U.S. Department of Agriculture

The Food and Nutrition Service and the
Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships

La Mesa Completa (The Complete Table)

Inviting the Latino community to set a full table

La Mesa Completa (The Complete Table) is USDA's initiative to reduce hunger in the Latino community by improving access and increasing participation in USDA nutrition assistance programs. It is being led by the Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and the Food and Nutrition Service. As evidenced by higher rates of food insecurity and lower rates of participation in certain USDA programs, Latinos are among the hungriest Americans, and Latino children make up the largest share of American children living in food insecurity. The challenge is great: more than one in four Hispanic households struggle to put food on their tables today, and Latinos are the country's fastest growing demographic. Unfortunately, on the other side of malnutrition, the Hispanic community also exhibits a higher incidence of obesity. ***La Mesa Completa*** will enable USDA to better serve all Hispanics eligible for these programs in an inclusive manner while broadening access to healthy food in low-income communities.

La Mesa Completa invites the Latino community to participate in nutrition programs available to Hispanics but which are not utilized to their full capacity. At USDA, we acknowledge the unique barriers to program access for Latinos and want to overcome them by including the Latino community in new and expanded ways. USDA wants to ensure that Latinos are welcomed to a place at the table in making decisions that affect the Hispanic community and by participating in USDA's nutrition assistance programs.

1. USDA is committed to lowering food insecurity among Hispanics by providing access to an adequate quantity and quality of food and nutrition.

2. USDA invites Latinos to have a seat at the table as respected participants in the national discussion of food and nutrition issues affecting them.

3. USDA programs can provide the food and nutrition assistance Latinos need to set a full table for their families.

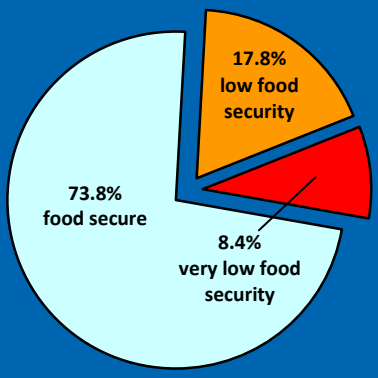
Latinos make up our nation's hungriest demographic but participate in some nutrition assistance programs at the lowest rates.

Hispanic households have the highest prevalence of food insecurity among all racial and ethnic groups in the country.[1]

Latinos participate substantially less in our primary safety net against hunger, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). In 2006, Hispanic participation was 56 percent of those eligible, while the national average was 67 percent.[2] The latest SNAP participation rate is 72 percent but that number does not include a demographic breakdown.[3]

The kitchen table is home to family meals. The table is set with a place for everyone, and the whole family sits to eat together. Everyone joins in the conversation as plates are passed and food is served. The meal is tasty, nutritious, and filling. No one leaves the table hungry.

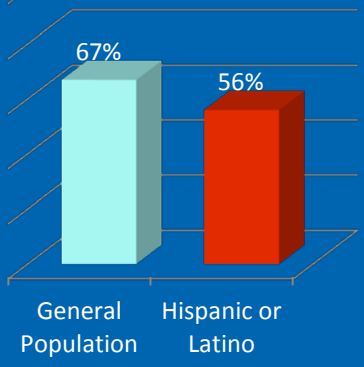
Hispanic Households by Food Security Status, 2010



Food secure: 73.8%
or 10.4 million households

Food insecure: 26.2%
or 3.7 million households

Rate of Hispanic and Latino participation in SNAP versus general US population:



Reaching Latinos presents challenges unique to this demographic group. Hispanics face distinct barriers to participation related to concerns about citizenship status and program eligibility.

- Many eligible Hispanics refrain from participating in SNAP due to concerns about public charge; however, if they are eligible to participate, their immigration status will not be affected.
- Hispanics are disproportionately affected (25.3% compared to 14.3% of the general population) by poverty and unemployment (12% of Latinos are unemployed compared to 9.6% of general population).
- Low literacy rates also present a challenge (44% below basic literacy levels compared to 7% of whites and 24% of blacks) to successfully delivering Spanish and English language materials. Research shows that Latinos receive and share information in unique ways. Information conveyed by word of mouth instead of media or written materials is more trusted, especially from someone close to home.

Hispanics are disproportionately affected by health disparities.

- Childhood obesity in the Hispanic population is growing faster than all other population segments with nearly two in five Hispanic children ages 2–19 being overweight or obese.
- Among infants and toddlers, Hispanics have the highest rates of overweight and obesity and continue to have the highest overweight and obesity rates through adolescence.
- One in three Hispanics are obese, and Hispanics also suffer from a higher incidence of chronic diseases related to obesity. Hispanic children are more likely to be diagnosed with diabetes.

SNAP generates economic and social revenue for communities

- Every $1 in new SNAP benefits generates up to $1.80 in total economic activity.
- Those receiving SNAP benefits spend more money on food than other low-income households. Every additional dollar's worth of SNAP benefits generates 17 to 47 cents of new spending on food.
- On average, an increase of $1 billion in retail food demand by SNAP recipients generates 3,000 farm jobs, including jobs for farm workers.

Through USDA's nutrition assistance programs, *La Mesa Completa* aims to help Latino families set a table that is complete with enough nutritious food:

… buy groceries:
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
…always have breakfast and lunch for children:
National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs
… make sure kids get enough to eat when school is out:
Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)
… get nutritious meals and snacks for children and older adults:
Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
… and support pregnant women and their kids:
Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC)

Call to Action

Help us understand and overcome the barriers faced by Latinos in participating in the nation's nutrition assistance programs, and join us in reaching out to every low-income Latino to ensure that they understand the benefits and eligibility requirements of these programs so that they participate and receive the nutrition they need for a healthy life. Visit www.usda.gov or contact us at collaborate@usda.gov to get involved.

[1] Andrews, Margaret, et al. *Household Food Security in the United States in 2010*. ERR-125, USDA/ERS. September 2011 (10).
[2] Wolkowitz, Kari. *Trends in Food Stamp Program Participation Rates: 2000 to 2006*. USDA/FNS. June 2008 (19).
[3] Leftin, Joshua, et al. *Trends in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates: Fiscal Year 2002 to Fiscal Year 2009*. USDA/FNS. August 2011 (1).

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