

The Food Assistance Landscape: FY 2017 Annual Report

Victor Oliveira

What Is the Issue?

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) administers 15 domestic food and nutrition assistance programs that together affect the lives of millions of people. These programs also represent a significant Federal investment, accounting for over two-thirds of USDA's annual budget. This report examines trends in food and nutrition assistance programs through fiscal year (FY) 2017. It also summarizes two recent Economic Research Service (ERS) reports: one that examines trends in the prevalence and severity of household food insecurity in the United States through 2016 and another that examines the contribution of SNAP benefits to household food spending.

What Did the Study Find?

- Spending for USDA's 15 domestic food and nutrition assistance programs totaled \$98.6 billion in FY 2017, 4 percent less than in the previous fiscal year and almost 10 percent less than the historical high of \$109.2 billion set in FY 2013.
- The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) accounted for 69 percent of all Federal food and nutrition assistance spending in FY 2017. On average, 42.2 million persons per month participated in the program, almost 5 percent fewer than in the previous fiscal year. Reflecting the decrease in participation, Federal spending for SNAP totaled \$68.0 billion, or 4 percent less than in the previous fiscal year. This was also 15 percent less than the historical high of \$79.9 billion set in FY 2013.
- On average, 7.3 million people per month participated in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) in FY 2017, 5 percent fewer than in the previous fiscal year. This was the fewest number of participants in 17 years. The decrease in participation combined with a decrease in average per person food cost in FY 2017 lowered total spending on the program to \$5.6 billion, 6 percent less than in the previous fiscal year and 22 percent less than the historical high of \$7.2 billion set in FY 2011.
- On average, 30.0 million children participated in the National School Lunch Program each schoolday in FY 2017, 1 percent fewer than in the previous fiscal year and about 6 percent fewer than in FY 2011.

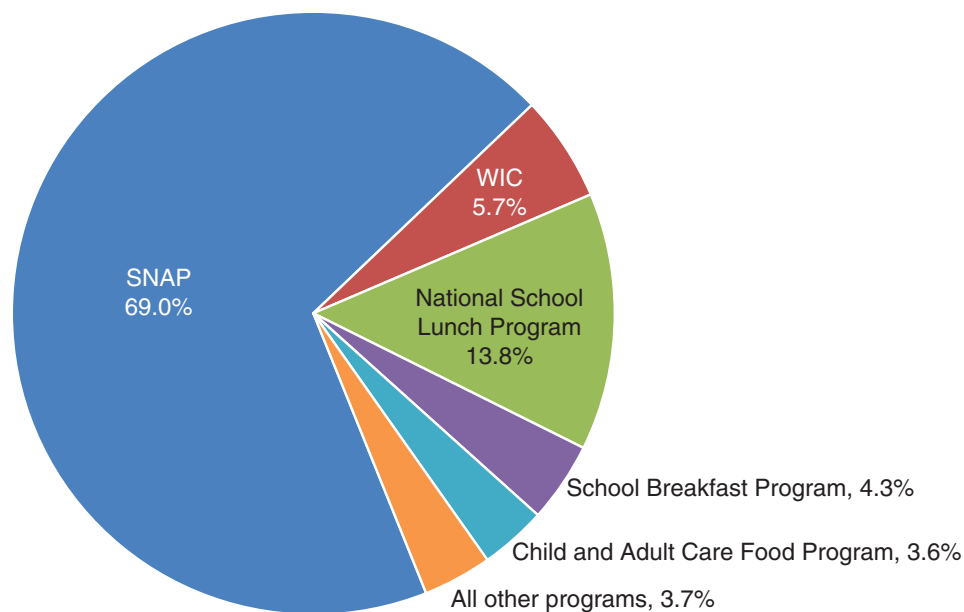
ERS is a primary source of economic research and analysis from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, providing timely information on economic and policy issues related to agriculture, food, the environment, and rural America.

- An average of 14.7 million children participated in the School Breakfast Program each schoolday in FY 2017, or 1 percent more than in the previous fiscal year. This was the smallest annual increase since 1985.
- Spending on the Child and Adult Care Food Program totaled \$3.5 billion in FY 2017, an increase of less than 1 percent over that in the previous year. This was the smallest annual increase since 1998.
- An estimated 12.3 percent of U.S. households (or 15.6 million households containing 41.2 million people) were food insecure at least some time during 2016. *Food insecurity* is a condition in which consistent access to adequate food for all household members is limited by a lack of resources at times during the year. About 59 percent of food-insecure households in 2016 participated in SNAP, WIC, and/or received a free or reduced-price lunch in the National School Lunch Program.
- On the days just after SNAP benefit receipt, average daily food expenditures were substantially higher than on days during the rest of the month. Food-at-home spending exhibited the same cyclical pattern; food-away-from-home spending, however, did not vary over the SNAP benefit month.

Summary figure 1

USDA food and nutrition assistance expenditures by program, FY 2017

SNAP accounted for over two-thirds of food and nutrition assistance expenditures



SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

WIC = Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children.

Expenditures for all food and nutrition programs totaled \$98.6 billion.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from USDA, Food and Nutrition Service.