

## **Summary**

Throughout most of its history, the laws governing the federal Food Stamp Program have explicitly defined program components such as eligibility, the process and rules of benefit determination, and recipient work requirements. With the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in 1996, however, States now have available an array of policy options from which to choose in designing and operating the Food Stamp Program, particularly in the areas of work requirements and participant sanctions.

A natural result of this new flexibility is that a variety of State policies related to food stamp disqualification practices, benefit determination and work-related time limits and sanctions have replaced more uniform national standards. This report provides a snapshot of the policy options each State had chosen by late 1997. It is the first major product of an ongoing study examining State choices under welfare reform entitled "Tracking State Food Stamp Choices and Implementation Strategies Under Welfare Reform."

The report presents the results of a survey conducted with every State during November and December 1997 to gather detailed information on State options taken in six main areas, with particular focus on time limits and work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) and on food stamp sanctions. Survey findings in these two most important option areas include:

### **State Choices on Implementation of ABAWD Provisions**

The survey reinforces information that a large majority of States have waived some portion of their ABAWD population from the time limit and work requirements. Forty-three States have ABAWD waivers approved by the Food and Nutrition Service. Seven of these States have chosen to not implement the waiver in all approved jurisdictions.

Of the 37 States which had decided at the time of the survey whether or not to take advantage of the expansion of ABAWD exemptions allowed under the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, 22 had opted to expand the exemption and 15 had decided not to. Not surprisingly, 11 of the 15 States choosing not to expand the exemption also had not applied for ABAWD waivers or had waived less than 15 percent of their ABAWD caseload from the time limit.

Half the States reported having workfare programs for ABAWDs (although it appears the number of actual slots may be small).

### **State Choices on Food Stamp Program Sanctions**

A little over half the States chose to disqualify only the head of household if he/she does not comply with food stamp Employment and Training requirements (a more lenient policy than prior law, under which the entire household is disqualified if the head does not comply).

Relatively few States selected the various other sanction-related options such as disqualification for noncompliance with another means-tested program, failure to cooperate with child support, or failure to ensure minors attend school.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all of its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, political beliefs, genetic information, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.)

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410; or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), or (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users) or (800) 845-6136 (Spanish Federal-relay). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.