

**FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE
RESEARCH AND EVALUATION PLAN
FISCAL YEAR 2019**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
ENSURE FNS PROGRAMS PAVE A PATHWAY TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY	2
UTILIZE DATA-DRIVEN STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE PROGRAM INTEGRITY.....	3
PROVIDE AMERICANS WITH ACCESS TO NUTRITIOUS FOOD.....	4
FACILITATE AN INCREASE IN NUTRITIOUS DIETS GROUNDED IN FOOD-BASED SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE	4
OTHER SUPPORT FOR PROGRAM MANAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE	4

Please Note: This plan is a forecast of projects FNS expects to pursue in fiscal year 2019, but it is subject to modification without notice based on funding availability and program priorities.

**FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE
RESEARCH AND EVALUATION PLAN – FISCAL YEAR 2019**

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) conducts a variety of studies, evaluations, and related activities that respond to the needs of policymakers and managers and help ensure that nutrition assistance programs achieve their goals effectively. This plan provides short descriptions of projects that are expected to be launched in fiscal year (FY) 2019. It reflects decisions by FNS’ program and research staff and leadership on the best use of available research funding to meet current information needs that are aligned with agency priorities to improve program efficiency, integrity, and nutrition. It was developed in consultation with the agencies of the Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area.

In addition to consulting on the development of the annual Research and Evaluation Plan, REE staff members regularly participate as valued experts in the development of study design specifications and data collection plans, and they also serve on advisory and technical panels for the studies.

Projects also include work conducted through partnerships between FNS and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture to improve diets through such efforts as the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Program.

Through these partnerships, USDA ensures that we utilize the respective strengths and expertise of each agency in support of the USDA mission. Close collaboration across the Department ensures the studies included in the plan reflect the best science in order to inform evidence-based policy development in Federal nutrition assistance programs.

STRATEGIC GOAL: PROVIDE AMERICANS WITH SAFE, NUTRITIOUS, AND SECURE FOOD

ENSURE FNS PROGRAMS PAVE A PATHWAY TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Understanding the Use and Role of Assessments in SNAP Employment and Training Programs

Before assigning work registrants to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training (E&T) components, individuals should be screened to determine their fitness for E&T and assessed to determine which component is most appropriate for their current skills and abilities. Currently, this practice is not carried out uniformly across States or E&T providers. This study will survey all SNAP State agencies to understand the types of assessments that are used for work registrants, when assessment typically occurs, what questions are asked, and how the data is used to place individuals in E&T programs. The study will also collect and review a sample of assessment tools used by providers. The results of the study will be used to determine best practices that can be shared with all State agencies to help bring uniformity to the process.

Assessing the Availability of Supportive Services and Case Management for SNAP Employment and Training Participants

To help SNAP E&T participants succeed in completing their training and moving forward on a path toward self-sufficiency, it is important that they receive case management and support services, such as child care or transportation subsidies. Although certain services, such as child care subsidies, are required by statute, it is unclear if States and providers uniformly offer them to E&T participants. This study will survey all SNAP State agencies to understand the types of support services that are offered to E&T participants, how many participants are offered the service, and what is the service uptake rate, as well as reasons for limiting or not offering certain services. For case management in particular, the survey will ask how many E&T participants receive case management as well as the nature and frequency of the interactions. The results of the survey will be used to develop best practices that can be shared with all State agencies.

Evaluation of State Child Support Enforcement Cooperation Requirements in SNAP

The Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 requires that USDA in cooperation with the Department of Health and Human Services conduct an independent evaluation in a sample of States that currently or formerly sanction participants for failure to cooperate with child support enforcement. The evaluation shall include the procedures used by each State to implement the policy, how good cause for noncooperation is determined, the costs associated with the policy, and impacts on participants such as SNAP eligibility, food security, income, and economic stability.

Study of Nutrition and Wellness Quality in Child Care Settings (SNACS-2)

The first study on Nutrition and Wellness Quality in Child Care Settings (SNACS) was awarded in 2015 to 1) assess nutrition and wellness policies/practices and meal quality for infants and children in Child and Adult Care Feeding Program (CACFP) child care settings; 2) describe food and nutrient intakes of infants and children in CACFP child care centers and outside of child care; 3) determine the meal costs and revenues in CACFP child care centers; and 4) describe and assess plate waste in CACFP child care centers. Data were collected before implementation of

the updated CACFP meal standards. This project proposes an update of SNACS and the first data collection after implementation of the new nutrition standards for CACFP. Data collection would occur in school year (SY) 2021/2022.

UTILIZE DATA-DRIVEN STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE PROGRAM INTEGRITY

Best Practices for Operating a Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (D-SNAP)

While all SNAP State agencies have disaster plans that are updated annually, many States find it challenging to implement a D-SNAP efficiently in the event of an actual disaster. Once a D-SNAP has been approved, the State agency is responsible for effectively implementing the program, ensuring program integrity, complying with civil rights laws, and reporting on operations to FNS. This study will use case studies for States that have recently implemented D-SNAP to highlight best practices and lessons learned by disaster type, policy choices (e.g. food loss only, automatic supplements), and state versus county administered programs. The study will also analyze the economic and demographic characteristics of D-SNAP participants before and after the disaster and estimate the economic impact of D-SNAP benefits.

Understanding Meal Service Providers in SNAP and Who They Serve

In addition to traditional food retailers, other types of establishments – such as drug addiction or alcohol treatment centers, group living arrangements, battered women and children shelters, homeless meal providers, meal delivery services, communal dining facilities, and private senior citizens centers or apartment buildings – can also be authorized to redeem SNAP benefits. These types of establishments, collectively known as meal service providers, represent less than 2 percent of SNAP retailers and redeem less than one percent of SNAP benefits. This study will survey currently authorized meal service providers to better understand how they operate – who they serve, how they redeem SNAP benefits, and how they are funded. The study would also survey SNAP participants who use meal service providers to understand their demographic characteristics and their views about using SNAP benefits through such providers. Results will help FNS better understand meal service providers and the potential risks and benefits.

Child Nutrition Operations Study–III (CN-OPS-III)

FNS conducts an annual study to collect and analyze data on select operational aspects of the Child Nutrition programs. This includes a wide range of descriptive information from the State and school district levels, as well as data on special topics of current interest, such as the level of State and local subsidies beyond Federal reimbursements, nutrition education and promotion in schools, policies regarding unpaid meal balances, professional standards and training requirements, and compliance with the Buy American provision. FY 2019 funds will be used to support data collection in SY 2020–21 and SY 2021–22. Results are used to inform Child Nutrition Programs management and policy development.

Child and Adult Care Feeding Program Operations Study I (CACFP-OPS I)

This project proposes to conduct a study of the Child and Adult Care Feeding Program (CACFP) to collect and analyze data on select operational aspects of the program, including factors affecting family day care home participation in CACFP. FY 2019 funds will be used to support data collection in SY 2020–21. Results are used to inform CACFP program management and policy development.

Evaluation of Integrity-Focused Initiatives for Child Nutrition Programs

Child Nutrition Programs is continually developing and implementing initiatives to improve program integrity by reducing certification, aggregation, and meal claiming error. These funds will be used to implement and evaluate error reducing strategies as well as support the refinement of error measurement procedures. Potential projects include: 1) evaluation of the effectiveness of USDA's model web-based application to reduce household reporting error; 2) development, user testing, and evaluation of a web-based household application for CACFP; and 3) data collection to test new materials (e.g. meal tabulation forms) at Summer Food Service Program.

WIC Certification Error Estimates – Aging for IPERA Reporting (annual)

This project conducts the annual aging of data on the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) certification errors for reporting the USDA financial reports. It helps fulfill the requirements of the Improper Payments Elimination and Recovery Act of 2010. Data from a national survey of WIC participants conducted in 2008-2009 are adjusted annually using data from the census of WIC participant administrative records contained in the WIC Participant and Program Characteristics report series and other WIC administrative data.

PROVIDE AMERICANS WITH ACCESS TO NUTRITIOUS FOOD

WIC Eligibles Estimates (annual)

This project, the latest in a series, will develop a set of national and State level estimates of the number of individuals eligible for WIC benefits in 2018. The report will present estimates by participant subgroup at the national level, and WIC coverage rates for all national and State level estimates. This annual study examines how well WIC reaches eligible women and children. Results are used in the budget process to support program management and to address program performance.

FACILITATE AN INCREASE IN NUTRITIOUS DIETS GROUNDED IN FOOD-BASED SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE

National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey Data Collection on WIC Participants

NHANES, administered by the Department of Health and Human Services, collects detailed information, including dietary intake, anthropometry, and health status data, from a nationally representative sample of Americans annually to enable tracking of diet and health related information over time. This project will provide support to HHS to collect information on WIC-aged infants and young children participating in NHANES in survey years 2021 and 2022 to ensure that the data set can be used for analysis of feeding practices, dietary intake, nutrient status, growth, and health of infants and young children participating in WIC, including comparisons to low income non-participants and children from higher income families.

OTHER SUPPORT FOR PROGRAM MANAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE

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

This project will generate the required annual report to Congress on the effectiveness of State and local efforts to certify SNAP participant children for free school meals without the need for

household applications. It will calculate state-specific performance metrics from data reported by State agencies and school food authorities. The project will also highlight direct certification operations in a handful of States for insight into successful strategies and promising practices.

School Food Purchase Study IV

This project proposes to collect data on the foods purchased for school meals, including the source and cost of all foods procured. FY 2019 funds will be used to support data collection in SY 2020–2021. This would be the first School Food Purchase Study conducted since implementation of the new standards for school meals and Smart Snacks.

Evaluation of Approaches to Delivering WIC Nutrition Education

Nutrition education is provided at no cost to all WIC participants. While Federal regulations and guidance provide a framework for providing nutrition education, State and local agencies have the flexibility to design education appropriate for their population. Current models of delivering WIC nutrition education include in-person (group or individual sessions); web-based; telephone; and Skype, FaceTime, or other similar technologies. This project proposes to conduct a series of randomized controlled trials to assess the relative impact of these approaches using interventions with the same goals, objectives and topic areas. Comparisons will be made by length of time mother received WIC benefits and age of child currently receiving WIC. Outcomes assessed will include program participation; retention; and satisfaction, including the value mothers put on the education received; participant dietary behavior, patterns and practices; and health, including the growth and anemia measurements recorded during clinic visits.

WIC Analytics and Modeling

This funding will provide financial support for a variety of analyses that are conducted to respond to legislative, budget and policy questions critical to the WIC program. The funding could support additional analyses using existing data from large nationally representative studies.