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Some Households Leaving SNAP Still Face Food Shortfalls

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program) is intended to help eligible low-income households obtain a more nutritious diet by increasing their food purchasing power. For many SNAP recipients, the program provides transitional assistance during periods of economic hardship. USDA's Food and Nutrition Service reports that half of all new recipients exit the program within 8 months of entry. In recent annual food security surveys sponsored by ERS, about 17 percent of households that reported receiving SNAP benefits at some time during the year (including long-term recipients) had left the program by the final month of the year.

Some households leave SNAP because their economic situation has improved so that they can adequately meet their food needs without assistance. However, for many SNAP recipients who exit the program, that seems not to be the case. Food insecurity (inability to consistently afford adequate food) is generally more prevalent among low-income households that have recently left SNAP than among those still receiving benefits. In 2005-07, 35 percent of low-income households that had left SNAP during the year were food insecure during the 30-day period from mid-November to mid-December. This rate compares with 29 percent of households that were still receiving SNAP benefits and 14 percent of low-income households that did not receive SNAP benefits at any time during the year. Similarly, very low food security was more prevalent among former recipients who had recently left the program (16 percent) than among current SNAP recipients (12 percent). Very low food security describes the subset of food-insecure households in which eating patterns of some household members were disrupted and food intakes reduced because of a lack of money and other resources for food.

Households that recently stopped receiving SNAP benefits could be food insecure for several reasons. Some may have left the program even though they were still eligible and still had unmet food needs. Some may have become ineligible, even though their incomes were still low, because they failed to meet work or other program requirements. Some may have become ineligible because their incomes increased, but they had debts and bills remaining that reduced funds available for food. Further research is needed to understand the diverse financial circumstances of households that have recently left SNAP and whether program enhancements could help them during the transition. **W**

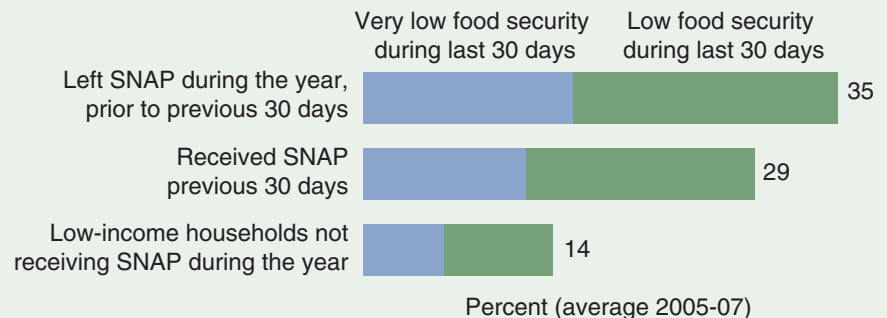
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An interview with the author is featured online at:
www.ers.usda.gov/amberwaves/



Getty Images

Food insecurity is more prevalent among households that have recently left SNAP than among those still receiving SNAP benefits



Source: Calculated by USDA, Economic Research Service using Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement data for 2005, 2006, and 2007.

This finding is drawn from . . .

Household Food Security in the United States, 2007, by Mark Nord, Margaret Andrews, and Steven Carlson, ERR-66, USDA, Economic Research Service, November 2008, available at: www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err66/

Characteristics of Low-Income Households With Very Low Food Security: An Analysis of the USDA GPR Food Security Indicator, by Mark Nord, EIB-25, USDA, Economic Research Service, May 2007, available at www.ers.usda.gov/publications/eib25/