

## Background

This study analyzes which factors are associated with individuals' decisions to start participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and with decisions to leave the program during the period 2004 to 2006. Based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), the study uses a technique called "multivariate regression" to isolate the impact of various factors associated with participation decisions while holding other factors constant. The factors examined in this report include individual demographic and economic variables, as well as State economic conditions and policies.

This report is a companion to *Dynamics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation in the Mid-2000s*.

## Findings

**Individuals who lost jobs within the previous four months were nearly twice as likely to begin participating in SNAP as those who had not experienced a recent job loss.** Other factors strongly associated with entering SNAP included:

- receipt of benefits from a needs-based assistance program such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Medicaid, or housing subsidies,
- increase in family size,
- no high school education,
- poor health, and
- age 18-29 as opposed to 65 or older.

**Individuals who participated in Medicaid or WIC or received housing subsidies received SNAP benefits for almost twice as long as individuals not participating in these other programs.** Holding all other factors constant,

individuals receiving WIC, Medicaid, or housing subsidies participated in SNAP, on average, for 12 months compared to 7 months for individuals not receiving those benefits. While individuals who receive TANF benefits are more likely to participate in SNAP, they stay in SNAP for an average of only 7 months compared to 9 months for individuals not receiving TANF benefits.

Individuals with no high school education received SNAP benefits for an average of 13 months, compared to 9 months for individuals with some high school and 8 months for individuals with some college education.

**Individuals who recently lost a job were more than twice as likely to re-enter SNAP as individuals who did not experience a recent job loss.** Other factors strongly associated with returning to SNAP included:

- increase in family size,
- no high school education, and
- receipt of benefits from WIC, Medicaid, or housing subsidies.

**Program policies were associated with individuals' decisions to enter SNAP but not with how long they participated.** Policies that were associated with higher rates of entry included using an expanded definition of categorical eligibility and offering simplified reporting.

## Data Source

The 2004 SIPP panel is a nationally representative, short-term longitudinal survey that collects detailed monthly data on family and household composition, labor force activity, earned and unearned income, and cash and non-cash assistance. It consists of approximately 51,000 households that are interviewed every 4 months over a 4-year period. Additional information on past history of employment and program participation is collected for individuals who are interviewed in the first 4 months of the survey.

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### For More Information

Mabli, James, Thomas Godfrey, Laura Castner, Stephen Tordella, and Priscilla Foran. *Determinants of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Entry and Exit in the Mid-2000s*. Prepared by Decision Demographics, for the Food and Nutrition Service. September 2011. (Available online at [www.fns.usda.gov/ora](http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora)).

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