

The Effect on Dietary Quality of Participation in the Food Stamp and WIC Programs. By Parke E. Wilde, Paul E. McNamara, and Christine K. Ranney. Food and Rural Economics Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Report Number 9.

Abstract

Participants in the Food Stamp Program consume more meats, added sugars, and total fats than they would in the absence of the program, while their consumption of fruits, vegetables, grains, and dairy products stays about the same. Participants in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) consume significantly less added sugars, which may reflect the substitution of WIC-supplied juices and cereals in place of higher sugar soft drinks and cereals. These findings come from a study of low-income Americans using the Continuing Survey of Food Intake by Individuals.

Keywords: Nutrition assistance programs, food intake, dietary quality, Continuing Survey of Food Intake by Individuals (CSFII)

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Summary

Participation in the Food Stamp Program (FSP) tends to increase one's intake of meats, added sugars, and total fats. It does not significantly change one's intake of fruits, vegetables, grains, or dairy products. The effects of food stamp use seem to be similar to the effects of having substantially more income. Food stamps appear to help low-income Americans acquire more of the food energy and other nutrients they need, but public policy is concerned with overall dietary quality and not just with increasing the amount of food intake.

Participation in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) tends to reduce one's consumption of food products with added sugars, perhaps reflecting the substitution of WIC-supplied cereals and fruit juices for high-sugar cereals and soft drinks. WIC participants also seem to consume more fruits and dairy products than they might otherwise, but this finding was not statistically significant.

The United States invests about \$17 billion annually in the FSP and about \$4 billion annually in WIC, to improve food security and dietary quality for low-income Americans. This study uses data from the Continuing Survey of Food Intake by Individuals (CSFII) for 1994-96. It measures seven categories of food intake using the serving definitions employed in the Food Guide Pyramid developed by the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services.