
August 2000**FOOD ASSISTANCE****Options for Improving
Nutrition for Older
Americans****G A O****Accountability * Integrity * Reliability**

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Abbreviations

CACFP	Child and Adult Care Food Program
CSFP	Commodity Supplemental Food Program
ENP	Elderly Nutrition Program
HHS	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
SSI	Supplemental Security Income



United States General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

**Resources, Community, and
Economic Development Division**

B-285169

August 17, 2000

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
Chairman
The Honorable John B. Breaux
Ranking Member
Special Committee on Aging
United States Senate

Many older persons cannot consistently obtain a nutritious diet, particularly if their income is near the poverty level. In 1998, about 1.6 million to 2 million households with individuals age 60 and older (elderly households) reported that they did not have enough of the right types of food needed to maintain their health or simply did not have enough to eat.¹ Lack of money was the underlying reason these households were unable to obtain a sufficient quantity of food or had to reduce the quality of their food. In some cases, older persons are forced to choose between buying food or paying for medicine, utilities, or other needed items.

To address these problems, the Congress has authorized a number of programs to help provide nutrition assistance to low-income households, including those with older persons. You asked us to look at four of these programs. The Food Stamp Program provides benefits that can be used to purchase food at participating retail food stores. The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and the Elderly Nutrition Program (ENP) provide prepared meals in a number of different settings. The CACFP serves participating day care facilities, while the ENP serves senior persons in group settings, such as senior centers, and offers home-delivered meals. Finally, the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) supplies federally donated foods to participants. However, many older persons do not take advantage of these programs, according to studies by government agencies and others.

Concerned about limited participation, you asked us to (1) determine why some older persons do not use these programs and (2) identify strategies that could be used to increase participation in these programs. To address

¹*Food Security Supplement to the Current Population Survey*, U.S. Bureau of the Census, August 1998.

these questions, we examined, among other things, available documents and studies discussing nutrition assistance for older persons and met with officials from the federal agencies principally responsible for administering these programs—the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ (HHS) Administration on Aging and the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service. For the largest of these programs, the Food Stamp Program, we conducted a telephone survey of the directors of the 51 state agencies responsible for administering the program at the state level.² Appendix I discusses our scope and methodology in detail, and appendix II presents the results of the survey of state food stamp directors.

Results in Brief

Older persons do not participate in federal food assistance programs for many reasons. Some of these reasons cut across programs. For example, older persons are often reluctant to accept food assistance because they believe such acceptance would compromise their independence. Additionally, some older persons associate accepting food assistance with welfare, which many older persons view negatively. Furthermore, funding constraints limit participation in several of the programs (for example, the Commodity Supplemental Food Program is available in only 22 states and the District of Columbia). Moreover, older persons’ lack of awareness of the availability of programs and problems with access to transportation hinder participation in several of the programs. Other problems, however, are more program-specific. For example, all state food stamp directors told us some eligible older persons believe the burden of applying for food stamps outweighs the expected low benefits. Finally, unlike the other programs, the Child and Adult Care Food Program is limited in the benefits it provides to senior citizens because a limited number of facilities participate in the program.

Program officials, providers, and advocacy groups have identified a number of actions that might increase older persons’ participation in nutrition assistance programs. In some instances, the options suggested would likely require a large infusion of resources. For example, nearly all of the state food stamp directors endorsed increasing the minimum benefit level from \$10 to \$25 per month. We estimate that the annual cost of this increase in Food Stamp Program benefits would be about \$102 million for older persons who currently participate and could increase participation

²Including the District of Columbia; does not include Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

resulting in additional annual costs of about \$26 million. Similarly, Elderly Nutrition Program providers and officials administering the Commodity Supplemental Food Program suggested that additional funding is needed to expand both programs to serve more people. At this time, neither the Food and Nutrition Service nor the Administration on Aging has estimated the additional cost that might result if more people were attracted to these programs. Other suggestions are not likely to be as costly. For example, state food stamp directors endorsed proposals to simplify the application process, such as automatically making older persons eligible for food stamps when they are approved for other means-tested programs, such as Medicaid. (Older persons receiving Supplemental Security Income are automatically eligible for food stamp benefits). Additionally, program providers in the Commodity Supplemental Food Program have suggested service improvements by, for example, providing a greater variety of foods and smaller packaging sizes. For the Child and Adult Care Food Program, officials noted that, in general, expanding participation depends on increasing the number of adult care facilities in the program.

Background

Individuals who are 60 years of age and older represent about 17 percent of the total U.S. population but are expected to increase to about 25 percent by the year 2025. Adequate nutritional intake is essential for optimal physical and mental activity and can help maintain the health and emotional independence of older persons. Conversely, poor nutrition can contribute to or exacerbate chronic and acute diseases, hasten the development of degenerative diseases associated with aging, and delay recovery from illness. Concerns have been raised about the nutrition of older persons and whether their households have enough of the right kinds of foods or have sufficient quantities of food to maintain their health and well-being.

Of the approximately 1.6 million to 2 million elderly households that experienced problems in obtaining a sufficient amount or quality of food in 1998, about 1 million to 1.2 million, or 60 percent of these households, were low-income, and approximately 500,000 to 660,000 reduced their food intake to the point that they experienced hunger.³ A lack of financial

³Low-income households are those with average monthly income up to 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Income Guidelines, referred to as the poverty level. The Guidelines are updated annually.

resources was the reason that all of these elderly households experienced problems in obtaining a sufficient amount or quality of food.

Food Stamp Program

The Food Stamp Program is by far the largest of the four programs serving older persons in both the numbers of participants and cost. It had an average monthly participation of 1.5 million elderly households in 1998, spending about \$1 billion in benefits for these households. According to the Food and Nutrition Service, the average monthly benefit for elderly households is \$59. The program provides participants with food coupons or electronic benefit transfer cards that can be used in authorized retail stores to purchase food items.⁴ Older persons may also use these benefits, if they so choose, as a donation towards their meals at ENP sites. In some areas they may also use these benefits to purchase low-cost meals at authorized restaurants. ENP program officials told us that the use of food stamp benefits by older participants at sites serving group meals or for home-delivered meals, while never extensive, has decreased even more with the advent of electronic benefit transfer cards. This is because it is costly to install electronic benefit transfer equipment at sites serving group meals and administratively burdensome to use paper vouchers as an alternative to electronic benefits for home-delivered meals.

The Food and Nutrition Service administers the Food Stamp Program through agreements with state agencies, which conduct day-to-day operations. The federal government pays all of the benefit costs and nearly one-half of the administrative costs for each state.

See appendix III for more detailed information on the Food Stamp Program, including special provisions for older persons and the method used to calculate benefits.

Elderly Nutrition Program

ENP provides grants and meal subsidies to state agencies on aging to support meals for older persons in group settings and delivered to participants' homes. Administered by the Administration on Aging, the program is designed to address problems of dietary inadequacy and social

⁴ As of May 2000, 41 states, including the District of Columbia, have operational on-line food stamp electronic benefit transfer systems (37 statewide). The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 requires that all states switch to electronic benefit issuance for food stamps by October 2002.

isolation among older persons. Meals served in ENP must meet nutrition standards, including one-third of the recommended dietary allowances established by the Food and Nutrition Board of the National Academy of Sciences, as well as the dietary guidelines for Americans. While the program does not include means testing, it targets its services to older people having the greatest economic or social need, with special attention given to low-income minorities. For example, 16 percent of home-delivered meal participants were low-income minorities, while 4 percent of the overall U.S. population aged 60 and over were low-income minorities. In administering the group meal program, state agencies must ensure that sites are in close proximity to areas where most participants reside.

The Administration on Aging estimated that ENP served about 244 million meals in fiscal year 1998. An estimated 130 million, or 53 percent, of these meals were home-delivered. This represents an approximate 11 percent increase in home-delivered meals as a percentage of total ENP meals since 1990. During this same period, the number of meals served in group settings decreased by about 20 percent. Organizations providing these meals, such as senior centers and religious facilities, provide nutrition education in addition to meals. They can also receive support from other sources, such as local governments, as well as donated food and supplies, private donations, and voluntary contributions from participants.

In addition to providing meals, the program has as a goal increasing socialization opportunities for its participants. For participants receiving meals in a group setting, such contacts usually involve considerable social interaction. In contrast, for persons receiving home-delivered meals, social interactions tend to be much shorter, but volunteers who deliver meals to older persons are encouraged to spend some time with the recipients and to check on their welfare.

See appendix IV for more detailed information on ENP.

Commodity Supplemental Food Program

CSFP provides free boxed and canned food (such as juice, canned vegetables and meat, and powdered milk) and nutrition education to low-income participants, including older persons. Older participants must have a household income at or below 130 percent of the poverty level. The state may also impose residency requirements.

CSFP participants pick up their food, generally once a month, from distribution centers, which are in locations accessible to low-income

people, such as community centers or churches. Older participants who cannot pick up their food can designate a representative to do so; in some locations volunteers deliver food to older participants who are unable to get to the distribution center. Currently, the program operates in 22 states, including 5 that joined the program in January 2000, as well as in the District of Columbia and on the Red Lake (Minnesota) and Pine Ridge (South Dakota) Indian Reservations. According to the Food and Nutrition Service, with the exception of Nebraska, none of the participating states provides CSFP coverage statewide. In most of the participating states, the program operates in parts of the state; for example, in Illinois, the program operates in only one county. For fiscal year 2000, \$88.3 million was appropriated for CSFP. In fiscal year 1999, about 71 percent of those enrolled in this program were older (about 270,000 of the total enrollment of almost 382,000 people).

See appendix V for more detailed information on CSFP.

Child and Adult Care Food Program

Any person 60 years of age or older, and any person 18 years of age or older who has a functional impairment, such as a mental disability, and attends a nonresidential day care facility can qualify to participate in CACFP.⁵ The participating care facility must be licensed or approved by the state. The program provides meal reimbursements to the day care facility according to the number of meals served and the income level of program participants. For example, during the period from July 1, 1999, to June 30, 2000, for participants from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty level, the day care facility received a reimbursement of \$1.09 for breakfast, \$1.98 for lunch or supper, and \$0.54 for a snack. Participating CACFP facilities cannot receive reimbursement for more than two meals and one snack or one meal and two snacks for each adult in a single day.

The Food and Nutrition Service does not maintain statistics only for participants aged 60 or older in this program. However, according to the Service, in fiscal year 1999, average daily participation by all adults aged 18 or over was about 62,500. The number of adult day care facilities participating in CACFP grew from 1,222 in fiscal year 1993 to 1,855 in fiscal year 1999, an increase of almost 52 percent. In fiscal year 1999, the Child

⁵Adults aged 60 and over can live in a group setting outside of their homes or in a group living arrangement on less than a 24-hour basis.

and Adult Care Food Program received \$1.6 billion in federal funds for both the child and adult care components of the program.

See appendix VI for more detailed information on the CACFP.

Multiple Reasons for Older Persons Nonparticipation in Nutrition Assistance Programs

A number of reasons account for older persons' nonparticipation in federal nutrition assistance programs, according to program officials, providers, and advocacy groups. Some reasons cut across programs, such as the belief that accepting food assistance would compromise their independence and the constraints on funding, which contribute to waiting lists for ENP home-delivered meals or limit the range of CSFP services. Other reasons are associated with a particular program, such as the perceived burdensome application procedure for food stamps or a shortage of licensed adult care facilities participating in CACFP.

Some Reasons for Nonparticipation Are Common to the Food Assistance Programs

According to the Food and Nutrition Service, the Administration on Aging and our interviews with state officials and local providers, a number of factors inhibit older persons' participation in food assistance programs.

Reluctance to Accept Food Assistance

Chief among many older persons' reasons for not participating in food assistance programs is their reluctance to accept food assistance because they take pride in their independence and believe that such assistance would compromise that independence. For example, according to a 1996 Urban Institute evaluation of ENP, 86 percent of older Americans eligible for, but not participating in, the ENP home meal program said that they did not believe they needed the program, even though about 35 percent of these people had shown one or more signs of inadequate food intake in the previous 6 months. In addition, some older persons associate the acceptance of food assistance with welfare, which many older persons view negatively.

Funding Limitations Constrain Increased Participation in Programs

Funding limitations also constrain participation in several of the food assistance programs. For example, according to the Urban Institute study, many older people who would like to participate in ENP cannot because the providers have reached their capacity to serve or deliver meals. Forty-one percent of the providers delivering meals to recipients at home and 9 percent of group meal providers reported having waiting lists. One provider

told us that it currently has a waiting list of 400 for ENP meals, while another provider has a list of 100. According to the Urban Institute study, the size of these waiting lists suggests a considerable unmet need among older persons for ENP nutrition assistance. Furthermore, officials believe that the degree of unmet need may be understated because many nutrition programs with unmet needs for services do not maintain waiting lists. Additionally, according to a 1999 HHS-sponsored study, the unmet need will grow as the number of older persons increases, particularly the group aged 85 and over, which is the fastest growing part of the older population. The study concludes that more older persons are likely to receive long-term care in their homes, thereby increasing future demand for home-delivered meals.

According to the president of one of the organizations representing ENP providers, some providers have transferred funds for group meals to supplement funding for program services and home deliveries. The president said the net result has been a "severe erosion of the congregate meal program." Even though they are transferring funds from the congregate program, providers continue to face unmet needs in the home delivery program, according to the ENP providers we contacted.

Further expansion of CSFP to more counties in participating states or into additional states is also constrained by funding limitations, according to USDA. Federal funding for fiscal year 1999 represented an increase of less than 2 percent from the level in fiscal year 1995. During the same period, participation by older persons in CSFP increased from about 200,000 in 1995 to about 270,000 in 1999, a 35-percent increase. During this same period, the number of women, infants, and children in CSFP decreased from about 164,000 to about 112,000, a 32-percent decrease, which was primarily due to increased participation in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children.

Several of the state food stamp directors we surveyed cited the lack of available state resources as constraining them from expanding outreach efforts. For example, they lack resources for developing and distributing literature about the Food Stamp Program targeted to older persons or locating food stamp employees to certify eligibility in places that would be more accessible to older persons.

Lack of Awareness of Programs Deters Older Persons' Participation

Studies of ENP and other nutrition assistance programs indicate that while older persons are vaguely aware that programs are available to meet their needs, their understanding of the program services provided, as well as

where and how to apply, may be unclear. For example, according to the president of an ENP provider organization, lack of program awareness is a primary reason older persons do not participate. Similarly, for CSFP, the providers we contacted told us that this lack of program awareness, as well as the perceptions of a burdensome application process, limit program participation. Furthermore, some older persons mistakenly believe that if they enroll in the Food Stamp Program, they will not be eligible to participate in other nutrition assistance programs. Many are also reluctant to apply for food stamps because they believe they will only receive a small monthly benefit.

Many Older Persons Lack Transportation

Finally, older persons may not be able to participate in food assistance programs because they either do not have access to transportation, particularly in rural areas, or because they are physically unable to leave their home to go to locations where assistance is available. For example, in rural areas, many older persons depend on others for transportation and may not want to impose on their families and friends for transportation to apply for benefits in government offices, which may involve multiple trips, and to receive food assistance benefits at, for example, distribution centers.

Program-Specific Reasons for Nonparticipation by Older Persons

In addition to the reasons for nonparticipation that are common to several programs, we identified reasons that appear to be unique to some programs.

Food Stamp Program

According to a USDA estimate, only about 30 percent of elderly persons who were eligible for food stamps in 1997 participated in the program. In contrast, about 63 percent of all eligible persons participate in the program.

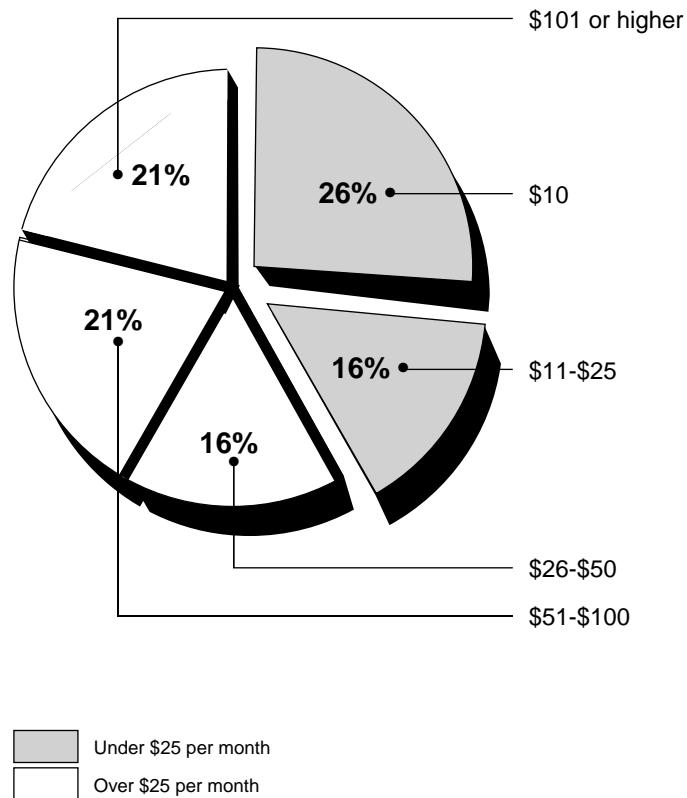
Food stamp officials in the 51 states we surveyed said that some older persons believe the burden of applying for food stamps outweighs the expected benefits. For example, to calculate a food stamp applicant's monthly allotment amount, using the available shelter and medical deductions, the applicant must provide documentation of income, rent/mortgage and utility expenses, and medical expenses. Applicants may also have to provide information on their assets.⁶ Applicants must also

⁶Assets of households in which all members are receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or of individuals receiving SSI are not counted for food stamp purposes.

discuss with program officials details on their general living arrangements, including, for example, who in the household purchases food and prepares meals. In one state we examined, the application form for just the Food Stamp Program was 15 pages. Participants must go through much of this process at least once every 2 years to continue receiving benefits, and many may only be eligible for the minimum monthly benefit of \$10.

As shown in figure 1, in fiscal year 1998, about one-quarter of the elderly households participating in the Food Stamp Program received the minimum monthly benefit of \$10 and another 16 percent received a monthly benefit ranging from \$11 to \$25.

Figure 1: Distribution of Food Stamp Benefits for Elderly Households, Fiscal Year 1998



Source: Food and Nutrition Service, "Characteristics of Food Stamp Households, Fiscal Year 1998," Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., February 2000.

Additional reasons for the lack of participation in the Food Stamp Program that we identified through our survey are discussed in more detail in appendix II.

Commodity Supplemental Food Program

According to the president of a CSFP provider organization and several local service providers, older persons do not use CSFP for a number of reasons, including the following:

- the program provides a limited variety of foods,
- the food is packaged in sizes that are often too large for older persons living in one- to two-person households,
- a number of the foods provided require too much preparation effort for many older persons who have difficulty cooking, and
- the food provided does not meet the needs of many older persons who are on restricted diets.

Child and Adult Care Food Program

Older persons do not use CACFP, principally because not enough adult day care facilities participate, according to program officials. The most recent major study of the adult segment of the program reported that these facilities do not participate for several reasons.⁷ According to the Mathematica report, one-third of the directors of nonparticipating facilities did not know the program existed. Furthermore, 20 percent of these directors said they were not eligible for the program because they were not licensed or approved by the state, as required. Finally, 26 percent of the nonparticipating directors believed that CACFP requirements for program administration were too burdensome, and 12 percent reported that meal reimbursement rates were too low. While an insufficient number of these facilities participate, program officials noted that the number of participating facilities increased by almost 52 percent between fiscal years 1993 and 1999.

⁷*National Study of the Adult Component of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP): Final Report.* Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., for USDA. October 15, 1993.

Options for Increasing Older Persons' Participation in Federal Nutrition Assistance Programs

Some options suggested by program officials, providers, and advocacy groups for increasing participation by older persons, would require a large infusion of resources, in some instances. Others would not likely require significant amounts of additional funding. However, increasing older persons' participation in federal nutrition assistance programs could be difficult to achieve.

Resource-Intensive Options

More resources would be needed to increase the participation of eligible elderly persons in the Food Stamp Program, ENP, and CSFP, according to many state program officials and service providers. For example, for the Food Stamp Program, we estimate that the annual cost of increasing the minimum benefit from \$10 to \$25 per month for only elderly households currently participating in the program would be about \$102 million. Moreover, higher benefits would likely increase participation by about 89,000 elderly households, resulting in additional annual costs of about \$26 million. To arrive at these estimates, we used a model developed by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. for the Food and Nutrition Service to, among other things, estimate changes in participation rates and changes in program costs.⁸ Food Stamp Program officials noted that the \$10 minimum benefit, which has been in place since 1979, is not always a sufficient incentive to overcome the perceived obstacles to participation.

The Food Stamp Program's application process could also be simplified by having a standard medical deduction. Although such a change could bring more older people into the program, it could also be quite costly. Currently, elderly persons may deduct medical expenses above \$35 per month that are not paid by insurance or someone who is not a household member. These expenses must be documented, which many elderly persons find difficult to do. Instituting a standard medical deduction of \$35 for older persons would eliminate the documentation now required for the first \$35 of these expenses, thereby easing older persons' record keeping burden somewhat and simplifying the application process. Eighty-eight percent of the state directors thought this was a strategy worth trying. Food and Nutrition Service officials told us that—while they have not made any formal estimates—implementing a standard medical deduction could significantly

⁸The model generated point estimates rather than ranges with confidence intervals. Mathematica verified through duplication the modeling results.

increase the cost of the program. For example, according to these officials, implementing a standard medical deduction of \$35, while retaining the current medical deduction for elderly households with out-of-pocket medical costs over the \$35 threshold, could increase program costs by about \$200 million annually. Using the Mathematica model, we estimate the total annual cost of a \$35 standard medical deduction would be about \$179 million. Of the \$179 million, about \$145 million would derive from increased benefits to 931,000 elderly households already participating in the program. In addition, according to the Mathematica model, the standard medical deduction would likely entice another 83,000 elderly households into the program, further increasing costs by about \$35 million.

ENP, which operates at full capacity in some areas, would also require an infusion of resources to expand service. For example, according to the Urban Institute study, 41 percent of home-delivered and 9 percent of group meal providers reported having waiting lists for the program. According to HHS officials and service providers, additional funding would be needed to meet this demand but at this time HHS has not estimated how much additional funding would be needed.

Similarly, additional funding would be needed to expand CSFP. Program officials and service providers told us that program expansion, both within participating states and into states where it has not yet been established, would require more funding but no estimates of this additional funding have been prepared.

Options Not Requiring Substantially Higher Expenditures

Program officials, providers, and others suggested several improvements to program services that could help to increase older persons' participation in the Food Stamp Program and CSFP, but that would not require significant amounts of additional funding. For the Food Stamp Program, for example, state directors suggested simplifying the application process by automatically making older persons eligible for food stamps when they are approved for other means-tested programs in addition to SSI, such as Medicaid.

For CSFP, program providers have likewise suggested that in some parts of the country they cannot serve all who wish to participate. However, some CSFP providers suggested that services could be improved through such means as providing a greater variety of foods and smaller, more manageable, package sizes.

Some states have received waivers from the Food and Nutrition Service to pilot other approaches to increase elderly participation in the Food Stamp Program. For example, in South Carolina, one-person SSI households automatically receive a standard food stamp benefit amount based on whether or not they receive other unearned income. If these households are entitled to a level of benefits higher than this standard amount because of high medical expenses or shelter costs, then they have the option of applying for food stamps under the standard rules for the Food Stamp Program. The Food and Nutrition Service estimates that food stamp participation rates among SSI recipients, many of whom are elderly, increased in South Carolina from 38 percent to 50 percent from 1994 (a year before the program began) to 1998. Other states, including Mississippi, New York, Tennessee, and Washington, are planning to start, or have expressed interest in starting, a similar program. The Food and Nutrition Service has approved waivers for other states to, among other things, simplify the application process by instituting a standard deduction for utilities and excluding one vehicle from the asset calculation (Montana) and reduce the stigma associated with receiving government assistance by depositing a cash benefit, instead of food stamp coupons or an electronic benefit transfer card, in the bank account of recipients age 65 or older (Vermont).

Finally, Food Stamp Program officials noted that older persons might be encouraged to participate in the program if a public education campaign was targeted to that population. Such a campaign could emphasize the provisions that are in place to make the program more accessible to older persons through, for example, using an authorized representative or completing the application over the telephone. They added that such a campaign might be a relatively inexpensive way to increase participation by older persons.

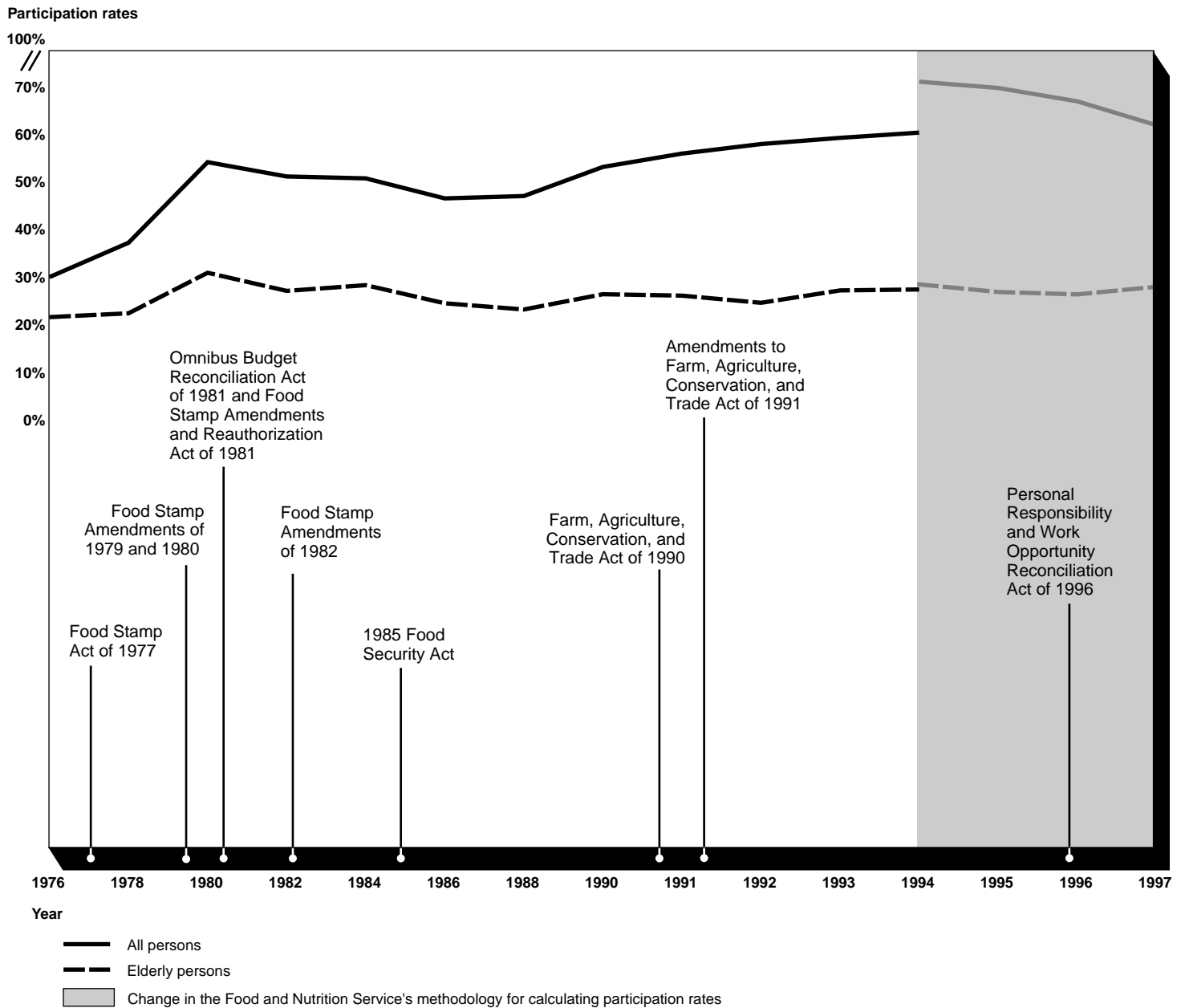
Increasing Elderly Participation Will Be Difficult

Although program officials agreed that more can be done to increase older persons' participation in food assistance programs, they noted that increasing participation will be difficult. For example, in an attempt to encourage elderly persons to participate in the Food Stamp Program, the Congress has relaxed program requirements over the years in the following ways:

- The Food Stamp Amendments of 1979 allowed elderly and disabled households to deduct medical expenses over \$35 per month from their gross income for eligibility purposes and for determining benefits.

-
- The Food Security Act of 1985 raised the asset limit for all elderly households to \$3,000, while keeping the limit at \$2,000 for any nonelderly household.
 - The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 extended the maximum certification period for elderly households to 24 months.

However, as shown in figure 2, despite these and other actions, older persons' participation rates have remained fairly stable since 1977, in contrast to the participation rates for all food stamp participants during this period.

Figure 2: Participation Rates and Major Food Stamp Program Legislation

In an attempt to increase older persons' participation, USDA recently developed a handbook for state agencies and others on ways to increase

access to the Food Stamp Program.⁹ Many of the strategies suggested in this access guide, while considered worthwhile, had previously been attempted, according to state food stamp directors. State directors' views on the access handbook and other strategies are included in appendix II.

Agency Comments and Our Response

We provided a draft copy of this report to the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Aging and to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service for review and comment. We met with Food and Nutrition Service officials, including the Director, Program Development Division, Food Stamp Program, and with Administration on Aging officials, including the Director of the Office of State and Community Programs. Overall, both the Food and Nutrition Service and Administration on Aging generally concur with the information in the report. The Food and Nutrition Service, however, expressed concern that establishing a standard medical deduction for older persons could result in considerable cost to the Food Stamp Program and therefore probably should not be included in the section entitled "Options Not Requiring Substantially Higher Expenditures." We agreed and moved this discussion to the section entitled "Resource-Intensive Options." In addition, the agencies provided technical suggestions, which we incorporated as appropriate.

As agreed with your offices, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 30 days from the date of this letter. At that time, we will send copies to congressional committees with jurisdiction over nutrition assistance programs; the Honorable Dan Glickman, Secretary of Agriculture; the Honorable Donna E. Shalala, Secretary of Health and Human Services; the Honorable Jacob J. Lew, Director, Office of Management and Budget; and other interested parties. We will also make copies available to others upon request.

⁹*The Nutrition Safety Net—Help for the Elderly and Disabled: A Primer for Enhancing the Nutrition Safety Net for the Elderly and Disabled.* Spring, 2000.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-5138. The key contributors to this report are listed in appendix VII.

Robert E. Robertson,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert E. Robertson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Robert" being more prominent than the last name "Robertson".

Associate Director, Food and
Agriculture Issues

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

We were asked to (1) determine the reasons some older citizens do not use the Food Stamp, Elderly Nutrition, Commodity Supplemental Food, and Child and Adult Care Food programs and (2) identify strategies for increasing older persons' participation in these programs. To address these objectives, we examined laws and program regulations and reviewed studies by, among others, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. and the Urban Institute. We also met with officials from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service and the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Administration on Aging. We also contacted representatives of associations of nutrition providers, including the National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs, the Meals on Wheels Association of America and the National Commodity Supplemental Food Program Association. We also contacted organizations that directly provide food assistance to older persons, including the Community Food Resource Center (New York), Catholic Charities (Archdiocese of New Orleans), Focus: Hope (Detroit), and Project Bread (Massachusetts). We also contacted human services advocacy groups, including the American Association of Retired Persons, American Public Human Services Association, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, and the Food Research and Action Center.

For the largest of these programs, the Food Stamp Program, we conducted a telephone survey of the directors of the 51 state agencies responsible for administering the program at the state level.¹ For the Elderly Nutrition Program, we contacted the president and several members of the National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs and the executive director of the Meals on Wheels Association of America, which are organizations representing nutrition service providers. For the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), we contacted the president and several members of the National Commodity Supplemental Food Program Association, an organization representing CSFP providers.

To determine the number of elderly households that have experienced problems in obtaining a sufficient amount or quality of food, we analyzed data collected by the U.S. Bureau of the Census and reported in the *1998 Food Security Supplement to the Current Population Survey*; these numbers are presented at the 95-percent confidence level.

¹Our response rate was 100 percent, including the District of Columbia.

To estimate the increase in program cost if the minimum food stamp benefit was increased from \$10 to \$25, we consulted with representatives of Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. and used their model—known as MATH (Micro-Analysis of Transfers to Households)—which utilizes data from the Bureau of the Census’ Current Population Survey. We also used this model to estimate costs from implementing a standard medical deduction. Mathematica verified our estimates by duplicating the modeling results of both analyses.

We conducted our work between February and July 2000 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Results of Telephone Survey of State Food Stamp Directors

This appendix presents a copy of the telephone questionnaire used to survey 51 state food stamp directors or their designees (including the District of Columbia), and the results of that survey.¹

Telephone Survey

Hello, my name is _____ with the U.S. General Accounting Office. GAO is a nonpartisan agency of the U.S. Congress. As part of a study we are conducting on food stamps for the elderly, we are calling the states to ask about their experiences in targeting elderly participation. Are you the right person to talk with? (If caller answers no, obtain the name and phone number of a better contact.) Did you receive the letter we sent?

It will probably take between 45 minutes and an hour to answer our questions. Is now a good time to talk or would you rather schedule another time? During this interview I may ask you some questions that you cannot answer because someone else in your state government handles that. Whenever this happens, just tell me and we'll skip on to the next question, OK?

In this survey, we'll be using the word elderly. As we understand, the Food Stamp Program considers the elderly to be adults 60 years and older.

¹Percentages do not add up to 100% for all questions due to rounding.

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1. To start our interview, I'd like to ask you some background questions about how your state operates the Food Stamp Program. First, we'd like to ask whether your state has integrated or consolidated procedures that cover food stamp applications. Which of the following choices best describes your state's procedures. First, an integrated or consolidated application includes food stamps, or second, the food stamp application is separate. N=51	80% Integrated/consolidated application includes food stamps 6% Food stamp application is separate 14% Depends on the situation
2. How often does your state generally require recertification for the elderly households for food stamps? Is it quarterly, annually, every two years, or some other time period? N=51	61% Annually 33% Every 2 years 6% Other
3. Is that recertification period different for elderly and nonelderly food stamp households? N=51	78% Yes 20% No 2% Other
4. Does your state currently use electronic benefit transfer cards, EBT for food stamp participants? N=51	69% Yes, currently use EBT 10% Yes, but not yet in all parts of state 12% No, no implementation date planned 8% No, but plan to implement 2% Other
<i>[If state has already implemented EBT:]</i>	
5. We're interested in your opinion about these electronic benefits and whether you think they affect food stamp participation by the elderly. You might think the EBT cards increase participation, decrease it, or maybe you think they have no impact. Let me read the categories, and tell me which one best describes the effect that electronic benefits have on <i>elderly</i> participation in your state. Would you say electronic benefits have <i>increased participation</i> , <i>decreased participation</i> , <i>had no effect on participation</i> , or would you say you have no opinion? N=41	12% Increased moderately 24% No effect 27% Decreased moderately 32% Can't say 5% Other

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	Major Reason (1)	Minor Reason (2)	Not a reason (3)	No opinion (4)
6. USDA has stated that 65 percent of the elderly who are eligible for food stamps do not receive them. We've made a list of reasons to explain why many of the elderly do not participate and we'd like to get your state's perspective on this list. For each one I read, I'll ask whether your state experienced this as a major reason, a minor reason, or not a reason to explain why many of the elderly who are eligible do not participate in the Food Stamp Program.				
a. The first one is ... Some elderly don't like the intrusive questions in the eligibility certification. How does that explain why some elderly in your state do not participate in the Food Stamp Program? Would you say that is a major reason, a minor reason, not a reason, or would you say you don't have an opinion on that one? N=51	41%	51%	2%	6%
b. Some elderly think the effort needed to apply is not worth the food stamp benefit received. N=51	86%	14%	0%	0%
c. Some elderly cannot afford the transportation costs to make the necessary trips to the food stamp office. N=51	8%	51%	31%	10%
d. Some elderly cannot deal with the difficulty of filling out the application form. N=51	24%	43%	29%	4%
e. Some elderly do not realize that they are eligible for food stamps. N=51	31%	53%	10%	6%
f. Some elderly feel that others need the food stamps more than they do, so they do not apply. N=51	12%	39%	35%	14%
g. Some elderly feel embarrassed to be a food stamp recipient because of the stigma associated with it. N=51	67%	28%	2%	4%
h. Are there any other reasons why elderly in your state do not participate in the Food Stamp Program when they are eligible?	43% gave comments			
7. The next set of questions concerns the Access Guide that the Food and Nutrition Service, FNS, distributed to the states in March 2000. It is called, "Help for the Elderly and Disabled." It shows how to increase food stamp participation for those two groups. Are you familiar with that guide?	92% Yes 8% No			

Even though the Access Guide covers disabled participation, our survey questions today are limited to food stamp participation by the elderly. We'd like to read you a list of suggestions that FNS makes in that guide and ask

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your opinion on each one. These suggestions are made to improve elderly participation in the Food Stamp Program. As I read each one, I'll ask you to rate the suggestion as excellent, good, fair, or poor. If you haven't tried the suggestion yet, please rate the suggestion considering how well you think it would work in your state to increase elderly participation. Please consider the practical issues of implementing each suggestion such as quality control and available resources. OK?

After you rate a suggestion, I'll ask you whether or not your state has actually tried that suggestion in the last 3 years. You might have sponsored a pilot project, you might have implemented the suggestion statewide, or maybe one of your counties tried it.

	Excellent (1)	Good (2)	Fair (3)	Poor (4)	No opinion (5)	Yes (1)	No (2)	Uncertain (3)
8. Our first set of suggestions is about marketing the Food Stamp Program to the elderly.								
a. Let's try the first one... Design materials that advertise the Food Stamp Program as nutrition assistance rather than "welfare." How would you rate that for increasing elderly participation in your state? Would you say it's excellent, good, fair, poor, or would you say you have no opinion? Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=51	26%	51%	16%	4%	4%	43%	55%	2%
b. Target nutrition education programs to the elderly. Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=51	33%	51%	10%	6%	0%	53%	45%	2%
c. Design promotional materials on food stamps that are targeted to the elderly. Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=51	28%	53%	18%	2%	0%	41%	57%	2%
d. Distribute flyers to locations where the elderly are likely to go such as grocery stores. Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=51	35%	45%	18%	2%	0%	57%	39%	4%
e. Promote the minimum benefit of \$10 a month as an annual value of \$120. Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=51	10%	14%	31%	43%	2%	20%	77%	4%
f. Emphasize to elderly persons that many will be eligible for more than the minimum benefit of \$10 a month. Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=51	12%	24%	41%	20%	4%	10%	84%	6%

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	Excellent (1)	Good (2)	Fair (3)	Poor (4)	No opinion (5)	Yes (1)	No (2)	Uncertain (3)
9. The next set of suggestions from the FNS Access Guide is about your Food Stamp Program staff.								
a. The first one is. . . Give staff special training to assist elderly applicants. Would you say it's excellent, good, fair, poor, or would you say you have no opinion? Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=51	16%	43%	28%	8%	6%	31%	65%	4%
b. Provide training on how the medical deduction works for the elderly. Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=51	28%	33%	22%	14%	4%	69%	31%	0%
c. Train workers to be more personal with the elderly such as giving them the worker's business card. Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=51	16%	41%	29%	8%	6%	43%	51%	6%
d. Encourage staff to provide timely, courteous and dignified service. Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=51	69%	18%	8%	6%	0%	96%	4%	0%
e. Place food stamp workers in locations that serve the elderly such as hospitals, community centers, and congregate feeding sites. Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=51	28%	53%	16%	4%	0%	49%	45%	6%
f. Encourage workers to spend extra time with the elderly such as making speeches at senior centers. Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=51	22%	59%	14%	4%	2%	65%	29%	6%
g. Set up a separate unit that focuses on the needs of elderly participants. Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=51	12%	45%	22%	16%	6%	31%	65%	4%

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	Excellent (1)	Good (2)	Fair (3)	Poor (4)	No opinion (5)	Yes (1)	No (2)	Uncertain (3)
10. The next set of suggestions from the FNS Access Guide is about certifying participants. Let me remind you that our categories are excellent, good, fair, poor, and no opinion.								
a. The first one is. . .Lengthen the certification period to 24 months for the elderly. Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=51	33%	29%	18%	12%	8%	45%	55%	0%
b. Promote the use of authorized representatives who can apply for food stamps or purchase food on behalf of the elderly. Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=51	35%	47%	10%	6%	2%	78%	20%	2%
c. Promote the use of collateral contacts such as neighbors to reduce the documentation required for food stamp applications. Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=51	14%	20%	24%	41%	2%	33%	63%	4%
d. Waive some or all fraud prevention procedures for elderly applicants. For example, waive finger printing for the elderly. Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=50	18%	26%	14%	28%	14%	12%	86%	2%
e. Waive face-to-face interview for all food stamp applicants over 60 years of age. Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=51	26%	33%	24%	12%	6%	28%	73%	0%
f. Promote the use of scheduled home visits to reduce the documentation required for food stamp applications. Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=51	12%	29%	26%	33%	0%	24%	77%	0%
g. Promote the use of medical deductions for elderly applicants for food stamps. Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=51	29%	41%	18%	10%	2%	55%	41%	4%
h. Create special forms for the elderly such as large type versions. Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=50	24%	56%	12%	6%	2%	14%	86%	0%

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	Excellent (1)	Good (2)	Fair (3)	Poor (4)	No opinion (5)	Yes (1)	No (2)	Uncertain (3)
11. [Skip if state not fully EBT implemented:] The next set of suggestions from the FNS Access Guide is about electronic benefits. Again, I'll remind you that our categories are excellent, good, fair, poor, and no opinion.								
a. The first one is. . . Give qualified elderly households 6 months rather than 3 months to use electronic benefits. How would you rate that for increasing elderly participation in your state? Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=46, 40	39%	24%	9%	9%	20%	20%	80%	0%
b. Provide training on the use of Automatic Teller Machines, with EBT cards. Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=46, 40	50%	39%	4%	4%	2%	93%	5%	3%
c. Follow up on non-users of EBT cards to find out if they need help accessing the benefits. Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=46, 40	39%	46%	11%	2%	2%	58%	35%	8%

	Excellent (1)	Good (2)	Fair (3)	Poor (4)	No opinion (5)	Yes (1)	No (2)	Uncertain (3)
12. The last group of suggestions from the FNS Access Guide is about partnerships with other agencies and organizations. Again, our categories are excellent, good, fair, poor, and no opinion.								
a. The first one is. . . Locate food stamp staff at the Social Security Administration who accept applications from the elderly even if they are not applying for SSI. Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=51	12%	33%	22%	29%	4%	8%	88%	4%
b. Work with staff at the Social Security Administration to increase elderly participation in the Food Stamp Program. Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=51	24%	47%	16%	10%	4%	37%	57%	6%
c. Work with companies and community organizations to promote elderly participation in the Food Stamp Program. Has your state tried that in the last 3 years? N=50	38%	54%	4%	4%	0%	67%	29%	4%

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	Excellent (1)	Good (2)	Fair (3)	Poor (4)	No opinion (5)	Yes (1)	No (2)	Uncertain (3)
[If respondent answered “poor” to any of Access Guide questions (Q8 to Q12 above):] You mentioned that one or more suggestions in the Access Guide were “poor.” We'd like to know more about your thinking on that.	80% gave additional comments							

13. Based on your reading of the Access Guide and the things you've learned about it in our interview today, we want to know how useful you think it is. We want you to consider its usefulness for helping your state increase food stamp participation among the elderly. Our categories are very useful, moderately useful, somewhat useful, and not useful. Which of those categories best describes how your state feels about the Access Guide. Would you say... it is very useful, moderately useful, somewhat useful, not useful or don't you have an opinion on that?

16% Very useful
 35% Moderately useful
 37% Somewhat useful
 10% Not useful
 2% No opinion
 0% Other

14. Considering the suggestions in the Access Guide that we covered, we'd like to know how many of them are new ideas for your state. Please tell me which of the following categories best answers that question. Would you say all of the ideas are new, more than half, about half, less than half, few, if any are new, or can't you say?

0% All or almost all
 0% More than half
 12% About half
 29% Less than half
 53% Few, if any
 6% None
 0% Can't say

15. Before we go on to the next series of questions, would you like to add any comments about your reaction to the Access Guide?

69% gave additional comments

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	Greatly increases (1)	Increases somewhat (2)	Does not affect (3)	No opinion (6)
16. The next series of questions asks about elements of food stamp participation rules that the federal government designed to increase elderly participation. Some have been made over the last few years; others have been in place for a while. We'd like to ask you about the effect of each of these rules on the elderly in your state. That is, whether the rule increases, decreases, or does not affect food stamp participation by the elderly.				
a. The first one is... Eligibility is relaxed for elderly households by allowing \$3,000 in resources. Would you say it increases, decreases, does not affect participation, or would you say no opinion? N=51	6%	55%	31%	8%
b. Elderly persons in institutions are eligible for food stamps under certain conditions. N=51	4%	41%	43%	12%
c. Medical costs over \$35 a month are deductible from income. N=51	12%	45%	39%	4%
d. Excess shelter costs are deductible from income for elderly households. N=51	14%	63%	24%	0%
e. An authorized representative can be designated by the household for food stamp application and using benefits. N=51	16%	53%	31%	0%
f. The face-to-face interview must be waived, if requested, in situations where an elderly household can neither appoint an authorized representative nor come to the food stamp office. N=51	16%	57%	27%	0%
g. The Social Security office must help SSI applicants apply for food stamps. N=51	8%	29%	60%	4%
h. The elderly are allowed to qualify by meeting only a net income standard. N=51	14%	63%	20%	4%
i. Households that receive public assistance or SSI benefits are categorically eligible for food stamps. N=51	22%	55%	22%	2%
j. A 24-month certification period is allowed for elderly households. N=50	14%	32%	36%	18%
17. [Ask as necessary:] Does your state use the 24-month certification period statewide for elderly households? N=48				
	46% Yes 48% No 6% Other			

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	High Priority (1)	Medium priority (2)	Low priority (3)	No change needed (4)	No opinion (5)
18. Finally, we'd like to ask you about a list of possible changes to improve participation in the food stamp program by the elderly. We'd like for you to think about the priority that you think the federal government should place on these changes. As I read each one, please tell me if the change should be a high priority, a medium priority, a low priority, or if you think the change is not needed.					
a. The first one is ... Adjust minimum benefit level from \$10 to \$25. What is your opinion about that change? Would you say that it should be a high priority, a medium priority, a low priority, no change is needed, or would you say you don't have an opinion? N=50	94%	4%	0%	0%	2%
b. Set a standard deduction for medical costs for the elderly. N=50	68%	20%	6%	4%	2%
c. Use adjunct eligibility so that the elderly automatically receive food stamps if they are eligible for related benefits. N=50	56%	16%	12%	10%	6%
d. Mandate passive certification for the elderly for periods of two years and adjust quality control procedures to account for it. N=50	44%	34%	12%	6%	4%
e. Increase a recipient's SSI check to include the value of any food stamp benefit.	34%	26%	16%	16%	8%
[As necessary:] Some states call this "cash out." N=50					
f. Increase a recipient's Social Security payment to include the value of any food stamp benefit. N=50	30%	22%	18%	16%	14%
g. Give the elderly a cash benefit in place of food stamp coupons or EBT cards. N=50	26%	12%	38%	18%	6%
h. Adjust resource eligibility for household size. N=50	20%	42%	12%	16%	10%
i. Provide more flexibility to states for elderly eligibility. N=51	55%	28%	14%	2%	2%

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18a. [Probe answer to "i":] Just to follow-up on that answer, could you tell me what you have in mind for more flexibility? N=51	80% gave additional comments
18b. Are there any other suggestions that you have for changes that the federal government should consider? N=51	55% gave comments
18c. Do you have any ideas for simplifying the application procedures? N=51	61% gave comments
19. I also wanted to ask you whether your state has done any research to find out why some elderly do not participate in the Food Stamp Program. Have you done anything like that? N=51	8% Yes 88% No 4% Other
20. Another thing I wanted to ask is whether your state has tried any other ideas that you would recommend to other states to improve elderly participation in the Food Stamp Program? N=51	63% gave comments
21. That's all the questions I have for our telephone survey. Before we finish today, would you like to add anything else? N=51	43% gave comments

Food Stamp Program

This appendix contains information on the Food Stamp Program and characteristics of participating and nonparticipating eligible households.

Program Information

Food stamp benefit allotments vary with the type and amount of income, household size and some nonfood expenses (such as high shelter costs or medical costs). Benefits are provided monthly, and recipients are expected to contribute a portion of their net income to their food expenses. The program has also established some special rules for households with older persons (elderly households). For example, while the general population must meet both gross and net income limits, elderly households need to meet only the net income limit. Therefore, they could have a higher gross income than other food stamp households and still be eligible once their allowable deductions are calculated. These deductions include a standard deduction of \$134 for all food stamp households; a medical expenses deduction for elderly or disabled members if these expenses are more than \$35 for the month, after insurance or government reimbursement or payment by someone who is not a household member; and a deduction for shelter costs that exceed one-half of household income after all other deductions.¹ Households with elderly members also have a higher limit on allowable assets (\$3,000) than other households (\$2,000). Additionally, applicants who have difficulty getting to the Food Stamp Program office or food retailer may appoint an authorized representative to apply for and use their food stamp benefits.

The maximum food stamp allotment is set annually at the cost of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's "Thrifty Food Plan" for the household's size, and indexed annually for food price inflation. Food stamp allotments are based on the maximum allotment, adjusted for household size, less 30 percent of monthly net income. Figure 3 shows a sample benefit calculation, using the most common deductions for elderly households. The calculation is for a one-person, elderly household with income of \$750, monthly medical expenses of \$175 and monthly shelter costs of \$350.

¹These are the deductions most commonly used by elderly households. Deductions for child support and dependent care are also available if applicable. The standard deduction is adjusted annually and is higher in Alaska and Hawaii.

Figure 3: Sample Food Stamp Allotment Calculation

Benefit Computation

Determine gross monthly income Earned and nonearned income.

Subtract deductions to determine net income

Standard deduction \$134 in the continental U.S.

Medical deductions Medical costs over \$35 a month that are not paid by insurance or someone else

Excess shelter cost deduction for shelter costs that exceed half of household income after all other deductions.

- Determine half of adjusted income
- Determine if shelter costs are more than half of adjusted income
- Subtract excess amount

Apply the net income test

Household size	Net monthly income limits
1	\$687
2	\$922
3	\$1,157
4	\$1,392
5	\$1,627
6	\$1,862
7	\$2,097
8	\$2,332
each additional person...	+ \$235

Calculate the benefits

- Multiply net income by 30% (round up)
- Subtract 30% of net income from the maximum allotment for the household size

Household size	Maximum monthly allotment
1	\$127
2	\$234
3	\$335
4	\$426
5	\$506
6	\$607
7	\$671
8	\$767
each additional person...	+ \$96

Example

A one-person, elderly household with \$750 gross monthly income, monthly medical expenses of \$175, and monthly shelter costs of \$350.

\$750

\$750 gross income
 - \$134 standard deduction
\$616
 - \$140 medical deduction (\$175-\$35)
\$476

\$476 x 1/2 = \$238
 \$350 - \$238 = \$112
 - \$112
\$364 Net income after deductions have been met

Since the net monthly income (\$364) is less than the \$687 allowed for a household of 1, the household has met the net income test.

\$364 x 0.30 = \$110

\$127 maximum allotment for 1 person
 - \$110 30% of net income
\$ 17 Food stamp allotment for a full month

Table 1 presents information, by state, on the number and percentage of elderly households receiving food stamps in fiscal year 1998—the most recent year for which complete data are available.

Table 1: Distribution of Elderly Food Stamp Households by State, Fiscal Year 1998

State	Number of elderly households (in thousands)	Percent of food stamp households with elderly members
Total	1,500	18.2
Alabama	37	21.9
Alaska	1	8.8
Arizona	13	11.8
Arkansas	25	24.9
California	30	3.4
Colorado	16	19.1
Connecticut	15	16.4
Delaware	2	11.6
District of Columbia	6	15.0
Florida	120	27.9
Georgia	58	22.5
Hawaii	10	19.0
Idaho	4	16.0
Illinois	71	18.1
Indiana	23	18.1
Iowa	11	19.4
Kansas	11	20.5
Kentucky	29	17.7
Louisiana	40	19.7
Maine	16	28.4
Maryland	18	13.2
Massachusetts	18	13.3
Michigan	44	13.5
Minnesota	17	17.4
Mississippi	39	30.2
Missouri	34	19.6
Montana	4	17.4
Nebraska	7	18.7

Appendix III
Food Stamp Program

(Continued From Previous Page)

State	Number of elderly households (in thousands)	Percent of food stamp households with elderly members
Nevada	7	22.0
New Hampshire	3	19.1
New Jersey	40	21.5
New Mexico	10	15.2
New York	147	19.4
North Carolina	60	26.8
North Dakota	3	21.2
Ohio	74	22.2
Oklahoma	28	23.2
Oregon	21	18.5
Pennsylvania	76	19.0
Rhode Island	5	15.0
South Carolina	31	22.7
South Dakota	3	15.4
Tennessee	62	26.8
Texas	103	17.2
Utah	4	12.8
Vermont	5	21.2
Virginia	41	24.1
Washington	18	11.5
West Virginia	22	20.0
Wisconsin	15	19.7
Wyoming	1	12.5

Notes: The data in this table are from the Food and Nutrition Service's fiscal year 1998 food stamp quality control database. This database contains detailed demographic, economic, and food stamp eligibility information for a nationally representative sample of 47,145 food stamp households. The national sample is stratified by month and by the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Food and Nutrition Service weights the file so that the data replicate, by state, the monthly number of Food Stamp Program households as reflected in the program operations data.

Characteristics of Older Participants in the Food Stamp Program

Table 2 lists some of the demographic characteristics of older participants in the Food Stamp Program, and shows how they compare with those who are eligible but do not participate. USDA has only limited information on eligible elderly households that did not participate.

Table 2: Characteristics of Older Persons Who Are Eligible for Food Stamps

Characteristic	Eligible population	
	Participants ^a	Nonparticipants ^b
Average age	66	67
Gender	73% female	73% female
Average gross monthly income	\$589	Not available
Average net monthly income	\$334	Not available
Live alone	79%	52%
Average household size	1.3	1.9
Urban/rural	69% urban	Not available
Race		
	53% Caucasian	65% Caucasian
	29% African American	27% African American
	13% Hispanic	5% Hispanic

^aFood and Nutrition Service's quality control data, 1998.

^b1999 pre-test survey by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. The limitations of these data include (1) small sample size, which made results not nationally representative, and (2) some nonparticipants who are probably ineligible for benefits.

Elderly Nutrition Program

This appendix contains information on the Elderly Nutrition Program’s (ENP) resources and on the characteristics of the population served by the program.

Program Information and Resources

The number of older persons, particularly those with impairments, has increased during a time in which funding for programs authorized by the Older Americans Act of 1965 has remained relatively flat. There are waiting lists for ENP services in various parts of the country, especially for home-delivered meals.

The Administration on Aging provides grants under title III of the Older Americans Act to state agencies that are based on a state’s relative share of the population aged 60 and over. In fiscal year 1999, the Administration on Aging provided about \$486 million for meal programs and support services, including the nutrition education required by the Older Americans Act. In addition, the Food and Nutrition Service provided state agencies with \$140 million in meal subsidies for ENP, at a rate of about 55 cents per meal. States may opt to receive the Food and Nutrition Service reimbursement in the form of cash or commodities; most states opt for cash.

About 41 percent of the providers that arrange or provide home-delivered meals reported waiting lists in the home-delivered meal program, according to a 1996 study. For providers maintaining waiting lists, the average number of older persons on the list is 85, and the median is 35—about one-third of the average daily number of homebound recipients served. The average length of time spent on a home meal waiting list is 2 to 3 months. Roughly 9 percent of the group meal programs reported waiting lists for elderly participants. The average size of these waiting lists is 52 persons, while the median is 47—about 20 percent of the average number of participants served. The average stay on such waiting lists is 2 months.

Characteristics of the ENP Population

Table 3 identifies some of the demographic characteristics of ENP participants, and compares them with the general population, aged 60 and over.

Table 3: Characteristics of ENP Participants Compared With the General Elderly Population

Characteristics	Participants in group meals	Home-delivery participants	General elderly population, 60+
Average age (years)	76	78	72
Percent living alone	57	60	25
Percent with income below 100% of the federal poverty level	34	48	15
Percent female	69	70	58
Percent in rural areas	28	16	25
Percent racial/ethnic minorities	27	25	14

Source: HHS, Administration on Aging, *Serving Elders at Risk: The Older Americans Act Nutrition Programs—National Evaluation of the Elderly Nutrition Program 1993-1995*, July 1996.

Commodity Supplemental Food Program

This appendix contains information on the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) and on the characteristics of the population served by the program.

Program Information and Resources

CSFP provides food and nutrition education to low-income participants; it is authorized under section 4(a) of the Agriculture and Consumer Protection Act of 1973. The program is available to low-income infants; children up to age 6; pregnant, postpartum, or breastfeeding women; and persons aged 60 and older. Older persons participating in CSFP must have household income at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level and meet state residency requirements. The program gives preference to women, infants and children at each site; eligible low-income elderly persons can participate in CSFP if there are resources available after all eligible women, infants and children have been served. While women, infants, and children have preference under the program, their participation has been declining since 1993, principally because of the expansion of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, which also provides benefits to these groups.

CSFP participants receive, at no cost, boxed and canned goods, which are generally distributed once a month. In some locations, participants who are unable to pick up their food at the distribution centers can have it delivered to their homes, generally by volunteers. Participants also receive nutrition education provided by the local CSFP agency. USDA provides guidance to participating states on the type and amount of food that should be provided to older CSFP recipients. The maximum monthly distribution rates for older persons and certain other participants are shown in table 4.

Appendix V
Commodity Supplemental Food Program

Table 4: Maximum Monthly Distribution Rates for Older Persons and Certain Other Participants

Food Item	Package size	Packages per month	Total maximum amount per month
Cereal (one of the following)			
Dry, ready-to-eat cereal	18-ounce package	2 packages	36 ounces
Farina	14-ounce package	2 packages	28 ounces
Rolled oats	3-pound package	1 package	48 ounces
Grits	5-pound package	1 package every other month	2.5 pounds
Fruit juice	46-ounce can	3 cans	138 ounces
Meat/poultry (one of the following)			
Meat/poultry	29-ounce can	1 can	29 ounces
Meatball stew	15-ounce can	2 cans	30 ounces
Tuna fish	12.5-ounce can	2 cans	25 ounces
Salmon	14.75-ounce can	2 cans	29.5 ounces
Egg mix, dry	6-ounce package	2 packages	12 ounces
Milk (both types)			
Evaporated milk	12-ounce can	3 cans	36 ounces
Instant nonfat dry milk	25.6-ounce package	1 package every other month	12.8 ounces
Peanut butter or dry peas/beans (one of the following)			
Peanut butter	18-ounce package	1 package	18 ounces
Dry peas/beans	2-pound package	1 package	2 pounds
Pasta, etc. (one of the following)			
Dehydrated potatoes	1-pound package	1 package	1 pound
Macaroni	1-pound package	2 packages	2 pounds
Spaghetti	2-pound package	1 package	2 pounds
Rice	2-pound package	1 package	2 pounds
Grits	5-pound package	1 package every other month	2.5 pounds
Process American cheese	2-pound package	1 package	2 pounds
Fruits	15- or 16-ounce can	2 cans	2 pounds
Vegetables	15- or 16-ounce can	4 cans	4 pounds

Note: Participants may choose to select one package of cereal and one package of farina, rather than two packages of either cereal or farina. Participants may also choose to select one can of tuna fish and one can of meatball stew, for example, rather than two cans of the same meat item.

Source: Food and Nutrition Service.

Federal funding for CSFP has varied somewhat over the past several fiscal years. Appropriations for fiscal years 1997 through 2000 were \$76 million, \$96 million, \$86 million, and \$88.3 million, respectively. In addition to appropriations, unused food funds can be carried over from one fiscal year to the next. For example, in fiscal year 1999, because of carryover funding, \$96.1 million was available for program expenditures, while in fiscal year 2000, a total of \$97 million was available. By law, no more than 20 percent of the total appropriation and carryover funds can be used to cover state and local administrative costs.

**Characteristics of Older
CSFP Participants**

USDA does not maintain a comprehensive database describing the characteristics of older persons served by CSFP. According to Food and Nutrition Service officials, since CSFP is relatively small compared with other federal food assistance programs and is not nationwide in scope, the program has not been subjected to as much study as some of the larger food assistance programs. Our discussions with the National Commodity Supplemental Food Program Association and CSFP service providers in several states suggest that a large number of older persons participating in CSFP are female and live alone.

Child and Adult Care Food Program

This appendix contains information on the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and on the characteristics of the population served by the program.

Program Information and Resources

The adult segment of CACFP was initially authorized under the Older Americans Act Amendments of 1987. The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 1989 changed the name to reflect the addition of the adult component. Any adult, aged 60 or older and any person aged 18 and over who has a functional impairment and attends a nonresidential day care facility can qualify to participate in CACFP. Participants from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty level qualify for free meals, while those with incomes between 130 and 185 percent of the poverty level qualify for reduced-price meals. Meals served to those with incomes above 185 percent of the poverty level are reimbursed at a lower rate.

CACFP services are provided by licensed adult day care centers (nonresidential) operated by public agencies, or private nonprofit and for-profit organizations meeting certain criteria. Participants do not pay for individual meals; instead the fee participants pay to attend the center includes meals and snacks, along with other program services. Meals served must meet minimum nutrition criteria as set forth in program regulations; participants cannot receive more than two meals and one supplement (snack) or one meal and two snacks in a single day. USDA reimburses the day care center for a portion of the cost of all meals and snacks served to adult participants.

Adult participation in CACFP has increased every year since fiscal year 1993. For example, average daily attendance has increased from about 36,000 in fiscal year 1993 to about 63,000 in fiscal year 1999, a 75-percent increase. During the same period, federal reimbursement to adult day care centers for meals more than doubled to approximately \$36.5 million in fiscal year 1999 and the number of participating facilities has increased from 1,222 to 1,855.

Characteristics of CACFP Participants

The most recent information describing the characteristics of adult CACFP participants is from an October 1993 Mathematica study done for the Food and Nutrition Service. Table 5 provides information from the study.

Table 5: Characteristics of CACFP Adult Participants

Characteristics	CACFP participants
Average age	59
Not married, living alone	19%
Not married, living alone in a group setting	21%
Income below 130% of the federal poverty level	84%
Female	62%
Participating in other federal programs:	
SSI	57%
Medicaid	68%
Food stamps	18%
Percent racial/ethnic minorities	43%

Source: *National Study of the Adult Component of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP): Final Report*, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., for USDA, October 15, 1993.

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