

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY: Food Stamp Recipients

DEFINITION

This indicator reports the percentage of New Hampshire children ages 0 to 17 who received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, also known as food stamps, on average annually during 2008 to 2009.

CONTEXT

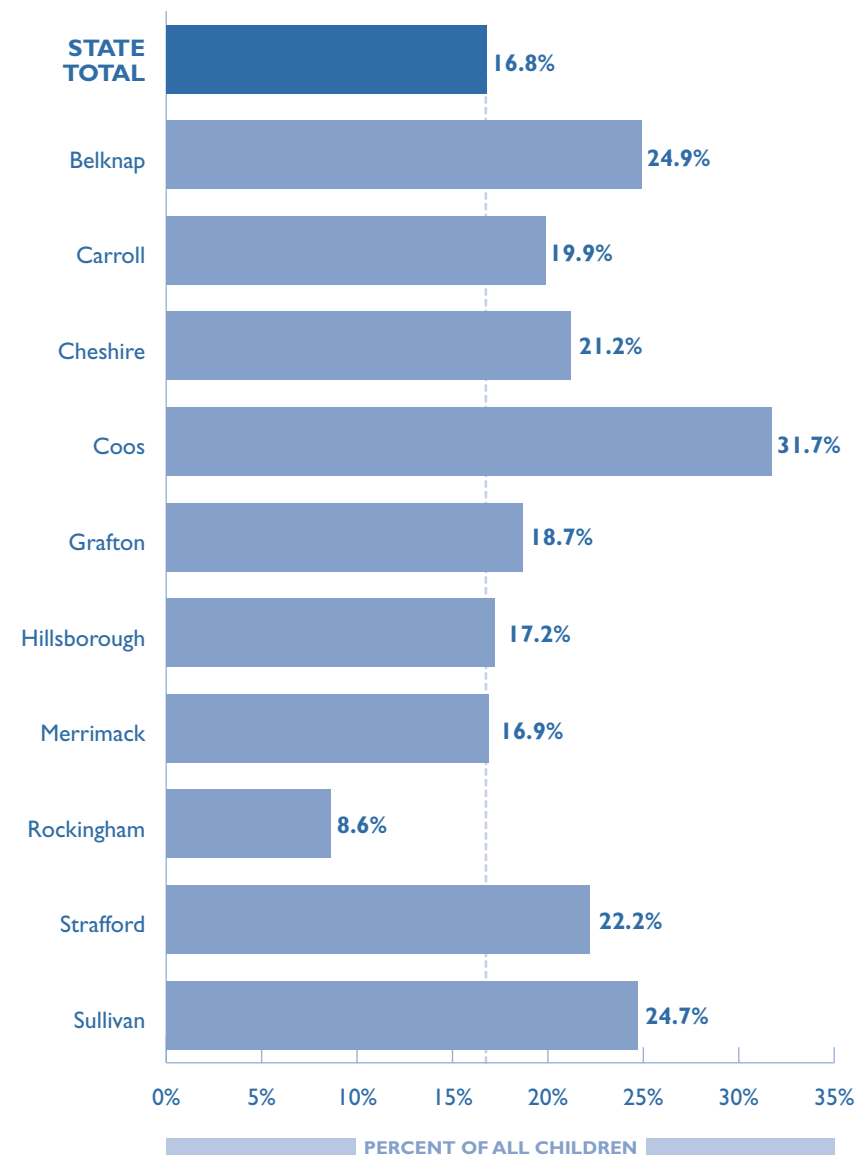
Formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, SNAP is the largest and broadest food assistance program in the United States. The federal government provides funds to cover program benefits and half of the administrative costs. States and local agencies fund the remaining 50 percent of the program's administrative costs. The program aims to provide low-income households with the opportunity to improve their nutrition by giving households more money to spend on food (Leftin et. al. 2010).

New Hampshire residents of all ages who are U.S. citizens are eligible if they meet income guidelines described in the Appendix. For the 2010-2011 program year, gross monthly income limits range from \$1,579 for a family of two, to \$4,010 for a family of eight with an allowance of \$406 for each additional family member. Non-U.S. citizens of all ages are eligible if they meet income eligibility requirements and have lived in this country legally for at least five years. Regardless of how long they have lived in the U.S., all children who are legal aliens are eligible for SNAP if their families meet income eligibility requirements.

This report focuses on New Hampshire children receiving SNAP benefits. To receive these benefits, families must apply and submit supporting documentation. Food stamp benefits are distributed automatically by direct deposit into an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) account. Recipients pay for eligible food items with an EBT debit card. Eligible foods include a wide range of items from every food group as well as water, ice, infant formula, garden seeds and plants. SNAP benefits cannot be used to purchase nonfoods such as alcohol, tobacco, over-the-counter drugs and pet food (NH DHHS 2010).

Nationally, 47.5 percent of SNAP recipients are children. The average monthly household benefit for households with children was \$398 in Fiscal Year 2009. Single-parent families accounted for the majority of households with children (58 percent) receiving benefits. The number of U.S. households receiving benefits climbed almost 19 percent from 2008 to 2009, likely due to expansion of the

Children Receiving Food Stamps
By County, 2008-2009, two-year average



program and worsening economic conditions. Congress responded to the need for additional SNAP benefits by passing the 2008 Farm Bill and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Leftin et. al. 2010).

Approximately two thirds of eligible U.S. and New Hampshire households receive food stamp benefits. A 1999 survey of eligible U.S. households not receiving benefits found 72 percent did not know they were eligible. Other nonparticipants did not believe they needed food stamps, did not want to accept public assistance, had previous negative experiences with food stamps, did not believe the benefits justified the effort required to obtain benefits, or were afraid of the stigma associated with receiving food stamps (Ponza et.al. 1999).

NEW HAMPSHIRE FINDINGS

In 2007, an estimated 66 percent of eligible New Hampshire families participated in the SNAP program, a rate equal to the national average (USDA 2009). In 2009, participation among eligible families declined to 64 percent while the total number of participants increased statewide and in every New Hampshire county (DeParle and Gebeloff 2009).

In Fiscal Year 2009, 77,000 New Hampshire residents in 38,000 households received food stamps with an average monthly household SNAP benefit of \$243. Children were living in 44.7 percent of participating New Hampshire households, of which 65 percent were single-parent households. In New Hampshire, only 23.9 percent of families receiving food stamps were working compared to 29.4 percent nationally. Ninety-five percent of New Hampshire recipients were U.S.-born citizens. Statewide, 73 percent of households receiving food stamps had incomes at or below the federal poverty level. (Leftin et. al.).

Children living in Rockingham County were least likely to participate in SNAP with just 8.6 percent of children receiving benefits, about half the state average. Children in the rest of the state participated at much higher rates, ranging from 16.9 percent in Merrimack County to a high of 31.7 percent in Coos County. The number of children participating statewide increased 19 percent from 2008 to 2009. Carroll, Grafton and Rockingham counties saw the largest increases (22 to 24 percent) and Coos County saw the smallest year-over-year increase (11 percent). (see chart on previous page)

SOURCE OF DATA FOR ILLUSTRATION/METHODOLOGY

New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (NH DHHS). 2010. Division of Transitional Assistance.

American Community Survey, 2009. *Table B01001: Sex by Age, 2006-2008 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates*. U.S. Census.

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