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# Recent Trends in Domestic Food Programs

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*Participation and costs discussed in this article compare the fourth quarter (July-September) of fiscal year 1990 with the same period in 1989. Recent data from USDA's Food and Nutrition Service are reported as of January and are subject to revision.*

**T**he Federal Government spent \$5.69 billion on domestic food assistance benefits in the fourth quarter of fiscal year 1990, a 18 percent increase over the \$4.84 billion spent in the last quarter of 1989.

The continuing economic slowdown and increased unemployment rates were reflected in the growth of Food Stamp Program participation and costs which accounted for the bulk of the increase in total Federal costs (table 1). Child Nutrition programs and the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program registered gains of over 10 percent over the previous year, while the numbers enrolled in Food Distribution programs continued to decline, a trend since 1987.

## Food Stamp Program

Food stamps help low-income households purchase more nutritious diets. Monthly benefits are based on the income and size of the household and the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP). The plan is the least costly of four representative food plans developed by USDA's Human Nutrition Information Service. TFP specifies the quantities of the types of foods that households may use to provide nutritious diets for their members.

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The average number of food stamp participants rose 8 percent from 18.77 million in 1989 to 20.26 million in 1990. Average monthly benefits increased from \$51.42 to \$58.42 during the same period. Total benefits during the quarter rose from \$2.90 billion to \$3.55 billion, reflecting the increases in both participation and benefit levels.

## Child Nutrition Programs

Average daily participation in the National School Lunch Program declined slightly from 23.70 million children in 1989 to 23.68 million in September 1990.

(Because the fourth quarter includes July and August when most school children are on summer vacation, figures for September are used to assess year-to-year changes in the School Lunch and Breakfast programs. Even September has its limitations due to changing school starting dates.) The National School Lunch Program provides approximately one-third of the recommended dietary allowance for school-age children. Eligibility for free and reduced price lunches is determined by family income and size. For example, children from a family of four with an income below \$16,510 are



USDA donates surplus commodities to charitable institutions under various food assistance programs.



Table 1. Benefit Costs of USDA Food Assistance Programs, Fiscal Years 1988-1990 <sup>1</sup>

Programs	1988	1989	1990	FY 1989 Quarters <sup>2</sup>				FY 1990 Quarters <sup>2</sup>			
				I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV
Million Dollars											
Family food											
Food stamps	11,149	11,676	14,100	2,902	2,954	2,925	2,895	3,488	3,529	3,542	3,550
Puerto Rico <sup>3</sup>	883	912	940	228	228	228	228	235	235	235	235
Food distribution											
Indian reservations	47	51	50	12	13	13	13	12	13	13	13
Schools <sup>4</sup>	830	771	611	273	297	120	81	191	247	92	82
Other <sup>5</sup>	220	209	179	57	56	52	43	46	50	43	40
TEFAP <sup>6</sup>	593	234	202	44	59	71	58	51	56	59	36
Cash-in-lieu of commodities <sup>7</sup>	152	152	156	37	38	39	40	38	39	40	39
Child nutrition <sup>8</sup>											
School lunch	2,908	3,005	3,210	903	931	772	398	958	1,045	773	434
School breakfast	474	505	594	149	153	130	73	173	190	147	84
Child care and summer food	648	744	866	148	157	187	252	171	187	217	291
Special milk	19	18	19	5	5	5	4	5	5	4	4
WIC <sup>9</sup>	1,435	1,489	1,641	371	366	370	382	402	428	406	405
Total <sup>10</sup>	19,358	19,766	22,568	5,129	5,257	4,912	4,467	5,770	6,024	5,571	5,213

<sup>1</sup>Administrative costs are excluded unless noted. <sup>2</sup>Preliminary. Quarterly data may not add to annual total due to rounding. <sup>3</sup>Puerto Rico transferred from the Food Stamp Program to substitute nutrition assistance program on July 1, 1982--represents appropriated amounts. <sup>4</sup>National School Lunch, Child Care Food, and Summer Food Service programs, and schools receiving only commodities. <sup>5</sup>Commodity Supplemental Food Program and Elderly Feeding Pilot Projects, excluding bonus commodities, and donations to charitable institutions including summer camps. <sup>6</sup>Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program. <sup>7</sup>Child nutrition programs and Nutrition Program for the Elderly. <sup>8</sup>Cash expenditures. <sup>9</sup>Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children--includes administrative costs. <sup>10</sup>May not add due to rounding.

Source: Food and Nutrition Service, Program Information Division.

currently eligible for free meals. Children from a family of four with an annual income between \$16,510 and \$23,495 are eligible for reduced-price lunches. These thresholds are changed annually to reflect changes in cost of living and poverty levels. Overall participation in the National School Lunch Program declined because the number of paid lunches fell from 13.0 million to 12.7 million participants, even though there were increases of 0.28 million in the number of free and reduced-price lunches served. Total costs for the program, including cash payments and entitlement commodities, were \$392 million in September 1990 compared with \$366 million in 1989. The increase reflects higher reimbursement rates and the relatively larger number of free and reduced-price lunches.

Schools also receive bonus commodities as part of the National School Lunch

Program. In 1990, they received \$27.0 million worth of bonus commodities during the months of August and September, nearly the same as the \$27.3 million distributed to schools in 1989.

The School Breakfast Program provides free and reduced-price meals to children whose families meet school lunch eligibility criteria. Approximately 42,600 schools participated in the program during the 1989-90 school year. In September 1990, 3.9 million children received breakfasts on an average school day, compared to 3.6 million the previous year. Of the 1990 participants, 85.8 percent received free or reduced-price breakfasts, nearly the same rate as the previous year, 85.9 percent. Federal expenditures for the program increased for September from \$55.9 million in 1989 to \$63.6 million in 1990.

Average daily attendance at facilities offering the Child Care Food Program

rose from 1.40 million in 1989 to 1.48 million in 1990 in the fourth quarter. Total meals served in the quarter increased 13 percent from 66.7 million to 75.6 million meals.

The adult care component of the program continues to grow rapidly. Average daily attendance at the adult centers increased from 13,800 thousand to 18,500 thousand persons, the number of sites increased from 462 to 665, and total costs for this part of the program increased from \$1.22 million to \$2.29 million. For the total program, including child and adult care components, costs increased from \$167.3 million to \$199.6 million in the fourth quarter of fiscal 1990.

The Summer Food Service Program, which is in operation only during June through September, served a daily average of 1.69 million children in 1990 compared with 1.65 million in 1989.



Total meals served in 1990 amounted to 91.2 million, a 6-percent increase from 86.0 million in 1989. Annual program costs increased from \$149.0 million in 1989 to \$164.1 million in 1990.

The number of half pints of milk served under the Special Milk Program increased slightly from 39.4 to 40.2 million in the last quarter of 1990. Program costs for the quarter rose from \$4.04 million to \$4.44 million in 1990.

## **Supplemental Food Programs**

Participation in the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) averaged 4.5 million per month in 1990, compared with 4.37 million the previous year. Of the 1990 participants, 23 percent were women, 32 percent were infants, and 45 percent were children. Average monthly benefits per person increased slightly from \$30.14 in 1989 to \$30.27 in 1990. Total food costs for the WIC program rose 6 percent from \$381.9 million in fourth quarter 1989 to \$404.6 million in the last quarter of 1990.

Monthly participation in the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) declined slightly from 271,100 to 269,100. Cost of food issued rose from

\$11.55 million to \$14.0 million, a 21-percent increase. Bonus commodity donations for this program dropped from \$6.31 million in fourth quarter 1989 to \$2.76 million in fourth quarter 1990. Total food costs for the program declined from \$17.86 million in 1989 to \$16.76 million in 1990.

The basic target population of CSFP is similar to that for WIC, although CSFP has an additional elderly component. The two programs can operate at the same location but a person may not participate in both programs. WIC provides benefits in the form of vouchers for use in purchasing food at retail stores. CSFP distributes monthly commodity food parcels to participants in the program.

## **Food Distribution Programs**

USDA provides food assistance to families that live on or near Indian reservations and to the Trust Territories of the Pacific Islands through the Needy Family Program. The average number of participants in the Food Distribution Program on Indian reservations declined 6 percent from 145,000 to 136,300 persons. Entitlement commodities totaled \$10.15 million in 1989 and \$10.49 million in 1990. The value of bonus commodities for this program, unlike other programs,

fell slightly from \$2.35 million to \$2.21 million.

An average of 931,300 meals per day was served under the Nutrition Program for the Elderly compared with 925,400 a year earlier. USDA provides cash and commodities to this program, which is administered by the Department of Health and Human Services. USDA expenditures for food and cash in lieu of commodities totaled \$34.9 million in 1990, down 4 percent from \$36.2 million in 1989. The value of bonus commodities donated to this program fell from \$750,700 to \$313,200.

In the fourth quarter of 1990, USDA donated \$17.9 million worth of commodities to charitable institutions compared with \$23.2 million the previous year, a 23-percent decline. The Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) distributed \$45.5 million worth of commodities to needy persons in 1990, which is 21 percent less than the \$57.6 million distributed in 1989. Very few surplus government commodities were made available to this program. However, under the Hunger Prevention Act of 1988, canned meat, peanut butter, egg mix, canned beans and raisins were purchased and distributed to needy households under this program. ■