

California Food Stamps Characteristics Report

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California Food Policy Advocates

California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) is a statewide public policy and advocacy organization dedicated to improving the health and well being of low-income Californians by increasing their access to nutritious, affordable food.



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Introduction

The Federal Food Stamp Program (FSP), recently renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, is the largest federal nutrition assistance program and a pivotal safety net for low income families. The program provides families with benefits to supplement their food budget, increasing family purchasing power and access to a nutritious and affordable diet. At a national level, the food stamp program helps put food on the table for more than 34 million people a month¹. In California, the program currently reaches nearly 3 million people on a monthly basis² and about 3 million more are eligible, but do not participate³.

With such a large number of eligible Californians, it is pivotal that we understand the changing characteristics of households participating in the FSP, as well as those who are eligible and not participating. Projected characteristics can inform potential policy changes and the possible outcomes of these changes.

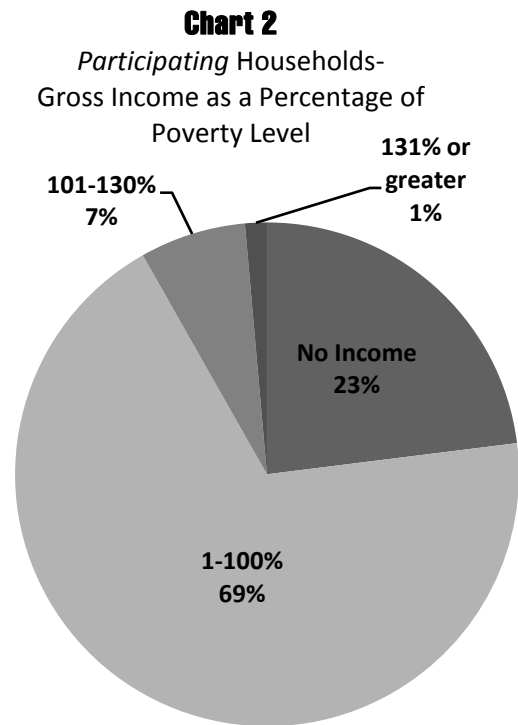
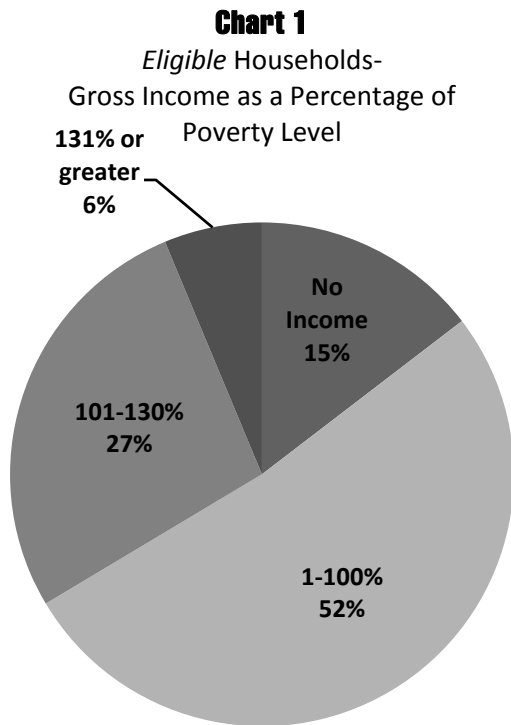
This report presents data related to a series of California FSP household characteristics for fiscal year 2009. The data reflect projected characteristics for both eligible and eligible and participating households, based on information gathered by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. using the MATH SIPP+ simulation model. The report outlines selected characteristics from the simulation process.

Statewide Data Tables

Table 1

Eligible and Participating Household Characteristic - Gross Income as a Percentage of Poverty Level

Gross Income as a Percentage of Poverty Level	Eligible		Participating	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total California Households	2,284,000	100.0	889,000	100.0
No Income	334,000	14.6	205,000	23.0
1-100%	1,184,000	51.9	611,000	68.7
101-130%	623,000	27.3	61,000	6.8
131% or greater	143,000	6.3	13,000	1.4



FSP eligibility rules set the maximum gross income at 130% of the Federal poverty line. Even so, due to allowable deductions, a small percentage of both eligible and participating households fall above this guideline. In addition, it's estimated that participating California households are more likely to have income at or below the federal poverty level (99%) compared to participating households across the U.S. (87%)⁴.

Table 2

Eligible and Participating Household Characteristic - Household Income Source

Household Income Source	Eligible		Participating	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total California Households	2,284,000	100.0	889,000	100.0
Earnings	1,224,000	53.6	301,000	33.9
TANF	424,000	18.6	309,000	34.7
Social Security	376,000	16.5	48,000	5.4
SSI	0	0	0	0

Chart 3

Eligible Households- Household Income Source

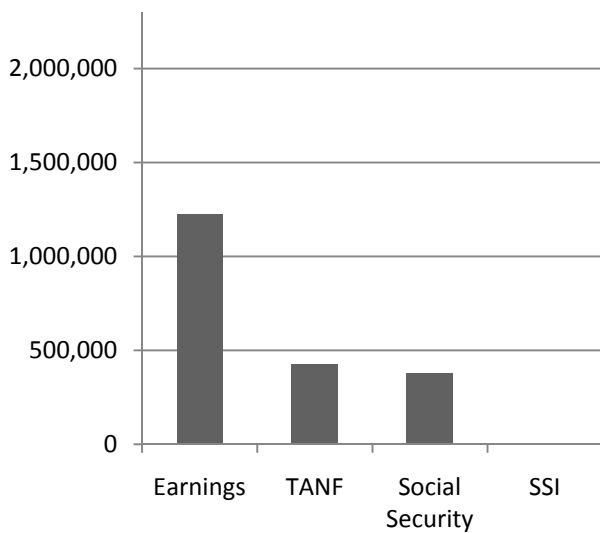
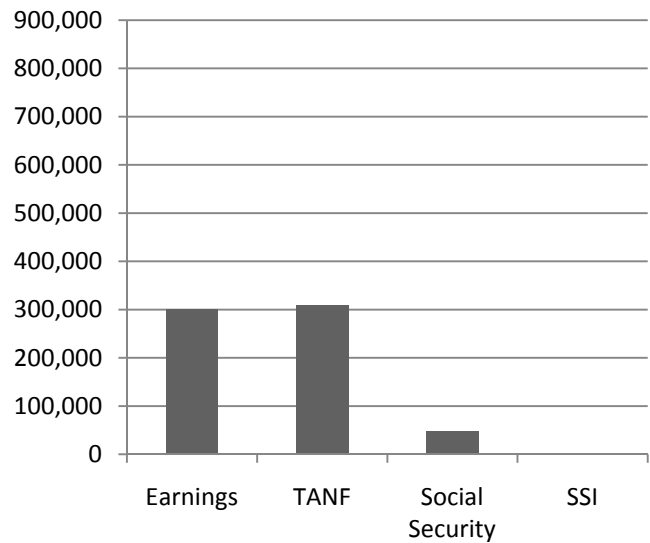


Chart 4

Participating Households- Household Income Source



The large portion of eligible households with earnings as an income source suggests that new outreach strategies should target working individuals who may not realize they qualify for FSP benefits. In addition, program policies, particularly those applied during the enrollment process, should address the unique barriers faced by working individuals.

Table 3

Eligible and Participating Household Characteristic - Benefit Level Eligibility

Benefit Level Eligibility	Eligible		Participating	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total California Households	2,284,000	100.0	889,000	100.0
Eligible for Minimum Benefit	246,000	10.8	11,000	1.3
Eligible for Maximum Benefit	568,000	24.9	361,000	40.6
Eligible for Other	1,470,000	64.4	516,000	58.1

Chart 5
Eligible Households-
Benefit Level Eligibility

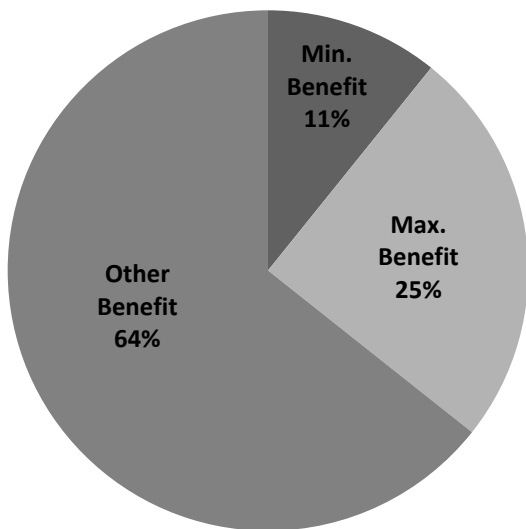
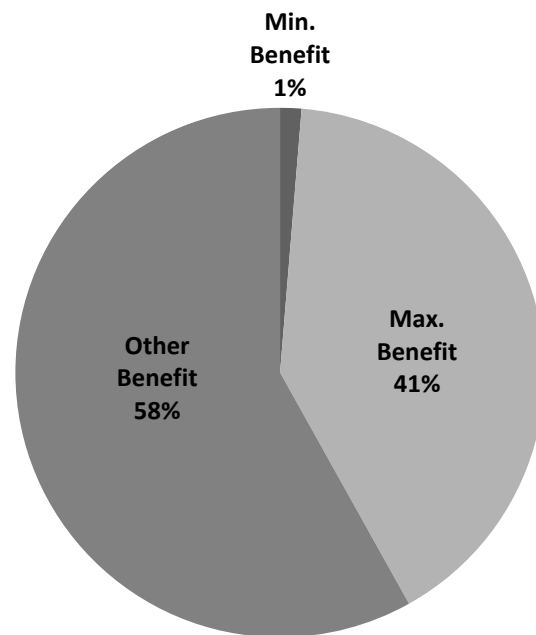


Chart 6
Participating Households-
Benefit Level Eligibility



FSP benefit allotments are based on income available for food after allowable deductions. The complexity of the FSP allows the program to tailor benefits to those with greater need; benefits are higher when the household net income is lower.

Table 4
Eligible and Participating Household Characteristic - Household Deductions

Household Deductions	Eligible		Participating	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total California Households	2,284,000	100.0	889,000	100.0
Excess Shelter	1,222,000	53.5	641,000	72.1
Medical	196,000	8.6	24,000	2.7
Dependent Care	75,000	3.3	23,000	2.6
Child Support Expense	40,000	1.8	21,000	2.4

Chart 7
Eligible Households-
Household Deductions

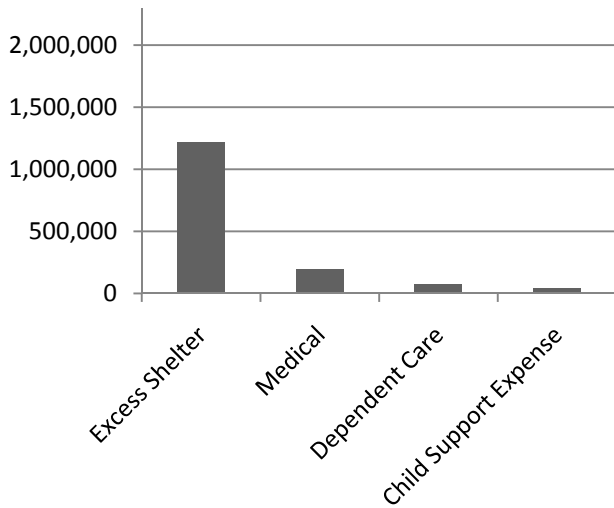
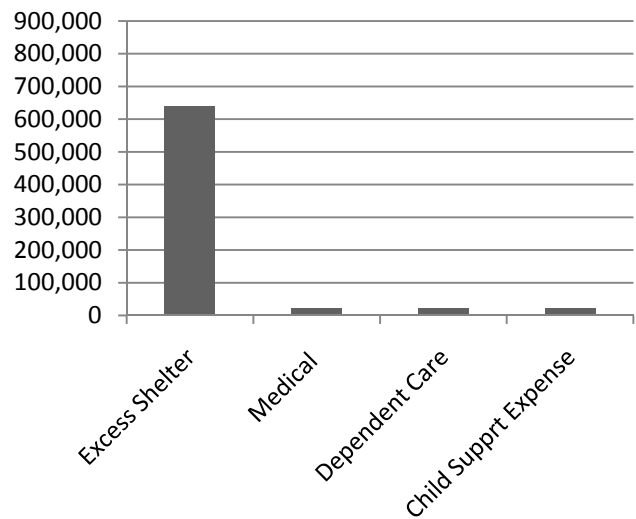


Chart 8
Participating Households-
Household Deductions



The dependent care and medical deductions are important components of the FSP benefit calculation; households who claim deductions may be entitled to a higher benefit. Yet, these deductions are underutilized in California. Future policy and program changes should consider strategies, such as deduction standardization, to increase utilization. See [The \(Under\) Utilization of Income Deductions in the Food Stamp Program in California](#) for more information.

Table 5

Eligible and Participating Household Characteristic - Household Size

Household Size	Eligible		Participating	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total California Households	2,284,000	100.0	889,000	100.0
One Person	891,000	39.0	285,000	32.0
Two People	471,000	20.6	223,000	25.1
More Than Two	923,000	40.4	382,000	42.9

Chart 9

Eligible Households-
Household Size

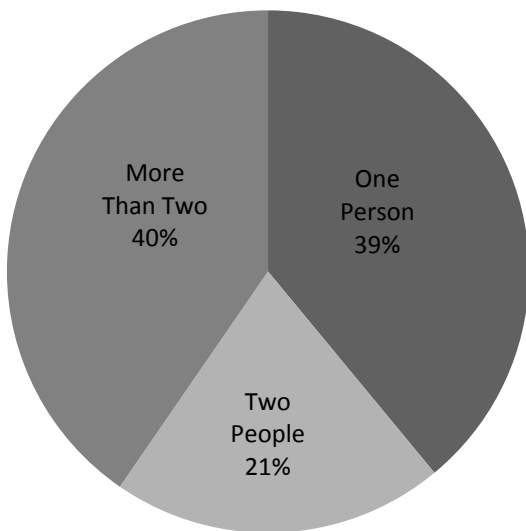
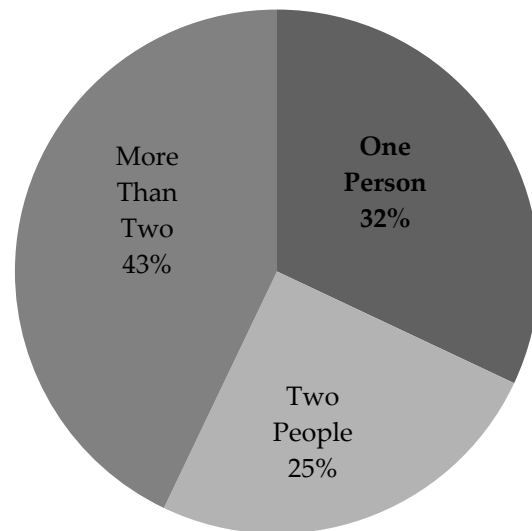


Chart 10

Participating Households-
Household Size



FSP households are defined as an individual living alone or a group of persons living together who also purchase and prepare food together.

Table 6

Eligible and Participating Household Characteristic - Household Composition

Household Composition	Eligible		Participating	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total California Households	2,284,000	100.0	889,000	100.0
Households with Elderly Adults	324,000	14.2	48,000	5.4
Households with Disabled Nonelderly Adults	112,000	4.9	17,000	1.9
Households with Children	1,428,000	62.5	627,000	70.6

Chart 11
Eligible Households-
Household Composition

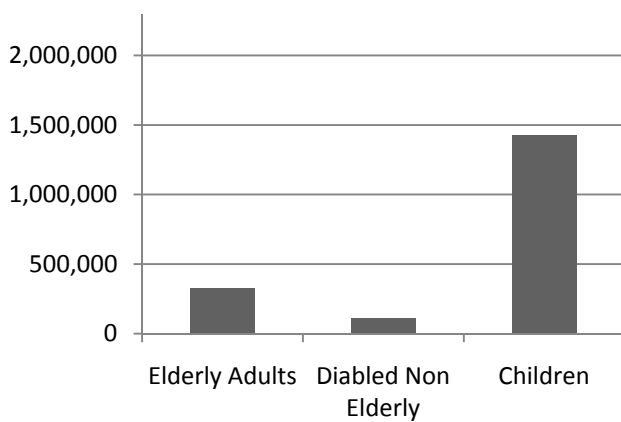
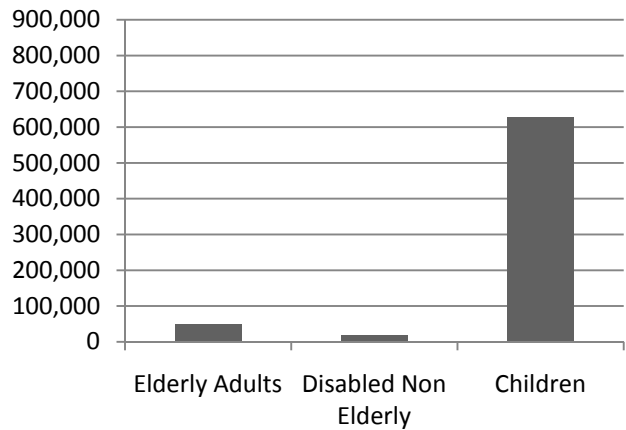


Chart 12
Participating Households-
Household Composition



Approximately 71% of California FSP households are households with children. Compared to the national average of 51%, California’s food stamp recipients are significantly more likely to be children than the rest of the United States⁵. Additionally, it’s estimated that California participant households are less likely to include elderly adults (5.4%) or people with disabilities (1.9%) when compared to the U.S. as a whole, 19% & 23% respectively⁶.

Table 7

Average Benefit for Eligible and Participating Households by Characteristic

Average Benefit by Household Characteristic	Eligible		Participating	
	Total (\$)	Average Benefit (\$)	Total (\$)	Average Benefit (\$)
Total California Benefits	598,636,000	262	305,799,000	344
Gross Income as Percentage of Poverty Level				
No Income	109,930,000	329	77,857,000	380
1-100%	389,714,000	329	216,839,000	355
101-130%	90,562,000	145	10,640,000	175
131% or greater	8,431,000	59	463,000	36
Household Income Source				
Earnings	323,186,000	264	94,130,000	312
TANF	111,157,000	262	96,137,000	311
Social Security	42,212,000	112	12,165,000	256
SSI	0	0	0	0
Benefit Level Eligibility				
Minimum Benefit	3,977,000	16	182,000	16
Maximum Benefit	196,539,000	346	138,482,000	383
Other Benefit	398,121,000	271	167,134,000	324
Household Deduction				
Excess Shelter	382,261,000	313	232,062,000	362
Medical	21,892,000	112	5,569,000	230
Dependent Care	22,681,000	303	8,451,000	370
Child Support	12,486,000	310	7,143,000	341
Household Size				
One Person	101,881,000	114	47,389,000	167
Two People	102,203,000	217	60,946,000	273
More Than Two	394,552,000	428	197,463,000	517
Household Composition				
Elderly Adults	34,957,000	108	10,730,000	225
Disabled Nonelderly	18,229,000	162	6,236,000	371
Children	479,495,000	336	250,589,000	399

The majority of participating FSP households receive a sizable benefit. In addition, households that are not participating, but are eligible, are also entitled to a significant benefit. This emphasizes the importance of improving FSP participation in California. FSP benefits increase family purchasing power and access to healthy and nutritious foods.

Table 8

Average monthly benefit, income and deductions of eligible and participating California households

Average Monthly Benefit, Income, & Deductions	Average Value for households (\$)	
	Eligible	Participating
Monthly Benefit	262	344
Monthly gross income among households with positive income	1,039	713
Monthly net income among households with positive new income	710	494
Monthly amount of income type among households with income type		
Earnings	1,060	720
TANF	510	535
SSI	0	0
Social Security	862	654
Amount of deduction among households with deduction		
Excess shelter deduction	276	280
Medical deduction	206	203
Dependent care deduction	211	285
Child support expense deduction	360	427

Methodology

The report uses the MATH SIPP+ computer model developed by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. in order to simulate the California FSP. This model involves two components: a database and a computer program. The database tracks records of individual households and contains information about income, assets, and household demographic characteristics used to determine FSP eligibility. The computer program applies eligibility rules to each household in the database to determine whether a household would be eligible. If determined to be eligible, the program then determines the benefit that a household would receive. The simulation model also predicts eligible household's participation in the FSP. Using this prediction, the model shows eligible household's characteristics and potential benefit.

Data

The MATH SIPP+ model uses data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) and incorporates state controls extracted from the Current Population Survey (CPS), both surveys are conducted by the US Census Bureau. FSP quality control data are used to calibrate the MATH SIPP+ model so that estimates of the number and characteristics of participating FSP households are similar to administrative data. Detailed data on state asset and categorical eligibility rules were also used to update the MATH SIPP+ model.

Overview of the Simulation Model

The 2009 Baseline of the 2005 MATH SIPP+ model, which is the model used in this report, uses FY 2009 values for the income and asset thresholds, maximum benefits and deductions and simulates the federal and state asset and categorical eligibility rules. Because the model is based on 2005 data, the parameter values are adjusted from 2009 dollars to 2005 dollars. Rather than simply applying FSP eligibility rules to reported households or families, the model first divides household members into FSP units according to FSP rules about who must apply for FSP together.

Because the SIPP underreports program participation, the MATH SIPP+ model simulates both TANF and SSI recipients. This is particularly important to FSP eligibility determination in California because of the state "cash-out" policy, which makes California SSI recipients categorically ineligible for the FSP.

The MATH SIPP+ model uses an algorithm to select participants from the pool of households simulated to be eligible. The algorithm incorporates caseload and characteristic targets derived from the FSP quality control data to ensure that the baseline simulated participant population is similar to the participant population in the administrative data.

Additional information and a detailed outline of the research tools used in this report are included in:

“Technical Working Paper: Creation of the September 2002 MATH SIPP+ Microsimulation Model and Database” (Smith, 2006)

Available at: <http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/2002mathsipp.pdf>

Endnotes

¹ Federal monthly participation based on USDA Food and Nutrition Service Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Average Monthly Participation for FY 2009

² State monthly participation based on USDA Food and Nutrition Service Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Average Monthly Participation for FY 2009

³ Estimated eligibility and nonparticipation for the California Food Stamp Program based on the County Program Access Index (PAI) for 2007

⁴ National poverty rate of participating households based on USDA Food and Nutrition Service Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Report: Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Households FFY 2008 Report No. SNAP 09-CHAR

⁵ Percent of Federal FSP households with children based on USDA Food and Nutrition Service *Characteristics of Food Stamp Households: Fiscal Year 2007*

⁶ National poverty rate of participating households based on USDA Food and Nutrition Service Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Report: Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Households FFY 2008 Report No. SNAP 09-CHAR