

Summary

On average, about 22.9 million people living in 9.5 million households received food stamps in the United States each month in fiscal year 1997. 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.

Most food stamp recipients are children or elderly. Over half (51 percent) are children and another 8 percent are age 60 or older. Working-age women represent 29 percent of the caseload, while working-age men represent 12 percent.

The majority of food stamp households do not receive AFDC or TANF benefits. Only 35 percent do so. Other cash assistance received by food stamp households includes Supplemental Security Income (27 percent of households), Social Security (21 percent) and State General Assistance benefits (6 percent). Nine percent of households have no income of any kind.

Many food stamp recipients work. Twenty-four percent of food stamp households have earnings, and for these households, earnings are the primary source of income.

Food stamp households have little income. Only 9 percent are above the poverty line, while 40 percent have incomes at or below half the poverty line. The typical food stamp household had gross income of \$558 per month and received a monthly food stamp benefit of \$169. Food stamp households possess few resources. The average food stamp household possesses only about \$92 in countable resources (including vehicles, checking and savings accounts, and other savings).

Most food stamp households are small. The average food stamp household size was 2.4, but varied considerably by household composition. Households with children were relatively large, averaging 3.4 members. Households with elderly members tended to be smaller, with an average size of 1.3 people.

Between 1994 and 1997, the caseload composition of food stamp recipients changed in several key areas. The proportion of food stamp households receiving AFDC or TANF fell from 38 percent to 35 percent of the caseload, while the proportion with earnings rose from 21 to 24 percent. The number of permanent resident aliens and childless unemployed adults receiving food stamps fell sharply as a result of welfare reform provisions restricting eligibility for these groups.

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