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Participation of the Latino/Hispanic Population in the Food Stamp Program (FSP)

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The Hispanic population is growing rapidly in the U.S. generally and in the southern states particularly. This rapidly growing population is characterized by high poverty rates among children and the elderly compared to other races. The Hispanic population is also less educated, characterized by low income, lacks English language proficiency, and has a need for public assistance. Hispanic total and household participation in the FSP increased rapidly, especially in metro counties. The increase in participation is about three times that of the total population. Participation of Hispanic children in the program was also much higher than for adults. The growing Hispanic population with special needs and requirements and rising participation in the FSP will pose new challenges to food assistance administration to serve this group.

The Latino/Hispanic population, which is growing rapidly in the U.S. generally and in the southern region particularly, is characterized by high poverty rates and poor living conditions, especially among those with children. According to the Census Bureau (Therrien and Ramirez 2002), the total Hispanic population in the south was 39.9 million in 2003, compared to 22.3 million in 1990. The Hispanic population increased by 78.49% from 1990 to 2003. The Latino/Hispanic population also increased significantly (13.01%) between 2000 and 2003. The total Hispanic population in the southern states is shown in Table 1. The Hispanic population increased more in the South (97.45%) than in the U.S. as a whole (78.49%) from 1990 to 2003.

The Hispanic population in the U.S. traditionally has been concentrated in specific areas of the country. But a study by Saenz et al. (2003) showed that the percentage change in the Latino/Hispanic in the southern region was ranked second, after the western region, during 1990–2000.

The percentage change was 117.2% in the West and 102.6% in the South. Florida and Texas con-

tribute a large Hispanic population (82%) in this region but other states showed significant increases in recent years. Figure 1 illustrates the rapid growing states in the South are North Carolina (508%), Arkansas (405%), Georgia (396%), Tennessee (345%), and South Carolina (274%) during 1990-2003. A majority of the Hispanic population lives in the larger metropolitan areas in Tennessee. According to Census data, the Hispanic population in Davidson and Shelby counties, Tennessee, was 31,976 and 26,434, respectively; this represents 40% of the total Hispanic population of Tennessee (146,000). The Census data showed that during 2000-03, the Hispanic population increased faster in adjacent-to-metro counties (20.67%) than in metro (17.57%) and non-metro counties (9.08%) in Tennessee.

A report by the Census Bureau (2000) highlighted some of the key economic characteristics of the Hispanic population in the U.S. According to the report, Hispanics face a high unemployment rate (6.8%), often live below the poverty level (22.8%), are less educated (43% with less than high school education), have larger households (30.6% with five or more people), and few earning over \$35,000 annually (23.3%). Another study (Arnold et al. 2001) also provides information and characteristics of food stamp recipients in California. Some of the main findings of this report were that majority of food stamp recipients are children (66%), non-citizens (12%) and Hispanic (44%).

Another reason for this growth in population is that the Latino/Hispanic group is a significant part of the total immigrant population in the U.S. According to the Department of Homeland Security

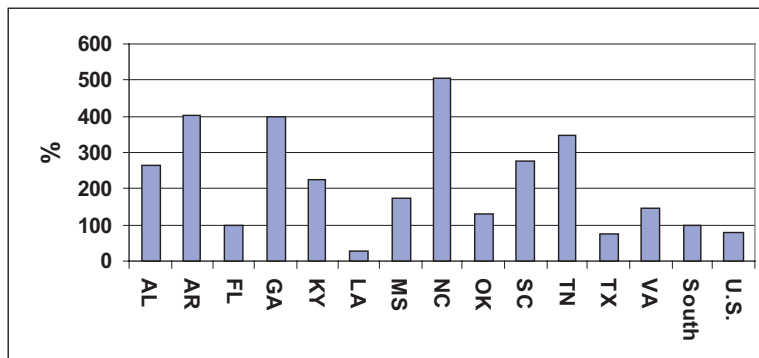
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Table 1. Total Hispanic Population and Percentage Change in the Southern States, 1990–2003.

	Population Change			Percent Change	
	1990	2000	2003	2000–03	1990–03
AL	24,629	75,830	89,195	17.62	262.15
AR	19,876	86,866	100,378	15.55	405.02
FL	1,574,148	2,682,715	3,160,287	17.80	100.76
GA	108,933	435,227	541,123	24.33	396.75
KY	22,005	59,939	71,905	19.96	226.77
LA	93,067	107,738	117,260	8.84	26.00
MS	15,998	39,569	43,441	9.79	171.54
NC	76,745	378,963	466,704	23.15	508.12
OK	86,162	179,304	199,748	11.40	131.83
SC	30,500	95,076	114,217	20.13	274.48
TN	32,742	123,838	146,000	17.90	345.91
TX	4,339,874	6,669,666	7,556,869	13.30	74.13
VA	160,403	329,540	394,856	19.82	146.16
South	6,585,082	11,264,271	13,001,983	15.43	97.45
U.S.	22,354,059	35,305,818	39,898,889	13.01	78.49

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

Figure 1. Percentage Change in Total Hispanic Population in the Southern States, 1990-2003.

(2004), total immigrants admitted into the U.S. in 2003 were 705,827. The majority of these immigrants were from Mexico (16.4%). Two southern states, Florida and Texas, ranked in the top four primary destination states for legal immigrants, behind California and New York.

A study by Capps (2001) shows that children of immigrant families face more hardship in three basic-needs areas of food, housing, and healthcare than do U.S. natives. The same study also suggests that one-fourth of all children born to immigrants live in poor families, compared to 16% for natives. Twenty-three percent of all poor children in the U.S. are either first- or second-generation immigrants. The immigration status of parents and restrictions introduced by the 1996 welfare reforms that targeted non-citizens also affect participation of eligible children who are US citizens in the welfare program (Fix and Zimmermann 1999). Recent restoration of food stamps benefits to legal immigrants will allow more Hispanics to participate in the FSP, and should have a significant impact, especially in the South.

Poverty Among the Hispanic Population

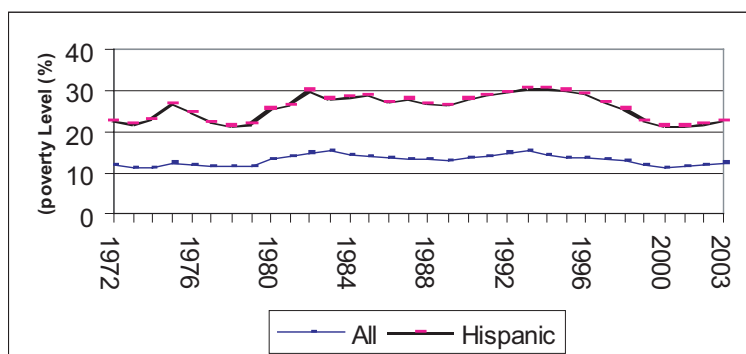
The economic conditions and standard of living of Hispanic families are much lower than for non-Hispanic families in the U.S. The poverty rate among Hispanics in 2003 was 22.5%, compared to 12.5% for the U.S. population as a whole (U.S. Department of Commerce 2004). The poverty rate for Hispanic children (under 18 years) is 29.7%.

The comparison of the poverty rate among Hispanics and the total population is shown in Figure

2. The data indicate that since 1972, poverty among Hispanics has always been higher than for the total population. The lowest poverty rate for the whole population was 11.3% in 2000, and the highest was 15.2% in 1983. The lowest poverty rate for Hispanic population was 21.4% in 2001, and highest rate was 30.7% in 1994. The poverty level in the South (14.1%) is higher than that for the U.S. (12.1%). The rate of poverty in southern states ranges from 9.3% in Virginia to 18.5% in Arkansas. In the South, eleven out of thirteen states have poverty rates higher than the national average and seven have a higher rate than the average for the South. The poverty rate in southern states is shown in Figure 3.

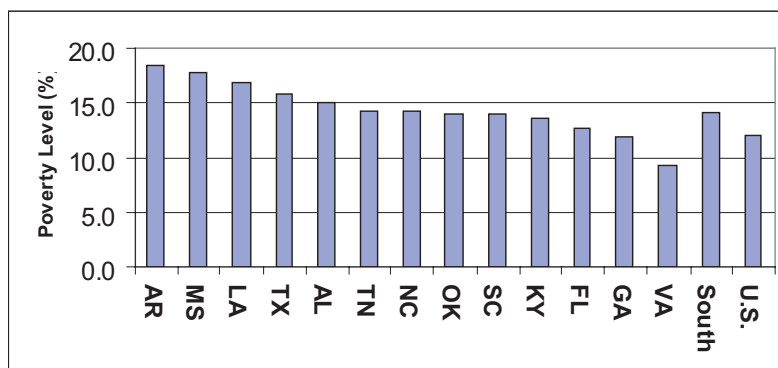
The poverty rate was not only higher among the Hispanic population when compared with the total population and other races, but higher among children and other age groups. The Hispanic population has a higher poverty rate than any other groups except the African-American population. The poverty rate was about 30% among Hispanic children and 20% among the elderly population. The poverty among children was much higher than for other age groups in all races. The Census Bureau uses a set of income thresholds that vary by family size and income composition to determine who is in poverty. Lower household income and large family size will increase the possibility of living in poverty.

The rapidly growing Hispanic population with a high poverty rate, especially among children, indicates their need for accessing public-assistance programs. The goal of this paper is to acquire an understanding of the dynamics of the Latino/Hispanic population and their participation in the



Source: U.S. Department of Commerce.

Figure 2. Comparing Poverty Levels of Hispanic and Total Population in the U.S., 1972–2003.



Source: U.S. Department of Commerce.

Figure 3. Poverty Level in the Southern States, 3-Year Average 2000–2003.

Food Stamp Program (FSP). The study examines current Latino/Hispanic participation in the food stamp program and suggests strategies to enhance their participation in the program. Tennessee State University collaborated with the Tennessee Department of Human Services and a faith-based organization serving the Latino/Hispanic population in Tennessee and Kentucky. Administrative data from the Tennessee Department of Human Services (2003), several secondary sources, and survey data are used to investigate the characteristics of the rapidly growing Hispanic population and its changes over time and to assess their need for food assistance.

Participation of the Latino/Hispanic Population in the Food Stamp program (FSP)

Monthly county-level administrative data was analyzed (January 2003–December 2003) to examine Hispanic and total participation in the FSP (Figure 4). In December 2003 there were 803,377 total participants in the FSP in Tennessee. A majority of these participants (67.35%) were located in metro counties, followed by adjacent-to-metro (26.26%) and non-adjacent-to-metro counties (6.39%). There were 14,870 Hispanic food stamp participants in December 2003 in Tennessee, but a majority (77.93%) were in metro counties, followed by adjacent-to-metro (19.63%) and non-adjacent-to-metro counties (2.44%). The distribution by county type remains the same for the total and Hispanic populations between January and December, 2003.

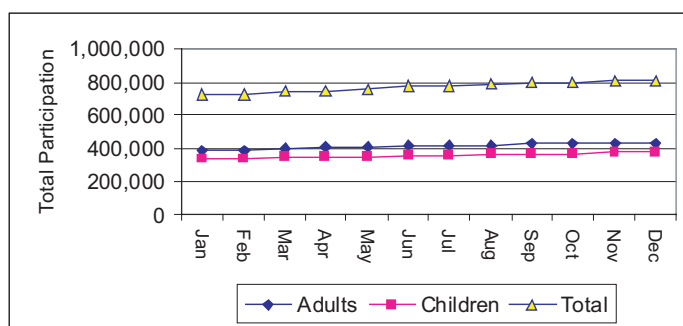
The data show that participation of Hispanics in the FSP increased rapidly in the state compared

to the total population. The total participation increased by 11.12% from January to December, 2003, but by 31.65% for the Hispanic population. The total change was much higher for Hispanic children (31.65%), compared to 20.29% for Hispanic adults. The percentage change for the total population was 11.23% for children and 11.02% for adults.

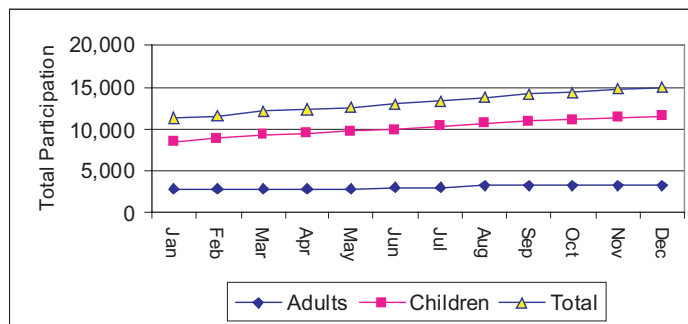
Hispanic participation in the metro counties increased by 34.51%, in adjacent-to-metro counties by 24.16%, and in non-adjacent-to-metro by 10.33% (Figure 5). The participation increase was much higher for Hispanic children in metro counties compared with the state average. Among Hispanics, participation by children (35.28%) increased more rapidly than for the adult population (20.29%). In metro counties, participation by children increased by 38.71% in the twelve-month period. Participation by county type for both groups is shown in Figure 4 and by percentage change in Table 2.

Similarly, total participation increased in metro counties more than for the total population (12.21%) but much less than for the Hispanic population. For the total population, the increase was 8.71% in adjacent-to-metro and 9.86% in non-adjacent-to-metro counties (Figure 6).

Total households receiving food stamps also increased more significantly for Hispanics than for the total population. The increase for Hispanic households was 36.87%, compared to only 11.81% for the total population. The increase in household participation in the FSP for Hispanics was 38.59% in metro counties, 30.88% in adjacent-to-metro counties, and 28.0% in non-adjacent-to-metro



Total participation

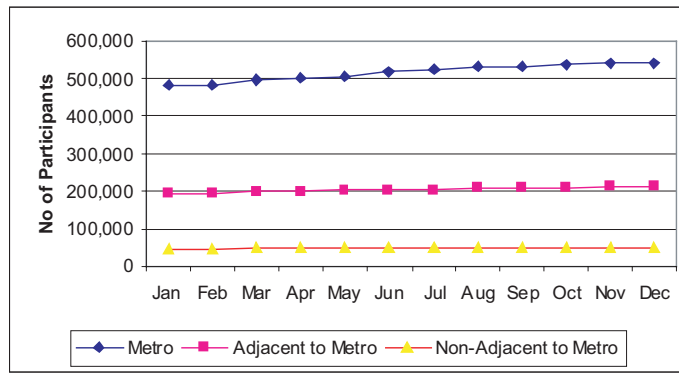


Hispanic Participation

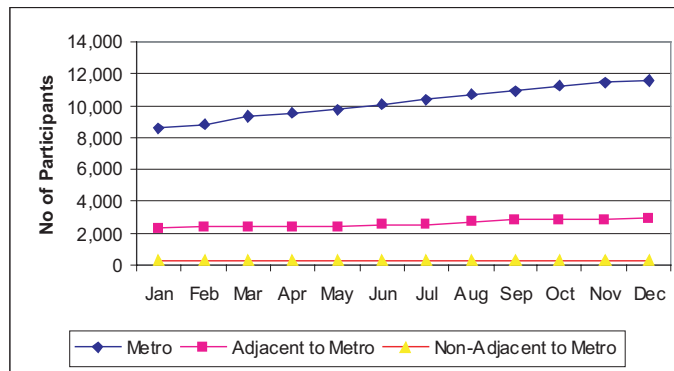
Figure 4. Total and Hispanic Participation by Adults and Children in the Tennessee FSP.

Table 2. Percentage Change in the Participation of Hispanics and the Total Population in the FSP by Type of County, Jan–Dec. 2003.

Type of County	Latino/Hispanic			Total Population		
	Adults	Children	Total	Adults	Children	Total
Metro	21.28	38.71	34.51	12.32	12.09	12.21
Adjacent to Metro	19.21	25.70	24.16	8.54	8.96	8.71
Non-Adjacent to Metro	5.15	12.50	10.33	9.68	10.13	9.86
Total	20.29	35.28	31.65	11.02	11.23	11.12



Total participation



Hispanic Participation

Figure 5. Total and Hispanic Participation by County Type in the Tennessee FSP.

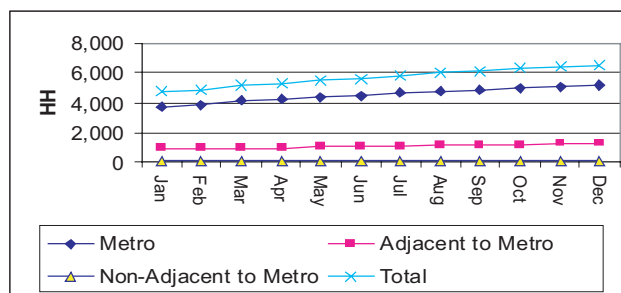
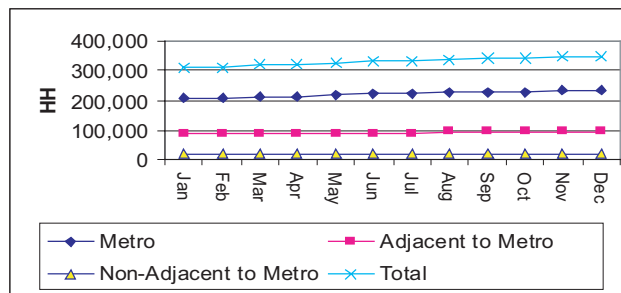


Figure 6. Total (TH) and Hispanic (HH) Household Participation in the Tennessee FSP by Type of County.

counties, while for the total population the increase was 12.97%, 9.37%, and 10.41% for metro, adjacent-to-metro, and non-adjacent-to-metro counties, respectively. The percentage change in household participation in the FSP by type of county is shown in Table 3.

Hispanic participation in Tennessee was 11,295 at the beginning of the year. Two large metropolitan counties—Davidson and Shelby—contribute about 41% of total participation in the state. These two counties also represent the same proportion of the Hispanic population in the state.

Summary and Recommendations

The Hispanic population is growing rapidly in the U.S. generally and in the southern states particularly. This rapidly growing population is characterized by high poverty rates among children and elderly populations compared to other races. The Hispanic population is less educated, characterized by low income, lacks English-language proficiency, and has a need for public assistance. In Tennessee, Hispanic participation in the food stamp program is increasing rapidly, especially in the metro counties. The increase in participation is about three times that of the total population. Participation of Hispanic children in the program was much higher than for adults.

Lack of English proficiency requires special effort and assistance to serve the growing Hispanic population. To accommodate this growing population, food stamp program offices will need staff with Spanish language skills. Training programs for staff in the food stamp offices will be helpful to better serve the Hispanic population. It is important to create trust and comfort among food stamp staff and Hispanics to enhance their participation. Specially

designed outreach programs to target low-income Hispanic families, especially those with children, will also help increase participation. Outreach material should be made available in Spanish. Collaboration between the food stamp offices and local ethnic and religious organizations will help increase the participation of the eligible Hispanic population. Some of the collaboration activities can include training local people to organize workshops to test eligibility and provide information/resources at public and private charity meetings. More staff with Spanish language skills and translated material will also enhance participation. Other measures to increase participation include making the food stamp application process less complicated, reducing waiting time, and providing more-friendly staff. All of the above will be important to prepare the food stamp program to serve a rapidly growing Hispanic population.

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Table 3. Percentage Change in Hispanic and Total Households Participating in the FSP, Jan–Dec. 2003.

	Hispanic	Total
Metro	38.59	12.97
Adjacent to Metro	30.88	9.37
Non-Adjacent to Metro	28.00	10.41

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