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The Food Assistance Landscape FY 2016 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 assistance 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 outlays. This report uses preliminary data from USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to examine trends in food and nutrition assistance programs through fiscal 2016. The report also summarizes a recent ERS report that examined trends in the prevalence and severity of household food insecurity in the United States through 2015.

What Did the Study Find?

Spending for USDA's 15 domestic food and nutrition programs totaled \$101.9 billion in fiscal 2016, 2 percent less than the previous fiscal year. This was nearly 7 percent lower than the historical high of \$109.2 billion set in FY 2013.

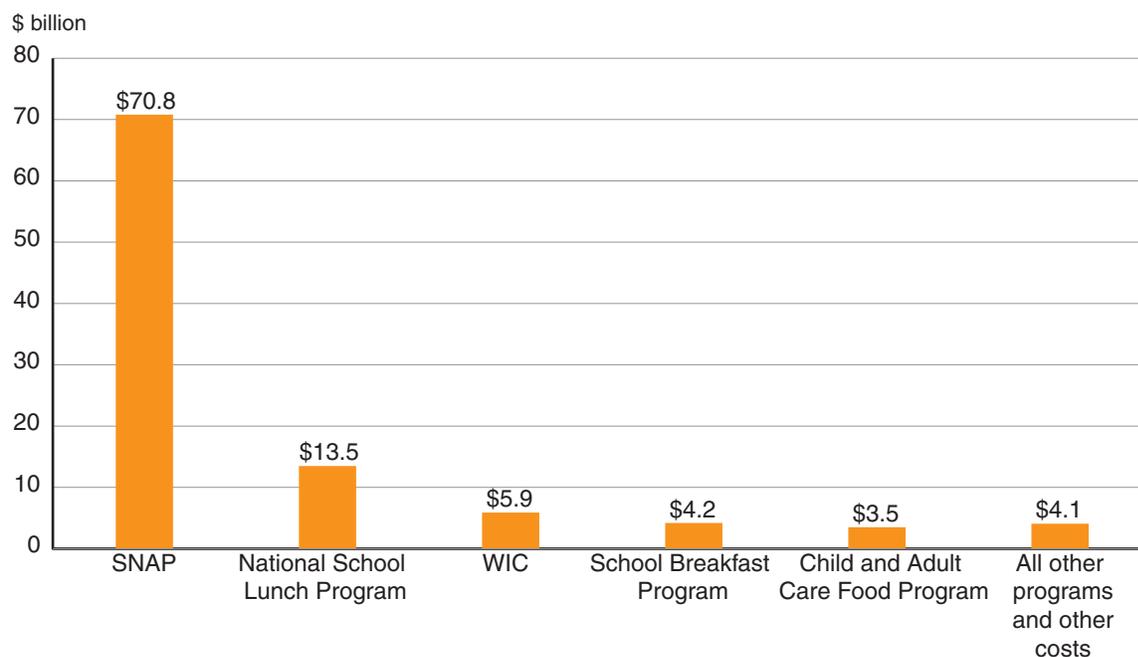
- The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)—formerly the Food Stamp Program—accounted for 69 percent of all Federal food and nutrition assistance spending in fiscal 2016. An average 44.2 million persons per month participated in the program, 3 percent fewer than the previous year. FY 2016 marked the third consecutive year that participation decreased.
- An average 7.7 million people per month participated in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program in FY 2016, 4 percent less than the previous year. This was the sixth consecutive year that participation fell.
- Daily participation in the National School Lunch Program averaged 30.3 million in FY 2016, about the same as the previous year. Free lunches comprised two-thirds (66 percent) of all lunches served, reduced-price lunches comprised 7 percent, and full price lunches comprised 27 percent.
- An average of 14.5 million children participated in the School Breakfast Program each school day, 3 percent more than the previous fiscal year. Free breakfasts comprised almost four-fifths (79 percent) of all breakfasts served, reduced-price breakfasts comprised 6 percent and full price breakfasts comprised 15 percent.

ERS is a primary source of economic research and analysis from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, providing timely information on economic and policy issues related to agriculture, food, the environment, and rural America.

Summary figure 1

Food and nutrition assistance expenditures by program, FY 2016

Five programs accounted for 96 percent of total expenditures



SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

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

Note: All other programs and costs include expenditures for all other programs not listed as well as administrative and other costs. Expenditures for all food and nutrition assistance programs totaled \$101.9 billion.

Source: USDA, Food and Nutrition Service.

- A total of almost 2.1 billion meals were served through the Child and Adult Care Food Program, 3 percent more than in the previous year.

An estimated 12.7 percent of U.S. households (or 15.8 million households containing 42.2 million people) were food-insecure at least some time in 2015, significantly less than in 2014. Fifty-nine percent of food-insecure households participated in one or more of the three largest food and nutrition assistance programs (i.e., SNAP, National School Lunch Program, or WIC) in the month prior to the survey.

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 administering the food and nutrition assistance programs—to examine trends in these programs through fiscal 2016 (October 1, 2015 to September 30, 2016). The report also summarizes a recent ERS report that examined trends in the prevalence and severity of household food insecurity in the United States through 2015 and highlights another recent ERS report that examined the effect of SNAP benefits on food spending.