

Conclusion

Food assistance programs in Mexico and the United States are in some ways quite similar. In both countries, identification methods use information about households and/or individuals; the programs are financed internally; and an improvement in the nutritional quality of diets (especially for children) is the primary goal of the many different programs. This similarity allows for comparisons among programs in the countries. In this report, we considered three critical elements to any analysis of food assistance programs: the methods of targeting, the influence of macroeconomic conditions on total expenditures, and the effect of food assistance benefits on well-being. We now consider two examples of how insights from one country can be applied to the food assistance programs of the other country.

While both countries identify recipients based on household criteria, Mexico generally uses a two-stage procedure whereby areas in need of food assistance are first identified and then families within those areas are identified. In the United States, regions are not used in the identification procedure. Poverty is, however, sometimes concentrated in specific geographic areas, especially in parts of the rural deep south, Appalachia, on Indian reservations, and in some cen-

tral cities. U.S. researchers could use the methods developed by Mexican food assistance programs to more effectively aid beneficiaries, especially when the programs have large fixed administrative costs. This is particularly true in terms of outreach programs and, perhaps, setting higher benefit levels for certain areas.

The effects of food assistance programs on individuals' well-being can be measured in the United States because surveys include relevant questions about food assistance receipt, food insecurity status, and food intakes. Unfortunately, information on food assistance receipt disaggregated to the household level is not available for Mexico, although it is available at more aggregated levels. Also, information on food insecurity status and food intakes in Mexico is available neither at the household level nor at more aggregated levels.³⁴ Because sound theoretical frameworks and econometric methods are well-developed, the inclusion of such questions would enable thorough studies of the effects of food assistance benefits in Mexico.

³⁴Surveys in Mexico do ask extensive questions about housing quality and the availability of services such as electricity and running water.