



## Food stamp use inconsistent across state

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Food stamp use in California has long been among the lowest in the nation, but a new report shows that participation varies widely among the state's counties.

The report, released Friday by California Food Policy Advocates, estimates that Fresno County ranks first in CalFresh participation among certain eligible individuals and that Mono County ranks last.

The estimates "point to the different level of access that a client can receive, depending on where they live," said Alexis Fernandez, a nutrition policy advocate at [California Food Policy Advocates](#).

Policies and practices for CalFresh participation are different in every county. For example, not all counties offer online enrollment, and some may offer phone interviews while others require in-person interviews.

The report does not suggest why food stamp participation is greater in some counties than it is in others. But lowering barriers to access "is a move in the right direction," Fernandez said.

The county rankings reflect participation based on three eligibility criteria, known as the "program access index." They do not reflect participation rates among fully eligible individuals; those figures are available only on a statewide basis.

The three criteria in the index are: income below 125 percent of the federal poverty level, no receipt of Supplemental Security Income and no participation in the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations.

Measured on the program access index, California enrolled 42.8 percent of eligible individuals in CalFresh in 2009, up from 37.1 percent in 2008. Nearly 79 percent of eligible residents in Fresno participated in 2009, compared to just 22 percent in Mono County. (Program access index rankings for all 58 counties are available in the [report](#).)

When all eligibility requirements are taken into account, [half of eligible Californians participated](#) in the food stamp program in 2008, compared to an average of 66 percent nationwide.