

## Reaching Those in Need: Estimates of USDA's State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2019 (Summary)

### 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) 2019 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.

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, working-poor households have participated at rates substantially below those for all eligible households. FNS estimates that 82 percent of eligible people received SNAP benefits in FY 2019, while the participation rate was 72 percent of eligible working-poor households.

### 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 comes 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 fairly small samples of households in many States. Thus, readers should take confidence intervals into account when interpreting differences between States 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 because SNAP-eligibility is not directly estimated in Census 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

### Key Findings

- Illinois, Oregon, Rhode Island, Delaware, New Mexico, Vermont, Washington, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin are all estimated to have 100-percent SNAP participation rates.
- The rate for households with earnings was significantly lower than for all eligible people in all States.
- In FY 2019, the USDA FNS Northeast Region had the highest overall SNAP participation rate.

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.

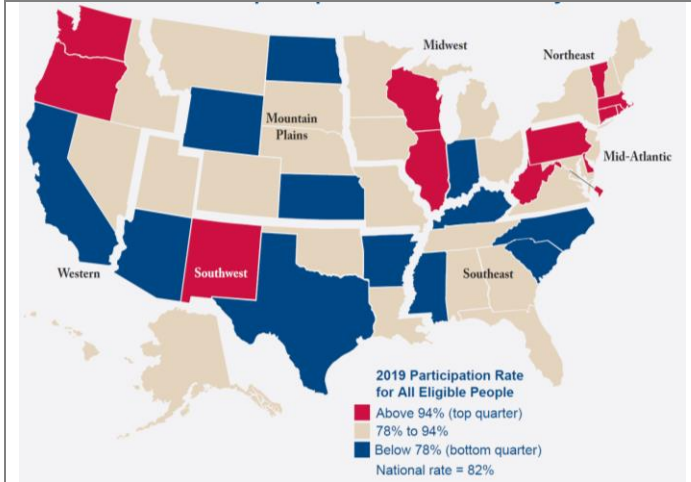
Every year, the participation rate estimates vary slightly from previous reports because the SNAP administrative data are updated and the regression model variables are chosen to best predict the participation rate for all 3 years. For this reason, the participation rates cited in this report are not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

### Findings

**In FY 2019, SNAP participation rates for all eligible households varied widely from State to State.** State participation rates ranged from a low of 55 percent in Wyoming to a high of 100 percent for Illinois, Oregon, Rhode Island, Delaware, New Mexico, Vermont, Washington, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin. Twenty-one States had statistically higher participation rates than the U.S. national rate, while 14 States had

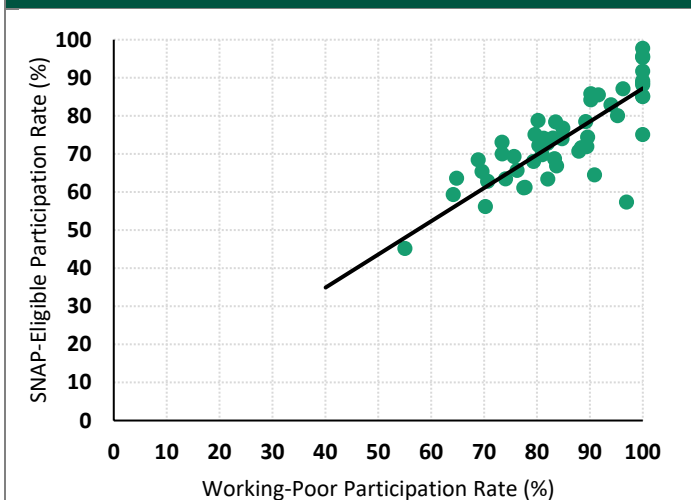
statistically lower rates. Additionally, the top quarter of States has participation rates higher than 94 percent, while the bottom quarter had rates below 78 percent (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Variation in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates by USDA Food and Nutrition Service Region (Fiscal Year 2019)**



**Some States have consistently high or low participation rates relative to other States.** In all 3 years from FY 2017 to 2019, Delaware, Illinois, New Mexico, Oregon, Pennsylvania, 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, North Dakota, and Wyoming had significantly lower rates than two-thirds of the States.

**Figure 2: Correlation Between All Eligible and Working Poor Participation Rates by State (Fiscal Year 2019)\***



\*Each point represents a State in FY 2019

**For More Information:**

Cunyngham, Karen (2022). Estimates of State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates In 2019. 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](http://www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis).

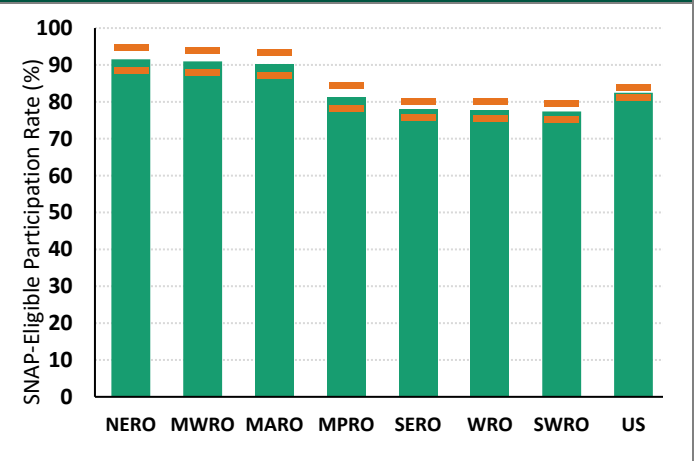
**The rate for working-poor households was significantly lower than for all eligible people in all States.** Generally, States with higher participation rates overall also had higher participation rates for working-poor households, with a correlation of over 87 percent (Figure 2).

**Participation rates for the working-poor also varied widely across States.** Rates ranged from a low of 45 percent in the District of Columbia to a high of 98 percent in Pennsylvania.

**Participation rates for the working-poor varied differently than those for all eligible people.** In all 3 years from FY 2017 to FY 2019, Alabama, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, and Ohio ranked significantly higher by their rate for working-poor households than when ranked by their rate for all eligible households. Similarly, Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, and the District of Columbia are ranked significantly lower in working-poor participation relative to all eligible households.

**There was variation between regional participation rates.** In FY 2019, the FNS Northeast Region had the highest overall participation rate but not statistically different from Midwest and Mid-Atlantic Regions (Figure 3). The Southwestern Region had the lowest rate, but it was not statistically lower than Southeastern and Western Regions. Mountain Plains Region was in the middle.

**Figure 3: Variation in Regional Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates (With 90% Confidence Intervals) (Fiscal Year 2019)**



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