

Reaching Those in Need: Estimates of State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2018

Background

This report – part of an annual series – presents estimates of the percentage of eligible persons, by State, who participated in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) during an average month in fiscal year (FY) 2018 and in the 2 previous fiscal years. SNAP eligibility criteria include income and resource guidelines and certain nonfinancial criteria.

This report also presents estimates of State participation rates for individuals in eligible “working poor” households (households with earnings) over the same period. Although SNAP provides important support for working families, historically, the working poor have participated at rates substantially below those for all eligible persons.

Nationally, 82 percent of eligible people received SNAP benefits in FY 2018. The participation rate for individuals in eligible working poor households was significantly lower, at 74 percent.

Methods

State participation rates are derived using a statistical approach known as shrinkage estimation, developed to improve precision when sample sizes are small. Data come from the Current Population Survey, American Community Survey, and administrative records. While shrinkage estimates are more precise than direct sample estimates, the estimated rates are still based on fairly small samples of households in many States. Users of these estimates should take the estimated confidence intervals into account when interpreting differences between States; within a State over time; and between estimates for all eligible persons and the working poor.

The participation rates presented here use SNAP administrative data to estimate the number of participants in each State and Census Bureau survey data to estimate the number of eligible individuals. The use of different data sources for these figures means that there is substantial uncertainty associated with estimates for some States. In particular, estimated numbers of eligible individuals in a given State can approach or equal 100 percent of the corresponding estimates of participants.

Key Findings

- SNAP participation rates for all eligible persons varied widely from State to State in FY 2018.
- Some States have consistently high/low participation rates relative to other States for all 3 fiscal years.
- The participation rate for individuals in eligible working poor households was 74 percent.
- Participation rates for the working poor also varied widely across States in FY 2018 and were consistently lower than the rates for all eligible persons.

Users of this report should be mindful that this reflects uncertainties in the estimates, rather than an “exact” 100 percent participation rate, and that these rates are best viewed as a relative measure of how a State’s rate compares to the national average.

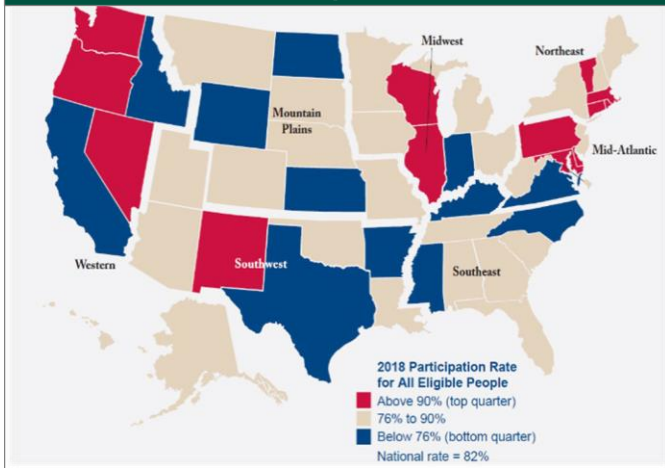
The estimates presented here do not include people eligible solely through State categorical eligibility policies. Additionally, the number of eligible persons in California is adjusted to reflect the fact that about 1.2 million Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients received a small cash benefit for food assistance from the State and were not eligible to receive SNAP benefits during this period. In the absence of this exclusion, about 800,000 SSI recipients would be eligible for SNAP under current program rules.

Every year, the participation rate estimates vary slightly from previous reports because the data are updated and the regression model variables are chosen to best predict the participation rate for all 3 years. For this reason, the participation rates cited in this report are not directly comparable to those presented in prior year reports.

Findings

SNAP participation rates for all eligible persons varied widely from State to State. State participation rates ranged from a low of 54 percent (Wyoming) to a high of 100 percent (Delaware, Illinois, and Oregon). In 22 States rates were significantly higher (in a statistical sense) than the national rate, and in 18 States rates were significantly lower.

Figure 1: Variation in State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)



Some States have consistently high participation rates relative to other States. In all 3 years from 2016 to 2018, Delaware, Illinois, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Washington had significantly higher participation rates for all eligible people than two-thirds of the States.

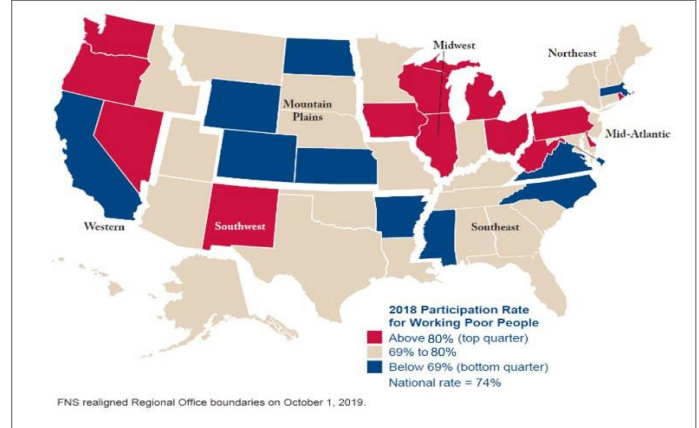
Some States have consistently low participation rates relative to other States. In the same 3 years from 2016 to 2018, Arkansas, California, Kansas, North Dakota, and Wyoming had significantly lower rates than two-thirds of the States.

Participation rates for the working poor also varied widely across States. Rates ranged from a low of 38 percent in the District of Columbia to a high of 98 percent in Delaware.

Participation rates for the working poor varied differently than those for all eligible people. In all 3 years from 2016 to 2018 Ohio ranked significantly higher when ranked by its rate for working poor people than

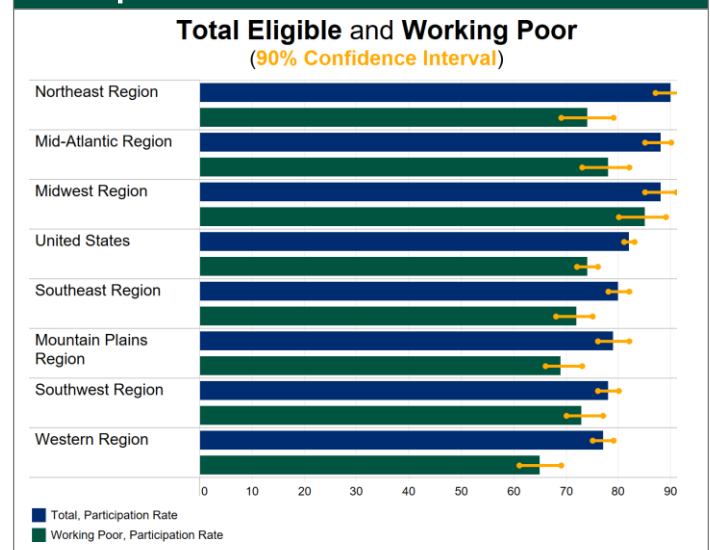
when ranked by its rate for all eligible people. In the same way, Massachusetts and the District of Columbia are ranked significantly lower for the same 3 fiscal years.

Figure 2: Variation in State SNAP Working Poor Participation Rates



There was also variation between regional participation rates. For 2018, the Northeast, Midwest, and Mid-Atlantic Regions all have significantly higher participation rates than the national estimate. For the working poor, only the Midwest Region had significantly higher estimates than the national rate.

Figure 3: Variation in Regional SNAP Participation Rates



For More Information:

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