

Reaching Those in Need: Estimates of USDA's State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation Rates in 2020 (Summary)

Background

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) administers 16 nutrition assistance programs with the mission to increase food security and reduce hunger—in partnership with cooperating organizations—by providing children and low-income people access to food, a healthy diet, and nutrition education in a manner that supports American agriculture and inspires public confidence.

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 (USDA)'s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) during an average month in fiscal year (FY) 2020 and in the two previous fiscal years. SNAP eligibility criteria include maximum income and resource thresholds, as well as certain nonfinancial criteria, such as age and disability status.

Because the Coronavirus COVID-19 public health emergency affected data collection starting in March 2020, this summary covers only the prepandemic period of October 2019 through February 2020. Thus, this report presents rates only for all eligible persons during the prepandemic months of FY 2020. FNS estimates that 78 percent of eligible people received SNAP benefits in prepandemic FY 2020.

Methods

State-level SNAP 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 SNAP administrative records. While shrinkage estimates are more precise than direct sample estimates, the estimated rates are still based on small samples of households in many States, requiring the use of 3 years of data. Thus, readers should take confidence intervals into account when interpreting differences between States over time.

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 because SNAP-eligibility is not directly estimated in Census

Key Findings

- Illinois, Oregon, Rhode Island, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts are all estimated to have 100 percent SNAP participation rates.
- In FY 2020, the USDA FNS Mid-Atlantic, Midwest, and Northeast Regions had the highest overall SNAP regional participation rates.
- Illinois, New Mexico, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Washington had significantly higher participation rates than two-thirds of other States.

data. In particular, estimated numbers of eligible individuals in a given State can approach or equal 100 percent of the corresponding estimates of participants. 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 U.S. 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 before June 1, 2019, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients were not eligible to receive SNAP benefits, instead receiving a cash benefit, and were not enrolled in SNAP until recertification, which could be up to 3 years from the above date.

Every year, the participation rate estimates vary slightly from previous reports because the SNAP administrative

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

In prepandemic FY 2020, SNAP participation rates for all eligible households varied widely from State to State. State participation rates ranged from a low of 49 percent in Wyoming to a high of 100 percent for New Mexico, Rhode Island, Oregon, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts. Twenty-three States and the District of Columbia (D.C.) had statistically higher participation rates than the U.S. national rate, while 15 States had statistically lower rates. Additionally, the top quarter of States had participation rates higher than 87 percent, while the bottom quarter had rates below 74 percent (Figure 1).

Some States have consistently high or low participation rates relative to other States. In all 3 years from FY 2018 to prepandemic FY 2020, Illinois, New Mexico, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Washington had significantly higher participation rates for all eligible people than two-thirds of the States. In each of the same 3 years, Arkansas, California, Kansas, Mississippi, North Dakota, and Wyoming had significantly lower rates than two-thirds of the States.

There was variation between regional participation rates. In prepandemic FY 2020, the FNS Mid-Atlantic Region had the highest overall participation rate but not statistically different from Midwest and Northeast Regions (Figure 2). The Western Region had the confidence interval, but it was not statistically lower than Southeastern and Southwestern Regions, which had participation rates of 73, 73, and 74 percent, respectively. Mountain Plains Region was in the middle.

Figure 1: Variation in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation Rates by United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Region (Fiscal Year 2020)

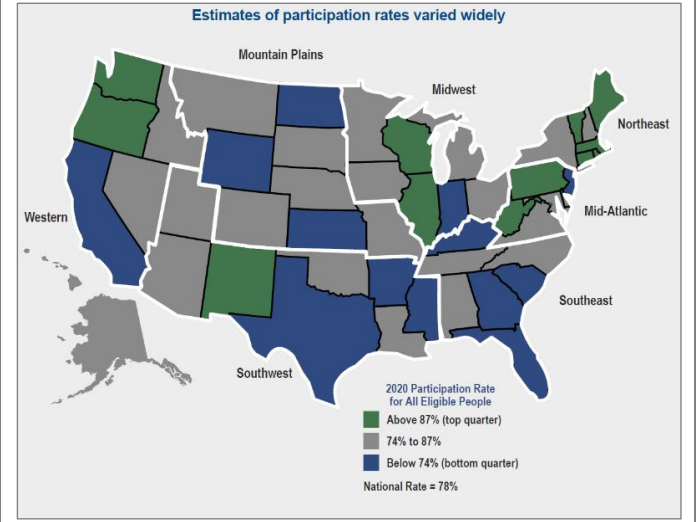
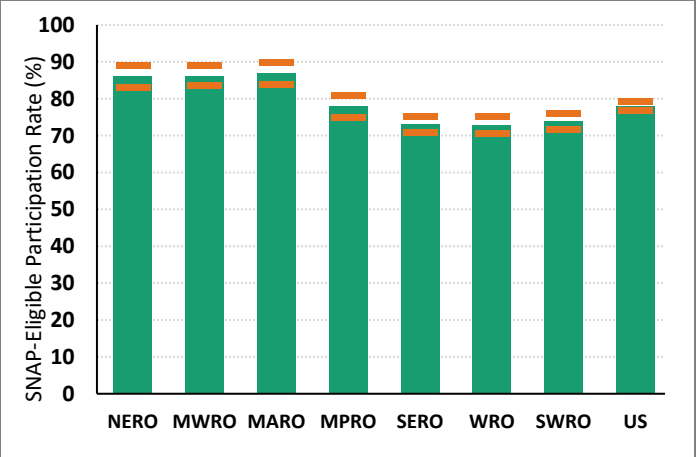


Figure 2: Variation in Regional Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation Rates (With 90% Confidence Intervals) (Fiscal Year 2020)



FNS Regions: NERO (Northeast), MWRO (Mid-West), MARO (Mid-Atlantic, MPRO (Mountain Plains), SERO (Southeast), WRO (Western), SWRO (Southwestern)

For More Information:

Cunyngham, Karen (2023). Reaching Those in Need: Estimates of USDA’s State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation Rates in 2020. Prepared by Mathematica, Contract No. 12-3198-20-F-0056 Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support, Project Officer: Kameron Burt. Available online at: www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis.