



CENTER *for* RURAL AFFAIRS

SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AND RURAL HOUSEHOLDS

BY JON M. BAILEY, DIRECTOR, RURAL PUBLIC POLICY PROGRAM
RURAL FAMILY ECONOMIC SECURITY PROJECT

JULY 2014

KEY FINDINGS

- For the period 2008 to 2012, 14.6 percent of rural households received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. That is a higher percentage than households receiving SNAP in both metropolitan and micropolitan (small city) areas.
- From 2008 to 2012, rural and micropolitan areas combined – small cities, small towns and rural areas – had about one in seven households (14.1 percent of all households) receiving SNAP benefits, over 3 percentage points greater than metropolitan areas.
- Rural areas and small cities both have higher proportions of their households with senior and child residents receiving SNAP than do larger urban areas and the nation as a whole.
- From 2008 to 2012, rural areas and small city micropolitan areas combined had 3.6 percent of their households with a SNAP recipient 60 or older
- From 2008 to 2012, rural areas and small city micropolitan areas combined had 7.5 percent of their households with children under 18 receiving SNAP benefits.

- Federal data show that rural SNAP participation rates – those eligible for SNAP benefits and receiving them – are significantly greater than urban participation rates. Nearly 86 percent of eligible rural residents receive SNAP benefits compared to nearly 73 percent of eligible urban residents.

INTRODUCTION

A review of recent data shows that a significant number of households across the nation received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) benefits. Large numbers of households in metropolitan, small city, and rural areas received SNAP benefits.

This brief uses data from the American Community Survey five year (2008-2012) estimates. The American Community Survey is a U.S. Census Bureau product that provides socio-economic data covering every community in the nation. This brief examines SNAP recipients by household and place of residence, and also explores SNAP recipients by place of residence and particular risks.

SNAP RECEIPT BY PLACE OF RESIDENCE

The table and chart below show data estimates for SNAP household receipt by place of residence from 2008 to 2012. Data is broken down for three place of residence types: metropolitan, micropolitan, and rural.¹

The smallest population areas have the largest estimated number of households receiving SNAP benefits. Rural and micropolitan areas combined – small cities, small towns, and rural areas – have about one in seven households (14.1 percent of all households) receiving SNAP benefits, over 3 percentage points greater than metropolitan areas.

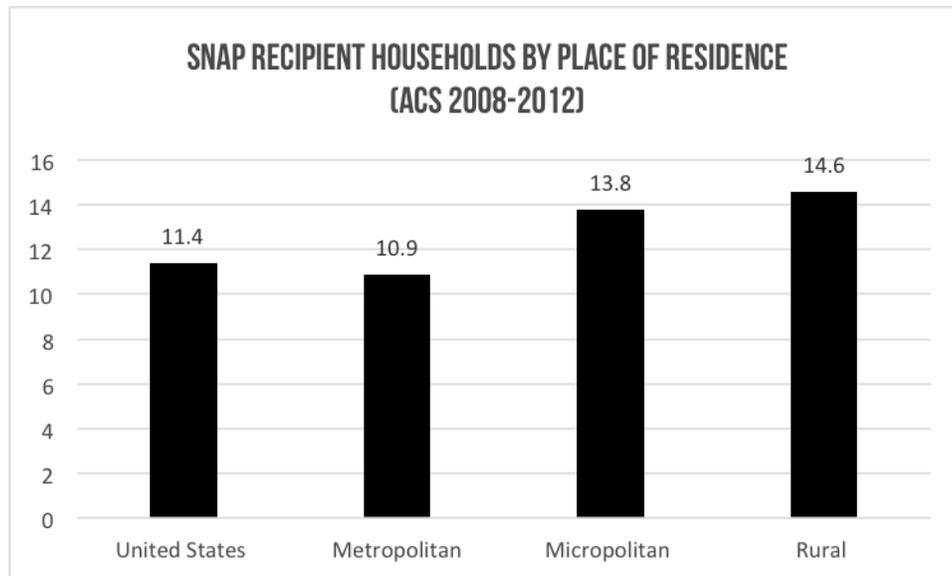
SNAP RECIPIENTS IN HOUSEHOLDS WITH SENIORS AND CHILDREN

Senior citizens and children are among those most at risk of food insecurity.² Therefore, it is likely that households that receive SNAP benefits – no matter their location – will contain a significant number of households with seniors and children. This brief examines the data for households with at least one member at least 60 years old and households with children under 18 that receive SNAP benefits.

The table and chart below show data estimates for SNAP recipient households with seniors and children by place of residence for the 2008 – 2012 period.

WHO RECEIVES SNAP? NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS BY RESIDENCE TYPE

PLACE OF RESIDENCE	TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS	HOUSEHOLDS RECEIVING SNAP	PCT. OF ALL HOUSEHOLDS RECEIVING SNAP
United States	115,226,802	13,180,710	11.4%
Metropolitan	95,789,365	10,432,786	10.9%
Micropolitan	11,847,353	1,637,843	13.8%
Rural	7,590,084	1,110,081	14.6%

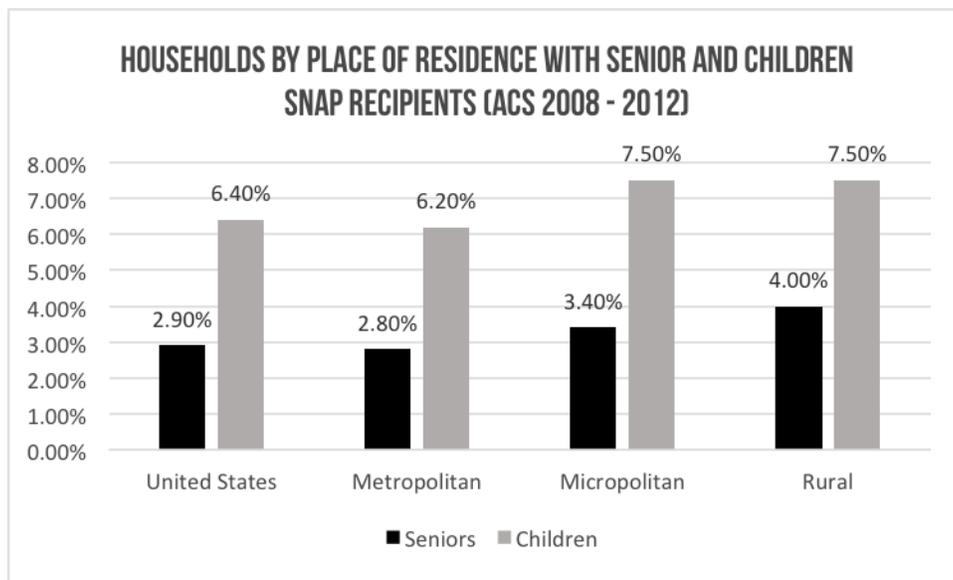


¹ **Metropolitan:** Any county designated as part of a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) based on the 2010 Census. Each MSA must have at least one urbanized area of 50,000 or more inhabitants. **Micropolitan:** Counties based around a core city or town with a population of 10,000 to 49,999. A micropolitan area may consist of more than one county depending upon economic, social and cultural connections. **Rural:** Counties with a population center of less than 10,000 inhabitants and not included in either a metropolitan or micropolitan area.

² Huang, J., Guo, B., Kim, Y.2009. "Food Insecurity and Disability: Do Economic Resources Matter?" St. Louis, MO: Center for Social Development, George Warren Brown School of Social Work, Washington University; Zilak, J., Gunderson, C., Heist, M. 2008. "The Causes, Consequences, and Future of Senior Hunger in America." Alexandria, VA: Meals on Wheels Association of America.

WHAT ABOUT CHILDREN AND SENIORS? NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS BY RESIDENCE TYPE

PLACE OF RESIDENCE	TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS	HOUSEHOLDS RECEIVING SNAP	SNAP HOUSEHOLDS WITH AT LEAST ONE RESIDENT 60	PCT. ALL HOUSEHOLDS	SNAP HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN UNDER 18	PCT. ALL HOUSEHOLDS
United States	115,226,802	13,180,710	3,351,607	2.9%	7,400,263	6.4%
Metropolitan	95,789,365	10,432,786	2,649,344	2.8%	5,941,400	6.2%
Micropolitan	11,847,353	1,637,843	398,135	3.4%	889,709	7.5%
Rural	7,590,084	1,110,081	304,128	4.0%	569,154	7.5%



Rural areas and small cities both have higher proportions of their households with senior and child residents receiving SNAP than do larger urban areas and the nation as a whole. Combined, rural areas and small city micropolitan areas have 3.6 percent of their households with a SNAP recipient 60 or older and 7.5 percent of their households with children under 18 receiving SNAP benefits.

SNAP PARTICIPATION RATES

These SNAP recipient data correspond with recent SNAP participation rate data. The most recent federal data on SNAP participation rates – those eligible for SNAP benefits actually receiving SNAP benefits – show that rural participation rates are significantly greater than urban participation rates. Nearly 86 percent of eligible rural residents receive SNAP benefits

compared to nearly 73 percent of eligible urban residents.³

That participation gap is also growing. In 1997 and earlier, urban food stamp participation rates were higher than rural food stamp participation rates. In the earlier 2000s, rural participation rates were less than 5 percentage points higher than urban participation rates.⁴

Numerous reasons for this growing rural-urban participation gap have been offered. Average SNAP benefits in urban areas have been consistently higher than in rural areas, so that

3 Eslami, E., Leftin, J., and Strayer, M. 2012. *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates: Fiscal Year 2010*. Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture.

4 Mills, G. “Urban-Rural Trends in SNAP Participation: What’s Going On?” MetroTrends Blog, January 7, 2013.

would not account for any difference in participation rates. Access to SNAP benefits have been made easier for eligible rural residents – there are now more options to apply for benefits than in-person visits often quite distant from one’s residence. That likely contributes to a participation gap.

The combination of a change in the makeup of the urban poor to a larger share of Hispanic households and research showing lower rates of SNAP participation among Hispanic households are offered as contributing factors to a rural-urban SNAP participation rate gap. Yet that fails to recognize the large and growing Latino population in many rural areas of the nation.⁵

Ultimately, the rural-urban SNAP participation rate gap is a reflection on the rural economy in recent years. Rural areas of the nation have generally lower incomes than do urban areas, and rural areas also generally have higher poverty levels. These economic facts and the effects of the Great Recession made more rural people more reliant on programs such as SNAP, particularly, as the data outlined above show, those households with older and younger vulnerable members.

PREVIOUS FINDINGS ON RURAL USE OF SNAP BENEFITS

The findings outlined herein correspond with other recent findings of rural usage of SNAP. 2001 data (a different data source than employed in this report) found that 7.5 percent of rural residents received food stamps compared to 4.8 percent of urban residents.⁶

A 2013 report (using the same data source as used in this report) examined household use of SNAP by location for the 2007-2011 period. For the three years of data in this period (2007, 2010, and 2011), rural and central city households had comparable SNAP usage. In 2007, 10.6 percent of rural households received SNAP benefits, compared to 9.8 percent of central city urban households. In both 2010

and 2011, a slightly greater number of central city urban households than rural households received SNAP benefits.⁷

Despite differences in data used, years examined, and specific locations analyzed, the results of this report and previous reports are similar: the SNAP program has become, in many respects a “rural program” as rural areas often contain the highest usage of food stamps/SNAP benefit recipients.

IMPLICATIONS

The data outlined herein show that SNAP is a necessary facet of everyday life for many rural families and households, especially those where seniors and children reside. One in nine (11.5 percent) rural households contain a SNAP recipient that is either 60 years old or older or a child under 18.

An interesting aspect of these data is that SNAP is a “rural program.” The stereotype of SNAP – as a type of social welfare program – as an urban, minority program is contrary to recent data. SNAP is a critical program to address food insecurity in rural America and to combat rural hunger. SNAP is crucial for lower-income rural families, of which there are generally more than other geographies in the nation.⁸ Any changes in SNAP and SNAP funding are likely to disproportionately affect rural families and rural communities.

It is thus incumbent on rural people and policymakers who represent rural areas to realize the importance of SNAP to rural people and rural communities. It is particularly important for rural people and rural policymakers to recognize certain rural households – those with seniors and children – desperately rely on SNAP benefits to make ends meet.

7 In 2010, this report found that 1.6 percent of rural households and 14.8 percent of urban central city households received SNAP benefits; in 2011, 1.6 percent of rural households and 16.0 percent of central city households received SNAP benefits. Carson, J. and Meub, W. 2013. *Recent Data Show Continued Growth in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Use*. Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire, Carsey Institute.

8 See, for example, Bailey, J. and Preston, K. 2012. *Poverty on the Great Plains*. Lyons, NE: Center for Rural Affairs.

5 Id.

6 Smith, K. and Slant, P. 2005. *Rural America Depends on Food Stamp Program to Make Ends Meet*. Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire, Carsey Institute.

SNAP has been shown to reduce the depth and severity of poverty, a necessity in rural areas across the nation that have higher rates of poverty than urban areas. Research has found that SNAP has a significant effect on reducing the depth and severity of poverty. SNAP benefits were also shown to have a particularly strong alleviative effect on poverty among children.⁹

Increases in SNAP benefits have also been shown to generate major growth in agricultural production and agricultural jobs.¹⁰ In general, it has been found that every \$5 in new SNAP benefits generates \$9 of economic activity.¹¹ SNAP provides a substantial boost to all segments of the economy of rural America as well as meeting the food needs and reducing food insecurity of needy families and households.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR RURAL AFFAIRS

Established in 1973, the Center for Rural Affairs is a private, nonprofit organization with a mission to establish strong rural communities, social and economic justice, environmental stewardship, and genuine opportunity for all while engaging people in decisions that affect the quality of their lives and the future of their communities.

The Rural Family Economic Security Project is a project of the Center for Rural Affairs' Rural Public Policy Program and is designed to examine social safety net programs and how they are employed in rural areas (i.e., how many rural people actually use these programs or are enrolled in them), discussing participation stereotypes related to these programs, why such programs are important to rural areas, and policy issues facing rural aspects of the programs.

⁹ Tichen, L. and Ver Ploeg, M. 2012. "SNAP Benefits Alleviate the Intensity and Incidence of Poverty." *Amber Waves*, June 5, 2012. Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture.

¹⁰ "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Linkages with the General Economy." United State Department of Agriculture, [http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-\(snap\)/economic-linkages.aspx](http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-(snap)/economic-linkages.aspx), accessed June 13, 2014.

¹¹ Id.