

**FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE
RESEARCH AND EVALUATION PLAN – FISCAL YEAR 2013**

NOVEMBER 28, 2012

**STRATEGIC GOAL: ALL OF AMERICA’S CHILDREN HAVE ACCESS
TO SAFE, NUTRITIOUS, AND BALANCED MEALS**

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ALL OF AMERICA'S CHILDREN HAVE ACCESS TO SAFE, NUTRITIOUS AND BALANCED MEALS

Improve Program Access and Reduce Hunger

Demonstrations to End Childhood Hunger and Food Insecurity

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (Section 141) authorizes a program of demonstrations to test innovative strategies – including alternative models for service delivery and benefit levels – to end child hunger and food insecurity. Projects may include enhanced SNAP benefits for eligible households with children; enhanced benefits or innovative program delivery models in school meals, afterschool snacks programs, and CACFP; and targeted Federal, State or local assistance, including emergency housing or family preservation services, for households with children who are experiencing food insecurity. USDA is required to conduct an independent evaluation of each demonstration project using rigorous experimental design and methodologies to measure the impact on participation, food security, nutrition, and associated behavioral outcomes and share results broadly to inform policy makers, service providers, other partners, and the public to promote wide use of successful strategies. The funding becomes available on October 1, 2012, and remains available for five years.

Research on Causes, Characteristics, and Consequences of Childhood Hunger and Food Insecurity

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (Section 141) authorizes a new research program on the causes, characteristics, and consequences of childhood hunger and food insecurity, with a particular focus on efforts to improve the knowledge base regarding contributing factors, geographic distribution, programmatic effectiveness, public health and medical costs, and consequences for child development, well-being, and educational attainment. The funding becomes available on October 1, 2012, and remains available until expended. Because of the breadth and complexity of the research mandate in the Act, FNS will seek input from a wide group of stakeholders to help focus on areas and methods with the greatest research potential.

Characteristics of Summer Food Service Participants and Programs

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) serves only a small percentage of the children who receive free and reduced price meals through the National School Lunch Program during the school year. This study would provide greater insight into who offers and who uses SFSP meals. The study would update data last collected in the summers of 2003 and 2004. It would explore families' SFSP participation decision, help identify gaps in service, and ultimately shed more light on potential reasons for the low participation rate. With this understanding, FNS can refine the program to reach more children more effectively.

Characteristics of Child and Adult Care Food Program Providers

This study would deepen FNS's understanding of CACFP provider characteristics. It would examine the type and size of providing institutions and homes, characteristics of participants served; types, amounts, and range of reimbursements; and other key characteristics. The study would inform policy about CACFP, ensuring it is able to reach its goals most efficiently, and provide a base for future research.

Dynamics of SNAP Participation

This study will update information on the duration of SNAP participation spells and the factors associated with entry, exit, and re-entry. FNS has released series of studies examining individuals' patterns of participation in SNAP showing, for example, that half of all new participants left the program within 10 months during mid 2000s. This project will use data from the 2009 longitudinal panel of the Survey of Income and Program Participation to update these analyses for the period of rising caseloads between 2009 and 2011.

Disability, Chronic Health Problems and Household Food Security

This collaboration with the Economic Research Service (ERS) has two components. First, it provides continued support to include a 10-item adult food security survey module in the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS). NHIS provides a rich source of nationally representative data to examine the links between food insecurity, health, and disability among all household members, including children. Second, it provides new support for a collaborative research project (with researchers at UCLA and ERS) to estimate the effects of disabilities and long-term health problems on household food insecurity, and the effects of food insecurity on the health and disease of household members. The project will also seek to answer how food insecurity affects short-term health outcomes.

Impact of the Affordable Care Act on WIC

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) will expand eligibility for the Medicaid program, and require all Americans to obtain health insurance. Some estimate that as many as 14 million people could become newly eligible for Medicaid. With this many people entering the social services system, possibly for the first time, some may learn about and decide to apply for other means-tested programs, including WIC. Moreover, the pace of program entries and exits – churning – may have consequences for WIC administration. This white paper would examine the potential impact of ACA on WIC enrollment.

Direct Certification in the National School Lunch Program: Report to Congress

Under direct certification, children are determined eligible for free school meals without the need for household applications by using data from other means-tested programs. The law requires local educational agencies to conduct direct certification for children from households that receive SNAP benefits, as well as annual reporting to Congress on the effectiveness of State and local efforts to directly certify children for free school meals. This project will analyze nutrition assistance program administrative data, compile information on best practices, and prepare the annual report to Congress for SY 2012-13.

Improve Nutrition and Reduce Obesity

Study on Nutrition and Wellness Quality of Child Care Settings

The Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (Section 223) directs USDA to conduct a nationally representative study of child care providers to assess the nutritional quality of foods provided in child care settings, opportunities for physical activity, and facilitators and barriers to providing healthy foods and physical activity and participation in CACFP.

Child Care Dietary Assessment

Contemplated as an adjunct and extension of the Congressionally mandated study on nutrition and wellness quality in child care settings, this project would examine the dietary intakes of a nationally representative sample of children in child care centers, including Head Start sites. (Additional funds would be required to extend the project to children in family day care homes.)

Putting Behavioral Economics to Work in School Cafeterias

These funds support a multi-year, integrated research program, launched in FY 2010 in collaboration with the Economic Research Service and the National Institute for Food and Agriculture, to develop, test, and promote applications of behavioral economic theory in the school nutrition environment. The goal is to identify, develop, and document evidence-based strategies, tools, and techniques that schools can use to shape their environments to support and encourage healthful food choices and behaviors. This year's focus will be on finding and promoting practices that illuminate the causes and reduce the volume of plate waste in schools. In particular, research will emphasize actionable factors within the school food environment – including, for example, the timing and duration of lunch periods, the timing of recess before or after lunch, the number of serving lines, the availability of grab-and-go options, and the preparation and presentation of food items – that may affect the amount of plate waste.

Support for National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey

The Agricultural Research Service (ARS) leads data collection and processing for *What We Eat in America*, the dietary intake component of the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES). These funds will provide partial support to ARS for the collection and processing of a second day of 24-hour dietary intake recalls for the 2013-2014 data collection cycle. Two days of dietary recalls are necessary to estimate patterns of usual intakes. FNS uses NHANES data to provide a comprehensive picture of the dietary intakes and food choices of nutrition assistance program participants.

Specifications for Scientific Review of WIC Food Package

The Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act (Section 232) requires a review of the WIC food package at least every ten years to ensure that it conforms to current nutrition science, public health concerns, and cultural eating patterns. The most recent scientific review concluded in April 2005. This project would initiate the process by (1) drafting specifications for the next scientific review, including a timetable that would allow for consideration of the 2015 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and the results of the FNS-sponsored *WIC Infant and Toddler Feeding Practices Study* (expected in late 2016) and (2) provide logistical support for two one-day workshops to take place in 2014. We anticipate that one workshop would be held in the East, the other in the West, with an opportunity provided for the public to submit on-line comments.

Food and Nutrition Information Center

Funds will support the Food and Nutrition Information Center within the National Agricultural Library (NAL) to systematically store and disseminate information on USDA nutrition assistance programs, nutrition education and related nutrition topics.

Improve Program Integrity and Reduce Improper Payments

Child and Adult Care Food Program Meal Cost Study

A recent expert panel commissioned by FNS to recommend new CACFP meal requirements aligned with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans was hampered by the absence of current and comprehensive information on the cost of providing meals in child care centers and family day care homes. This study would provide basic information on the cost of producing a reimbursable meal under CACFP, based on a nationally representative sample of child care providers. The effort would be expected to inform future analyses of the potential cost of changes to the CACFP meal patterns.

WIC Vendor Risk Reduction Project

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act requires WIC to transition to EBT benefit delivery by 2020. The nature of vendor error, overcharging, and fraud under EBT is fundamentally different from these activities under the traditional paper WIC food instrument. This study will include exploration of effective methods of screening new vendor applicants, including assessment of competitive pricing and improved peer group structure and assignment. It will build upon ongoing studies of high-risk vendor identification and data analysis to identify possible patterns of fraud in EBT transaction data.

Child and Adult Care Food Program Tiering Error Measurements

The Improper Payments Information Act of 2002 (IPIA) requires agencies to produce annual measures of erroneous payments in Federal programs subject to risk. For CACFP, FNS has met this requirement through studies of errors child care sponsoring organizations make when assigning family day care home providers to higher or lower reimbursement tiers. This item provides funding for the 2013 annual measure.

Feasibility of Improved Estimates of Trafficking

The Office of the Inspector General has recommended that FNS explore the feasibility of using a nationwide random sample of retailers to develop the trafficking rate. The current estimation methodology is based on investigations and monitoring of a sample of stores most likely to traffic, adjusted to reflect the full population of redemptions at authorized stores. While this methodology makes maximum use of all available data and resources and offers a conservative and practical approach, it has known limitations. This study will determine and document the feasibility of using the redemption practices of a nationwide random sample of SNAP retailers for calculating a national trafficking rate.

WIC Vendor Error Estimates Aging

This project funds the annual aging of data on erroneous WIC vendor payments for reporting in the USDA Performance and Accountability Report (PAR). It helps fulfill the requirements of the Improper Payments Accountability Act of 2002. Data from a study of vendor payments in 2004-2005 are adjusted using administrative data reported by States and maintained in the Integrity Profile (TIP) database. The TIP database includes reports of findings from the required covert compliance purchases at WIC vendors conducted on an ongoing basis by State WIC agencies. Annual aging of the data from the 2004-2005 study will be needed until results from an ongoing study of vendor practices are available in late 2013.

OTHER SUPPORT FOR PROGRAM MANAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE

SNAP Employment and Training Services

The objective of this study is to develop a national inventory of current E&T services (not limited to SNAP), including goals and policies, target audience and persons served, provider characteristics, partnerships, performance measures and available outcome data. The inventory would also capture links between SNAP E&T services and other work-related programs. To the extent available data permit, the project will describe the effect of E&T programs on long-term economic stability of SNAP participants.

Measuring Access, Trends and Impacts (Microsimulation)

This on-going project supports several key analytic tools and analyses to address program participation trends and impacts; generates annual reports on the characteristics, participation rates and patterns of SNAP participation; and supports the Agency's capacity to assess cost and distributional impacts of proposed changes to SNAP and other nutrition assistance programs.

WIC Participant and Program Characteristics 2014

This project summarizes information on participant income, nutrition risk, and demographic characteristics – including data on initiation of infant breastfeeding and migrant farm worker families – nationwide at a point in time. It delivers a data set covering the food packages issued for use in projections of program cost and other market impacts. Data for this project has been generated from State management information systems biennially since 1992, based on a near census of WIC participants as they are enrolled in the program.

School Nutrition Program Operations

In FY 2010, FNS awarded a contract for a multi-year panel study of selected operational aspects of the school nutrition programs. The project is designed to collect data from a nationally representative sample of about 1,500 school food authorities (SFAs) and all Child Nutrition State agencies. The surveys provide a cross-sectional snapshot of program characteristics, as well as longitudinal estimates of year-to-year changes in operations. The study will provide general descriptive information on the characteristics of the school-based Child Nutrition Programs necessary for the preparation of program budgets, data on various aspects of the program administration to inform program policy and regulations, as well as data to identify areas in need of technical assistance and training. It will also include an analysis of the impact on participation of Section 205 of the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act, which requires schools to charge students for paid meals at a price that is on average equal to the difference between free meal reimbursement and paid meal reimbursement.

Simulation of Limited Medicaid Adjunctive Income Eligibility

This project is intended as a collaboration with one or more States to see what it would take to develop the capability to electronically query Medicaid information systems at the time of application for WIC benefits to see if the applicant is on Medicaid and has income below a selected threshold (such as 250% of poverty). It would determine the start-up and ongoing costs to use this system as a routine component of certification, *but is only exploratory and would not*

impact the WIC certification decision. The information would better position WIC in case legislation at a later date requires an upper bound on Medicaid adjunctive income eligibility.

WIC Food Cost Estimation Improvements

This project would explore methods to improve national WIC food item price and average food cost estimates as the program transitions from paper-based to EBT food delivery systems. It would explore various alternatives, including working with the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Economic Research Service to obtain actual prices on WIC-approved foods. The project would explore the addition of more detail in ongoing BLS and ERS data collections to include specific categories of WIC-approved foods to provide a clearer picture of the costs of the WIC food package, and how changes to it affect program costs.

Cooperative Food Purchasing for School Meals

In School Year 2009-10, almost half of all school districts in the 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia participated in some form of cooperative buying with other districts. Many districts find such cooperative agreements to be useful means of reducing costs and improving food variety and quality; but many others do not take advantage of such arrangements. This study will collect information from State agencies and SFAs to learn more about best practices and perceived benefits of cooperative buying, barriers to using it more widely, and potential tools and strategies to encourage and facilitate cooperative buying agreements. It will also consider the relationship of these cooperative food purchasing practices to the use of USDA Foods.

Feasibility of a National Database of SNAP Caseload Data

FNS regularly has the need for current and longitudinal State SNAP caseload data. While there are some efforts underway to bring a few States together under data sharing agreements, these efforts have been extremely difficult to implement. SNAP Quality Control data provide a rich dataset for some purposes, but lag in time before they are available, the cross-sectional nature of the sample limits certain analyses, and relatively small samples mean that they cannot be used for projects specific to certain geographic areas or samples of specially-selected participants. The objectives of this feasibility study are to understand the technological, policy, and cost requirements of creating a system that could capture and store State SNAP caseload data; identify barriers to State cooperation and ways to overcome those barriers; identify potential risks associated with data quality, cost, privacy, confidentiality and potential abuses; and provide options for delivering all data and a representative sample from each State Agency.

Catalog of Noncash TANF Assistance Programs

This study would develop an updated catalog of State TANF programs or policies that provide a noncash TANF benefit to SNAP household, including the number of households and individuals that have received the benefit in recent years.

Methods to Standardize State Standard Utility Allowances

This study would develop alternative methods for standardizing the development of Standard Utility Allowances (SUA) across the States. Devoting resources to standardizing the process for calculating annual SUAs has the potential to produce information that could be used to improve and simplify State and Federal program administration.

Improved Reporting WIC Participants by Food Package

The change in the WIC food packages in 2009 was followed by conforming changes in the requirements for reporting data in the biennial WIC Participant and Program Characteristics (PC) data collection. The results from PC2010 indicate that many States are having challenges providing the biennial data with proper assignment of participants to the 27 WIC food package categories. This project would enable FNS to work with State agencies to refine and improve the accuracy and completeness of reporting to properly align with the food package categories in preparation for the PC2014 data collection.

Commodity Food Distribution System

The project will provide a descriptive analysis – based on data currently submitted to FNS – of food distribution systems. The project would examine food delivery systems, storage centers, associated costs, and the services States receive for costs incurred.

Analytic Support for Policy Development

These blanket purchase agreements provide for analysis of existing data sets to address a variety of specific program or methodological questions useful to program managers and to support development of cost estimates for legislative, budgetary and regulatory proposals. These include the generation of estimates of the number of people eligible for WIC, development of information to support State WIC funding allocations, and an annual analysis of regional office review of school meal applications. Separate agreements are in place for SNAP, CN, and WIC.