

  
United States Department of Agriculture

## Census-FNS-ERS Next-Generation Data Platform for USDA food assistance program research

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[www.ers.usda.gov](http://www.ers.usda.gov)



## Census-FNS-ERS Project Goals

- **ERS and FNS:** to inform policymakers, program managers, and the public on:
  - who participates in USDA food assistance programs
  - how program participation affects the lives of those individuals
  - and who does not participate and why
- **Census:** to inform decisions on surveys, the 2020 Census, and data-linkage processes

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## Census-FNS-ERS Project Activities

- Acquiring USDA administrative data from States
  - data are collected and reside at the State-level
- Linking administrative data to Census surveys
  - linking leverages the strengths of each data source
- Conducting analysis
  - gain results unobtainable by either one separately



## Strengths and Limitations of Data Sources

### State SNAP records

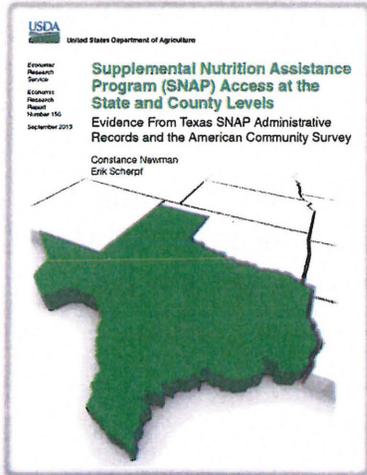
- **Strengths**
  - complete—all participants
  - reliable detail on SNAP duration and benefits each month
  - “available”
- **Limitations**
  - exclude non-participants
  - include only set of variables needed to operate program
  - omit data on food security, health, other outcomes

### Survey data

- **Strengths**
  - include participants and non-participants
  - include a rich set of socio-economic data
  - include outcomes
- **Limitations**
  - households underreport SNAP participation and benefits
  - may lack any information on SNAP duration and benefits



## Report 1. SNAP Access Rate

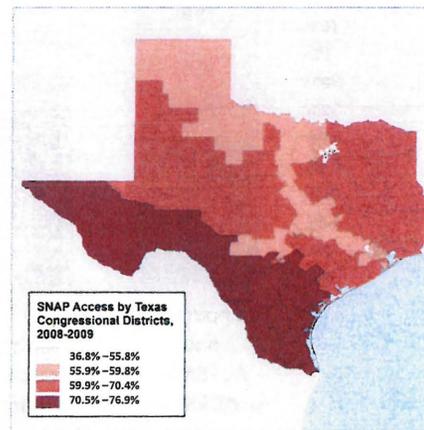


- Issue: Who does SNAP reach—and not reach—at the sub-State level?
- Linking SNAP data and American Community Survey gives detailed geographic and demographic results
- Access rate = share of people estimated to be eligible who receive SNAP benefits

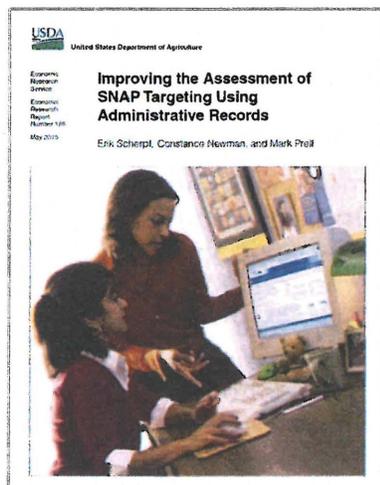
## SNAP Access Rates: Geographic

(2009 ACS linked to 2008-09 SNAP data)

- Texas: 63%
- Among congressional districts: 37% to 77%
- Among 25 “large” counties: 46% to 78%



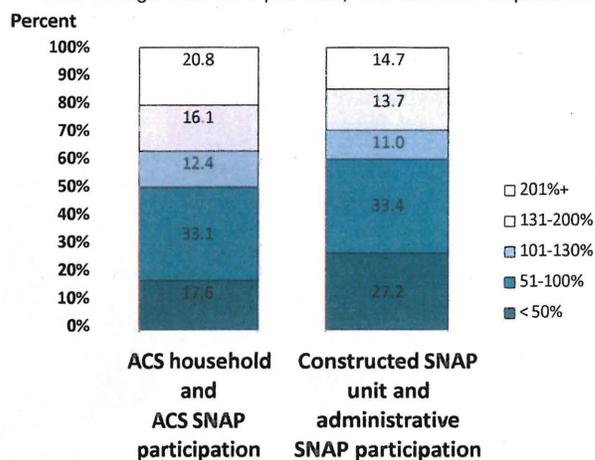
## Report 2. SNAP Targeting



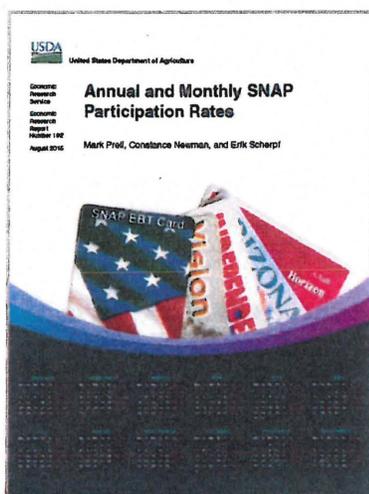
- Issue: What percentage of SNAP households have the “very lowest” income?
- Data linking provides official record of SNAP participation and data on annual income.

## Distribution of Income Relative to Poverty, SNAP “Households”

2008 through 2012 ACS 1-year data, New York State respondents



## Report 3. Annual vs. Monthly Participation Rates



- Issue: Who participates in SNAP among two “statistical” populations of eligibles?
- People can be eligible (and participate) in:
  - Monthly timeframe: a given month (a “moment” in time)
  - Annual timeframe: one or more months of a year (“at some time during the year”)
- Federal surveys often ask: “At some time in the last year ...?”

## New York Results

(based on New York SNAP data, CPS and SIPP, 2012)

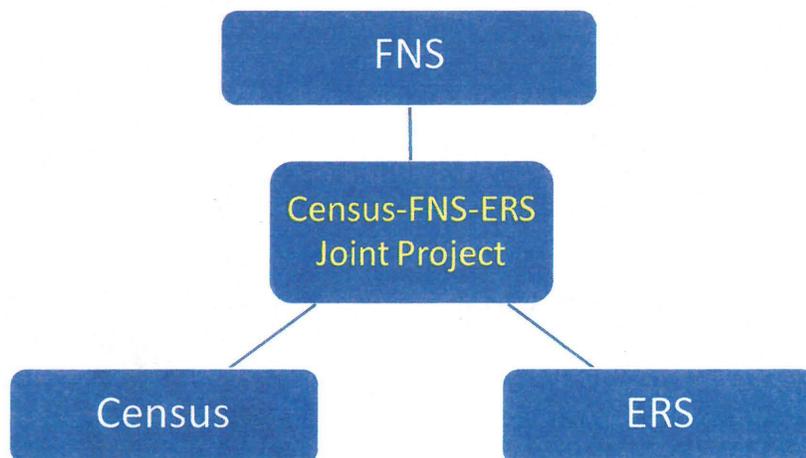
- Monthly Rate > Annual Rate
  - Monthly SNAP participation rate of 80%
  - Annual SNAP participation rate of 75%



## Three Lessons for Success

- **Partnership**—not all elements of support (programmatic, infrastructure, and analytical) may come from a single agency
- **Mutual benefits**—but often different benefits for the different agencies
- **Valued results**—policymakers, program managers & other stakeholders deem project worthy of support, necessary for resources to support the work

## A Three-Way Partnership



## Partners Contribute Specialized Expertise and Resources

- **FNS programmatic support:**
  - meets statutory use restriction for administrative or enforcement purpose
  - knows SNAP's issues
  - facilitates acquiring SNAP data from States
- **Census "infrastructure" support:**
  - IT and acquiring, cleaning, linking data
  - policies & procedures for handling data (maximize use while protecting confidentiality and integrity)
  - Accessing Census data requires research to provide a Census benefit and researcher obtains Special Sworn Status as a Census agent.

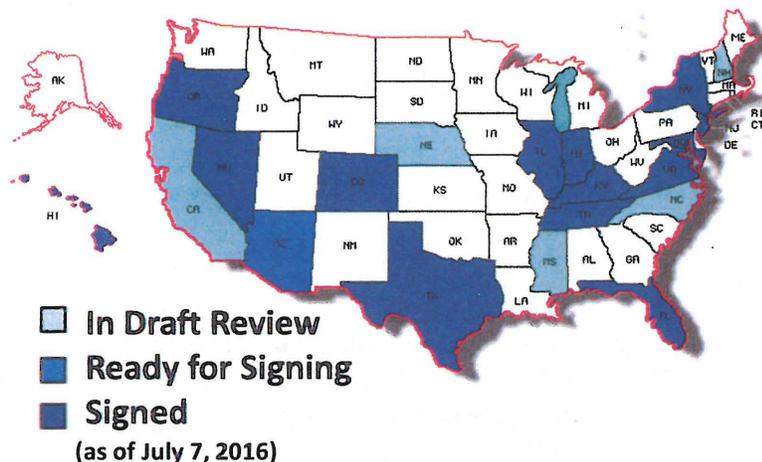


## Partners Contribute Specialized Expertise and Resources (continued)

- **ERS analytical and financial support:**
  - economics, statistics and econometric modeling
  - identifies policy and economic issues with FNS and Census
- **State SNAP agencies are key partners too:**
  - State-specific expertise in SNAP files
  - quid-pro-quo recipients of statistical results
- **Other partners:** OMB, OGCs, and political leadership



## SNAP Agreements at Census: A process to reach final signature



## Next Steps

- More States, more programs
- Nutrition and food security research
- Expanding “data” access
  - confidential SNAP data as “data”: external researcher access via Federal Statistical Research Data Centers
  - statistical aggregates as “data”: Census developing data visualization (Tableau)



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**Thank you!**



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