did Your State Rank in 2011?

Participation Rate for
All Eligible
Ranks and Confidence Intervals
People
(Estimated ranks are in red; estimated bounds of confidence intervals are in black.)


A confidence interval expresses our uncertainty about the true value of a State's rank. Each interval displayed here is a 90 -percent confidence interval. One interpretation of such an interval is that there is a 90 -percent chance that the true rank falls within the estimated bounds. For example, while our best estimate is that Florida had the 26th highest participation rate in 2011, the true rank may have been higher or lower. However, the chances are 90 in 100 that the true rank was between 16 and 33 among all of the States. To determine how Florida or your State compares with any other State, see the chart on page 7.

How Did Your State Compare with Other States in 2011 for All Eligibles?


Whether one State has a significantly higher participation rate than a second State can be determined from this figure by finding the row for the first State at the left of the figure and the column for the second State at the top of the figure. If the box where the row and column intersect is red, there is at least a 90 -percent chance that the first State (the row State) has a higher true participation rate. If the box is blue, there is at least a 90 -percent chance that the second State (the column State) has a higher true participation rate. Equivalently, there is less than a 10-percent chance that the first State has a higher rate. If the box is tan, there is more than a 10-percent chance but less than a 90-percent chance that the first State has a higher rate; thus, we conclude that neither estimated rate is significantly higher.
Taking Florida, the State in the middle of the distribution, as an example, we see that it had a significantly lower participation rate than 11 other States (Maine, Oregon, Washington, the District of Columbia, Michigan, Vermont, Tennessee, Missouri, Kentucky, Wisconsin, and Massachusetts) and a significantly higher rate than 16 other States (Wyoming, California, Hawaii, Colorado, New Jersey, Alaska, Nebraska, Kansas, Nevada, Indiana, Texas, Arkansas, North Dakota, Montana, Minnesota, and Louisiana). Its rate was neither significantly higher nor significantly lower than the rates for the other 25 States, suggesting that Florida is probably in the broad center of the distribution, unlike, for example, Maine and Wyoming, which were surely at or near the top and bottom of the distribution, respectively. Although we use the statistical definition of "significance" here, most of the significant differences were at least 10 percentage points, a difference that seems important as well as significant, and all of them were at least 4 percentage points.

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FEBRUARY•2014


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Participation Rates Varied Widely

${ }^{1}$ About 1.3 million Supplemental Security Income recipients in California receive a small food assistance benefit through the State supplement. In the absence of the state rule excluding these individuals from receiving SNAP benefits, slightly less than half this number would become eligible for
inder current program rules. SNAP under current program rules.
participation among people who were eligible for SNAP, the estimates of eligible people were adjusted using available data to reflect the fact that Supplemental Security Income recipients in California are not legally eligible to receive SNAP benefits because they receive cash instead. ${ }^{1}$ It might be useful in some other contexts, however, to consider participation rates among those eligible for SNAP benefits or a cash substitute.


[^0]:    A confidence interval expresses our uncertainty about the true value of a participation rate. Each interval displayed here is a 90-percent confidence interval. One interpretation of such an interval is that there is a 90-percent chance that the true participation rate falls within the estimated bounds. For example, while our best estimate is that Indiana's working poor participation rate was 70 percent in 2011, the true rate may have been higher or lower. However, the chances are 90 in 100 that the true rate was between 64 and 77 percent.

