



REACHING LOW-INCOME HISPANICS WITH NUTRITION ASSISTANCE

Federal Nutrition Assistance Facts

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Food and
Nutrition
Service

December 2006

Hispanic families add to the vibrant diversity of US society and contribute significantly to our cultural melting pot. In 2004, one of seven people in the United States was of Hispanic origin. About 34 percent were under 18 years of age. Latino families are much more likely to live in poverty and experience food insecurity than white non-Hispanic households.

USDA nutrition assistance programs offer a variety of ways for low-income Hispanic families to meet basic needs:

- **The Food Stamp Program helps low-income households supplement their food purchases to obtain a more nutritionally adequate diet.** The Nation's largest nutrition assistance program, it delivered benefits to 26.7 million persons each month in fiscal year (FY) 2006, at a total cost of nearly \$33 billion. About 19 percent of all food stamp participants were Hispanic in 2006.
- **The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) provides a combination of food assistance, nutrition education, and easier access to health care for pregnant, breastfeeding, and postpartum women, infants, and children up to the age of five years.** Eligible persons must be financially needy and at nutritional risk. WIC benefits usually take the form of vouchers or checks that may be redeemed for specific food types. In FY 2006, USDA spent nearly \$5.1 billion to serve about 8.2 million WIC participants. Hispanics represent the largest racial/ethnic group in the WIC Program. In 2004, about 39 percent of those enrolled in WIC were of Hispanic origin. Approximately 3/4 of the Hispanic infants born in the United States participate in WIC.
- **The Child Nutrition Programs provide cash reimbursement and commodity support for meals served to children in schools, child care facilities, and summer recreation settings.** Programs include the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, the Summer Food Service Program, and the Special Milk Program. The general purpose of these programs is to help ensure the health and well being of all the Nation's children. In FY 2006, more than \$12.8 billion in cash and commodities were provided. These resources resulted in meals for approximately 32.9 million children on an average day during the school year and more than 3.3 million during the summer months.

USDA also administers a variety of other nutrition assistance programs that provide meals, food packages, or vouchers redeemable for food. These include the **Emergency Food Assistance Program** serving those who use soup kitchens and food pantries and the **Commodity Supplemental Food Program** providing food packages to low-income seniors, infants, young children, and pregnant, breastfeeding, and other postpartum women. While not targeted specifically to Hispanic persons with low incomes, these programs are a part of the overall safety net to ensure healthy diets for everyone in America. About 16 percent of the participants in the Commodity Supplemental Food Program were Hispanic in 2006.

Although many low-income Latinos participate in USDA's nutrition assistance programs, a large number do not. In 2004, about 5 out of 10 people in food stamp eligible households with a Hispanic head participated in the program. People in Hispanic-headed households represent a

large proportion – about one-quarter – of all food stamp eligible persons who do not participate. The bottom line is that while 11.0 percent of all US households were food insecure at some time during 2005, the prevalence of food insecurity among Hispanic families was nearly 18 percent.

USDA is making a concerted effort to address barriers to program participation among eligible Hispanics, including immigrants. The effort covers a broad range of activities:

- **Restoring Food Stamp Eligibility for Many Legal Immigrants.** We are working with States to implement the restoration of food stamp eligibility to many legal immigrants -- a critical step in restoring fairness and equity for legal immigrants to the United States. Over 150,000 legal immigrants were added to the Food Stamp Program caseload in 2003 immediately after the provisions were implemented. When fully implemented, food stamp benefits should reach an additional 400,000 low-income immigrants.
- **Targeting Outreach to the Hispanic Community.** The agency has reached out to underserved groups to raise awareness of the Food Stamp Program, including significant efforts to reach the Spanish-speaking population. These include:
 - **A national media campaign** to promote the nutrition benefits of the Food Stamp Program and educate non-participating eligible people, including radio advertisements in English and Spanish, is now in its second year. Advertising carries the Food Stamp Program's national toll free number and/or State-specific toll free information numbers.
 - **A web-based pre-screening tool in English and Spanish.** Individuals using the pre-screening tool receive estimates of their food stamp eligibility and benefit amounts. This tool is online at <http://www.foodstamps-step1.usda.gov>. **A national toll free number** offering listen to recorded information about the Food Stamp Program in Spanish or English. Callers may order informational materials in Spanish or English.
 - **Educational posters and flyers in English and Spanish** which may be ordered for use in local outreach campaigns, along with a photo library, including pictures of Hispanic individuals and families, that can be used in promotional and informational materials. These resources are available at <http://foodstamp.ntis.gov/>
 - **A Hispanic outreach plan, now under development,** to better reach and educate the Hispanic audience about the nutrition benefits of the FSP. A small Hispanic owned business is working closely with our national media campaign contractor to prepare a 3-year outreach plan to complement our existing national efforts by identifying community activities to reach potentially eligible Hispanic households.
 - **A national Food Stamp Outreach Coalition** to bring together national and local organizations working with low-income audiences. Coalition members share effective outreach strategies to educate eligible, non-participating, low-income Hispanic people about the benefits of the Food Stamp Program.
 - **Participation Grants** for projects that look at ways that State partnerships can promote participation, and make the application and intake process more user-friendly, and **Outreach Grants** for small organizations to study the effectiveness of strategies to inform eligible low-income people about the program. FY2006 grantees plan to do outreach to Hispanic families.
- **Partnering with Mexico.** USDA and the government of Mexico have entered into a partnership to help educate eligible Mexican nationals living in the United States about available nutrition assistance. Mexico will help disseminate this information through its embassy and network of 45 consular offices.

- **Making Program Application Easier for Non-English Speakers.** While the Food Stamp Program currently offers a number of informational and promotional materials in Spanish for potential applicants and retailers, USDA is expanding the number and types of products available in Spanish and other languages. States with web sites must post their applications on the Internet in the same languages they currently use for paper applications. The school meal programs also make applications for free and reduced-price meals available in Spanish.
- **Promoting Healthy Food Choices in Ways that Are Understandable and Culturally Relevant.** As USDA tackles the nationwide problem of poor eating habits and the health consequences, appealing materials are being developed at an appropriate reading level in Spanish, along with examples that reflect the food preferences and consumption patterns of the low-income Hispanic population.

Nutrition Education Reaching Hispanics

- **Spanish-Language Dietary Guidelines and MiPirámide:** Both the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and the popular <http://www.MyPyramid.gov> website are available to the public in Spanish-language editions, to make it easier for Hispanics and other Spanish-speaking Americans to find nutrition information vital to good health, and personalize that information to their own lifestyle.
- **Nutrition Education for Low-Literacy and Spanish-Language Groups:** USDA is developing a comprehensive *Dietary Guidelines* nutrition education program to reach low-literacy and Spanish-language populations. The project is designed to help food stamp recipients and other groups served by USDA to overcome their barriers to healthy nutrition as outlined in the DGAs. The interventions target mothers of children ages 2 to 18. The materials will be made available in 2007.
- **Eat Smart. Play Hard.™** materials are available in Spanish. The materials promote healthy eating and physical activity using activity sheets, bookmarks, posters, and brochures. The posters and activity sheets are bilingual: Spanish on one side and English on the other. The brochures and bookmarks are in Spanish only. The materials can be viewed and downloaded from links on the following web page: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/eatsmartplayhard/Collection/main.html>; and can be ordered from http://www.fns.usda.gov/eatsmartplayhard/Collection/Files/powerpac-order_spanish.pdf.
- **The Food Stamp Nutrition Connection (FSNC)** is an online resource system designed to facilitate communication and resource sharing among Food Stamp Nutrition Education (FSNE) providers. Nutrition education materials written in Spanish are available on the FSNC website, <http://www.nal.usda.gov/foodstamp>.

These initiatives should ensure that Hispanic households and other immigrant groups take advantage of the help available when they need some help to become self-sufficient. After all, the United States values its diversity and will not leave its newest residents to fall behind.