

### **Summary**

On average, 19.1 million people living in 8.2 million households received food stamps in the United States each month in FY 2002. Food stamp households are a diverse group. Because food stamps are available to most low-income households with few resources, regardless of age, disability status, or family structure, recipients represent a broad cross-section of the nation's poor. This report provides summary information about the demographic and economic circumstances of food stamp households.

Most food stamp recipients are children or elderly. Over half (51 percent) are children and another 9 percent are age 60 or older. Working-age women represent 28 percent of the caseload, while working-age men represent 12 percent. The majority of food stamp households do not receive cash welfare benefits. Just over one in five (21 percent) received TANF benefits, down from 42 percent in 1990. Nearly 30 percent received Supplemental Security Income. Almost one quarter (24 percent) received Social Security benefits. Eleven percent had no cash income of any kind.

Many food stamp recipients work. Over one fourth (28 percent) of food stamp households have earnings, up from 19 percent in 1990. For these households, earnings are the primary source of income.

Food stamp households have little income. Only 12 percent are above the poverty line, while 36 percent have incomes at or below half the poverty line. The typical food stamp household had gross income of \$633 per month and received a monthly food stamp benefit of \$173. Over one-fifth of monthly funds (cash income plus food stamps) available to a typical household come from food stamps.

Food stamp households possess few resources. The average food stamp household possesses only \$134 in countable resources (including the non-excluded portion of vehicles and the entire value of checking and savings accounts and other savings).

Most food stamp households are small. The average food stamp household size was 2.3, but varied considerably by household composition. Households with children were relatively large, averaging 3.3 members. Households with elderly members tended to be smaller, with an average size of 1.3 people.

The overall economic conditions of the average food stamp household worsened slightly from 2001 to 2002. After adjusting for inflation, average gross income fell by -1.6 percent for households, while the average household benefit increased by 4.3 percent. The percentage of households receiving the maximum allotment rose from 22 percent to 24 percent.

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