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# **CHARACTERISTICS OF FOOD STAMP HOUSEHOLDS: SUMMER 1994 (Advance Report)**

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The Food Stamp Program is the nation's largest food assistance program. In summer 1994, the Food Stamp Program served an average of 27.3 million people per month. During that summer, a food stamp household received an average of \$165 in benefits per month. Over \$22.7 billion were paid out in food stamps that fiscal year.

Food stamps are made available to virtually all low-income households with few resources to supplement their food purchases and help them maintain a healthy diet. In summer 1994, food stamps represented approximately one-fourth of a participating household's total monthly income including food stamps. If the value of food stamps were counted as gross income, the addition of food stamps to cash would move approximately one-quarter of food stamp households from below to above half the poverty line (Figure 1).

In summer 1994, slightly over half of all food stamp participants were children (Figure 2), most of whom lived in single-parent households. The remaining participants were nonelderly adults (42.1 percent) or elderly adults, age 60 or more (7.1 percent).

## **I. Characteristics of Food Stamp Households**

In summer 1994, the majority of food stamp households contained children (Table 1). Of these households, over two-thirds (67.8 percent) were single-parent homes, over one-quarter (27.5 percent) were multiple-adult homes, and the remaining households contained no members over the age of 17. Households with children received an average monthly food stamp benefit of \$219, reflecting their relatively large average size (3.3 persons). Single-parent homes (3.0 persons on average) received an average of \$212 in food stamps, and multiple-adult homes with children (4.5 persons on average) received an average of \$253.

Households containing elderly persons represented 15.9 percent of all food stamp households. About three-quarters of households containing an elderly person were single-person homes, which received an average benefit of \$49. Households containing elderly and other persons received an average benefit of \$110. A substantial proportion of food stamp households contained disabled persons (13.9 percent); these households received an average benefit of \$114.

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This brief was prepared by Suzanne Smolkin of Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. with programming support provided by Susan Thomas. The information presented in this brief is based on data collected by the Food and Consumer Service for quality control purposes for fiscal year and summer (July and August) 1994.

## **II. Characteristics of Food Stamp Participants**

Among adult participants (age 18 or more), women outnumbered men by about two to one (Table 2). Of the children participating, almost 40 percent were preschool age (0 to 4), and about 60 percent were of school age (5 to 17).

The largest proportion of food stamp participants were white, non-Hispanic (41.1 percent); about one-third were African-American, non-Hispanic (32.7 percent); and approximately one-fifth were Hispanic (19.2 percent). The remaining participants were Asian, Native American, or of another race or ethnicity (Table 3).

## **III. Benefits and Income of Food Stamp Households**

The average monthly food stamp benefit in summer 1994 was \$165. The majority (71.1 percent) of food stamp households received monthly benefits of over \$100--36.0 percent received over \$200 (Table 4). In summer 1994, 81.0 percent of all benefits went to households with children and six percent of all benefits went to households with elderly members.

Food stamp households' average monthly gross income was \$514 (Table 5). The majority of households (86.6 percent) received assistance payments from one or more of the following sources: Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), General Assistance (GA), Social Security, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Unemployment Compensation, or some other payment such as veterans' benefits or educational loans. About one-fifth of all households had earned income. Nearly one-fifth of all households (18.2 percent) received Social Security payments. A substantial proportion (9.9 percent) had zero gross income.

## **IV. Characteristics of Food Stamp Households by State**

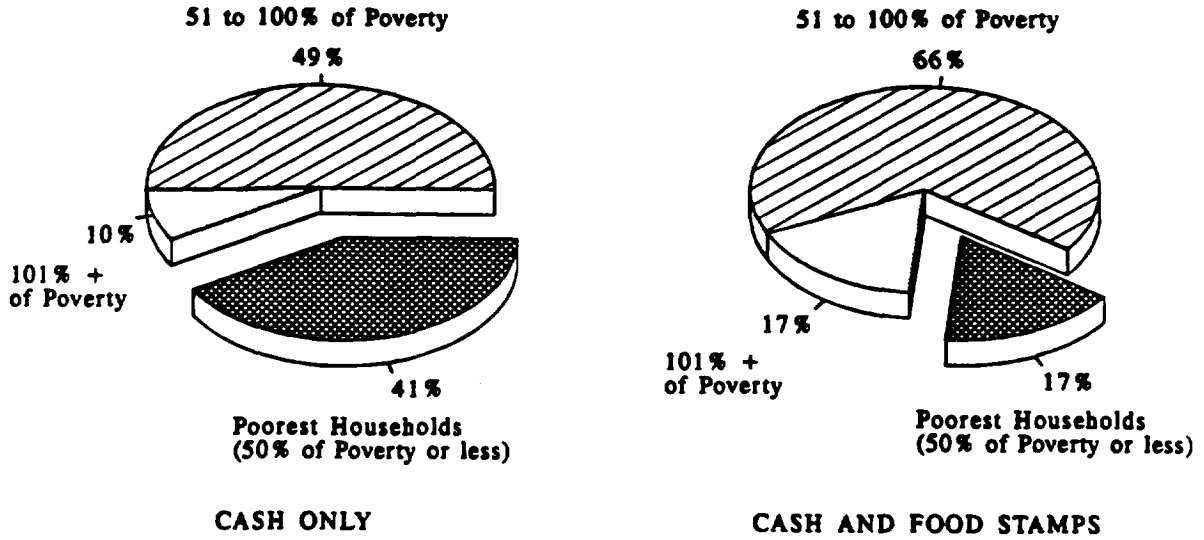
In 1994, slightly over half of all food stamp households were located in eight states: California, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Texas (Table 6). The average monthly food stamp benefit varied by State, reflecting differences in income, household size and composition, and expenses. Average monthly benefits were largest in Alaska, Hawaii, Guam and the Virgin Islands, because the maximum allotment is set higher in those areas to accommodate higher costs of living. Within the contiguous United States, food stamp benefits were relatively high (greater than \$185) in Arizona, Louisiana, and Texas, States with below average gross household incomes and above average household sizes. Average monthly food stamp benefits were lowest (less than \$140) in Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Vermont, States with above-average gross household incomes and below-average household sizes.

## **V. Description of and Participation in the Food Stamp Program**

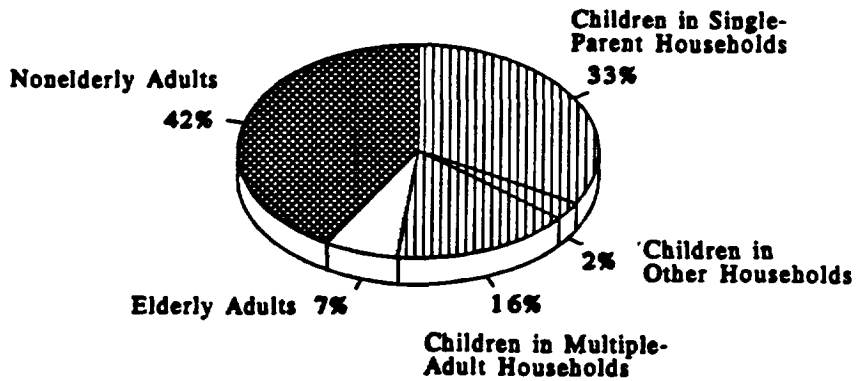
The Food Stamp Program is unique among income maintenance programs in two important ways. First, it offers assistance to nearly all financially needy households, imposing few nonfinancial categorical criteria. Second, instead of cash, it provides benefits in the form of coupons, which can be redeemed for food in any of over 200,000 authorized stores across the nation. The cost of providing food stamps to needy persons is funded fully by the Federal Government. Administrative costs are shared by Federal, State and local governments.

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**FIGURE 1**  
**POVERTY STATUS OF FOOD STAMP HOUSEHOLDS**  
**WITH AND WITHOUT FOOD STAMPS, SUMMER 1994**



**FIGURE 2**  
**DISTRIBUTION OF FOOD STAMP PARTICIPANTS, SUMMER 1994**



**Eligibility.** To be eligible for food stamps, a household's assets, gross income, and net income, which is based on gross income less deductions permitted under the Food Stamp Program, must not exceed specified levels that vary by household size, composition, and location. In addition, able-bodied members of the food stamp unit are required to register for work, and some are then required to participate in an employment and training program as a condition for receiving food stamps.

**Food Stamp Benefit Computation and Issuance.** Benefits are computed by subtracting 30 percent of a household's net income from the maximum benefit amount based on 103 percent of the June cost of the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) for a family of four, adjusted for different household sizes and some locations. The TFP is based on the cost of a market basket of food that provides an economical and nutritious diet. In 1994, the maximum benefit for a family of four in the contiguous United States was \$375 per month. Food stamp participants receive their monthly benefits through the mail, directly from the local office, or through an electronic benefit transfer (which is similar to a bank card).

**Change in Participation Over Time.** The number of persons participating in the Food Stamp Program has changed significantly since 1989, as has the number of unemployed persons and the number of persons living in poverty (Figure 3). The number of food stamp participants grew from 18.6 million persons in July 1989 to a record high of 28.0 million March 1994, and then decreased to 26.5 million in May 1995. The changes in Food Stamp participation have been accompanied by changes in the composition of the caseload (Table 7). Although households with children remained a large proportion of the caseload, that proportion dropped slightly from 62.1 percent in summer 1993 to 60.8 percent in summer 1994. The proportion of households with an elderly member rose slightly between summer 1992 and summer

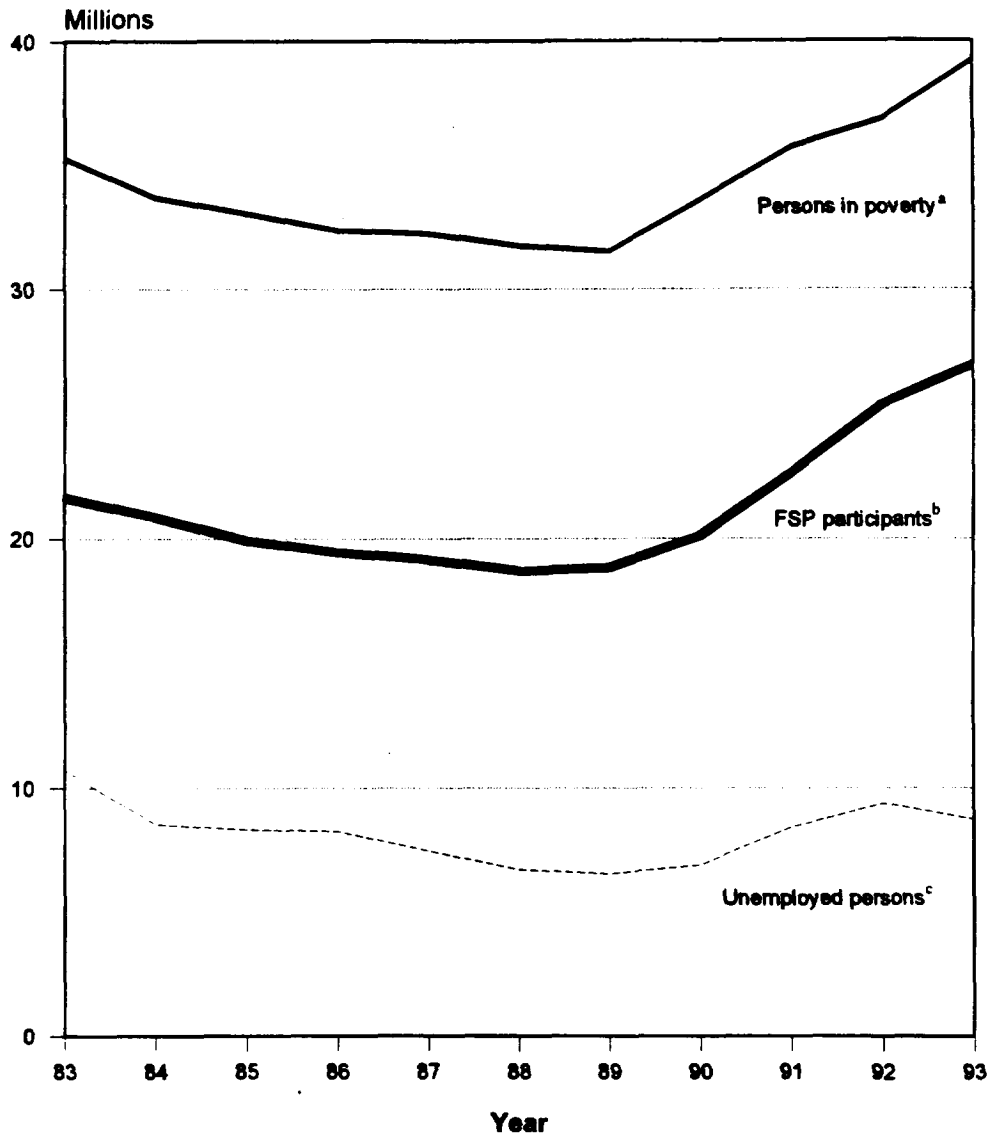
1993 to 15.9 percent, and then remained steady at that level in summer 1994. The proportion of households with a disabled member rose considerably between summer 1993 and summer 1994 from 10.8 percent to 13.9 percent.

## VI. Data

The estimates presented here are based on data extracted from the Integrated Quality Control System, which is an ongoing review of food stamp households designed to measure the accuracy with which eligibility and benefit amount determinations are made. All estimates except State-level estimates are based on a summer (July and August) sample of 9,088 households. The State-level estimates are based on a full-year sample of 55,081 households.

Based on Food and Consumer Service administrative records, the Food Stamp Program served 27.3 million persons in summer 1994. The figure of 27.6 million persons served by the program in summer 1994, as presented in the attached tables, is based on the Food Stamp Quality Control sample and varies from the administrative figure because it is a sample estimate weighted by households rather than persons.

**FIGURE 3**  
**FOOD STAMP PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS, UNEMPLOYED PERSONS, AND POOR PERSONS**  
**(1983 - 1993)**



<sup>a</sup> Source: Bureau of the Census, General Information Office; July 1995

<sup>b</sup> Source: Food and Consumer Service. Fiscal Year 1993 FSP Participants and Issuance

<sup>c</sup> Source: Economic Report of the President, February 1994, Table B-33

Table 1 -- Selected Characteristics of Participating Food Stamp Households, Summer 1994

Household type	Participating households		Average monthly values (dollars)			Average household size (persons)
	Number (thousands)	Percent	Food stamp benefit	Gross income	Net income	
<b>Total</b> .....	11,022	100.0	165	514	273	2.5
<b>Children</b> .....	6,706	60.8	219	598	333	3.3
Single-parent households .....	4,544	41.2	212	523	266	3.0
Multiple-adult households .....	1,844	16.7	253	834	534	4.5
Other .....	318	2.9	138	292	137	1.7
<b>Elderly</b> .....	1,757	15.9	64	543	290	1.4
Living alone .....	1,304	11.8	49	483	231	1.0
Not living alone .....	453	4.1	110	716	458	2.4
<b>Disabled<sup>a</sup></b> .....	1,530	13.9	114	655	398	2.3
Living alone .....	705	6.4	52	477	219	1.0
Not living alone .....	825	7.5	167	806	550	3.5
<b>Other</b> .....	1,861	16.9	107	214	75	1.2
Single-person .....	1,604	14.6	98	180	55	1.0
Multiple-person .....	256	2.3	165	425	200	2.2

<sup>a</sup> Disabled includes only those participants who receive SSI but are not over age 59.

Source: Summer 1994 Food Stamp Quality Control sample.

**Table 2 -- Gender and Age of Food Stamp Participants, Summer 1994**

Age	All participants		Female		Male	
	Number (thousands)	Percent	Number (thousands)	Percent	Number (thousands)	Percent
<b>Total</b> .....	27,552	100.0	16,060	100.0	11,490	100.0
Children (0-17) .....	13,977	50.7	6,724	41.9	7,252	63.1
0-4 .....	5,265	19.1	2,458	15.3	2,807	24.4
5-17 .....	8,711	31.6	4,266	26.6	4,444	38.7
Adults (18 or more) .....	13,549	49.2	9,328	58.1	4,221	36.7
18-35 .....	7,273	26.4	5,240	32.6	2,033	17.7
36-59 .....	4,316	15.7	2,664	16.6	1,651	14.4
60 or more .....	1,960	7.1	1,424	8.9	536	4.7
Unknown .....	27	0.1	9	0.1	18	0.2

Source: Summer 1994 Food Stamp Quality Control sample.

**Table 3 -- Race/Ethnicity of Food Stamp Participants, Summer 1994**

Race	Participants	
	Number (thousands)	Percent
<b>Total</b> .....	27,552	100.0
White, Non-Hispanic .....	11,331	41.1
African-American, Non-Hispanic .....	9,006	32.7
Hispanic .....	5,290	19.2
Asian .....	1,042	3.8
Native American .....	406	1.5
Other .....	478	1.7

Source: Summer 1994 Food Stamp Quality Control sample.

**Table 4 – Monthly Food Stamp Benefits of Participating Food Stamp Households, Summer 1994**

Monthly food stamp benefit	Participating households	
	Number (thousands)	Percent
Total .....	11,022	100.0
\$0-50 .....	1,766	16.0
\$51-100 .....	1,421	12.9
\$101-150 .....	2,505	22.7
\$151-200 .....	1,357	12.3
\$201-250 .....	1,642	14.9
\$251-300 .....	1,156	10.5
\$301 + .....	1,174	10.7

Source: Summer 1994 Food Stamp Quality Control sample.

**Table 5 – Selected Economic Characteristics of Participating Food Stamp Households, Summer 1994**

Income source	Participating households		Persons in households with source		Average income (dollars)		Average food stamp benefit (dollars)	Average household size (persons)
	Number (thousands)	Percent	Number (thousands)	Percent	Gross	From source		
Total .....	11,022	100.0	27,552	100.0	514	(n/a)	165	2.5
<b>Earned income</b> .....	2,324	21.1	7,946	28.8	855	693	180	3.4
Wages and salaries .....	2,120	19.2	7,373	26.8	875	724	180	3.5
Self-employment .....	134	1.2	391	1.4	578	301	198	2.9
Other earned income .....	95	0.9	260	0.9	806	386	131	2.7
<b>Unearned income</b> .....	9,546	86.6	24,641	89.4	564	425	164	2.6
Aid to Families with Dependent Children .....	4,237	38.4	13,838	50.2	533	378	227	3.3
General Assistance .....	794	7.2	1,122	4.1	358	233	112	1.4
Supplemental Security Income .....	2,545	23.1	4,979	18.1	613	358	92	2.0
Social Security .....	2,009	18.2	3,621	13.1	615	445	79	1.8
Unemployment .....	192	1.7	639	2.3	688	482	188	3.3
Other unearned income .....	2,763	25.1	8,252	29.9	675	134	176	3.0
<b>No income</b> .....	1,088	9.9	1,701	6.2	0	0	163	1.6

Source: Summer 1994 Food Stamp Quality Control sample.



Table 6 -- Selected Characteristics of Participating Food Stamp Households by State, Fiscal Year 1994

State	Total (thousands)	Percent of all households	Average monthly amount					Average house- hold size (persons)
			Food stamp benefit (dollars)	Gross income (dollars)	Net income (dollars)	Total deduction (dollars)	Countable assets (dollars)	
Total .....	11,091	100.0	168	507	268	272	81	2.5
Alabama .....	215	1.9	175	481	264	257	82	2.6
Alaska .....	15	0.1	271	849	540	356	136	3.0
Arizona .....	187	1.7	189	500	255	280	62	2.8
Arkansas .....	108	1.0	160	530	310	249	146	2.6
California .....	1,179	10.6	175	604	362	269	69	3.0
Colorado .....	107	1.0	171	520	250	302	41	2.5
Connecticut .....	97	0.9	131	619	362	268	111	2.4
Delaware .....	22	0.2	182	416	189	267	104	2.4
Dist. of Col. ....	41	0.4	166	392	215	204	20	2.3
Florida .....	607	5.5	175	488	227	302	125	2.5
Georgia .....	329	3.0	166	487	261	259	101	2.5
Guam .....	5	>0	357	484	198	370	82	3.0
Hawaii .....	50	0.4	268	647	375	290	184	2.3
Idaho .....	30	0.3	170	594	343	278	170	2.8
Illinois .....	499	4.5	161	413	211	242	70	2.3
Indiana .....	194	1.7	175	512	279	267	82	2.7
Iowa .....	79	0.7	151	548	305	262	114	2.5
Kansas .....	76	0.7	157	514	272	271	123	2.4
Kentucky .....	196	1.8	166	482	292	221	91	2.6
Louisiana .....	278	2.5	189	469	252	255	45	2.7
Maine .....	61	0.5	151	555	247	340	100	2.3
Maryland .....	165	1.5	186	415	195	248	14	2.5
Massachusetts .....	191	1.7	146	576	303	288	87	2.4
Michigan .....	434	3.9	168	500	247	286	65	2.5
Minnesota .....	133	1.2	151	579	330	271	194	2.6
Mississippi .....	194	1.7	166	502	291	242	106	2.6
Missouri .....	240	2.2	164	491	264	257	116	2.5
Montana .....	28	0.3	164	546	301	271	172	2.6
Nebraska .....	45	0.4	153	604	339	285	219	2.6
Nevada .....	44	0.4	165	411	176	298	51	2.2
New Hampshire .....	26	0.2	132	554	347	242	168	2.4
New Jersey .....	227	2.0	177	469	203	296	35	2.4
New Mexico .....	86	0.8	183	508	298	245	98	2.8
New York .....	1,004	9.0	154	542	239	330	23	2.3
North Carolina .....	259	2.3	155	512	292	246	151	2.4
North Dakota .....	18	0.2	151	592	320	296	393	2.5
Ohio .....	531	4.8	155	476	250	252	71	2.3
Oklahoma .....	150	1.4	164	519	289	266	68	2.6
Oregon .....	127	1.1	149	479	247	275	101	2.3
Pennsylvania .....	530	4.8	153	474	233	272	77	2.2
Rhode Island .....	40	0.4	156	513	272	270	101	2.4
South Carolina .....	146	1.3	175	507	291	251	111	2.7
South Dakota .....	19	0.2	170	536	274	291	250	2.6
Tennessee .....	307	2.8	168	460	240	260	107	2.4
Texas .....	1,002	9.0	191	452	238	264	57	2.7
Utah .....	46	0.4	165	589	338	281	173	2.8
Vermont .....	29	0.3	132	605	335	297	182	2.3
Virgin Islands .....	6	0.1	293	482	294	209	90	3.1
Virginia .....	232	2.1	164	483	258	255	89	2.4
Washington .....	196	1.8	162	512	248	291	70	2.4
West Virginia .....	126	1.1	166	496	289	236	66	2.6
Wisconsin .....	122	1.1	150	633	379	271	158	2.7
Wyoming .....	13	0.1	164	535	291	271	179	2.6

Source: 1994 Food Stamp Quality Control sample.  
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Table 7 -- Selected Characteristics of Food Stamp Households Over Time

Year	Total		Children		Elderly		Disabled <sup>a</sup>
	Participants (thousands)	Households (thousands)	Children (percent of all participants)	Households with children (percent of all)	Elderly (percent of all participants)	Households with elderly (percent of all)	Households with disabled (percent of all)
Summer 1994	27,552	11,022	50.7	60.8	7.1	15.9	13.9
Summer 1993	28,183	10,910	51.4	62.1	7.0	15.9	10.8
Summer 1992	26,091	10,238	51.8	61.6	6.6	15.4	10.1
Summer 1991	24,157	9,204	52.2	61.4	7.1	16.6	9.2
Summer 1990	20,737	7,973	49.4	61.0	7.5	17.5	9.1
Summer 1989	18,652	7,213	49.2	60.1	8.4	19.5	9.2
Summer 1988	18,545	7,015	50.3	60.9	8.1	19.1	8.4
Winter 1988	19,063	7,071	50.9	61.3	8.3	20.3	8.7
Summer 1987	18,748	6,881	51.2	61.2	8.3	20.5	8.4
Summer 1986	19,385	7,101	50.8	61.2	8.4	20.2	7.1
Summer 1985	19,040	7,121	49.5	59.2	8.9	21.4	6.4

<sup>a</sup> Disabled includes only those participants who receive SSI but are not over age 59.

Source: Food Stamp Quality Control samples.