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# Effects of Food Assistance and Nutrition Programs on Nutrition and Health

## *Volume 2, Data Sources*

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## **Abstract**

This is the second of four reports completed by Abt Associates Inc., under the contract “The Nutrition and Health Outcome Study.” This report is an evaluation of various data sources for their potential for analyzing the impacts of USDA’s food assistance and nutrition programs (FANPs). Data sources are evaluated against three criteria: coverage of both program participants and nonparticipants; identification of participants and determination of eligibility among nonparticipants; and availability of impact measures. Each data source is classified into one of four categories: principal, potential, recognized, and insufficient. Principal and potential sources are discussed and profiled in this report.

**Key words:** USDA Food Assistance and Nutrition Programs, data sources, program participation, nutrition outcomes, health outcomes.

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## Summary

Since the mid-1940s, the United States Government has committed to alleviating hunger and the consequences of inadequate dietary intake. Today, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) implements 15 programs as a “food safety net,” to provide low-income people with food or the means to purchase food. These 15 food assistance and nutrition programs (FANPs) were funded at a level of \$34.1 billion in fiscal year (FY) 2001.

Under contract with the Economic Research Service of USDA, Abt Associates Inc. has conducted a study to review the state of current knowledge about FANP impacts on nutrition- and health-related outcomes. A thorough literature review was conducted to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of research design, analytical methods, and data sources employed to analyze FANP outcomes. A series of four reports has been prepared to document what we know and do not know about FANP outcomes and to identify future research needs.

This report, the second of the four reports, documents available data sources. A thorough search was conducted to identify data sources of relevance to FANP-related research. The FANPs of interest in this report are the Food Stamp Program (FSP), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), and the School Breakfast Program (SBP).

Each data source was evaluated against three criteria:

- coverage of both program participants and eligible nonparticipants for at least one of the FANPs;
- identification of program participation status and sufficient information to determine eligibility for nonparticipants; and
- nutrition- or health-related measures that might be useful in studying program impacts or in describing relevant characteristics of program participants and nonparticipants.

Using these criteria, each data source was assigned to one of four categories with current and potential usefulness for FANP research, as follows:

**Principal Sources.** This category includes existing databases that appear to have the greatest potential for conducting research on FANP outcomes. These data sources meet all three of the criteria noted above and, in some cases, provide the only or best source of data for a given outcome. The principal sources have undergone the most detailed of the assessments for this report.

**Potential Sources.** The sources in this category are less useful than the principal sources because they cover limited populations, have a critical gap in participation information, or include outcome measures that, by comparison, are weaker than those available in the principal sources. Many of the potential sources are ongoing data collection programs that could be made more useful for future FANP research if questions were incorporated to fill gaps in relevant information.

**Recognized Sources.** This category includes existing databases that have already been used to evaluate one or more of the FANPs. The sources are either dated or have not been expanded since initial analyses were conducted, so additional analyses of them may not be warranted.

**Insufficient Sources.** Data sources in this category were judged to have very little potential for evaluating outcomes of FANPs, so detailed assessments were not completed.

In all, 26 data sources were classified into the 2 categories offering clear potential for FANP-related research, namely, principal and potential sources. (There are 13 principal sources and 13 potential sources.) In this report, key FANP-related data for each of the 26 data sources are discussed in detail. In addition, each of them is profiled by listing information on purpose of the research, sponsoring organization/agency, data collection timeline, population covered, sampling design, FANPs for which participation is identified, nutrition- and health-related data, demographic data, and data availability.