

Program Access Index
2015



California
Food Policy
Advocates

Measuring CalFresh Utilization by County

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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 wellbeing of low-income Californians by increasing their access to nutritious, affordable food.

For more information about this report or for more information about other aspects of CFPA's work on CalFresh, please contact Jared Call at jared@cfpa.net or 213.482.8200 ext. 201.

For more information about CFPA, please visit <http://www.cfpa.net>.

CFPA's Program Access Index is the only independent analysis of county-specific CalFresh utilization in California. CFPA would like to continue producing this publication annually. If you would like to support this work, please contact George Manalo-LeClair, CFPA's executive director, at 510.433.1122 ext. 103 or george@cfpa.net.

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CFPA's county Program Access Index (PAI) draws on the methodology developed for the United States Department of Agriculture's state PAI. We appreciate the effort and expertise that is dedicated to producing that measure.

Special thanks to Caroline Danielson and Sarah Bohn of The Public Policy Institute of California for their expertise in providing analysis used to calculate CFPA's 2015 Program Access Index. Special thanks also to Gabby Tilley, CFPA Policy Advocate, for her assistance in reviewing and formatting this year's report.

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THE PROGRAM ACCESS INDEX

The Program Access Index (PAI) estimates CalFreshⁱ utilization among low-income individuals. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) produces an annual state-by-state PAI.ⁱⁱ The PAI provided in this report is a county-level analysis modeled on the USDA methodology with one significant difference: this PAI incorporates county-specific estimates of SSI recipients who have incomes below 125 percent of the federal poverty threshold.

[For methodological details see page 11.](#)

As shown in the general formula below, the county-level PAI estimates CalFresh utilization among individuals who meet three CalFresh eligibility criteria: (1) income below 125 percent of the federal poverty threshold, (2) no participation in the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), and (3) no receipt of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) if income is below 125 percent of the federal poverty threshold.

$$PAI = \frac{(\text{CalFresh Participants} - \text{Disaster CalFresh Participants})}{(\text{Individuals w/Income} < 125\% \text{ of poverty} - \text{FDPIR Participants} - \text{SSI Recipients w/Income} < 125\% \text{ of poverty})}$$

The PAI incorporates only three CalFresh eligibility criteria. Therefore, it is not a participation rate that measures CalFresh participation among fully eligible individuals. However, the PAI can help illuminate county-level differences in CalFresh utilization by comparing the number of individuals who meet select CalFresh eligibility criteria and the number of individuals who actually receive CalFresh benefits.

USDA uses its state-level PAI as one measure to “reward States for high performance in the administration of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).”ⁱⁱⁱ Within California, CalFresh administrative policies and practices vary by county. The PAI cannot be used as a comprehensive measure to evaluate administrative performance. However, administrative policies and practices do impact the number of CalFresh participants. Therefore, CalFresh administrative policies and practices do impact one of the primary factors used to calculate the PAI.

CDSS Program Reach Index

In 2015, CDSS developed the Program Reach Index (PRI) to measure CalFresh utilization by county. The PRI differs from the Program Access Index (PAI) developed by USDA and adopted for counties by CFPA in two important respects. First, the PRI makes a linear extrapolation to obtain estimates for the California threshold of 130% FPL, rather than 125% FPL. Secondly, the PRI makes applies an adjustment for ineligibility due to citizenship status. More detailed information on the PRI methodology, can be found in Appendix B and at <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/Data-Portal/Research-and-Data/CalFresh-Data-Dashboard>.

Comparing the PAI and State Participation Rates

USDA releases annual SNAP “participation rates” for all 50 states and the District of Columbia. These participation rates may be the best available estimates of SNAP utilization among eligible individuals. However, the rates are calculated as statewide measures and have limited relevance at the county level, particularly in a state as diverse as California. USDA does not calculate county-level participation rates.

Determining CalFresh Eligibility

USDA’s state participation rates are complex estimates of SNAP/CalFresh participation among eligible individuals. The rates take into account several factors affecting CalFresh eligibility and utilization. In comparison, the PAI takes into account three CalFresh eligibility criteria: income, FDPIR participation, and SSI status.

Timeliness of Available Data

State participation rates for any given year are typically released two to three years following. For instance, USDA's state participation rates for 2013 were released during January of 2017.^{iv} In comparison, the PAI is typically calculated within one year.

Interpreting the PAI

The county-level PAI compares two population estimates: the number of individuals in each county who receive CalFresh benefits and the number of individuals in each county who meet three CalFresh eligibility criteria (income below 125 percent of the federal poverty threshold, no participation in FDPIR, and no receipt of SSI for individuals with income below 125 percent of the federal poverty threshold).

Assessing the Impact of County Administration

Because CalFresh policies and practices vary among California counties, county-level measures that assess the extent to which administrators reach and serve the eligible population are critical. The PAI is one such measure because CalFresh administration affects a central component of the PAI calculation: the number of individuals receiving CalFresh benefits. On its own, the PAI is not a comprehensive tool for evaluating counties' administration of CalFresh. Advocates and policymakers should look to establish the use of additional indicators in assessing CalFresh administrative performance.

Ranking

The PAI tables in this report include county rankings. The county ranked number one has the highest estimated CalFresh utilization relative to the total number of individuals who meet the three eligibility criteria previously discussed.

Trends

The county-level PAI is not designed to definitively establish trends over time. There are two primary challenges with using the PAI to establish trends:

1. Methodological approaches may change over time, altering the comparability of PAI estimates calculated before and after each change. For example, the 2013 and 2014 CFPA PAI incorporate county-specific estimates of SSI recipients with incomes below 125% of the federal poverty threshold. The 2012 CFPA PAI employed a different methodology, subtracting all SSI recipients from the PAI denominator.
2. Income data from the American Community Survey are used to calculate the PAI. These data have a given level of precision expressed as a margin of error. Margins of error can make it difficult to distinguish true trends from variations inherent to the methods used for collecting and analyzing survey data.

Printable PAI Tables

This section contains two tables. Table 1 shows the PAI for all California counties listed alphabetically. Table 2 shows the PAI for all California counties listed by rank. ***When applied to statewide data, the methodology used to generate Tables 1 and 2 yields a PAI of 0.582 for California in 2015.***

Table 1

2015 PAI for All Counties: Listed Alphabetically

County	PAI	Rank
Alameda	50.9%	43
Alpine	67.0%	18
Amador	70.7%	12
Butte	54.9%	36
Calaveras	80.3%	5
Colusa	37.0%	57
Contra Costa	48.0%	48
Del Norte	93.3%	1
El Dorado	53.8%	39
Fresno	75.2%	8
Glenn	52.9%	40
Humboldt	64.7%	24
Imperial	88.8%	2
Inyo	73.1%	9
Kern	65.2%	23
Kings	65.8%	21
Lake	66.6%	19
Lassen	82.9%	3
Los Angeles	52.1%	41
Madera	70.0%	14
Marin	40.8%	53
Mariposa	68.2%	16
Mendocino	64.6%	25
Merced	70.0%	13
Modoc	48.6%	47
Mono	54.8%	37
Monterey	54.3%	38
Napa	35.8%	58
Nevada	49.0%	46

County	PAI	Rank
Orange	49.9%	44
Placer	43.4%	50
Plumas	57.4%	34
Riverside	61.0%	29
Sacramento	69.6%	15
San Benito	67.5%	17
San Bernardino	82.3%	4
San Diego	50.9%	42
San Francisco	40.6%	54
San Joaquin	76.0%	7
San Luis Obispo	38.7%	56
San Mateo	38.9%	55
Santa Barbara	42.2%	52
Santa Clara	49.1%	45
Santa Cruz	55.0%	35
Shasta	65.7%	22
Sierra	59.7%	31
Siskiyou	62.4%	27
Solano	64.1%	26
Sonoma	47.2%	49
Stanislaus	72.0%	11
Sutter	58.4%	32
Tehama	66.6%	20
Trinity	58.0%	33
Tulare	78.7%	6
Tuolumne	60.3%	30
Ventura	62.1%	28
Yolo	43.1%	51
Yuba	72.8%	10

¹⁻² The PAI is listed here with three significant digits. However, the PAI used to calculate the county ranking contained 15 significant digits. Viewed with four significant digits, Merced County's PAI is 0.6999 and Madera County's PAI is 0.6997. Thus, their respective ranks are 13 and 14. Similarly, Lake County's PAI is 0.6665 and Tehama County's PAI is 0.6657.

Table 2

2015 PAI for All Counties: Listed by Rank

County	PAI	Rank
Del Norte	93.3%	1
Imperial	88.8%	2
Lassen	82.9%	3
San Bernardino	82.3%	4
Calaveras	80.3%	5
Tulare	78.7%	6
San Joaquin	76.0%	7
Fresno	75.2%	8
Inyo	73.1%	9
Yuba	72.8%	10
Stanislaus	72.0%	11
Amador	70.7%	12
Merced	70.0%	13
Madera	70.0%	14
Sacramento	69.6%	15
Mariposa	68.2%	16
San Benito	67.5%	17
Alpine	67.0%	18
Lake	66.6%	19
Tehama	66.6%	20
Kings	65.8%	21
Shasta	65.7%	22
Kern	65.2%	23
Humboldt	64.7%	24
Mendocino	64.6%	25
Solano	64.1%	26
Siskiyou	62.4%	27
Ventura	62.1%	28
Riverside	61.0%	29

County	PAI	Rank
Tuolumne	60.3%	30
Sierra	59.7%	31
Sutter	58.4%	32
Trinity	58.0%	33
Plumas	57.4%	34
Santa Cruz	55.0%	35
Butte	54.9%	36
Mono	54.8%	37
Monterey	54.3%	38
El Dorado	53.8%	39
Glenn	52.9%	40
Los Angeles	52.1%	41
San Diego	50.9%	42
Alameda	50.9%	43
Orange	49.9%	44
Santa Clara	49.1%	45
Nevada	49.0%	46
Modoc	48.6%	47
Contra Costa	48.0%	48
Sonoma	47.2%	49
Placer	43.4%	50
Yolo	43.1%	51
Santa Barbara	42.2%	52
Marin	40.8%	53
San Francisco	40.6%	54
San Mateo	38.9%	55
San Luis Obispo	38.7%	56
Colusa	37.0%	57
Napa	35.8%	58

¹⁻² The PAI is listed here with three significant digits. However, the PAI used to calculate the county ranking contained 15 significant digits. Viewed with four significant digits, Merced County's PAI is 0.6999 and Madera County's PAI is 0.6997. Thus, their respective ranks are 13 and 14. Similarly, Lake County's PAI is 0.6665 and Tehama County's PAI is 0.6657.

Methodology

This methodology details the calculations used for the PAI shown in Tables 1 and 2. Making adaptations for county-level data where appropriate, this methodology largely follows the USDA methodology^v used to calculate the 2015 state-level PAI. As detailed in Step 7 below, this methodology differs with respect to the treatment of SSI data from that used in iterations of CFPA's PAI analysis published before 2015.

Methodology for Tables 1 and 2

Step 1: Determine the annual count of CalFresh participants for the 2015 calendar year by summing monthly participation counts from January through December 2015.

Sum of Monthly Participation from January through December = Annual Count of CalFresh Participants

Data Source: CalFresh participation data for the state of California and all California counties are available at: <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/Research-and-Data/CalFresh-Data-Tables/DFA296>.

Step 2: Determine the number of individuals who received Disaster CalFresh benefits (disaster assistance) during the 2015 calendar year. In 2015, 75 individuals in Calaveras County and 2,905 individuals in Lake County received Disaster CalFresh.

Data Source: Disaster CalFresh participation data were provided by the California Department of Social Services.

Step 3: Calculate the adjusted number of annual CalFresh participants by subtracting Step 2 from Step 1.

Annual Count of CalFresh Participants – Number of Disaster CalFresh Recipients = Adjusted Annual Count of CalFresh Participants

Step 4: Calculate the adjusted number of average monthly CalFresh participants for the 2015 calendar year by dividing Step 3 by 12.

Adjusted Annual Count of CalFresh Participants ÷ 12 months = Adjusted Number of Average Monthly CalFresh Participants

Step 5: Determine the number of individuals with incomes below 125 percent of the federal poverty threshold. Eligibility criteria for CalFresh allow participants to have incomes up to 130 percent of the federal poverty guidelines (FPG).

However, county-level estimates are not available for the number of individuals with incomes below 130 percent of FPG. Therefore, having an income below 125 percent of the poverty threshold is used as a proxy for CalFresh income eligibility. The use of this proxy may underestimate the number of individuals who are income-eligible for CalFresh.

Data Source: Five year estimates of the number of individuals with incomes below 125 percent of the poverty threshold are available from American Fact Finder at: <http://factfinder2.census.gov/main.html>. (American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2011-15, Table C17002)

Note: The five-year American Community Survey (ACS) estimates incorporate the most recently available data and data from the four previous years. ACS also produces one-year and three-year estimates for some California counties. However, only the 5-year estimates are available for all California counties. In order to ensure PAI comparability across all counties, this analysis uses 5-year income estimates. Again, these estimates include but are not limited to the most recently available ACS data.

Step 6: Determine the average monthly participation for the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) during the 2015 calendar year.

Data Source: Average monthly FDPIR participation data were obtained from the USDA Food and Nutrition Service Western Regional Office. (See Appendix A.)

Data provided by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service Western Regional Office do not identify the county of residence for each FDPIR participant. In December 2007/January 2008, FDPIR program directors estimated the number of participants residing in each county. Six program directors were able to update these estimates in early 2015 for the 2013 program year and three were able to update these estimates in early 2016 for the 2014 program year. Estimates were then applied to current participation data to approximate the number of 2015 FDPIR participants in each county.

Note: By federal law, FDPIR participants are categorically ineligible to receive CalFresh benefits. However, FDPIR and CalFresh have the same income eligibility guidelines. Consequently, if income were the only measure of eligibility, FDPIR participants would qualify for CalFresh benefits.

Step 7: Determine the number of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) participants in December 2014 with incomes below 125 percent of the poverty threshold.

7a. Use the 2015 ACS to calculate the percentage of SSI recipients in each county or county group with incomes below 125 percent of the poverty threshold. In the 2014 ACS, 35 counties are identified individually and 23 counties are combined into seven groups: (1) Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Inyo, Mariposa, Mono, and Tuolumne; (2) Colusa, Glenn, Tehama, and Trinity; (3) Del Norte, Lassen, Modoc, and Plumas; (4) Lake and Mendocino; (5) Monterey and San Benito; (6) Nevada and Sierra; and (7) Sutter and Yuba.

7b. Identify the total number of SSI recipients in a given county using 2015 caseload data from the Social Security Administration (SSA).

7c. Multiply a county's total number of SSI recipients by the county's percentage of SSI recipients with incomes below 125 percent of the poverty threshold.

The ACS and SSA data sources are used together to improve the accuracy of the estimates. Estimates from the ACS are subject to both sampling error and to possible misreporting of SSI receipt by survey respondents.

SSI caseload data is publicly available from the Social Security Administration for the month of December for any given year.

Percent of County's SSI Recipients with Incomes Below 125% of Poverty x Number of SSI Recipients per County = Number of SSI Participants with Incomes Below 125% of Poverty

Data Source:

- California SSI data for December 2015 (Table – 3) is available at: https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/ssi_sc/2015/index.html
- 2015 ACS data is available at: <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>

Note: In California, SSI recipients are categorically ineligible to participate in CalFresh. Therefore, SSI recipients with incomes below 125 percent of the federal poverty threshold should be excluded from estimates of individuals who are eligible for CalFresh benefits. SSI recipients with higher incomes are necessarily excluded from estimates of CalFresh eligibility because of the CalFresh income criteria.

Step 8: Calculate the adjusted number of individuals with incomes below 125 percent of the poverty threshold by subtracting Steps 6 and 7 from Step 5.

Individuals with Incomes Below 125% of Poverty - Average Monthly FDPIR Participation - SSI Participants with Incomes Below 125% of Poverty = Adjusted Number Of Individuals With Incomes Below 125% of Poverty

Step 9: Calculate the Program Access Index for 2015 by dividing Step 4 by Step 8.

Adjusted Number of Average Monthly CalFresh Participants for 2013 ÷ Adjusted Number of Individuals with Incomes Below 125% of Poverty = County PAI

Step 10: Rank order counties by PAI. The county ranked number one has the highest PAI score. That is, the county ranked number one has the highest estimated CalFresh utilization relative to the total number of individuals with incomes below 125% of the poverty threshold who do not participate in FDPIR or receive SSI.

Appendix A

Average monthly FDPIR participation data for were obtained from the USDA Food and Nutrition Service Western Regional Office. These data are accurate as of January 2017.

Indian Tribal Organizations Administering FDPIR within CA	Average Monthly Participation: Calendar Year 2015	Estimated Percent of FDPIR Participants by County Affiliation: Calendar Year 2015
Fort Mojave Food Distribution	243	San Bernardino 100%
Hoopa Food Distribution Program	873	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Butte 8% ● Humboldt 51.3% ● Lassen 4.3% ● Plumas 1.8% ● Shasta 8.4% ● Siskiyou 22.4% ● Sutter 0.2% ● Tehama 1.9% ● Trinity 0.6% ● Yuba 1%
Riverside-San Bernardino Indian Health, Inc.	529	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Riverside 94% ● San Bernardino 6%
Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association	491	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Riverside 1.6% ● San Diego 98.4%
Tule River Food Distribution Program	372	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fresno 37% ● Kern 7.9% ● Kings 1.5% ● Madera 18% ● Tulare 17.6% ● Tuolumne 18%
Sherwood Valley Food Program	2,107	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Colusa 2% ● Glenn 4.2% ● Lake 21.3% ● Mendocino 61.2% ● Sonoma 11.3%
Yurok Food Distribution Program	475	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Del Norte 70% ● Humboldt 30%
Total	5,090	N/A

Appendix B

Methodology: CDSS Program Reach Index

<p>Step 1: Obtain the PRI numerator - yearly average of CalFresh persons by county for calendar year 2015</p>
<p>Step 2: Obtain the number of persons below 125% of the federal poverty level (FPL) (ACS 5yr. 2011-2015).</p>
<p>Step 3: Increase the 125% FPL obtained in step 2 linearly to estimate the number below the California threshold of 130% FPL.</p>
<p>Step 4: Obtain the number of child-only households (where the oldest member in CalFresh AU is under 18) by county and apply a factor of 0.94 (for example 100 child-only households are reduced to 94 households).</p>
<p>Step 5: Apply a factor of 1.77 to obtain a count of adults in each child-only household (in the above example: $94 \times 1.77 = 166$).</p>
<p>Step 6: Apply a factor of 1.70 to obtain a count of adults in households without children (in the above example, $166 \times 1.70 = 283$).</p>
<p>Step 7: Obtain an estimate of undocumented adults by applying steps 4, 5 and 6 to county total of child-only households.</p>
<p>Step 8: Obtain an estimate of SSI recipients below 130% FPL using the ACS 5-years PUMS dataset for each county.</p>
<p>Step 9: Subtract the numbers in steps 7 and 8 from the number in step 3 to obtain a new denominator.</p>
<p>Step 10: Subtract the number of undocumented children from the adjusted denominator obtained in step 9.</p>
<p>Step 11: Divide step 1 by step 9 to obtain county Program Reach Index (PRI).</p>

References

- ⁱ The nutrition assistance program known federally as “SNAP” (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) is known as “CalFresh” in California.
- ⁱⁱ United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, *Calculating the SNAP Program Access Index: A Step-by-Step Guide for 2015*, January 2017, available at: <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/ops/PAI2015.pdf>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid
- ^{iv} Cunnyngham, Karen. United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, *Reaching Those in Need: State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Participation Rates in 2014*, available at: <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/ops/Reaching2014-Summary.pdf>
- ^v The USDA methodology is available at: <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/ops/PAI2015.pdf>.

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