

USDA'S FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE

Reaching Low-Income Hispanics with Nutrition Assistance

Federal Nutrition Assistance Facts

Hispanic families add to the vibrant diversity of US society and contribute significantly to our cultural melting pot. In 2008, 15 percent of the U.S. population was Hispanic and 24 percent of U.S. population was under age 18. Latino families are much more likely to

live in poverty and experience food insecurity than white non-Hispanic households.

USDA nutrition assistance programs offer a variety of ways for low-income Hispanic families to meet basic needs:

- **The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly the Food Stamp Program, helps low-income households supplement their food purchases so they can purchase more and healthier food.** The Nation's largest nutrition assistance program, delivers benefits to nearly 38 million people each month. About 14.8 percent of participants were Hispanic in 2008.

- **The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) provides nutritious foods, nutrition education, and referrals to health and other social services for pregnant, breastfeeding, and postpartum women, infants, and children up to age five, who meet income guidelines and are at nutritional risk .** In most States, WIC participants received vouchers or checks to purchase specific food each month that are designed to supplement their diets with specific nutrients that benefit WIC's target population. In FY 2008, USDA spent nearly \$6.2 billion to serve just over 8.7 million WIC participants. Hispanics represent the largest racial/ethnic group in the WIC Program. In 2008 about 41.2 percent of those enrolled in WIC were of Hispanic origin. That year, about 900,000 Hispanic infants born in the United States participated in WIC.

- **The Child Nutrition Programs provide cash reimbursement and commodity support for meals served to children in schools, child care facilities, and summer settings.**

Programs include the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, the Summer Food Service Program, and the Special Milk Program. The general purpose of these programs is to help ensure the health and well being of all the Nation's children. In FY 2008, more than \$9.3 billion in cash and commodities were provided. These resources resulted in meals for approximately 31 million children on an average day during the school year and more than 2.2 million during the summer months.

USDA also administers a variety of other nutrition assistance programs that provide meals, food packages, or vouchers redeemable for food. These include the **Emergency Food Assistance Program** serving those who use soup kitchens and food pantries and the **Commodity Supplemental Food Program** providing food packages to low-income seniors, infants, young children, and pregnant, breastfeeding, and other postpartum women. While not targeted specifically to Hispanic persons with low incomes, these programs are a part of the overall safety net to ensure healthy diets for everyone in America. About 12.9 percent of the participants in the Commodity Supplemental Food Program were Hispanic in 2009.

Although many low-income Latinos participate in USDA's nutrition assistance programs, a large number do not. In 2006, about 56 percent of people in SNAP eligible households with a Hispanic head participated in the program. People in Hispanic-headed households represent a more than one-quarter of eligible people who do not participate.

The bottom line is that while about 15 percent of households in the United States were food insecure at some time during 2008, the rate of food insecurity among Hispanic families was over 25 percent.

USDA is making a concerted effort to address barriers to program participation among eligible Hispanics, including immigrants. The effort covers a broad range of activities:

- **Targeting Outreach to the Hispanic Community.** The agency has reached out to underserved groups to raise awareness of the nutrition benefits of SNAP, including significant efforts to reach the Spanish-speaking population. These include:
 - A national media campaign to promote the nutrition benefits of SNAP and educate non-participating eligible people, including radio advertisements in English and Spanish, is now going into its seventh year. Advertising carries the SNAP national toll free number or a State-specific toll free information numbers.
 - A web-based pre-screening tool in English and Spanish provides users with estimates of their eligibility and benefit amounts. This tool is online at <http://www.snap-step1.usda.gov>.
 - A national toll free number provides information about the program in Spanish or English and includes the option to receive a packet of information by mail.
 - Educational posters and flyers in English and Spanish which may be ordered for use in local outreach campaigns, along with a photo library, including pictures of Hispanic individuals and families, that can be used in promotional and informational materials. These resources are available at <http://foodstamp.ntis.gov/>.
 - A Hispanic outreach plan, now under development, to better reach and educate the Hispanic audience about the nutrition benefits of the SNAP.
 - A national SNAP Outreach Coalition to bring together national and local organizations working with low-income audiences. Coalition members share effective outreach strategies to educate eligible, non-participating, low-income Hispanic people about the benefits of SNAP
 - Participation Grants for projects that look at ways that State partnerships can improve access, and make the application and intake process more user-friendly
 - Outreach Grants for small neighborhood and faith-based organizations to study the effectiveness of strategies to inform eligible low-income people about the program.

- **Partnering with Mexico.** USDA and the government of Mexico have entered into a partnership to help educate eligible Mexican nationals living in the United States about available nutrition assistance. Mexico will help disseminate this information through its embassy and network of approximately 50 consular offices.

- **Making Program Application Easier for Non-English Speakers.** While SNAP currently offers a number of informational and promotional materials in Spanish for potential applicants and retailers, USDA is expanding the number and types of products available in Spanish and other languages. States with web sites must post their applications on the Internet in the same languages they currently use for paper applications. The school meal programs also make applications for free and reduced-price meals available in Spanish.

- **Promoting Healthy Food Choices in Ways that Are Understandable and Culturally Relevant.** As USDA tackles the nationwide problem of poor eating habits and the health consequences, appealing materials are being developed at an appropriate reading level in Spanish, along with examples that reflect the food preferences and consumption patterns of the low-income Hispanic population.

Nutrition Education Reaching Hispanics

- **Spanish-Language *Dietary Guidelines* and *MiPirámide*:** Both the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and the popular <http://www.MyPyramid.gov> website are available to the public in Spanish-language editions, to make it easier for Hispanics and other Spanish-speaking Americans to find nutrition information vital to good health, and personalize that information to their own lifestyle. USDA's Team Nutrition also has two parent flyers in Spanish-language editions

- **Eat Smart. Play Hard.**™ materials are available in Spanish. The materials promote healthy eating and physical activity using kid's activity sheets, bookmarks, posters, and parent brochures. The posters and activity sheets are bilingual: Spanish on one side and English on the other. The brochures and bookmarks are also in Spanish and English. Team Nutrition also has two flyers for Spanish-language parents: Tips for Families and Preschool Pointers. All of these materials can be viewed and downloaded from links on the following web page: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/eatsmartplayhard/Collection/main.html>; and can be ordered from http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/resources_spansih.html

- **The SNAP Nutrition Connection** is an online resource system designed to facilitate communication and resource sharing among SNAP-Ed providers. Nutrition education materials written in Spanish are available on the FSNC website, <http://www.snap.nal.usda.gov>. These materials include a recipe finder in English and Spanish with more than 400 easy, low cost, and tasty recipes as well as Loving Your Family, Feeding Their Future, nutrition education materials targeted for low literacy Hispanics mothers.

These initiatives should ensure that Hispanic households and other immigrant groups take advantage of the help available when they need some help to become self-sufficient. After all, the United States values its diversity and will not leave its newest residents to fall behind