

COMBATING HUNGER – III

WHO RECEIVES FOOD ASSISTANCE?

By Maureen Berner, University of Northern Iowa

A typical recipient of food assistance is a child in a low-income household, with a single mother. This fact sheet presents data on who qualifies and who receives food assistance, both nationally and in Iowa.

NATIONALLY

Federal Food Assistance (Food Stamps) is an entitlement program. That means anyone who qualifies is guaranteed, by law, to receive benefits. Benefits are based on household size, assets and other variables, but generally households have to be low-income. Most other government food assistance programs, such as Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, (WIC) are also based on financial need.

- **Working People:** Among Food Stamp families with children with an able-bodied, non-elderly adult in the household, 43 percent had earnings in any given month in 2003.¹
- **Children:** Over half of all Food Stamp recipients are children.²
- **Elderly and Disabled:** A quarter of all Food Stamp recipients are elderly or disabled.³

HOLES IN THE SAFETY NET

- The federal food assistance program serves only about one half of those eligible to receive it.⁴
- Only one-third of the elderly who qualify for the program participate.⁵
- The Iowa Food Policy Council determined elderly Iowans are being underserved through the Food Stamp Program and is working to improve outreach to that population.⁶
- Outreach efforts seem to be working. The USDA's Food and Nutrition Service calculated the participant access rate (PAR) for 2002 and 2003 for Iowa and found that Iowa had improved. The PAR measures the extent to which low-income people are participating in the Food Stamp Program. In 2003, Iowa's PAR was 60.4 percent, a rise of 6.6 percent from 2002. However, that means that almost 40 percent of low-income people in Iowa are not participating. In addition, Iowa ranks low – 34th – nationally, in its PAR. Missouri, North Dakota, Minnesota and Nebraska all ranked higher in participation. We are not reaching Iowans in need.⁷
- Iowa's outreach in the Food Stamp Program might be improved, but the need is increasing faster. From February 2000 to February 2005, Food Stamp participation in Iowa increased from 123,087 to 204,992, a **66.5 percent change in only five years.**⁸

About this project ...

This is one in a series of fact sheets about hunger in Iowa and the United States from University of Northern Iowa Professor Maureen Berner. The Iowa Fiscal Partnership is a joint initiative of two nonprofit, nonpartisan organizations – the Child and Family Policy Center in Des Moines and the Iowa Policy Project in Mount Vernon. IFP reports on tax and budget policy are on the web at www.iowafiscal.org.

IOWA

■ According to a 2003 report from the Drake University's Agricultural Law Center, approximately 90,000 Iowa households are considered food insecure. Within these households are approximately 100,000 children and 100,000 working Iowans.⁹

■ Of the 13 government food assistance programs available to Iowans, of those with trend data, eight have seen increases in participation or program costs from 2002 to 2003:

Table 1. Iowa Participation in Government Supported Food Assistance Programs

Program	Iowa Participation	
	2002	2003
The Food Assistance Program (persons)	140,729	153,816
WIC (persons)	63,010	64,583
WIC Farmer's Market Nutrition Program		50,963
Commodity Supplemental Food Program (persons)	4,494	4,346
The Emergency Food Assistance Program (costs)	2,441,420	2,504,937
National School Lunch Program (persons)	380,099	380,864
School Breakfast Program (persons)	69,747	71,061
Special Milk Program (pints served)	858,831	714,569
Summer Food Service Program (persons)	317,085	384,993
Child and Adult Care Food Program (persons)	28,316	29,948
Elderly Nutrition Program (persons)	28,316	29,948
Iowa Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program	14,109	18,574

Note: Most figures are average daily attendance.

Source: Food for All? The Status of Hunger in Iowa, Iowa State University Extension, January 2005

■ In Iowa, all but 20 counties saw increases in the monthly average number of households receiving Food Stamps from FY2000 to FY2002.¹⁰

■ In FY2002, the low was 45 households in Osceola. Pottawattamie and Woodbury had over 2,000 recipient households, Linn had over 3,000 recipient households, Black Hawk and Scott counties had over 4,000 recipient households, and not surprisingly, Polk County had the largest number, with almost 8,000 recipient households.

■ Polk County saw an increase of over 1,000 households from FY2000 to FY2002.

■ Nonprofit food assistance is generally coordinated through Food Banks, which obtain, store and distribute surplus food through local service agencies. The national organization representing food banks is America's Second Harvest (A2H), a nonprofit based in Chicago. There are six A2H food banks serving Iowans, four in Iowa, one in Moline, Illinois, and one in Omaha, Nebraska. These six food banks distributed more than 10 million pounds of grocery products each year.

¹⁻⁴ Rosenbaum, D., & Super, D. (2005). Summary of Report. The Food Stamp Program: Working smarter for working families. (Washington, D.C.: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities) Found at <http://www.cbpp.org/3-15-05fa.htm> accessed on April 26, 2005.

⁵ Haider, S.J., Jackowitz, A. & Schoeni, Robert F. (2003). Food Stamps and the elderly: Why is participation so low? *Journal of Human Resources* 38(Supplement), 1080-1111.

⁶ Congressional Hunger Center, "2004 Victory Against Hunger Awards Winner Summaries" found at <http://www.hungercenter.org/chs/news8b.htm>, accessed on May 13, 2005.

⁷ Food Resource Center, "Food Stamp Participation Access Rates State-by-State" found at http://www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/FSP/Participation_Rates_03.html on May 13, 2005.

⁸ Food Resource Center, "Food Stamp Participation 5-Year Change" found at http://www.frac.org/html/news/fsp/02.05_5yr.html on May 13, 2005.

⁹ Roberts, Susan. *Hunger in Iowa*, Agricultural Law Center, Drake University, 2003.

¹⁰ Author's calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, County Food Stamp Input data files and description, found at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/SAIPE/inputdata/countyFS.html>.