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The Food Assistance Landscape FY 2015 Annual Report

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What Is the Issue?

At some point during the year, about 1 in 4 Americans participates in 1 or more of 15 domestic food and nutrition programs that provide children and needy families better access to food and a more healthful diet. These programs also represent a significant Federal investment, accounting for over two-thirds of USDA's annual budget. This report uses preliminary data from USDA's Food and Nutrition Service to examine trends in food and nutrition assistance programs through fiscal 2015 and ERS data to examine trends in the prevalence and severity of household food insecurity in the United States through 2014.

What Did the Study Find?

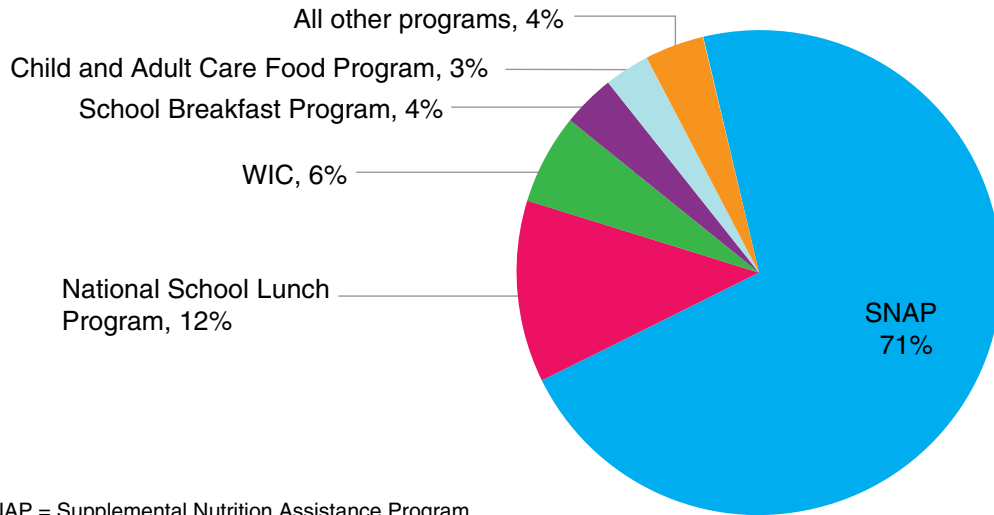
Spending for USDA's 15 domestic food and nutrition programs totaled \$104.1 billion in fiscal 2015, or about the same as the previous fiscal year. This was about 5 percent lower than the historical high of \$109.2 billion set in FY 2013.

- The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)—formerly the Food Stamp Program—accounted for 71 percent of all Federal food and nutrition assistance spending in fiscal 2015. An average 45.8 million persons per month participated in the program, or 2 percent fewer than the previous year. FY 2015 marked the second consecutive year that participation decreased, and only the third time in the last 15 years.
- An average 8.0 million people per month participated in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) in fiscal 2015, or 3 percent less than the previous year. This was the 5th consecutive year that participation fell.
- Daily participation in the National School Lunch Program averaged 30.5 million in FY 2015 or about the same as the previous year. Sixty-five percent of all participants received free meals, 7 percent received reduced-price meals, and 28 percent paid full price.
- An average of 14.0 million children participated in the School Breakfast Program each school day, or 3 percent more than the previous fiscal year. Seventy-nine percent of all participants received free meals, 6 percent received reduced-price meals, and 15 percent paid full price.
- A total of almost 2 billion meals were served through the Child and Adult Care Food Program, or 2 percent more than in the previous year.

Summary figure 1

Food and nutrition assistance expenditures by program, FY 2015

SNAP accounted for over two-thirds of food and nutrition assistance expenditures



SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

WIC = Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children.

Expenditures for all food and nutrition assistance programs totaled \$104.1 billion.

Source: USDA, Food and Nutrition Service.

- An estimated 14.0 percent of U.S. households (or 17.4 million households containing 48.1 million people) were food-insecure at least some time in 2014, essentially unchanged from the previous year; however, the cumulative decline from 14.9 percent in 2011 was statistically significant. Sixty-one percent of food-insecure households in the month prior to the survey participated in one or more of the three largest food and nutrition assistance programs (i.e., SNAP, National School Lunch Program, or WIC).

How Was the Study Conducted?

In this report, the Economic Research Service uses preliminary data from USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)—the agency responsible for managing the food and nutrition assistance programs—to examine trends in these programs through fiscal 2015 (October 1, 2014 to September 30, 2015). The report also highlights a recent ERS report that examines trends in the prevalence and severity of household food insecurity in the United States through 2014 and summarizes two other recent ERS reports that examined food access-related issues for vulnerable population groups.