

## CHARACTERISTICS OF FOOD STAMP HOUSEHOLDS: FISCAL YEAR 1998

Office of Research and Analysis

February 2000

### Summary

This report provides information about the demographic and economic circumstances of food stamp households. On average, about 19.8 million people living in 8.2 million households received food stamps in the United States each month in fiscal year 1998. Food stamp households are a diverse group. Because food stamps are available to most low-income households with few resources, regardless of age, disability status, or family structure, recipients represent a broad cross-section of the nation's poor.

Most food stamp recipients are children or elderly. Over half (53 percent) are children and another 8 percent are age 60 or older. Working-age women represent 28 percent of the caseload, while working-age men represent 11 percent.

The majority of food stamp households do not receive TANF benefits. Only 31 percent do so. Other cash assistance received by food stamp households includes Supplemental Security Income (28 percent of households), Social Security (23 percent) and State General assistance benefits (6 percent). Nine percent of households have no income of any kind.

Many food stamp recipients work. Twenty-six percent of food stamp households have earnings, and for these households, earnings are the primary source of income.

Food stamp households have little income. Only 10 percent are above the poverty line, while 37 percent have incomes at or below half the poverty line. The typical food stamp household had gross income of \$584 per month and received a monthly food stamp benefit of \$165. Over one-fifth of monthly available funds (cash income plus food stamps) available to a typical household comes from food stamps.

Food stamp households possess few resources. The average food stamp household possesses only about \$118 in countable resources (including vehicles, checking and savings accounts, and other savings).

Most food stamp households are small. The average food stamp household size was 2.4, but varied considerably by household composition. Households with children were relatively large, averaging 3.3 members. Households with elderly members tended to be smaller, with an average size of 1.3 people.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all of its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, political beliefs, genetic information, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.)

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410; or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), or (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users) or (800) 845-6136 (Spanish Federal-relay). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.